

4-1-1998

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Recommended Citation

Burch, Susan R. (1998) "New Mentor Program Builds Community," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 11 : No. 1 , Article 11.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol11/iss1/11

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assignments based on reviewing papers and hearing practitioner presentations about cases in areas such as interstate adoption and property settlements. Students also spend several days with a family law judge, the judge's clerk and a law guardian.

"After completing the colloquium I think they feel as though they are leaving law school with some expertise in a particular substantive area," Mangold says. "Whether or not they go into family law, they have delved very deeply into cutting-edge issues as well as dealt with the day-to-day issues. Otherwise, law school can be a smattering of so many substantive areas. This way they can leave with a refined understanding of a large area of law."

The concentrations are still evolving. Some that do not already have a full-year colloquium are expanding that component. The Finance Transactions concentration is developing closer ties with the School of Management. The Criminal Law concentration has added a federal criminal law clinic. The new Regulatory Law and Policy concentration plans to bring in alumni practicing in regulatory law and work cooperatively with the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. And the Law School expects to continue adding new concentrations in the future, possibly in areas such as litigation.

Olsen says the concentrations remain fairly unusual among American law schools. "Parts of it may exist at other schools, but it isn't the norm," he says. "And it's not for everybody. You don't have to do this in order to benefit from the educational process at UB Law. But it's an option if you have a strong interest."

As demanding as the concentrations are, they do not preclude students from indulging their curiosity in other areas. "You definitely have the time to take all the courses you want in other fields," says Frank J. Jacobson, a third-year student in the Criminal Law concentration. But, he adds, the time spent in the concentration provides a structure and sense of accomplishment that might otherwise be missed. "Instead of aimlessly wandering through your law school career you can tailor your education for yourself," he says. "And you get out of here with something more than just a degree." ■

New Mentor Program builds community

BY SUSAN R. BURCH '00

When first-year law student Maria Mitsios moved to Buffalo last fall from California, she had never been to Western New York before. "It was a little intimidating to move across the country by myself to start law school," Mitsios says. "I met a few students, but I still had many questions about school and finding my way around."

Then one day, Mitsios received a letter in her mailbox from law Professor Errol Meidinger inviting her to meet with him and a small group of other first-year students. The professor wanted to get together to discuss how the first year was going, to answer any questions and to offer some advice — not just about being a law student, but about living in the Buffalo community. Meidinger is Mitsios' mentor, and participates in a new faculty/student mentoring program implemented this past fall at the Law School.

"I was so impressed when I read the letter," says Mitsios. "It was a real relief to have a faculty adviser around to give me advice and guidance through what sometimes seemed like a maze."

Created over the summer by Vice Dean R. Nils Olsen, the idea of the mentoring program is to make the first year more comfortable and welcoming. Mentors give students someone they can turn to for advice — someone who knows their name and can make the law school experience less daunting. With the more complex New Curriculum in place,

Olsen thought it was important that the first-year students be given an opportunity to get to know UB Law faculty or staff on a personal level — and not necessarily one of their professors.

"I felt that giving each student a mentor would be a good way to humanize the first-year experience and make it interpersonal. This is something that is very hard to accomplish in classes of 100 students."

Olsen sent out letters to all of the faculty asking for volunteer mentors. The response was overwhelming. More than 30 faculty and staff members signed up for the opportunity to get to know the first-year class. Students were then randomly matched with mentors. Within the first few weeks of school, contact was made.

A goal of the program is to have the mentors meet with their group of students at least once during each semester in an informal setting, such as dinner or lunch, where they could sit down and just talk about anything that was on their minds. Ideally, the mentors would be able to alleviate some of the students' anxieties during the fall semester and give advice on registering for their second year during the spring semester.

Professor Jim Atleson agrees that the mentoring program is a great idea. In the past he had taught first-year students, but in recent years he missed that contact. "The first-year students seem to be excited about learning something new. There is a sense of discovery about them that is very energizing," he says.



Left to right: Amod K. Choudhary '00, Alexander Billias '00, Professor James B. Atleson and Susan R. Burch '00

Like many other mentors, Atleson took his students out to dinner and shared useful advice. "Several of the students expressed concerns about participating in class," he recalls. "I told them not to worry about how other students answer questions.

"When a professor asks a question, there may be 20 different answers, but any one person may only think of two of them. So when another student gives an answer that you haven't thought of, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are more intelligent than you. They most likely would not have thought of the answer that you came up with."

Other topics included the grading system, and surviving the first year in general. "I tried to address these real concerns and allay their fears," Atleson says.

First-year student Amod Choudhary found such advice to be very helpful. "Professor Atleson told us things that put me at ease, especially about tests and the whole law school experience. I found meeting with the other students helpful, too. I realized that we were all in the same boat. Even the professor had some of the same concerns and experi-

ences when he was in law school. It helped give me a sense of confidence about being in law school."

Another first-year student, Kerry Diggin, was also pleased with the mentoring program. Growing up in Long Island, Diggin had never been to Western New York before attending UB Law. She went to a large undergraduate school, where personal interaction with professors was rare. Diggin says that she even had a difficult time finding professors to write her recommendations for law school.

Diggin met with her mentor group for dinner and was especially impressed when her mentor, Vice Dean Alan Carrel, gave out his home phone number and invited the students to call him any time if they needed help.

"He really took an interest not only in us as students, but in who we were as individuals. He got to know us on a personal level, which made me feel much more at home and relaxed about tackling that first semester," Diggin says.

Carrel was helpful not only by

offering advice on school problems, but also dispensing legal advice, providing ideas on how to get through the Buffalo winters, suggesting places to visit during their spare time, and even helping with personal problems.

When Diggin was having problems getting the heat in her apartment to work, she visited Carrel at school. He gave her advice on how to approach her landlord. He told her to call him if the problem was not resolved in time for finals. "He said that he would even help me find another place to stay so that I could concentrate on my studies and not be stressed about my living situation."

Students also benefit from getting to know their fellow classmates, an opportunity that isn't often readily available in large classes. "This is an important part of the program," says Atleson. "We feel that the benefits of not only getting to know the faculty, but the other students as well, helps to foster a sense of community and breaks down the competitiveness that is found at other law schools."

Diggin agrees. "Having a mentor eased the transition from undergraduate school to law school and gave me a support network right here at UB." ■