A Nod to Service: Professor Charles Patrick Ewing Is Named A SUNY Distinguished Service Professor

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A nod to service

Professor Charles Patrick Ewing is named a SUNY Distinguished Service Professor

Ewing, who has been a member of the UB Law faculty since 1983, teaches criminal law, evidence, juvenile law, forensic science and psychology, and psychiatry and law. His service as a consultant and trial witness includes expertise in forensic psychology; insanity defenses, including postpartum psychosis; juvenile violence; domestic violence; and repressed memory. He has testified before Congress about the need for better legal protections for battered women, and his writing and research on battered women and on intrafamilial violence is considered seminal in the field.

"This is really nice for a lot of reasons," Ewing says of the honor. For one, he says, his friend and mentor Murray Levine, recently retired from...
Ewing took an unusual route to his legal career, having practiced psychology for five years after earning his doctorate in child and family psychology at Cornell University. At that point he decided to go to law school, graduating cum laude from Harvard and coming almost immediately to UB Law. “I like to say that I was a law student in June and a law professor in August,” he laughs. He was drawn, he says, by UB Law’s reputation, even then, as an institution that valued interdisciplinary approaches to the law—much like Brandeis University, where he taught undergraduate law part time while a student at Harvard.

He went on to research and write extensively about the intersection of psychology and law, a rich vein that he was supported in exploring. “One of the beauties of this place,” Ewing says, “is that everything I have ever done here has been encouraged.”

It helped, too, that in the early 1980s the discipline of law and psychology was just coming into its own, including establishment of the American Board of Forensic Psychology.

The two fields, he says, fit together nicely.

“They work well together because they are different, but they are a lot more closely related than people would think,” Ewing says. “A lot of law is psychology. Law is designed to shape behavior and change behavior. To me, they go hand in hand.”

That fascination has carried over to his teaching. Ewing says he tries “to get students to think about, why do we do it that way?” For example, he points to the admission of deathbed declarations as an exception to the rule prohibiting hearsay, on the assumption that people have nothing to gain by lying in their last hours. Empirical evidence to support that assumption, though, is scarce, Ewing says.

His research has resulted in five books: Fatal Families: The Dynamics of Intrafamilial Homicide, Kids Who Kill, When Children Kill: The Dynamics of Juvenile Homicide, Battered Women Who Kill; and Crisis Intervention as Psychotherapy. He also co-authored the book Psychology, Psychiatry and the Law: A Clinical and Forensic Handbook, and is the author or co-author of about 70 other publications.

In addition, Ewing edits the bi-monthly journal Behavioral Sciences and the Law, to which he has been associated since 1991.

It is a full calendar, and Ewing insists there is no method to the madness. “My time management strategy is just to keep working, to keep doing it,” he says. “I have always got a lot of things going at once. I cannot ever really turn it off. Waiting is the worst thing in the world for me. That is why it would be hard for me to be a practicing lawyer—they do a lot of waiting. When I go to court to testify, I always bring a brief-case of books.”

The whirlwind of activity is not confined to his office on the seventh floor of O’Brian Hall, though. Ewing says one project of which he is most proud is coaching the 10-member mock trial team at Williamsville North High School. The team was one of six, out of 600, to reach the New York State championships in Albany this year. “These kids are amazing,” he says. “The season runs from December through April, and they are arguing both sides of the same case all through that time, and you can just see the growth happening. It is a lot of fun.”

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