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## Foreword: Symposium on Current Issues in Professional Identity Formation

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# Foreword: Symposium on Current Issues in Professional Identity Formation

Patrick E. Longan\*

On March 8, 2024, the Mercer Center for Legal Ethics and Professionalism, in partnership with the Mercer Law Review, held the 24th Annual Georgia Symposium on Ethics and Professionalism.<sup>1</sup> These symposia rotate among Mercer University School of Law, Georgia State University College of Law, Emory University School of Law, and the University of Georgia School of Law. Funding for the symposia comes from endowments created by the settlement of claims of litigation misconduct against the DuPont Corporation and its counsel in litigation in the 1990s.<sup>2</sup> The initiative for the structure of the settlement came from the late Judge Hugh Lawson of the United States District Court for the Middle District of Georgia.<sup>3</sup> The settlement also endowed professorial chairs in ethics and professionalism at each of these four law schools and created an endowment for the Georgia Chief Justice's Commission on Professionalism.<sup>4</sup>

The topic of the 2024 symposium was "Current Issues in Professional Identity Formation."<sup>5</sup> In 2022, the Council of the American Bar

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1. *Ethics and Professionalism Symposia*, MERCER UNIV. SCH. OF L., <https://law.mercer.edu/faculty/centers-and-institutes/symposia/> [https://perma.cc/MEJ2-8LMS], (last visited Apr. 7, 2024).

2. *Centers and Institutes*, MERCER UNIV. SCH. OF L., <https://law.mercer.edu/faculty/centers-and-institutes/> [https://perma.cc/GJ5M-DR9X], (last visited Apr. 7, 2024).

3. Sadly, Judge Lawson died a few weeks after the 2024 symposium. His priceless obituary, which he wrote himself, appears at *Obituary of Roger Hugh Lawson, Jr.*, CLARK FUNERAL HOME, <https://www.clarkfuneralhawkinsville.com/obituary/roger-lawson-jr> [https://perma.cc/5GKY-AC8F], (last visited Apr. 7, 2024).

4. *Centers and Institutes*, *supra* note 2.

5. *Ethics and Professionalism Symposia*, *supra* note 1.

Association Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar changed its standards for law school accreditation to require all law schools to provide substantial opportunities for students to cultivate a professional identity.<sup>6</sup> An interpretation of the ABA Standards elaborates on the concept of professional identity: “Professional identity focuses on what it means to be a lawyer and the special obligations lawyers have to their clients and society. The development of professional identity should involve an intentional exploration of the values, guiding principles, and well-being practices considered foundational to successful legal practice.”<sup>7</sup> The 2024 symposium gathered leading teachers and scholars of professional identity to address specific emerging issues relating to compliance with the new ABA standard.

Professor Tim Floyd gave the opening address. He traced the evolution of the ABA standard on professional identity back to earlier movements to require instruction in legal ethics and, later, to encourage teaching the broader concept of lawyer professionalism. The symposium included four panels, each with a primary presenter and two commentators. David Grenardo of the University of St. Thomas School of Law spoke on “How Law Schools Can Help Historically Underrepresented Students Develop Their Professional Identities.”<sup>8</sup> The commentators were Barbara Glesner-Fines of the UMKC School of Law and Janice Craft from the University of Richmond School of Law. Daisy Floyd from Mercer spoke on “The Role of Purpose in Professional Identity,” and Harmony Decosimo of Suffolk University Law School<sup>9</sup> and Ken Townsend of Wake Forest Law provided commentary.<sup>10</sup> Kendall Kerew from Georgia State University College of Law presented her paper on “The Rule of Law, the

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6. See Neil W. Hamilton & Louis D. Billionis, *Revised ABA Standards 303(b) and (c) and the Formation of a Lawyer’s Professional Identity, Part 1: Understanding the New Requirements*, Nat’l Assoc. for L. Placement (May 2022), <https://www.nalp.org/revised-aba-standards-part-1>.

7. STANDARDS AND RULES OF PROC. FOR APPROVAL OF L. SCH., Interpretation 303-5 (2023–2024), [https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal\\_education\\_and\\_admissions\\_to\\_the\\_bar/standards/2023-2024/23-24-standards-ch3.pdf](https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2023-2024/23-24-standards-ch3.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/PA4N-RMGW>].

8. See David Grenardo, *What About Us? How Law Schools Can Help Historically Underrepresented Law Students Develop Their Professional Identities*, 75 MERCER L. REV. (2024).

9. See Harmony Decosimo, *Reflections on Purpose and Professional Identity Formation*, 75 MERCER L. REV. (2024).

10. See Kenneth Townsend, *Purpose, Practical Wisdom, and the Formation of Trustworthy Lawyers*, 75 MERCER L. REV. (2024).

Role of the Public Citizen, and Professional Identity Formation.”<sup>11</sup> Her commentators were Eduardo Capulong of CUNY School of Law and Kelly Terry from the University of Arkansas Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law. Finally, Aric Short from Texas A & M University School of Law spoke on the topic, “Beyond Fiduciary Duties: Developing Discernment to Navigate Conflict in Professional Identity Formation.”<sup>12</sup> Carwina Weng from the Law School Admission Counsel and Lindsey Gustafson from the University of Arkansas Little Rock William H. Bowen School of Law commented.

A recording of the symposium proceedings is available on YouTube.<sup>13</sup> This special issue of the Mercer Law Review contains the articles and essays that emerged from the event. We at Mercer are deeply grateful to those who participated in the symposium by speaking, writing, or both. We hope that others who are striving to find the best ways to comply with the new ABA Standard on professional identity formation will find these materials to be useful.

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11. See Kendall Kerew, *The Rule of Law, the Role of the Public Citizen, and Professional Identity Formation: How Professional Identity Formation Can Help Law Schools Address the Crisis Facing American Democracy*, 75 MERCER L. REV. (2024).

12. See Aric Short, *Putting the Lawyer First: Framing Well-Being in Law as an Ethical Dilemma*, 75 MERCER L. REV. (2024).

13. MercerLawSchool, *Current Issues in Professional Identity Formation: Mercer Law Symposium*, YouTube (Mar. 12, 2024), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgC-6Ifjgos> [<https://perma.cc/PT9B-SBTT>]. Because of technical difficulties, the first part of Professor Grenardo’s presentation was not recorded.