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Crossing Lines

The Baldy Center promotes scholarship with an interdisciplinary twist

Interdisciplinary — that word is the key to understanding the plethora of scholarship, teaching and outreach that comprises the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. Located on the fifth floor of John Lord O'Brian Hall, the center has been a hotbed of activity since it was created in 1978.

"We're trying to get a better fix on law and legal institutions and how they function in society," says Law Professor David M. Engel, who has directed the center since 1992. (His predecessor was Barry B. Boyer, now dean of the Law School.)

"The kind of work the center has sponsored is closely associated with UB Law School as people know it all around the country and around the world," Engel says.

"UB has developed a reputation over the last 30 years for being willing to take that kind of interdisciplinary look at things. It's based not only on law as an abstraction, but on law as it actually operates in everyday life. That's the point that we want to examine and theorize about."

Under Engel's stewardship, and the daily administration of Assistant

Director Laura Mangan, the institution has developed such offerings as:

- Short courses — intensive, week-long, for-credit courses taught by visiting scholars. Unique to UB Law School, the short courses have met with acclaim: "Some students," notes Engel, "have said this is the best educational experience they've ever had." Part of their success may be their informality. Scholars and students dine together and spend time in casual discussion as well as formal presentations.

- Colloquia in which visiting scholars present papers or debate issues in the law and the social sciences.

- Summer workshops growing out of the center's research programs.

- Major conferences on legal issues. Last fall the center sponsored a conference directed by Law

Professor Nancy Staudt on tax policy in relation to race, gender and sexual orientation; and contributed to another directed by Philosophy Professor Pablo deGreiff on drug policy.

In addition, the Baldy Center publishes the journal *Law & Policy*, under the editorship of Psychology Professor

Murray Levine.

That journal is jointly edited by a professor from Great Britain's Oxford University, and Engel notes that kind of global approach to scholarship is a linchpin of the Baldy Center's work. "We're interested in enriching not only the interdisciplinary aspects of the Law School community, but we've also been very strong on international and global perspectives on legal issues," he says. "We've tried to infuse an international component everywhere we can, even in the short courses we've done on children's issues."

"We think this is a really important way that legal studies are developing these days. It's almost impossible to think of things in a purely domestic way."

Baldy Center-sponsored research is organized in four major programs, each with a separate director. A brief review of each program — highlighting a single piece of work by way of example — gives an idea of the breadth and depth of the Baldy experience.

On the Children's Side

The Program on Children, Families, and the Law, directed by Professor Murray Levine, tackles issues of concern to families and their youngest members: the work of social service agencies, children in the legal system and coping with delinquency.

Simon Singer, an associate professor of sociology, has worked with Levine in studying Persons in Need of Supervision — the state's term for juveniles in trouble for running away, chronic truancy and the like — and their rates of recidivism. They found that among the sentencing options available to judges, adjournment in

CHRISTOPHER BALDY 1875-1959

A member of the Buffalo Law School Class of 1910, Christopher Baldy was a distinguished attorney and a senior partner in the law firm that was to become Phillips, Lytle, Hitchcock, Blaine & Huber. Keenly interested in advancing higher education, he served as secretary of the University Council and was awarded UB's highest honor, the Samuel P. Capen Award. Through his estate, he left a major bequest to the University that was used to endow the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. We are grateful for his lifetime support of this university and for his generous legacy to the Law School.

contemplation of dismissal — in which the young offender has no criminal record if he keeps his nose clean for a period of time — best discourages a repeat of the offending behavior.

That's a "middle ground" approach — somewhere between a scolding and probation — that is gaining favor in the courts, Singer says. "When the court intake people or prosecutors say to people, 'Listen, just don't do it again,' that seems to be less effective" than adjournment in contemplation of dismissal, he says.

Singer says the Baldy Center's financial support helped the researchers secure additional state funding, money that bought supplies and student research assistance. And he praises the center's mission: "What's important is that it provides an interdisciplinary outlet for thinking about law, sociology and many applied public policy issues. That's quite important, especially in this day and age when, for things to be relevant, there has to be an overlap across disciplines."

The Way We Live Together

In the Program on Community and Difference, directed by Law Professor Frank Munger, issues include how certain groups become disadvantaged or excluded within communities, and how law can work to promote or hinder that process.

Through this Baldy Center program, Munger has studied how families at or below the poverty line survive. In Buffalo, he says, 25 percent of residents are below poverty level, defined by the U.S. Department of Labor as income of \$14,000 a year for a family of four. Nationwide, the figure is around 18 percent, he says: "Poverty is a very deep and serious problem."

"I'm interested in how people actually are able to make it — by networking with family, by doing with less than they had before, by entering

an illegal or underground off-the-record economy, by pooling their resources in neighborhoods among friends or family."

Munger, who also teaches a class in Poverty Law, says he hopes his work will result in a series of biographies, extended interviews with a cross-section of poor families. "The idea," he says, "is to put a face on poverty and show the variety of experience among the poor. The message I would like to get across is that these are people who are doing a remarkable job of surviving, and would, with a modest amount of help, like to re-enter the mainstream of work and be self-sustaining."

He notes that there are more poor people who have paying jobs than who are unemployed — shattering the stereotype of the "welfare freeloader" that has come into vogue in Washington and elsewhere.

"We mostly think about people who are not working, who are undereducated," he says. "There are a whole lot of stereotypes. It's not just an economic debate but a moral debate. The whole thing has shifted in a very mean way: If you're poor, you don't deserve help. But in fact, poverty is a tragedy that happens to a broad spectrum of people."

Gender Changes Everything

Law Professor Lucinda Finley directs the Program on Law, Gender, and Social Policy. Work in this program studies gender issues in many areas: reproductive rights, the intersection of race and gender, women in the work force, and issues of violence against women and effective responses to that violence.

Brenda Moore, an assistant professor of sociology, has taken a socio-historical look at the experience of African-American women in the military — specifically, the first group of women to serve overseas in World War II, an Army postal battalion of

850 African-American WACs who sorted mail in England and France.

In an era when racial segregation was the norm in the U.S. armed forces, she says, these women confronted both racism and sexism within the military — but found they were welcomed freely in the public establishments and private homes of the British and the French.

Moore interviewed 51 women from the battalion, traveling to every geographical region in the United States. The result is a book, *To Serve My Country, to Serve My Race: The Story of the Only African-American WACs Stationed Overseas During World War II* (New York University Press).

"The more I learned about the women in this unit, the more I realized that their story needed to be documented," she says. "Many of these women developed an intolerance to discrimination and took an aggressive stance against it. Some of them returned to the U.S. with greater expectations of themselves. Many of them used the GI Bill to obtain undergraduate, and in some cases, graduate degrees. Among the women I interviewed is a judge, a couple of attorneys, and a former schoolteacher who earned a Ph.D. at Cornell University, and retired as a professor of English.

"They came from all walks of life, from all over the country. Regardless of how diverse these women were, however, they were unified against the social inequality which was exacerbated by the War Department's laws of racial and gender segregation. There was a big thrust on the part of the War Department to ensure that the races did not, quote, 'intermingle.' Members of the 6888th refuted the negative implications of these laws."

Moore also has studied the changing face of the all-volunteer military, effects of its recent downsizing on race and gender representation, and the changing roles of women within the armed forces. Her current book project takes another historical tack: She is examining the roles of Japanese-American women who served the U.S. armed forces in World War II.

(To join the newsgroup, send an e-mail message to:
listserv@ubvm.cc.buffalo.edu. The first line of the message should read:
SUB TWATCH-L followed by your name.)

The Rights of Humankind

The Program on Human Rights Law and Policy is directed by Law Professor Virginia Leary and Political Science Professor Claude Welch. Its emphasis is on human rights, broadly defined to include both civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights.

A chance encounter at a Baldy Center short course led to a computer-age application of this ancient philosophical debate. Law student Scott T. Johnson, in conversation with Leary and Welch, set out to establish a group to monitor the performance of the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. This U.N. tribunal is gathering evidence and hearing the cases against Bosnian Serb soldiers who are accused of crimes against humanity in that country's long, ethnically motivated civil war.

So Johnson established Tribunal Watch, an Internet newsgroup — a computerized mailing list of more than a hundred human rights activists, political activists, attorneys and law students interested in following the trials. Newsgroup members — in Serbia, Australia, across Europe and throughout the United States — have discussed the background of the cases, the philosophy behind the genocide, even shared reading lists.

"It's been a fascinating intellectual and activist dialogue," Johnson says.

He spent time last summer in The Hague, where the tribunal is located, and is negotiating for electronic access to the trial proceedings and press releases. He says part of the newsgroup's mission is to ensure that the U.N. does its job.

"We want this tribunal to succeed," he says. "We're not just going to sit back and observe, we want to really get involved. It's really going to be a significant set of trials. They've got a great set of judges, and the prosecution is wonderful. It's not just a show. It isn't a joke. It really has potential, and we'd hate to see it messed up if the U.N. pulls the plug on funding the tribunal.

"We have a voice within this small niche." ■

Domestic Violence Clinic Receives State Funding

The Domestic Violence Clinic in the University at Buffalo School of Law has received more than \$20,000 in local-initiative funding

from the Western New York delegation to the New York State Legislature.

The funding includes \$14,000 that was included in last year's state budget, but was frozen due to the deficit at the end of the legislative session, and \$7,000 in this year's budget.

The money will be used to continue the clinic's work in Erie, Niagara and Monroe counties, said Suzanne E. Tomkins, clinic instructor.

"This three-county study of responses by police and social service agencies to incidents of family abuse is putting us in a position where we will be able to say what works and what doesn't, what kinds of intervention make a difference in dealing with this problem of violence against women, and how we can take our knowledge and convert it into effective

programs," says Dean Barry B. Boyer.

Part of the Law School's Legal Assistance Program, the clinic combines academic training in domestic-

violence issues with real-world experience.

Students earn academic credit while providing more than 150 hours a week of free assistance to social-service agencies and legal offices, including the district attorney's offices in Erie, Niagara and Monroe coun-

ties; Neighborhood Legal Services; Women's Law Center; Legal Aid of Niagara County, and Haven House, a shelter for battered women in Buffalo.

They are involved in a variety of projects, such as compiling and editing a resource manual on domestic violence for Niagara County, assisting law-enforcement agencies in evaluating their policies and working with the Erie County District Attorney's Domestic Violence Unit.

In Niagara County, students work in the district attorney's office

"This three-county study of responses by police and social service agencies to incidents of family abuse is putting us in a position where we will be able to say what works and what doesn't."