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By the Numbers: New Program Melds Legal Skills and Economic Concepts

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By the numbers

New program melds legal skills and economic concepts

As controversy swirls nationwide around the issue of corporate accountability and shoddy accounting practices, UB Law School has instituted another interdisciplinary program, one that bridges the gap between the worlds of business and law.

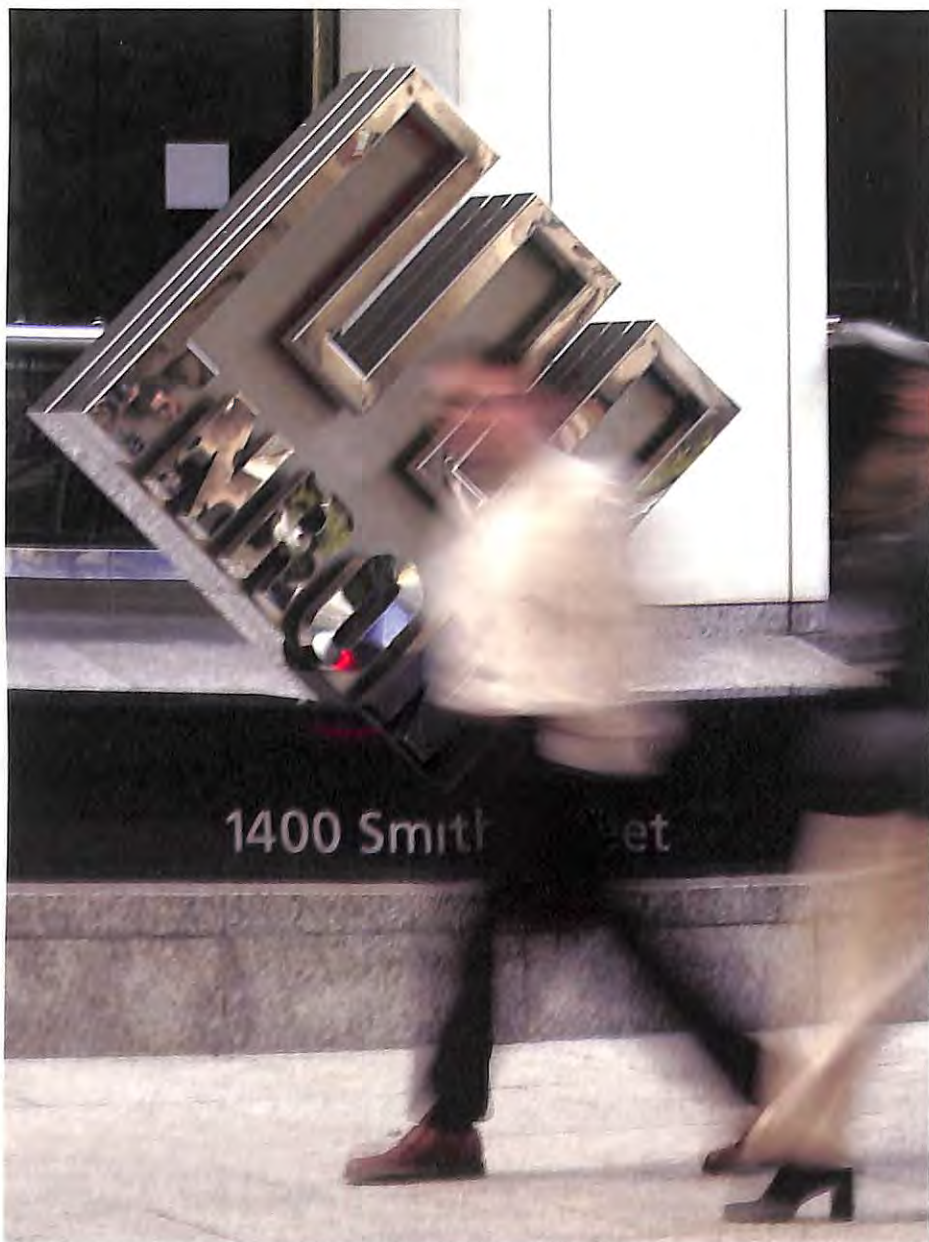
The collaborative program in Law and Applied Economics will train students in legal theory as it relates to economics, and will provide practical skills and knowledge that could be used in such fields as management consulting, corporate legal work and government-agency professional work.

Students in the program, drawn from both the Law School and the University's Department of Economics, will graduate with joint degrees of Juris Doctor and Master of Arts in economics. Taking 3½ years to complete, the program is slightly longer than the traditional three-year law degree.

"It makes sense to do this, because of synergy between the Economics Department and the Law School," said Peter Pitegoff, UB Law's vice dean for academic affairs. "We already had law students who were pursuing these dual degrees in an ad hoc way. There is real interest in the program."

Pitegoff said the program also should draw economics students who want to increase their expertise and employability by acquiring a measure of legal theory and skills.

"The J.D. helps people understand the structure of power in society," he



The collaborative program in Law and Applied Economics will train students to understand issues of corporate accountability such as those swirling around Enron Corp.

said. "One of the signatures of UB Law School is its interdisciplinary focus. Much of the scholarship here, as well as much of the teaching, puts law in the context of the broader society. A number of our faculty have advanced degrees in other disciplines."

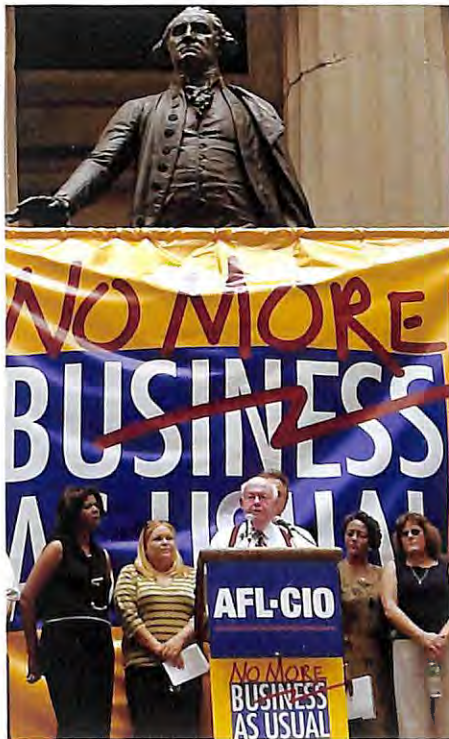
The economics program, Pitegoff pointed out, joins several other interdisciplinary degree programs offered through the Law School, including programs combining a J.D. degree with degrees in management, social work, public health and library science.

Isaac Ehrlich, chair of UB's Department of Economics, said the program's "twist" on the law-and-economics movement in legal theory is to use economic factors to explain the development of the legal system. "Our program puts together law and economics in a new way," Ehrlich said. "It is applied economics – it will give students skills they can use."

"No other school has a program of the magnitude and design that we have here," said Chris S. Connor, who coordinates the program through the Economics Department. He said interest among potential students has been so high that "we are running out of brochures."

As examples of fields in which such a combination of degrees might serve well, Ehrlich ticks off a list: regulatory activity such as antitrust work, wrongful-death cases, patent work, commercial activities, intellectual property and Internet property rights. In antitrust, for example, "corporations need a lot of economic advice, and so does the government, to try to prove that there was a trust. When you deal with a case like this, the corporation spends millions of dollars on economic advice, and so does the government. Lawyers have to become more conversant in these types of skills and knowledge."

Connor said the program likely will



AFL-CIO President John Sweeney asks for corporate reform. The collaborative program teaches students skills they can use to solve business problems.

attract a high proportion of international students. The Economics Department, which four years ago had only 23 students, expects to have a complement of 120 students in the 2002-03 school year, 60 percent of them from countries outside the United States.

Said Ehrlich: "This program should attract international attention. The word will get out there that if you want to get a specific leg up in the legal process, as a product of both programs in law and economic and econometric skills, consider the University at Buffalo."



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