A World of Influence: Extending Our Global Reach

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A world of influence
Extending our global reach

No doubt about it, SUNY Buffalo Law alumni treasure their close ties to Western New York. And many stay in the area upon graduation, forming the heart of the area’s legal community.

But increasingly, Law School alumni, faculty and administrators are exerting an influence that goes far beyond the local legal community. Indeed, even as SUNY Buffalo Law solidifies its standing as a school of national rank and reputation, it is increasingly making itself known on an international scale.

One reflection of this trend is simply the global reach of Law School alumni. The school’s Alumni Office has identified about 100 alums working in 26 countries outside the United States, with the largest concentrations in Canada, Great Britain, the Republic of Korea and Germany. The Law Alumni Association board has also taken steps to establish an international alumni chapter.

Another factor is the presence and work of Dean Makau W. Mutua. A native of Kenya who became SUNY Buffalo Law’s permanent dean in 2008, Mutua has pursued an activist role in international human rights. In 2002-03, while on sabbatical in Kenya, Mutua was appointed chairman of the Task Force on the Establishment of a Truth, Justice, and Reconciliation Commission. He was also a delegate to the National Constitutional Conference, the forum that produced a contested draft constitution for Kenya. Mutua has written widely about subjects in international law, human rights and religion, particularly in Africa, and is a columnist for the Sunday Nation in Kenya.

Since 2008, another distinctive feature of SUNY Buffalo Law is Professor David M. Engel’s January-term bridge course that takes students to Chiangmai, Thailand, where Engel once served in the Peace Corps. He has studied and written about Thai law for more than 30 years, and the course introduces students to that nation’s civil law system (as distinct from the common-law basis of the U.S. legal system).

“No matter what career people pursue, we live in a globalized world and a globalized economy, and we’re going to come into contact with people and organizations that are not U.S.-based,” Engel says. “It behooves us to understand how they work and how people from other countries and cultures think. A trip like this changes people’s understanding of themselves. It makes them more confident and more mature.”

On the other side of the world, Professor Isabel Marcus, who has been traveling to the Balkans since the mid-1990s to work with organizations promoting women’s rights and working against domestic violence, has led student trips to study the role of non-governmental organizations there. The 2009 bridge-term trip took students to Bosnia, Serbia and Kosovo in a three-week intensive learning experience that left all involved both sobered and inspired.

For the students, the experience was eye-opening. Said Sarah Brancatella: “This trip was not in isolation from my Law School experience. It was like a napoleon pastry—layers upon layers. For example, in the course I’m taking now on the federal courts, it...
strikes me about the complications of having a national court system in Bosnia.

Professor David A. Westbrook has done extensive speaking and consulting work under the sponsorship of the U.S. State Department. In November he will host a digital conference for the World Economics Association, titled "Rethinking Financial Markets: Social Capitalism, Economies of Money, and Custodial Regulation." Participants include prominent central bankers, economists and social scientists. In October, Westbrook will give a keynote address at a workshop on regulatory culture in Sydney, Australia. And in June, he spoke in London at a conference on corporate law, sponsored by the University of London and the Seattle University School of Law.

The Law School’s faculty roster also includes Associate Professor Irus Braverman, whose legal studies were in Toronto and Jerusalem; Professor Rebecca R. French, whose four years of field research in Tibet and India resulted in the first study of the Dalai Lama’s pre-1960 legal system; Associate Professor Sagit Levien, who holds a dual appointment with Ono Academic College Faculty of Law, in Israel; and Associate Professor Tara J. Melish, who directs the Buffalo Human Rights Center and has taught at Oxford University in England and Abo Akademi University in Finland.

And beyond these ways that Law School students and faculty reach into the wider world, master of laws programs targeted at international students bring legal professionals to Buffalo. A general LLM program and another in criminal law enable lawyers educated outside the United States to pursue a particular research interest and gain exposure to the U.S. legal system. Students have come from, to name a few, Albania, Bolivia, China, Egypt, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Nigeria, Pakistan, South Africa and Turkey.

Selected for 2012 award for outstanding contributions to international education

Following a rigorous selection process, the University at Buffalo has chosen Professor Isabel S. Marcus to receive the 2012 Award for Outstanding Contributions to International Education. This award is conferred by UB’s Council on International Studies and Programs, a group of faculty from a wide range of disciplines who are involved in international activities at the University. In past years, more than one recipient has been chosen, but this year the Council settled on Marcus as the sole winner. The award will be presented at the Council’s annual award luncheon later this semester.