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At the Head of the Class: Alumni Who Are Law School Faculty Members

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ne measure of a law school is the quality of the legal practitioners it produces. Another is its list of alumni who have gone on themselves to teach at law schools far and wide. For UB Law, that list is long. Nearly 30 alumni identify themselves as professors, lecturers, librarians and deans; dozens more alumni who are practicing lawyers teach as adjuncts. Two alumni – Dianne Avery ’82 and Elizabeth Menoch ’78 – are professors at UB Law School.

Others range geographically from California to Florida, Canada to Texas.

I very much enjoyed my UB Law School experience,” Abramovsky says, “and I always look forward to coming back to the reunions.”

William Barker ’77 Professor Dickinson School of Law Carlisle, Pa.

Since 2002, Barker has had a standing appointment with the law faculty at the London School of Economics and Political Science and since 1996, he has taught international, European and United Kingdom tax. In the last two years, he has received two Fulbright grants to teach and study in South Africa and Latvia. Barker’s research focuses on international tax and tax avoidance issues, especially in respect to developing and transitional economies. Teaching, he says, “is much more fun than being a student. Two great benefits are helping students achieve success in a difficult but fascinating subject, and helping in a small way others in different countries with the important issues confronting their tax systems.”

He adds: “I had some absolutely fabulous professors at Buffalo. From Adolf Hornbuzger I learned to appreciate international law from a global perspective. From Kenneth Kamin who is simply the best I learned the pure delight that working with the law and with students could be.”

At the head of the class

Alumni who are law school faculty members

Robin Barnes ’89 Professor University of Connecticut School of Law Hartford, Conn.

In her 14th year at UConn Law School, where she went to teach after earning an LLM in Wisconsin, Barnes has just completed her first casebook, for Carolina Academic Press. It features the most controversial subjects in the debate surrounding privacy and individual rights. She is writing a second book, The Caroline Verdict, based on a paper that she delivered at a media law conference in Mainz, Germany, this summer. It recommends remedies for widespread defamation of the rich and famous under American media law by contrasting those found in the European Union. “My life as a professor far exceeds my expectations,” Barnes says. “I truly love what I do, and I have the audience before me that I am actually making a difference in the world. The late Denise Carty-Bennia and Muhammad Kenyatta provided a great deal of the moral inspiration. I have come close to truly appreciate the superior legal training that I received before joining the academy. Guyora Binder provided superb guidance in my quest to become a law professor. Under his tutelage I graduated with honors, an LLM from the University of Wisconsin after serving as a Hauser Fellow, and Harvard Law Review published my first essay.”

“I have grown even more committed to the same ideals that I held during law school. I now teach three courses in advanced constitutional law. Free Speech, Individual Rights, and Civil and Political Rights. It has been challenging at times in the current political climate domestically as well as the war in Iraq. Yet I go right through semester after semester. We roll up our sleeves, dig deep and have those conversations that seem all too scarce in many quarters. Some days we all leave class in need of Extra Strength Excedrin, but I would not have it any other way.”

Alberto Manuel Benitez ’86 Professor of critical law and director of the Immigration Clinic George Washington University Law School Washington, D.C.

On Oct. 18, the Hispanic Bar Association of D.C. awarded its Hugh A. Johnson Jr. Memorial Award to the Immigration Clinic that Benitez directs. The award recognizes the service provided to the alien community by the Immigration Clinic since its inception in 1979.

Also, Benitez’s first casebook, An Introduction to the U.S. Legal System: Fundamental Causes and Materials, is scheduled for publication this year by the Carolina Academic Press.

“When I was at UB,” he says, “I never imagined that nearly 20 years later I would be doing this kind of work. I have so much fun that I am amazed that I am paid to do this. I have a hand in both the theory and the practice of immigration law. In the fall Immigration Law I course, I teach my students the intricacies of the Immigration & Nationality Act. My course covers the range of issues in immigration, including immigrant and non-immigrant visas, asylum, citizenship, and removal. In the Immigration Clinic, I supervise eight students per semester as we represent aliens in immigration matters.”

“My almae have gone on to successful careers in government, public interest and private practice. My greatest satisfaction is when my alums contact me after graduation. I am honored that they consult with me on personal and professional matters, if they invite me to their weddings, and when they e-mail me pictures of their newborns. On those occasions, I think that maybe I am good at this.”

At UB Law, Benitez was a student in the Immigration Clinic, directed by Kathy Rinar, and spent two summers doing immigration law in Houston and Chicago. “I learned from, and I recall with respect, all my UB professors,” he says, “but a few who stick in my mind are Virginia Leary, Guyora Binder, Alan Freeman, Betty Mensch and Jacob Hyman.”

“What I most appreciate is that UB stimulated my thinking. It trained my mind to be critical, and to challenge established legal norms and principles. I’ve had the privilege of teaching at Northwestern, Chicago-Kent, and George Washington University. These are all top-ranked law schools. But UB is their equal in terms of the quality of its faculty, staff, curriculum and students.”

Cheryl Block ’79 Professor George Washington University Law School Washington, D.C.

Block has concentrated her teaching and research in tax, now expanded to include federal budget issues. Her recent articles have included one on “pathologies” at the intersection of the tax and budget-making process, and another on Enron-like scandals in which she argues that Occam’s razor and some questionable accounting itself. She also has studied and written lately about the federal response to Hurricane Katrina. In Washington Post op-ed pieces, Block has argued that using the tax code for relief — such as giving businesses and entrepreneurs tax breaks for investing in the area’s so-called Gulf Opportunity Zones, or GO Zones — is misguided public policy. Citing the nation’s experience with similar “Liberty Zones” established in New York City after 9/11, Block argues that there is little evidence that such zones result in economic recovery. “You have got a disaster on your hands, and you give them a tax break with some reason for which the evidence is inconclusive.”

Block says she got into her area of specialization by accident. “When I was at the Law School, tax was a required course,” she says. “I am not even sure I would have taken the course had it not been required. I found Lou Del Cotto and Ken Joyce so inspiring, I got really interested about tax. I realize there is so much policy involved, and it ties in so much to my interest in political science. It comes as quite a surprise to me that tax is what I do.”

“The one thing that I recall about UB Law is just the extraordinary quality of the teaching.”

Mary Anne Bobinski ’87 Dean and professor George Washington University School of Law Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

Nationally prominent in the field of health law, Bobinski was named Dean and professor of the University of British Columbia Faculty of Law in 2003. After 15 years of teaching U.S. health care law at the University of Houston Law Center, she began teaching in Canada last year. Among her specialties is an interest in the legal aspects of HIV. Of her UB Law experience, Bobinski says: “I was fortunate to be able to participate in a joint J.D.-Ph.D. program under the auspices of the Baldy Center. I therefore enjoyed a mix of law and public policy courses which continue to be very helpful to me today.”
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UB Law Forum caught up with a handful of these professors to ask what’s new in their professional lives—and how the UB Law experience made a difference for them.

Abe Abramovsky ’70
Professor
Fordham University School of Law
New York City

Abe Abramovsky earned his LL.M. and J.S.D. from Columbia. At Fordham since 1979, Abramovsky teaches criminal law and international criminal law, and serves as assistant dean. He also has written 46 law review articles on criminal law and criminal procedure. He says, “I have had absolutely fabulous professors at Buffalo. From Adolf Hitman I learned to appreciate the importance of a critical perspective on a given problem. From Kenneth Cabiya, who is simply the best, I have learned the pure delight that working with the law and with students could be.”

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Since 2002, Barker has had a standing appointment with the law faculty at the London School of Economics and on Legal Systems. In the last two years, he has received two Fulbright grants to teach and study in South Africa and Latvia. Barker’s research focuses on international tax and tax avoidance issues, especially in respect to developing and transitional economies. Teaching, he says, “is much more fun than being a student. Two great benefits are helping students achieve success in a difficult but fascinating subject, and helping in a small way others in different countries with the important issues confronting their tax systems.”

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It is difficult to mention particular faculty members, because virtually all of them had an influence on my current career. But David Engel was an inspiring professor and helped me to find my first job while in law school. Errol Meldinger taught a very influential course on research methods. Nils Olsen led the legal research and writing program in which I gained my first teaching experience. Tom Headrick’s Corporation’s class was immensely interesting and intellectually challenging. Finally, Lee Albert was a wonderful mentor in health law, my major field of scholarly interest.

Charles Cercone ’84
Associate dean and professor  Thomas M. Cooley Law School Lansing, Mich.
Cercone entered the legal profession after practicing litigation for 12 years in New York City and then traveled in Buffalo. As associate dean of faculty at Thomas M. Cooley Law School, he manages 160 faculty members, including issues of hiring, promotion and sab- batical. In the classroom, he teaches civil procedure.

A recent article by Cercone in the University of Pittsburgh Law Review dealt with the frequent practical problems that confronted federal courts when they are faced with work product claims.

"Many of the things that a UB student learns, he says, ‘the person who really inspired me to teach was Professor Del Collo. He was the best teacher I ever had — courteous, understanding, and how he taught and how he inspired me, how he dealt with the frequent practical prob- lems that confront federal courts when they are faced with work product claims.”

Linda Fentiman ’75
Professor  Pace University Law School White Plains, N.Y.
A recent highlight for Fentiman was the opportunity to teach at the University of Warsaw, Poland, on a 2003 Fulbright scholarship. There she taught American criminal procedure, a course in constitutional law and tax law. Her class was very attractive to female students in Poland. There is a cultural difference in Poland. There is a cultural difference in the way that gender stereotypes are expressed based on sex. Although Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 promised to eliminate sex discrimination in employment, special judicial decisions solving sex challenges to sex-based dress and grooming codes have produced an inchoate body of law. Consequently, employers are generally free to refuse to hire or to fire employees who are unwilling to conform to these sex-based policies.

"My current research explores the historical role that gender stereotypes have played in constraining effective legal market and challenges to employer prerogatives in this area."

Dianne Avery ’82
Professor  University at Buffalo Law School Buffalo, N.Y.
Avery, who took a stint as UB’s law vice dean for academic affairs from 1998-2003, has returned to what she describes as best- teaching and scholarship. Avery’s most re- cent major publication is a co-author with Robert Belton, Maria L. Ontiveros and Roberto L. Corradia, of the casebook Employment Discrimination Law: Cases and Materials on Equality in the Workplace. Published in 2004, the book is the seventh edi- tion of this casebook. It is a part of a series of casebooks on employment law and topics authored by members of the Labor Law Group, a scholarly associa- tion.

She is currently working on an article on legal challenges to sex-based dress and grooming codes in the workplace. It will examine the role that gender stereotypes have played in constraining effective legal and market challenges to employer prerogatives in this area.

Jerry Hesch ’70
Adjunct professor  University of Miami School of Law Miami, Fla.
After 20 years as a full-time law professor, Hesch became a practicing tax lawyer, but he continues as an adjunct at the University of Miami, teaching courses in the graduate programs in taxation and estate planning.

Last January he taught a one-week bridge course at UB Law School, and intends to do the same this January.

“I learned that the key to a successful advisor is not how much you know, but the ability to communicate that knowledge in a manner the client can understand,” Hesch says. “The communication skills I developed in the classroom have proven to be invaluable in the practice of tax law.

“In this age of specialization, I have been emphasizing the need for tax practitioners to look at the broader picture and integrate the different tax disciplines. Estate plan- ning lawyers frequently do not consider income tax planning, and income tax lawyers typically do not consider estate planning disciplines. My recent publications have stressed the need to integrate these two tax objec- tives along with the necessary financial analysis. I have been lecturing around the country on the integration of the income tax and estate planning disciplines and how to use financial software to more effectively communi- cate that knowledge in a manner the client can understand.”

Going to class was always fun and exciting. But there is little to equal the environment and opportunity that UB offers as much time as I need to pursue my in- terests. As a student, there was often just a little time for anything but study.”

Faculty
“It is difficult to mention particular faculty members, because virtually all of them had an influence on my curric- lent career. But David G. Elledge Jr. was an ins- piring professor and helped me to land my first job while in law school. Errol Meidinger taught a very influential course on research methods. Nils Olsen led the legal research and writing program in which I gained my first teaching experience. Tom Headrick’s Corporations class was amazingly inter- esting and intellectually challenging. Fi- nally, Lee Albert was a wonderful men- tor in health law, my major field of scholarly interest.”

Charles Cercone ’84
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Cercone entered academia after practicing litigation for 12 years in New York City and then for a period in Buf- falo. As associate dean of faculty at Thomas M. Cooley Law School, he manages 100 faculty members, including issues of hiring, promotion and sab- baticals. In the classroom, he teaches civil procedure.

A recent article by Cercone in the University of Pittsburgh Law Review dealt with the frequent practical problems that confront federal courts when they are faced with work product claims. “We often think of UB, he says, ‘the person who re- ally inspired me to teach was Professor Del Colto. He was the best teacher I ever had — courteous, and he was very interested in what he taught and how he inspired me, how he dealt with students. Aside from a very powerful intellect, he had a great class- room presence. He is, in fact, the model I try to emulate. He made connections in the materials that I always learned to be look for and to emulate. He made connections in the materials that I always learned to be look for and to emulate.”

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A recent highlight for Fentiman was the trip to Poland at the University of Warsaw, Poland, on a 2003 Fulbright scholarship. There she taught American criminal law in English and legal concepts in a graduate course in comparative health law and bioethics. “Just because we do it in the United States does not mean that is the only way to do it,” she says. “Issues are han- dléd differently in Poland. There is a different health care system and differ- ent values. A number of the women in the class were very rapidly adapting to the American model of reproductive freedom. That was just wonderful.” “I started to understand how exciting and attractive the American ap- proach to legal education is. In Poland, students are lectured to in large lecture halls; they have virtually no interaction with the professor, on the final exam, which is oral, they can be tested on anything, for example three questions from a 500-page criminal code. The idea that there could be give- and-take was thrilling to them. It really energized me as a teacher.”

Elizabeth B. Mensch ’78
SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor
University at Buffalo Law School
Buffalo
Last year, Mensch was named a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor in recognition of her outstanding teaching on the under- graduate and professional levels. She joined the UB Law faculty in 1980 after earning an LL.M. from Harvard and a stint on the tax faculty of the University of Miami Law School. At UB she teaches courses in legal history, church/state rela- tions, abortion, law, morality and pol- itics; and contracts and torts — the latter courses are required of all first-year law students.

Mensch co-authored, with her late husband, Alan Freeman, also a UB pro- fessor of law, the book The Politics of Virtue: Abortion Debates which advocates introducing theological thought into the public debate on abor- tion to bring about a compromise be- tween the two sides of the volatile is- sue. “The Supreme Court seems unable to resolve the legal dilemma of church/state relations with anything ap- proaching doctrinal clarity,” Mensch says. “The intractability of the dilemma reflects a long and complex history of both separation and interconnection — a history that reaches back through centuries and continues to inform cur- rent controversies. My research does not suggest a solution to the ‘problems’ of church and state. Instead, it explores the complexity of self-evident reasoning and intellectual interrelationships that have made theology a stubbornly central part of the history of American culture.”

Dennis Patterson ’80
Distinguished professor
Rutgers University School of Law
Camden, N.J.
A Ph.D. as well as a J.D., “I have spent the last 30 years as an academic,” Patterson notes. “In that time, I have enjoyed my work immensely. I have especially enjoyed teaching and having students in my classroom, and the many places my interests have taken me.” “I practiced and taught commercial law and legal philosophy for many years. In the last few years, I have de- veloped an interest in trade law and in- ternational law. I am currently working on a book with a colleague, titled Statecraft, Trade and the Order of States. In an article-length version of the book (to appear in December in the University of Chicago International Law Journal), we make the case that the nature of the state is changing and that these changes will impact the way we do trade in the future.”

In the spring of 2005, Patterson spent three months teaching and lectur- ing at the University of Trento, Italy, and a month at the University of Bologna in Italy. In November, he of- ten teaches in Austria and Germany. “I am an officially recognized tax lawyer, but he continues as an adjunct at the University of Miami, teaching courses in the graduate programs in taxation and estate planning.” Last January he taught a one-week bridge course at UB Law School, and intends to do the same this January. “I learned that the key to a successful adviser to clients is not how much you know, but the ability to communicate that knowledge in a manner the client can understand,” he says. “It is difficult to mention particular faculty members, because virtually all of them had an influence on my curricular career. But David G. Elledge Jr. was an inspiring professor and helped me to land my first job while in law school. Errol Meidinger taught a very influential course on research methods. Nils Olsen led the legal research and writing program in which I gained my first teaching experience. Tom Headrick’s Corporations class was amazingly interesting and intellectually challenging. Finally, Lee Albert was a wonderful mentor in health law, my major field of scholarly interest.”