Doug Sylvester ’94 on A Tiny Revolution

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Alumni Publications at Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in UB Law Forum by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ University at Buffalo School of Law. For more information, please contact lawscholar@buffalo.edu.
Douglas J. Sylvester ’94 is thinking big — and also small. Really, really small. As a research fellow at Arizona State University, where he teaches IP law and serves as an associate dean, he has immersed himself in the global issues arising from nanotechnology, the emerging science of machines and materials measured in billionths of a meter. Especially he studies and writes about the human impacts of such microscopic technology, which some say may revolutionize the way we live. One of the problems with revolution, though, is that it makes people nervous.

“Human beings adapt to technologies and deal with the consequences a lot better than lawyers and social scientists would like to believe,” Sylvester says. “Change bothers people. But one of the things the law does really well is to allow technologies to disperse and be accepted by society.” In his writing, Sylvester explores the psychology of how humans accept or reject new technologies. He also thinks and writes about privacy issues that arise from new technologies, taking issue with those who assert that individual privacy should always trump social concerns. “The concern I have always had about lawyers and law professors,” he says, “is that we look for people who are losers and say everything is about protecting their rights. I tend to think that is wrong. If individuals lose a degree of privacy, there are many beneficial results for society.”