Professor Harold Norris, one of the most senior of DCL faculty members, evokes a great deal of both affection and respect from most of his students. Many of his former students recognize the quality of his concern, the depth of his feelings, and the wealth of the knowledge which he offers to them without reservation.

Neil H. Fink, '67, wrote, "What ever success I have had in the practice of law I will always believe in my own mind was attributable in great part to your guidance in criminal law. I will never forget the first day's lecture on representing the unpopular client."

Harold Norris is many things. He is, foremost, a teacher. As such, he has taught 5,000 students in his 30 years at the Detroit College of Law. As a political being, he was elected a delegate to the Michigan Constitutional Convention of 1961, serving as Vice-Chair of the Declaration of Rights Committee and authoring several sections of the Constitution itself. He is an author and a poet, a civil libertarian and attorney, and a "Sunday" photographer, sculptor and painter.

A native Detroiter, Harold Norris graduated from Central High School, where he met his wife of 47 years, in 1935. They have two children: daughter Barbara, a teacher, and son Victor, a lawyer, both born during his Columbia Law School years, which he refers to as his "Torts and Diapers Period." He attended the University of Michigan, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in 1939 and a Master's in Economics in 1941, planning on a teaching career.

The following four years found him in the United States Army Air Corps. He first entered Officer Candidate School, attending the Harvard Business School program to train Statistical Control Officers. Among his classmates were Robert McNamara, later to become Secretary of Defense and President of Ford Motor Company. After graduating from the school, he spent almost three years in Britain and France with the Ninth Air Force, Air Transport Command.

In the service, law, rather than education, seemed a better road to travel. He wanted to put in place the basis for economic and political independence. After he left the service in January, 1946, and considered law schools, he found Columbia University had an accelerated course for veterans in which he could complete three years work in two calendar years. Thus, he graduated from Columbia Law School in February, 1948, and was able to take the Michigan Bar examination two months later.

After brief employment by two practitioners, he entered private practice, concentrating on constitutional, criminal and administrative problems. "The practitioners I worked for were active members of bar associations; I became active too. In bar association work I helped initiate and secure prepaid legal insurance, the principle of fair employment practice legislation, compulsory automobile liability insurance and the inclusion of lawyers in the Social Security Act." He wrote the Michigan Automobile Liability Accident Claims Act.

"I was," he notes, "a child of the depression. What happened in Detroit during the depression made a painful picture. I was sensitive to what was happening in my city, particularly to the efforts of working people toward making government responsive and responsible to the employment, housing, health and education problems of the day. I had strong feelings of justice and reason. I hoped, with the writer Albert Camus, that I could always love justice and my country at the same time."

Professor Norris believed at that time that a general practice would provide the economic basis for political independence. He began serving as a sort of labor union, in particular Local 22 at Cadillac and Local 163 at GM, and he represented the Wholesale Paper Jobbers Association.

Among the community groups with which Professor Norris worked was the Greater Detroit Public Tenants Housing Council. This group consisted of people living in temporary and permanent housing projects, most of whom had been displaced by the great land clearance projects of the 1930's which resulted in our system of expressways and housing areas such as Lafayette Plaza.

"I tried," he says, "to get the City of Detroit to relocate people before they were displaced. I was able to get many of the residents facing eviction some time, and I also got the City to realize they had some moral and legal responsibility for relocation. Mayor Albert Cobo put Zoltan Ferency, who graduated from DCL in 1952, into the Management of Relocation Office which was, unfortunately, a very modest and inadequate operation.

"I argued to the Mayor and the Council that they were placing the cost of dislocation without relocation upon the people least able to bear it, that people would be living in basements and attics, and that this would lead to density of use and a pressure cooker situation and blow up. It did. The riots came, the pressure cooker exploded. Detroit has not been the same since."

Professor Norris also became active in the American Civil Liberties Union. He represented several teachers and students who were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Affairs Committee. When asked to help reconstruct the ACLU to provide help for those subpoenaed in Detroit, he did so. He has been a member of the Executive Board of the Detroit Chapter of the ACLU since 1952, and served as President of the Chapter from 1958-1961.

"The policies of the Trustees and the Deans of DCL recognized academic freedom," he states. "In my 28 years at DCL, starting in 1961, I was accorded effective academic freedom, both inside and outside of the classroom. I also tried to recruit law students living in temporary and permanent housing projects, most of whom had been displaced by the great land clearance projects of the 1930's which resulted in our system of expressways and housing areas such as Lafayette Plaza."

"I tried," he says, "to get the City of Detroit to relocate people before they were displaced. I was able to get many of the residents facing eviction some time, and I also got the City to realize they had some moral and legal responsibility for relocation. Mayor Albert Cobo put Zoltan Ferency, who graduated from DCL in 1952, into the Management of Relocation Office which was, unfortunately, a very modest and inadequate operation.

"I argued to the Mayor and the Council that they were placing the cost of dislocation without relocation upon the people least able to bear it, that people would be living in basements and attics, and that this would lead to density of use and a pressure cooker situation and blow up. It did. The riots came, the pressure cooker exploded. Detroit has not been the same since."

Professor Norris also became active in the American Civil Liberties Union. He represented several teachers and students who were subpoenaed by the House Un-American Affairs Committee. When asked to help reconstruct the ACLU to provide help for those subpoenaed in Detroit, he did so. He has been a member of the Executive Board of the Detroit Chapter of the ACLU since 1952, and served as President of the Chapter from 1958-1961.

While President of the ACLU, Professor Norris pressed cases on the one-man, one-vote issue, so that electors who could challenge as denials of equal protection districting of unequal population. He was also the spokesperson for greater public review of police work and the establishment of an independent review board to give impartial evaluation of citizen complaints against police.

During this period at the ACLU, he met the late Dean Charles H. King, '33, who later asked him to join the faculty of the Detroit College of Law.

The request rekindled his old interest in teaching. Important to him was the independence, both political and economic, which would continue with an appointment at DCL under a civil libertarian such as Dean King.

In 1961, Professor Norris was elected a delegate to the Michigan Constitutional Convention, representing Detroit. As the ranking Democrat, he served as the Vice-Chairman of the Committee on the Declaration of Rights, Suffrage and Elections; he also served on the Committee on Style and Drafting.

He was author of the provisions of the Michigan Constitution of 1963 prohibiting racial and religious discrimination and co-author of those creating a Civil Rights Commission. He wrote the provisions creating a right to appeal in a criminal case, a freedom of expression, an expanded right of petition and a right to fair and impartial treatment in legislative and executive investigations. He also authored the action of the convention deleting from the constitution the provision denying the defense of First Amendment rights to any person charged with "subversion."

For these, and other contributions to the new constitution, veteran Congressman John Conyers, Jr., acknowledged Professor Norris as "a principal architect of Michigan's Bill of Rights" in the Congressional Record. He also was awarded an honorary Doctor of Laws from Wayne State University, as well as one from Detroit College of Law.
The book is a collection of essays on the occasion of the Bicentennial of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. It is, as United States Senator Carl Levin notes in his Preface, a sample of Professor Norris’ “life’s efforts to protect the U.S. Constitution and to extend its guarantees to each of us.”

Senator Levin continues, “This book is a fitting way to remember our country’s basic document as we enter its third century of life.”

Newsmen Bill Moyers says, “If it were not for people like Harold Norris, the Bill of Rights would be just as it was on the day it was adopted. In his own life he has demonstrated how one individual can put their beliefs into action, and in this book he summons every one of us to the front lines of the ceaseless struggle to defend our most precious liberties.”

Education for Popular Sovereignty Through Implementing the Constitution and the Bill of Rights reflects the total dedication with which Professor Norris has directed his entire life’s work in support of the federal and state Bills of Rights and the Constitution of the United States. A review of his legal work, his teaching, and his total outlook, are all summed up in this publication.

If one would seek affirmation of Professor Norris’ feelings regarding the Constitution and its concepts, one need only review some of his poetry:

"An American Moral is a volume of selected and new poetry to be published by Professor Norris in 1991. Archibald MacLeish and Norman Cousins have praised his work as "authentically American and authentically human," and "refreshing." Pulitzer Prize writer Theodore H. White has said of his poetry, "How easy it is to say that Harold Norris writes keenly, lifting poetry. But it is poetry infused with an almost forgotten sense of love — love of country and of people, love of America’s monuments and places, love of its future and heroes. This is a Whitmanesque voice, whose sound has been too long absent from our hearts and our culture."

Familiar to many DCL alumni and students is "The Liberty Bell," originally published in 1976 by Harlo Press, Detroit, in the collection, You Are This Nation. The poem hanged in the lobby of the Detroit College of Law, as well as in the public lobby of Independence National Park’s Administration Building in Philadelphia, home of the Liberty Bell. In the poem, Norris asks the reader to listen through the silence of the cracked Liberty Bell to the reverberations behind it which continually resound with the rights of man. It is an encapsulation of the emotions which run deeply through Professor Norris’ life.

As most of his students, present and past, are aware, Professor Norris’ life is reflected in his office. There are enthroned photographs of his dear Frances (who died last fall) and of his children, of his OCS class and of Earl Warren and of poet Archibald MacLeish. Reminders of the 25 winter DCL classes he took to visit the Supreme Court in Lansing peek from various corners. Framed there is the document of recognition given to him by the Michigan Supreme Court in 1987 acknowledging him as "Lawyer, Educator, Poet and Statesman," and expressing "Appreciation for the vision, faith and commitment that have inspired a lifetime of contributions to the jurisprudence of this state." A portrait and clipping about the Frank Murphy Hall of Justice reminds that Harold Norris suggested that the Recorders Court Building be named after the U.S. Supreme Court Justice who taught at DCL during the years 1924 to 1926. Professor Norris was asked by Mayor Jerome Cavanaugh to give the speech dedicating the building.

Crammed onto the shelves which occupy two full walls of the office are thousands of books. There are law books and philosophy books and business books and history books, all contributing to the immense store of knowledge of the law and of the components of our form of government which become a part of the transmitted information at DCL.

Very dear to the center of Harold Norris’ core is the Detroit College of Law. He calls it, "A good place for law learning and law teaching." He recognizes considerable academic freedom at DCL. "It permits the teacher to challenge himself or herself, and it challenges the student to increased excellence. I have found that it has been possible for a professor to cause the student to do more work than he or she ever intended, and yet to enjoy the experience of being a law student at DCL.

"Of all the jobs in the United States, teaching law to earnest students learning responsibility for the Constitution and the Bill of Rights, in my judgment, is a most stimulating and inspiring one and permits a wholesome integration of personal purpose and national purpose. I am immensely grateful to the Detroit College of Law for this privilege for 30 years."