March 27, 2015

Dear Applicant:

We wanted to make sure you were aware of some very exciting news concerning the future of Widener University School of Law.

As of July 1, 2015, Widener University will have not one, but two separately accredited schools of law – one in Wilmington, Delaware, and one in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The long-awaited approval from the American Bar Association for the move came in late March.

The decision means Widener University School of Law – which is currently one school, sitting on two university campuses – will become Widener University Delaware Law School in Wilmington and Widener University Commonwealth Law School in Harrisburg. Each will have its own dean and each will operate independently of each other.

This change allows us to enhance the student services we offer to you because we will have separate law school administrations on each campus. This means that as a student, you will have more interaction and attention from the dean and administrators at each school. We anticipate that this will also translate into greater alumni pride and involvement, particularly in the form of experiential learning, externships, mentoring, networking, and career opportunities for our students.

Furthermore, we are very proud to announce that two new deans have been appointed to head the two law schools as of July 1. Each of the new deans has had a multi-faceted career as an educator, scholar and attorney.

Rod Smolla will serve as dean of Widener University Delaware Law School. He is a visiting professor of law at the University of Georgia School of Law. Previously, he served as the dean of University of Richmond School of Law and Washington and Lee University School of Law, and as president of Furman University in Greenville, S.C.

A native of the Chicago area, Smolla graduated first in his class from Duke University School of Law and earned his undergraduate degree from Yale University. He has authored and edited many books for general audiences, legal treatises, law school casebooks, law review articles, and pieces for newspapers and magazines. The FX television network turned his book “Deliberate Intent: A Lawyer Tells the True Story of Murder by the Book” into a movie with Timothy Hutton in the role of Smolla. His book “Free Speech in an Open Society” won the William O. Douglas Prize, which recognizes distinguished contributions to freedom of speech. An active litigator, Smolla has presented oral arguments in state and federal courts throughout the nation, including the U.S. Supreme Court. His many service activities include eight years as a director of the Media General Corp., service on the executive committee of the board of the American Arbitration Association,
and an appointment as a commissioner on the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education. Smolla has taught a wide variety of courses in the law school curriculum, and has been the recipient of many teaching awards.

Christian A. Johnson will serve as the dean of Widener University Commonwealth Law School. He is the Hugh B. Brown Presidential Endowed Chair in Law at the University of Utah S.J. Quinney College of Law, where he has been on the faculty since 2008. He teaches and writes in the areas of business, banking and tax law. He currently co-chairs Utah’s curriculum and ABA site visit committees and served as the school’s associate dean for academic affairs from 2012-2014. Prior to his time in Utah, he spent 13 years on the faculty of Loyola University Chicago School of Law, during which he spent three years as an academic consultant to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, and was also a senior lecturer for three summers at the University of Melbourne. Prior to teaching he was an associate attorney at Milbank Tweed in New York and Mayer Brown in Chicago, as well as a certified public accountant for Price Waterhouse in Houston.

Johnson earned his law degree at Columbia University School of Law where he was executive editor of the Columbia Law Review and a Harlan Fiske Stone Scholar. He has an undergraduate degree from the University of Utah and a master’s of accounting from the University of Utah Graduate School of Accounting. He chairs the Subcommittee on Insolvency and Related Issues for the American Bar Association’s Business Law Section Committee on Derivatives and Futures Law. He is the author or co-author of eight books and portfolios and more than 50 legal publications, book chapters, book reviews and more.

This is a very exciting time for legal education at Widener University. Our two, already strong law schools with a shared mission of legal education leadership, are poised to make a strong impact on national legal education. We hope you will decide to join us for that journey.

Sincerely,

Barbara Ayars
Assistant Dean for Admissions

Eric Kniskern
Director of Admissions