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From her office at the University of British Columbia, where she serves as dean of the Faculty of Law, Mary Anne Bobinski ’87 regularly sees bald eagles in flight against the backdrop of forest, mountains and ocean.

It is one of the small rewards of her law school’s newly completed building, Allard Hall, which replaces a Brutalist concrete building that, Bobinski says, was “misplaced on our campus as it was pretty much devoid of usable windows.”

Like many law schools, the Faculty of Law at UBC was established to serve the veterans returning from World War II. It has grown to comprise 45 full-time faculty members, about 580 J.D. students and about 120 graduate students studying for the master of laws and Ph.D. degrees. (Bobinski points out that Canadian law students interested in teaching at the university level typically pursue a graduate degree.)

At SUNY Buffalo Law School, Bobinski was in a joint J.D./Ph.D. program, but left with the J.D. to serve a judicial clerkship before going on to earn a master of laws at Harvard Law School. “The program at Buffalo was incredibly strong,” she remembers. “It prepared me very well. I still draw on the knowledge and perspective that I acquired in Buffalo decades ago. I really believe that the law school provided the kind of foundation that allows people to follow their dreams.”

Before moving to Vancouver, Bobinski – whose specialty is health law – was the John and Rebecca Moores Professor of Law and director of the Health Law and Policy Institute at the University of Houston Law Center. She joined the UBC Faculty of Law in 2003 as dean and professor, and she still teaches whenever she can.

“Being dean is a pretty intensive job from the administrative standpoint,” she says. “I try to structure the times that I teach in ways that are consistent with the fairly heavy travel schedule I have as dean.” She also continues to publish, and is working on a major revision of the U.S. casebook Health Care Law and Ethics, for which she is one of three co-authors.

Serving as dean of a law school, Bobinski says, is “among the best jobs you can have. You work with fantastically smart people in a higher education environment, people who are all committed to the students and the future of the legal profession; you’re looking at research that’s making a difference; and you’re in a position to work with a wonderful group of people to make great things happen. I go from one meeting to the next talking to people who have interesting ideas, and my job is to help find a way to support those ideas and make them happen.”

The UBC law school, she says, is known for particular strengths in business law, Asian legal studies, environmental law and indigenous legal studies. The Canadian and U.S. models of legal education are very similar, Bobinski says, but the sources of law are quite different. She has had to research and learn about the sources of Canadian law concepts that correspond to landmark U.S. cases. “A lot of the issues would sound familiar,” she says, “but Canadian students learn about them through a different legal system that uses different cases and different legislation.”

And the issues that law school administrators worry about, she says, are the same in both countries: how to raise funds, how to set tuition, how to make law school affordable enough for people of all economic backgrounds, and how to strike the balance between legal theory and practice. While the Canadian market for legal employment remains strong, Bobinski also travels widely – across Canada and to Hong Kong, London and New York – making the case to employers for her students.

Like SUNY Buffalo Law School, her school’s student culture is a supportive one. “In addition to their outstanding GPAs and LSAT scores, our students bring a broad range of life experiences; we welcome everyone, from first-generation immigrant families or even people who’ve immigrated themselves, to people who have many judges and famous lawyers in their family,” she says. “There’s a wide range of students who all have incredible academic records and potential, so we try to create an environment that’s welcoming to all of those backgrounds.”

Overall, she says, the deanship is a chance to share a vision. “You have a key role where you can bring your own vision and ideas about legal education and can work with others to make a difference,” Bobinski says. “It’s really an incredible honor and privilege to be able to do that.”