Elon University School of Law is one of only a handful of law schools in the nation to house a working court—the North Carolina Business Court. The court hears cases involving complex commercial and corporate law disputes in the law school’s Robert E. Long Courtroom. The Honorable James L. Gale, Special Superior Court Judge for Complex Business Cases, presides over Business Court trials in Greensboro. Judge Gale’s chambers are also located in Elon Law’s primary facility, the H. Michael Weaver Building in downtown Greensboro.

The location of the Business Court provides Elon Law students with numerous educational benefits. First, students are exposed to the workings of a unique and well-regarded court. Second, students interact with accomplished attorneys and judges who have special knowledge of corporate and commercial law. Third, students engage cutting-edge issues in corporate law and hone trial advocacy skills, both of which are beneficial to their professional and career development.

**EXPOSURE TO A UNIQUE AND WELL-REGARDED COURT**

North Carolina is among the first states, and still part of a minority of states, to include a business court in its judicial system. Established in 1996, the North Carolina Business Court has quickly become an integral and valued part of the state’s corporate law environment.

“Through its experienced judges and staff, the Business Court manages complicated business disputes more efficiently and delivers more consistent results than would be possible under the traditional North Carolina system of rotating Superior Court judges who must adjudicate all types of civil and criminal matters and who work without law clerks,” says Reid Phillips, a commercial litigation attorney with Brooks, Pierce, McLendon, Humphrey & Leonard, LLP. “Because the Business Court has written opinions on all matters of substance since it was founded seventeen years ago, North Carolina now has an expanded body of case law on business issues. This is quite valuable to lawyers when advising their business clients.”

Elon Law Professor Tom Molony, whose expertise is in corporate governance, securities regulation and business law, says the Business Court’s existence plays a role in making North Carolina an appealing location for corporations.

Learning through the prism of a working court
“The Business Court gives North Carolina the opportunity to develop a body of case law that gives lawyers and clients a degree of certainty in planning business transactions,” Molony says. “By paying a lot of attention to the statute and by having good judges who are building a body of law, the Court ultimately has the effect of making North Carolina attractive as a place of incorporation.”

Each year, Molony presents the “Business Law Update” to the joint annual meeting of the Business Law, Corporate Counsel and International Law and Practice Sections of the North Carolina Bar Association (NCBA), as well as providing “Business Law Developments” articles for the quarterly publication of the Business Law Section of the NCBA. Molony’s work in this area regularly includes analysis of key cases decided by the Business Court, which not only enriches his business law teaching in the classroom but also underscores the value of the Court’s proximity to students.

**EXPERIENCE WITH ACCOMPLISHED JUDGES AND LAWYERS**

More than a dozen Elon Law students have clerked, externed or interned for judges of the North Carolina Business Court, who also hold trials in Charlotte and Raleigh, N.C. These students benefit from hands-on experiences working with accomplished judges and many of the best lawyers in North Carolina and the nation.

“Judge Gale is very purposeful in providing an incredible learning experience for students serving as externs in his chambers,” says Andrew R. Jones L’13, an associate attorney with Rountree Losee LLP in Wilmington, N.C. “For example, at the conclusion of most hearings, Judge Gale takes time to discuss the matters at issue with clerks and externs. These conversations would almost always begin with the same question: ‘So, what did you learn at school today?’ The opportunity to have experiences like that was an invaluable addition to my legal education.”

“As a summer intern for Judge Albert Diaz at the Business Court in Charlotte (now a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit), I had a unique opportunity to learn about the advocacy process for complex business litigants in North Carolina,” says Amy N. Holthouser L’09, an attorney with The McIntosh Law Firm, P.C. in Davidson, N.C. “Not only was I exposed to a variety of legal issues and to talented attorneys advocating for their clients, but more importantly, I experienced both of these things through the lens of Judge Diaz. The internship served as a wonderful foundation for the beginning of my own legal career.”

Andrew Haile, associate dean for academic affairs and associate professor of law at Elon, invites Judge Gale to speak in his classes and has students in his Business Associations class attend hearings of the Business Court.

“I have students read the pleadings and attend the Business Court hearings that involve issues we are studying in Business Associations,” Haile says. “At the end of the hearings, Judge Gale almost invariably will address the students directly about what they’ve just seen. Then he’ll ask the attorneys to talk to the students about what they just did. We are getting the benefit of our students seeing the court in action, witnessing some of the best lawyering in the state and having direct interaction with Judge Gale. Having the Court in the building is an exceptional advantage.”

**ENGAGEMENT WITH CORPORATE LAW AND TRIAL ADVOCACY**

Elon Law students learn a great deal from their involvement with the Business Court, in substantive areas of law, in trial advocacy skills and in overall professionalism.

“My judicial internship with Judge Ben Tennille (who presided over the Business Court in Greensboro prior to retirement in 2011) taught me how to balance opposing arguments and apply the rule of law to form and draft a court opinion,” says Julie Goldfarb L’11, legislative aide for U.S. Representative Andy Harris (MD). “I was able to use what I had learned in Business Associations taught by Professor Haile in a practical setting, especially corporate ethics and mergers & acquisitions law. It is incredibly beneficial to have an actual running court such as the N.C. Business Court housed inside of Elon Law. It allows students to witness the judicial process firsthand from voir dire to witness preparation and trial advocacy.”

Mark York, an associate attorney with Carruthers & Roth, P.A., notes the work ethic and high standard of professionalism he observed while an extern at the Business Court.

“When presented with a matter of first impression, Judge Gale takes the time necessary to make the right decision in light of the existing law, the particular facts of the case, the intentions of the parties and the potential impact of his ruling,” York said. “When a judge is willing to stay up until two a.m. during a jury trial to review the proposed jury instructions provided by the parties, you know the judge respects the value of the jury’s time.”

Brooks Pierce attorney Reid Phillips underscores the value of the Business Court for Elon Law students.

“Every practicing trial lawyer wishes he or she could have had in law school what the Elon University School of Law has, a real courtroom and judicial chambers right within the law school,” Phillips says. “The opportunity to see and hear motions argued and trials take place, often with the most accomplished lawyers not only from our state but from around the country as well, is a great gift to learning. Every law student should take advantage of that.”

**In addition to housing trial proceedings of the North Carolina Business Court, The Robert E. Long Courtroom serves as a classroom for trial advocacy courses, practice space for Elon’s moot court and mock trial programs, and a location for final rounds of the law school’s annual Billings, Exum & Frye National Moot Court Competition.**