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Perfect Fit: Dartmouth Scholar Named Head of Baldy Center

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Faculty



MARK MULVILLE

Perfect fit *Dartmouth scholar named head of the Baldy Center*

“I am interested in how law works – not the intellectual puzzle of law, but law as a political and social institution. An understanding of law from that perspective requires the skills of social science. All of my education, all my teaching and all my research has taken the perspective of a social scientist looking at the law.”

The words are those of Lynn Mather, who comes to UB Law School this fall to head the Baldy Center for Law and So-

cial Policy. But they might just as well serve as a mission statement for the Baldy Center, the nationally known resource for interdisciplinary research on law and legal institutions.

Indeed, it would be hard to imagine a better fit for the Baldy Center than Mather, who has spent 30 years teaching at Dartmouth College and just completed a term as president of the Law & Society Association. That group comprises scholars, from all disciplines and worldwide, who are interested in the place of law in social, political, economic and cultural life.

At Dartmouth, Mather (pronounced with a long a) held the Nelson A. Rockefeller Professor of Government Chair and served as acting director of the Rockefeller Center for the Social Sciences. She received Dartmouth College's Distinguished Teaching award in 1995 for excellence in teaching. At UB, she will have a joint appointment in the Law School and the Department of Political Science,

in addition to directing the extremely active Baldy Center.

Her work in developing a legal studies program at Dartmouth, Mather said, made her appreciate the resources available in O'Brian Hall. "While the Dartmouth program has been successful," she said, "when I compared it to the number of faculty and the resources in Buffalo, it was just clear that Buffalo offered so much more to me."

As well, she said, for those in the Law & Society field, UB Law School enjoys a prominent reputation. "I have known some of the scholars at Buffalo for over 20 years," she said. "The Baldy Center and the Buffalo Law School have a national reputation for excellence in the field of Law & Society. It is probably one of the three or four major educational centers in the country in this field. This is a very lively and exciting place to be."

Mather's research has focused on decision making by lawyers, legal professionalism, the nature and impact of litigation against tobacco companies, trial courts and policy making, women in the legal profession, divorce mediation, plea bargaining and the transformation of disputes. Her most recent book, with two co-authors, is *Divorce Lawyers at Work: Varieties of Professionalism in Practice*. The book has won the American Political Science Association's C. Herman Pritchett Award for the best book published in the Law and Courts field during 2001.

"I am interested in the conversations those in black-letter law can have with those like myself who take a Law & Society perspective." As an example, she cites how the plea bargaining process operates: "What are the informal rules of the court that structure that discussion? They are informed by black-letter law, but also by personal relationships, sociological characteristics of criminals and their cases, the politics of judges in the courts, and organizational structures."

In the litigation against the tobacco industry, "what fascinated me was how such a tenuous legal case could have such a powerful political impact: to mobilize attorneys general to go against the industry, to create networks of medical and legal actors in opposition to tobacco, to generate negative publicity against the

industry, to bring pressure from Wall Street on the industry to change its behavior. Now we have had this huge increase in cigarette taxes. I am looking at the economic, political and social impacts of litigation. Litigation is important beyond what goes on in the courtrooms and the lawyers' offices."

At the Baldy Center, Mather says she hopes to increase the visibility of the center's existing programs and conferences. She will also do some teaching, both in the Law School and in the Department of Political Science, but not until fall 2003.

When she came to interview for the job, Mather said, "I was actually overwhelmed and surprised by how excited I became. I think there is a lot of potential for further growth of the center. What the Baldy Center can do is provide resources to joint degree students and create an intellectual home for them, so that the 'law-and' students will find support from faculty and other students in their education."

Mather's undergraduate degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, was in political science and mathematics. She has done graduate study in law and social science at the University of Wisconsin and in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, and has a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Irvine. She has published and lectured widely and is a regular participant in professional conferences.

Said Law School Dean Nils Olsen: "The law faculty and I feel extremely fortunate to have attracted a scholar and teacher of Lynn's caliber. The Baldy Center – which is already nationally respected as a center of excellence at the University – will not only be maintained but enhanced under her leadership."

The Baldy Center for Law and Social

Policy was founded in 1976 and seeks to foster interdisciplinary research on law and legal institutions. Over 120 faculty members at the University at Buffalo are affiliated with the Center, organized in programs and working groups focused on the following topics: Children, Families and the Law; Community and Identity; Gender, Law and Social Policy; International and Comparative Legal Studies; Regulation and Public Policy; Environmental Stewardship; Law and Religion; and Law, Technology and Society.

In addition to supporting socio-legal research, it administers conferences, workshops, and visiting scholar programs. Workshops and conferences hosted by the center during the past semester included: Technology, Legal Information, and Legal Knowledge; Exploring, Constructing, and Sustaining Progressive Black Masculinities; Feminism and Child Protection: Tensions and Possibilities (co-hosted by the Feminism and Legal Theory Project, Cornell Law School); and Regional Socio-legal Studies Conference at University of Toronto.

In partnership with seven other universities, the center coordinates a growing regional socio-legal network of more than 100 U.S. and Canadian researchers who meet regularly to discuss their work and to plan collaborative teaching and research activities. In May, the regional group met in Toronto co-hosted by University of Toronto's Centre for Criminology & Osgoode Hall Law School, York University. Information about the Baldy Center is available on the Web at www.law.buffalo.edu/baldycenter/conferences.html.



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– Lynn Mather