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# Professor McThenia Shares Perspective on 40th Anniversary

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By: Rachele A. Reis, 3L

Executive Editor

The Law News continues the series about 40th Anniversary of the Class of 1975 with an interview of Professor Emeritus Andrew "Uncas" McThenia, Jr. After graduating from W&L Law in 1963, Professor McThenia joined the faculty in 1967. McThenia has the unique perspective of having been a student in the all-male school and a professor both before and after women joined the student body.

**The Law News:** Were you involved in the decision to admit women?

**Andrew McThenia:** Faculty were active in the decision to admit women, and the majority of us were in support of the move. The decision was ultimately made at the administrative level by Law School Dean Roy L. Steinheimer and University President Robert E. R. Huntley.

**TLN:** What was that first year like?

**AM:** There was a lot of humor that year. Sometimes humor is a way to proceed when something is new and you don't know what to do—nervous laughter. There was nothing momentous, in terms of the community being upset. Everyone was welcome. All the women who came here were good-spirited. They knew it was unknown territory for them and they made the school learn about itself and grow.

**TLN:** Did you have any of the first women in your classes?

**AM:** I taught first year contracts in 1972, and there was only one section of it, so I had taught them all that year. They were great students. The women came from various places with various life experiences. They weren't just young girls, they were accomplished young women who took law school in stride.

**TLN:** What was the attitude of the faculty during the transition to co-ed?

**AM:** As gender equality grew, there were noticeable changes early on. Diversity was also growing. Expectations were either met or not, but people weren't really sure what to expect at first. We tried not to stress. It was a few years before we moved into Lewis Hall, which was a much better place to be to get things done.

**TLN:** Was there a quota for admitting or enrolling women?

**AM:** I was on the admissions committee and I don't remember any notion of a quota. There was a problem at first of stimulating enough applications. In those first years there just weren't enough women applying.

**TLN:** Were you and the other faculty members aware of the hardships and roadblocks for the female students?

**AM:** We were aware or made aware of the big problems. I was very much involved in the issue with the swimming pool and locker room. The only entrance to the pool was through the men's locker room so the women did not have access to the pool at first. The law faculty helped put pressure on the athletics director to include changing the entrance in his budget. That pool issue is probably the most interesting story I have from that time. It didn't become a full-blown crisis, but it definitely ruffled some feathers. Now it's a somewhat funny story, but it was a very important issue forty years ago.

*Professor McThenia graduated Magna Cum Laude with a B.A. from Washington & Lee in 1958. Serving as President of the Executive Committee, a member the Student Activity Board, and a member of the football team, he was easily chosen for Omicron Delta Kappa. While a student at W&L Law, he was Editor in Chief of the Law Review and earned Order of the Coif honors. After a brief career in private practice, he returned to the law school as a professor where he led a clinical program for women inmates at the Federal Prison in Alderson, West Virginia and established the Black Lung Clinic. He held the position of James P. Morefield Professor of Law until 2001, when he retired and became a Professor Emeritus. Professor McThenia still resides in Lexington.*



Andrew W. McThenia, Jr. was a beloved professor at W&L Law for over three decades. | Source: law.wlu.edu

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