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Law in Context

Two journals mark UB’s leadership in interdisciplinary studies of law

The name of UB Law School is reaching far in academia — indeed throughout the world — as the home of two of the world’s leading journals for interdisciplinary scholarship on law and legal institutions, the Law & Society Review and Law & Policy.

UB law faculty member Frank Munger was recently named general editor of the Law & Society Review. Law & Policy is currently under the co-editorship of faculty members Thomas Headrick and Errol Meidinger and Keith Hawkins of Oxford University, England. It came to the Law School in 1984 and is now permanently located at UB and underwritten by the Baldy Center for Interdisciplinary Studies.

Both journals derive intellectual focus and support from UB’s faculty, more than a quarter of whom hold Ph.D.s in social science or history. UB Law School has been a national center for interdisciplinary scholarship and teaching at least since the deanship of sociologist Richard “Red” Schwartz in the early 1970s. The Law & Society Review had been at UB during the mid-1970s under Marc Galanter’s editorship.

The Law & Society Review has a rotating editorship, which is now Munger’s for the next three years. In recent years its editorial offices have been at Michigan Law School, UCLA Law School, the American Bar Foundation and Temple University. Awarding the editorship constitutes recognition not only of the interest and commitment of the individual selected as editor, but of the institution, which is asked to provide partial support for the editor’s office.

The Review is the official publication of the Law and Society Association, the oldest scholarly society committed to the interdisciplinary study of law and legal institutions. The Review draws articles from a community of scholars that is worldwide and has subscribers around the world.

“Because the oldest and largest scholarly publication for law and social science,” says Munger, “it is committed to publishing the highest quality empirical research and theory in the field.

“However, the field has grown enormously over the past decade. Law and society research has become a real growth industry. World change has stimulated the interest of American scholars in particular, but scholars in other countries are also increasingly recognizing the importance of studying law and its effects in context.”

Munger recently returned from a conference in Thailand on Law and Society in Southeast Asia sponsored by the Law and Society Association with funding from the National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation, and organized by UB law faculty member David Engel. Munger also points to the Law and Society Association’s decision to hold its annual meeting in Amsterdam last year as evidence of international growth.

The field is changing in other ways as well. Munger notes, reflecting the views of scholars within and outside law schools about law and methods of scholarship. “Recent work in the field is pursuing new and important approaches to understanding law in context, from economic analysis to narratives of experience, from feminist discourse to the study of law as literature,” he says.

“I came in with a kind of mission, to have the Review tap these very exciting new currents in the research community, often reflected in the annual meeting of the Association, but which are only now emerging in scholarship publishable in the Law & Society Review.

Among other innovations intended to help showcase work on the leading edge of the field, Munger plans to introduce what he calls “mini-symposia,” or small groups of thematically interrelated articles and comments that will provide a sampling of work and debate in an area of thought or research. Examples of mini-symposium proposals under consideration include: historical work in criminology on the impact of institutions of criminal justice on the creation and maintenance of gender and race differences; the personal narrative as a form of law and society scholarship; research on women in the labor force; privatization in Eastern Europe; and a symposium of commentary on research on immigration regulation.

Munger is now seeking an associate editor for the journal, partly to help him handle the 150 to 200 manuscripts
it receives each year, most of which are good enough to go through the peer review process. Editorial assistant Sara Faherty ("she's been absolutely essential to maintaining the Review in Buffalo") and copy editor Bette Sikes, based in Chicago, share the work of producing the Review.

The Review has been completely redesigned for Munger by professional graphic artist, Ann Cassidy, to give the featured articles more emphasis on the cover and to create a fresh, more readable format.

"I think having this publication at UB creates a nice opportunity for the Law School to refocus its attention on its law and society roots," Munger says. And of the Law and Society Association's decision to bring the Law & Society Review to Buffalo, he says, "It is recognition that the law school is an important center for law and society research."

UB Law's other journal, Law & Policy, is smaller but just as intellectually broad-minded.

Professor Errol E. Meidinger, a co-editor of Law & Policy, says the journal strives to be "very pluralistic and open-ended" and welcomes submissions from scholars in any discipline.

"It is a journal that's most willing to invite serious work on the issues of the day," says Meidinger, who spent the 1991-92 academic year as a visiting professor at Syracuse University. "The other journals tend to be more narrowly scholarly. Although Law & Policy is very much a scholarly journal, it invites synthesis among disciplines.

"The philosophy of the journal," Meidinger says, "is that legal discussions are not separate from the larger discussions about how society should be organized and how it should distribute its resources. The idea is to provide a vehicle that not only is multidisciplinary, but is open to multiple methodologies — a place where discussions can come together on policy problems which try to link laws with their social implications and also their social origins.

"It invites that vision about how something might be changed to work in a different way."

Laura Mangan, assistant director of the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy, and managing editor of Law & Policy, says most of the journal's articles deal with social policy, not case law. Examples from recent issues include a piece on the buying and selling of human organs, and a study of why car owners tend to patronize automobile inspection stations with lax standards.

"We receive articles from all over the world — Canada, Europe, even Australia," Mangan says. "You get a real cross-fertilization of ideas.

"Law & Policy believes in publishing the more alternative articles, the more innovative ones," she says. "It's sort of the oddball among law and social policy journals, but it's mainstream enough so that it's not wacky.

"We think it's a little bolder, braver, more flexible than the other journals."

Law & Policy's 550 subscribers, she says, include major libraries, academicians and government regulators. It is typeset and printed in Great Britain, necessitating a steady transatlantic Federal Express traffic of articles, galleys and correspondence.

In the works are three special topical issues of Law & Policy: one on privatization and constitutional reform in Eastern Europe, another on financial regulation, and a third on environmental regulation.

"It's both an important service to the scholarly community and an excellent thing for us to be home to both Law & Policy and Law & Society Review, because it draws attention to the place," Meidinger says. "It gives people a sense that there's a fair bit going on here."