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William & Mary is No. 1

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"Yard Work," May, page 26, calls Harvard "the nation's oldest law school." In fact, the teaching of law in a university setting began in this country in 1779 at the College of William & Mary. The instigating

force was then-Gov. Thomas Jefferson, a member of the college Board of Visitors. He felt strongly that lawyers should be trained in a university setting, not simply in practitioners' offices, as was the norm.

George Wythe (a leading lawyer, legal scholar, jurist and statesman of the Revolutionary era) held the first chair in law at William & Mary. He ran the law school from 1779 to 1790. Widely acclaimed by his generation as a master teacher, Wythe got legal training at William & Mary off to an innovative start, adding two new, important dimensions to his students' experience: a moot court and a model legislature.

In a 1974 lecture, Erwin Griswold, one of Harvard Law School's great deans, said: "There can be no doubt that Wythe and [his successors] were engaged in a substantial, successful and influential venture in legal education, and that their effort can fairly be called the first law school in America."

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