HUSCH BLACKWELL



Stephen J. Owens

SENIOR COUNSEL

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OVERVIEW

With a background as both the general counsel and an administrative leader of a large state university system, Steve advises colleges and universities on matters that range from daily operations to defusing crises to Title VI concerns.

As a former GC of the University of Missouri system, Steve has the perspective to address legal, operational, regulatory, reputational, and financial challenges, and he has personal experience with a wide array of areas, including student and faculty disciplinary issues (including those involving tenured faculty); Title VI and Title IX advice and proceedings; internal investigations; OGC structures and operations; crisis management and crisis communications; diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts; campus safety and reporting; athletic department operations and athletic conference affiliations; litigation; academic medical center operations and governance; intellectual property transfers and transactions; governing board operations and governance; and leadership training; among others things. Additionally, thanks to his years of on-campus experience, Steve effectively provides long-term and interim services to public and private colleges and universities who do not have a dedicated general counsel or who, for a time, find themselves without one.

Prior to joining Husch Blackwell in 2022, Steve dedicated 14 years to the UM system as general counsel. He also served as interim UM system president and interim MU chancellor at different points during his tenure—the only individual in the university's history to

Industries

Education

Healthcare

Services

Academic Medicine

Collegiate Athletics

Higher Education

Litigation & Alternative Dispute Resolution

Title IX

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serve in all three roles. Steve's background gives him not only an inside view on campus legal matters, but an up-close perspective on the administrative concerns of colleges and universities. He's sat where client chancellors and presidents are sitting, and he understands how outside counsel can be most helpful by offering concrete, succinct advice and options. Steve can personally relate to administrators' goal of making not only good legal decisions, but overall good decisions for the school and its students.

In addition to serving as institutions' first point of legal counsel, Steve also devotes a portion of his practice to Title VI issues. He advises colleges and universities on how best to avoid OCR complaints of discrimination based on national origin, and he represents clients before the Office of Civil Rights and during OCR investigations when complaints do occur.

Steve has long been passionate about education. Prior to joining the UM system, he practiced with a large law firm for 26 years, where he was included in The Best Lawyers in America while focusing on commercial litigation, sports law (including collegiate athletics), and environmental matters. However, he had always viewed education as one of the best vehicles for changing lives, and he jumped at the opportunity to serve his own alma mater as general counsel. Steve has also twice served as a member of the board of directors of the National Association of College and University Attorneys (NACUA), in addition to prior service as NACUA's Treasurer and on its four-member Executive Committee. He remains an active member of several NACUA committees.

Recognition

- Designated General Counsel Emeritus, University of Missouri System (UM)
- UM Board of Curators Resolution of Appreciation for service as Interim President
- University of Missouri-Columbia (MU) School of Law Distinguished Non-Alumnus Award
- Presidential Award for Outstanding Service to UM System
- MU Faculty-Alumni Award
- UM Board of Curators Resolution of Appreciation for service as General Counsel
- Martindale-Hubble highest rating for legal ability and ethics
- Selected for law school ABA accreditation site visit teams

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Education

- J.D., Wake Forest University School of Law
- B.A., University of Missouri
    - Public Administration

Admissions

- Missouri
- U.S. District Court, Western District of Missouri
- U.S. District Court, District of Kansas
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Fourth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Fifth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Eighth Circuit
- U.S. Court of Appeals, Tenth Circuit

Clerkships

- The Hon. William R. Collinson, U.S. District Court, Western District of Missouri

Community Leadership

- Wake Forest School of Law General Counsel Advisory Committee
- Habitat for Humanity
- Great American Basketball League

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