"I rave about my law school," gloats a 3L at the North Carolina Central University School of Law. By all accounts, NCCU is a “great value.” It’s unquestionably possible to graduate from here with little or no debt. The renovated law school building feels “very new” and it’s “always well-kept.” The facilities are state-of-the-art and “extremely high-tech.” “Practical training is strongly encouraged” and readily available. “NCCU has substantial opportunities for practical legal experience outside the classroom,” explains a 1L. “Excellent” clinics, pro bono opportunities, externship programs, and hands-on skills courses provide real world experience galore. “The variety of clinics” (eighteen in all) includes criminal litigation, juvenile law, and a small business clinic—just to name a few. There’s also a standard JD/MBA program, a JD/MLS program (for future law librarians), and a unique Biotechnology and Pharmaceutical Law Institute, where you can engross yourself in the labyrinth of prescription drug regulation. It’s also worth noting that students here have easy access to the state and federal courts in the nearby state capital, Raleigh.

Inside the classroom, the “passionate, knowledgeable,” and “very dedicated” faculty brings plenty of “real-world” know-how. For the most part, professors are also “very clear in explaining concepts.” “The teachers are really encouraging, and they want to see each student succeed.” “Motivation, guidance, and encouragement” are ample. “Faculty accessibility” is another huge plus. “They are tough but there for you in many ways.” Faculty members are “very responsive” and “always available and willing to help” if you stay after class or stop by their offices.

Some students call NCCU “the total package” and wouldn’t change a thing. Others, however, see areas that could be better. While some students tell us that management is “organized” and “always helpful,” for example, others disagree. Also, despite the fact that a loyal alumni base works “to ensure that you have an opportunity to practice” and a recently reorganized Career Services Office has helped students with job placement, “other support services” could still use “an overhaul.” A broader selection of electives would be another improvement. “We could offer a wider variety of classes in more concentrated areas,” suggests a 3L.

NCCU began in 1939 as North Carolina’s only law school for African Americans. Today, it’s quite a diverse bastion of legal education, ethnically and otherwise. “Students come from all over the country and all over the world.” Ages run the gamut from students straight out of undergrad to those in their fifties who are training for a second (or third) career. “Different perspectives on life and law” are abundant. “Many schools claim to be diverse and accepting of diversity,” observes one 3L. “Yet my school proves it every day. We are a family. It includes the good, the bad, and ugly.”
NCCU’s relatively small size lends an intimacy that you just won’t find at larger schools. First-year sections are particularly cozy, and the atmosphere for all students is “very friendly.” “We are a strong, supportive community,” explains a 3L. “We help each other out and truly want each other to succeed.” “Upperclassmen are mentors for new law students,” and they offer advice “on a daily basis and on a variety of subjects and experiences.” Nevertheless, and all of this social comfort notwithstanding, students are often competing for just a few precious A’s. “The curve of our grading system can be devastating to a GPA,” cautions a 2L,” but it does force students to work their hardest to achieve good grades.”

Students here are very satisfied with their lives outside of law school. “The campus has some problems with crime,” but students stress that safety isn’t much of an issue at all. Durham is a growing and revitalizing city that offers a low cost of living, some forty annual festivals, and unbeatable medical facilities. With about 15,000 students in town (at NCCU and at nearby Duke University), there are certainly plenty of lively social options. If you prefer laid-back ones, you can find those, too. An array of outdoorsy activities is available in every direction as well.

Gettin In

Though the acceptance rate at NCCU is low, you don’t necessarily need outstanding grades and test scores to get admitted. Admitted students at the 25th percentile have LSAT scores of 142 or so and their undergraduate GPA is right around 3.0. Admitted students at the 75th percentile typically have LSAT scores around 148 and GPAs in B+ to A– territory.