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Vice Dean and Professor Luis E. Chiesa oversees curriculum

Searching for the competitive advantage

A popular professor and specialist in criminal law has been appointed to one of the Law School's most influential administrative positions.

Professor **Luis E. Chiesa**, who joined the faculty in 2013, was named vice dean for academic affairs by Dean Makau W. Mutua. In that role, he is responsible for issues related to the curriculum, including hiring adjunct professors, assigning courses to professors and scheduling classes, and dealing with student disciplinary matters and students' concerns about their Law School experience. In addition, he continues as director of the Buffalo Criminal Law Center.

One of his first items of business: working with a committee of faculty and staff to examine the overall curriculum, starting with the foundational courses that all first-year law students take, and seeing where reforms might be made.

"With the crisis in legal education, the product of a sharp decline nationally in law school applications, many schools including ourselves are reflecting and engaging in a self-study to see how we can offer an even better product than we are offering," Chiesa says.

"All law schools are fighting for a smaller pool of students, which makes everything more competitive, from the students themselves choosing a school to the amount of money schools give for scholarships to entice students. Small changes could make a big difference in attracting the best students."

In addition, Chiesa is focusing on the quality of teaching at the Law School, looking to find ways for both full-time and adjunct professors to share ideas and hard-won wisdom about effective teaching. As an example, he cites the hot-button issue of whether to allow students to use laptops in class; some professors see



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— Professor Luis E. Chiesa,
vice dean for academic affairs

the computer as an essential tool, while others struggle with the reality that students may be checking Facebook as well as taking notes.

"I want to bring to our full-time faculty some opportunities to talk in a more formalized setting about teaching," Chiesa says. "We may want to bring in speakers who are experts on teaching and the law school curriculum, so they can talk to our faculty about cutting-edge techniques in the classroom or best practices." Another possibility, he says, is a daylong faculty retreat at which SUNY Buffalo Law professors present on teaching topics, such as using technology in the classroom.

As well, Chiesa says he hopes to "incorporate the adjunct professors more into our community. Our adjuncts have some awesome but also very time-intensive jobs. They teach mostly because they want to give back, they enjoy it and they're friends of the Law School." So he is organizing a reception for adjunct faculty, where these practicing lawyers can mingle with the school's full-time faculty and know that their contributions are valued. A further idea is a yearly workshop for adjunct professors covering the basics of the teaching life: choosing a casebook, writing a syllabus, classroom management, using technology, grading

assignments and exams, and how much reading to assign.

"Sometimes being a law professor is a lonely job," Chiesa says. "I hope we can build some camaraderie."

He also continues to revitalize the Buffalo Criminal Law Center, coming off a successful conference in May that brought leading U.S. criminal law scholars to the table with their peers from Spain, Chile, Germany, the United Kingdom and Belgium.

This fall, a leading U.S. criminal law scholar, Professor Joshua Dressler of the Moritz College of Law at Ohio State University, will speak about reforming homicide laws. His visit to Buffalo Law is sponsored by the BCLC and the student Criminal Justice Society.

Another upcoming highlight is a conference next spring, part of the center's Comparative Criminal Law Conversations Project, that seeks to foster conversation between younger junior scholars and older, more established senior scholars. The young scholars — from civil law countries including Chile, Argentina, Spain and Germany — will write papers, and the senior scholars will write a brief response. Then, in Buffalo, comes the free exchange of ideas, with a twist: To open the discussion, the respondents will present the original papers, and the authors will reply.