

Ben Overton

1926-2012 – Class of 1952

At a time when Florida politics and scandal plagued the court system, Ben Overton became the first Florida Supreme Court justice chosen through the merit selection process under Gov. Reubin Askew (JD 52). The merit system was meant to clean up the Florida judiciary's blatantly political and sometimes-corrupt habits. Florida's 62nd justice since statehood turned out to be a perfect agent for the mission.

Overton completed his undergrad at UF and graduated from UF Law in 1952.

At UF, he participated in the ROTC program. He later became an executive officer and was called to active duty during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Overton worked as a private attorney for more than a dozen years before his appointment as a Pinellas County circuit court judge. He served for nearly 10 years on the Pinellas County circuit court, including as its chief judge.

Overton brought an unblemished ethical reputation to the Florida Supreme Court. He gave the public new ways to observe the justice system in action by bringing computers, public access and TV cameras into state courtrooms.

Overton authored more than 1,400 decisions as a justice from 1974 to 1999. As a Supreme Court justice, Overton wrote the opinion that required continuing legal education classes as a requirement to practice law in Florida. He served as chief justice from 1976 to 1978.

College Education/Achievements

J.D., University of Florida, 1952; LL.M. certificate in jurisprudence, University of Virginia; Certified circuit civil mediator, Duke University Dispute Resolution Center; Taught at UF Law, Stetson University College of Law and Florida State University as an adjunct professor; was a faculty member at National Judicial College 1976 – 1987.

Legal experience

Private practice, 12 years; Pinellas County Circuit Judge, 10 years; Florida Supreme Court Justice, 25 years; Chief Justice, 1976 – 1978; Adjunct professor at UF, FSU and Stetson University, 1971 – 1998; Faculty member, National Judicial College, 1968 – 1977.

Associations/organizations/honors

Member of the Board at National Judicial College, 1976 – 1987; Chair of the Academic Committee, 1978 – 1987; Chair of the Florida Family Court Commission, 1990 – 1991; The Florida Bar Medal of Honor, 1984; Chair, United States Constitution Bicentennial Commission of Florida, 1986 – 1992; Guardian of the Constitution Award, 1992; Chair, Florida Appellate Structure Commission, 1978 – 1979; U.S. Delegate to Romania, 1990; UF Distinguished Alumnus, 2008.