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A World at the Doorstep

International Law Society honors Professor Virginia A. Leary

A woman whose influence has touched a generation of UB Law students — and countless other people around the world — was honored on Oct. 16 at the first Alumni Dinner of the student-run International Law Society.

Professor Virginia A. Leary was saluted for her long-standing commitment to human rights and the international rule of law, as well as for her work in establishing and encouraging the Law School's several hands-on programs in international law.

Professor Leary heard tributes from a succession of speakers, both alumni and faculty, and delivered a stirring keynote address in which she detailed several "unfortunate developments" in the world in which the United States has been complicit in abridgements of human rights.

Carol Greiner, wife of UB President William R. Greiner, opened the remarks. Professor Leary, she said, "exemplifies both the finest attributes of the legal profession and the spirit of internationalism that increasingly shapes our world."

Law School Dean Barry B. Boyer added: "We all owe her a debt for opening our eyes to the legal world that exists beyond our borders...Virginia is one of the nicest and best people to deal with that you're ever going to find. We are all in your debt," he said to the honoree, "and we love you very much."

After a presentation of flowers to Professor Leary — more than she could hold — Professor David Engel, recently appointed as director of the Baldy Center, began his introductory remarks with

gentle kidding about her extensive travel schedule. He told of calls from Professor Leary received in the wee hours of the morning — when it was 10 a.m. in whatever part of the world she was. "You can pretty much tell what time zone she's in by looking at your clock before you pick up the phone in the middle of the night," Engel said. "When we say we all sleep better when you're safe and sound in Buffalo, we mean it."

But he turned serious when he praised Professor Leary as "a person of great courage and personal conviction."

"I've spoken with people in Sri Lanka and the Philippines who view Virginia's work on behalf of human rights in those countries with admiration and respect," Engel said.

He also cited Professor Leary's work with UB Law School's international law programs. Among her many

accomplishments since joining the UB Law faculty in 1976, she established and co-directs the Human Rights Center. This includes the Niagara-Geneva Internship Program, under which three or four students each year spend a 10-week summer internship with an international organization in Geneva, Switzerland, under Professor Leary's supervision. The internship program is funded by a grant of nearly \$500,000 from the Ford Foundation.

As for the student-run international law groups, Engel said, "In my eyes they grow directly out of her teaching and her personal example."

Professor Leary, who was welcomed to the podium with a standing ovation, began her remarks by crediting the students themselves for their work in international law. She mentioned, for example, the Jessup Moot Court Board

Professor Virginia A. Leary and Joseph C. Grasmick '78.





Jennifer L. Krieger '89, left, and Carol Greiner.



Left to right: Peter D. Grubea '93, Daniel J. DeRosso '93, Henry J. Nowak '93 and Thomas Cannavo '93 represented the Law School in the international Jessup Moot Court Cup Competition.

— organized while she was away from Buffalo for a full year.

“Law,” she said, “like science, like trade, like business, is really becoming more international. And international law is one of the fastest-developing courses of study in law schools.”

Professor Leary then detailed several instances in which, she argued, the United States has abdicated its commitment to international legal agreements. A brief synopsis:

* A June 1992 decision by the Supreme Court that asserted it was acceptable for U.S. agents to kidnap a criminal defendant on Mexican soil, bring him to the United States and try him here — despite an extradition treaty between the United States and Mexico.

* Interdiction of Haitian refugees on the high seas, in contradiction to the 1951 Convention on Refugees which states that persons in danger of persecution must not be turned away. “Haitians,” Professor Leary said, “are being returned without a hearing. Given the present situation in Haiti, they are being returned to persecution and probably loss of life.”

* U.S. mining of harbors in Nicaragua, contrary to international treaty.

* Two 1989 cases in which the Supreme Court upheld the capital sentences of two persons who were under age 18 at the time they committed murder. This, Professor Leary argued, contradicts our ratification of an international treaty that prohibits the execution of minors. “We are one of the few Western countries conducting executions,” she pointed out.

With these examples, Professor Leary restated her contention that only a true commitment to the principles and the letter of international law can bring about a just and peaceful world. “It is in the best interest of the United States,” she said, “to do what the founding fathers urged: to uphold the rule of law not only in domestic affairs, but in international affairs as well.”

The Alumni Dinner, held in the Center for Tomorrow, was presented by an 11-member committee chaired by Jennifer L. Krieger '89. ■

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