A Different Eye: New Journal Brings a Woman's Perspective to Issues in the Law

UB Law Forum
A Different Eye
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A new legal journal published at the Law School combines the best of legal scholarship with a real-world perspective from a woman’s point of view.

Called Circles, the journal was conceived by students as a way to put into context the “black-letter law” they study in the classroom. Its editors come both from the Law School and from UB’s women’s studies department.

Far from the staid law reviews that every lawyer is accustomed to wading through, Circles promises to take a lively and energetic approach to legal and social policy issues.

“It is law-related work, but there will also be poetry, short stories, and artwork by women,” said second-year student Joanne Fuchs, one of the editors. “It’s a mix of things, which I think makes it really interesting and creative.”

The editors — a loose coalition of interested students, including some men — are reviewing submissions for the premiere issue, which they expect to publish in the spring. Work was solicited through a call for papers that was sent to every law school and every women’s studies department in the United States — nearly 800 mailings.

The submissions are electric and their subjects diverse. They include:

* A first-hand account of a rape victim’s experience with the legal system.
* A discussion of fetal tissue research, a matter of debate at the federal level.
* A book review section, including a piece on female detective novels.
* Short fiction on domestic violence.
* A piece on one women’s organization and how it dealt with the issue of racism within the group.

Circles was born out of students’ frustration with the limitations of classroom study. Says second-year student Carla Goldstein, chairperson of the journal’s 10-member executive board: “It really was an attempt to allow women and men to communicate about women in a non-traditional way, and to read about women in a non-traditional way. I don’t mean just women, but women and the law.

“Law is a changing body over time. The Constitution was written by men, and in the 200-plus years since it was written, its evolution has been guided by men. The law itself has not accounted for the needs of women until much more recently, and even as it has started to, it does so from the perspective of the male.

“The equality standard in the law is, How is a woman like a man? as opposed to, How can we give women equal opportunity and integrity to men without making them be like men?”

The name of the journal, Fuchs said, came out of the editors’ desire to avoid the hierarchy and rigidity that characterize more traditional law reviews. “Since this is about sharing women’s perspectives, we really thought that wasn’t what we wanted,” she said. “There’s not one person or two people making all the decisions. We try to keep an open dialogue.”

“The important thing about the organization,” said Goldstein, “is that it really cuts across all ideological lines of the Law School. A lot of the groups at school don’t communicate with each other or do activities together. But they can all come together in Circles.

“And the community has been very responsive. We’ve received contributions from almost all of the very large firms in Buffalo.”

Another major donation came from Daniel Charny, the father of 1991 graduate Nathaniel Charny. The elder Charny owns a computer firm, High Tech Marketing, in Elmsford, N.Y. When he heard about the journal being established by friends of his son, he donated a custom-built computer system and laser printer.

“That cuts out an entire process of dealing with printers, and a lot of the costs,” Goldstein said.

Individuals interested in subscribing or purchasing a sample issue of Circles may inquire at Box 36, John Lord O’Brian Hall, University at Buffalo School of Law, Buffalo, N.Y. 14260.

Said Fuchs: “Law is thinking in categories and boxes, in a rigid way. There are a lot of other things that go into what the law is and the way it should be. Circles came out of that perspective. Everyone has a different perspective on what it means to them.”

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