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Soft Sell: New Career Services Director Will Be Advocate for Students

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Faculty:

Soft Sell

New **career services director** will be advocate for students

“I am evidence,” says Lisa Patterson, “that you end up where you should be, whether you plan to or not.”

For Patterson, that means a new job as a UB Law School associate dean and director of the Career Services Office. She comes to UB from the University of Notre Dame Law School, where she has been in career services for five years. She holds a J.D. from Notre Dame and an undergraduate degree from Harvard University, in Comparative Religion.

“With my first-year students, I always open by talking about myself. I have a counseling background in psychology, and I once ran a resume agency.” She discovered that career services work was a good fit during her last year at Notre Dame, when she was a student assistant in the department.

“I didn’t go to law school to become a career services professional. But when I was offered the job as a new graduate, it fit my background and interests so well that it seemed like fate. I believe that if you keep doing work you enjoy, it will eventually tie together somehow.”

UB’s gain is Notre Dame’s loss – one felt deeply, according to a message that Notre Dame Law School Dean Patricia A. O’Hara distributed to faculty and staff to break the news. It said in part: “We will miss Lisa a great deal. She has overseen a substantial increase in on-campus interviews, implemented a very efficient Web-based system for

scheduling those interviews, and created a significant number of innovative programs for communicating with students.

“Outside the law school, she has played an increasingly prominent role in her professional organization, the National Association for Law Placement. All of this has come without her losing touch with the public service dimensions of the mission of the law school – as anyone knows who has purchased daffodils for cancer research, joined her at a table in support of the Homeless Center, or hammered nails with her during Christmas in April (an urban renewal program similar to

Habitat for Humanity), to mention but three of her activities.”

“I was perfectly happy at Notre Dame,” Patterson says. “But every time I saw a posting in Boston (my hometown) or Buffalo (my husband’s), I would look into it.

“And when I interviewed at UB, I had a wonderful time. The people were overwhelmingly nice, and the quality of the students and the program seemed amazing. It just did not seem like something I could walk away from.”

Contrasting the two law schools, she says: “UB is definitely much more practice-oriented. Notre Dame is geared more towards a general education. The clinical programs and concentrations at UB teach people much more about how to be lawyers.

“Also, at Notre Dame, 70 percent of the students go into private practice, sometimes out of necessity because they paid so much for tuition. What is nice about UB is that its tuition enables students to take lower-paying jobs in public interest and government. That gives me more options for meaningful career searches.”

In career services, she says, “I am a salesperson. That is my job. To have a good product and something you can stand behind is half the battle. Because of the clinical programs and the academic concentrations, UB students are able to hit the ground running. They do not have to spend as much time at the beginning learning what lawyers do. That is one reason why I thought UB students are easy to sell.”

“I am evidence,” says Lisa Patterson, “that you end up where you should be, whether you plan to or not.”



“The other part of my job,” she adds, “is being an educator. Students would love it if I could just hand them their dream jobs out of my magic hat. But as much as I try to facilitate the process, I would do them an educational disservice if they didn’t also learn to write resumes and cover letters, to interview, network and keep deadlines. It is a hidden aspect of law school education, yet it is so important for life.”

She also emphasizes the continuum that begins with the admissions process, continues through a student’s law school academic career, and culminates in career services and alumni contact. “For all of us who work here, it is very important to collaborate,” she says. “I am looking forward to participating in collaborative projects with admissions, alumni relations, clinics, faculty and student groups.”

Once she landed the job, Patterson and her husband, a mechanical engineer and native of Randolph, N.Y., rented a car in Buffalo and put 950 miles on it, looking for the right community in which to live. They settled on Lockport, in Niagara County.

She plans to “get involved in the community” here as she did in South Bend — “If I see something that is worthy, I try to drum up support,” she says. She also continues to bake for fun. Her father was a baker in Germany, and she grew up around bakeries. She even sold homemade cakes, mostly chocolate, during her time in Boston.

Of the move to Buffalo, Lisa Patterson says: “I am very excited. I think UB Law has a great thing going, and I am happy to be a part of it.

“As for the weather — after the storms we got off Lake Michigan in South Bend, my attitude is, same snow, different lake!” •