

10-1-2011

Transition and Tradition: with 15 New Tenure-Track Faculty Hired in the Past Four Years, UB Law Propels A Proud Legacy into A Promising Future

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UB Law Forum (2011) "Transition and Tradition: with 15 New Tenure-Track Faculty Hired in the Past Four Years, UB Law Propels A Proud Legacy into A Promising Future," *UB Law Forum*: Vol. 24 : No. 1 , Article 6. Available at: https://digitalcommons.law.buffalo.edu/ub_law_forum/vol24/iss1/6

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Tax

TRANSITION *and*

With 15 new tenure-track faculty hired in the past four years,

UB Law School is undergoing a sea change in its faculty the likes of which hasn't been seen in a generation or more. In just four years, 15 promising young scholars have set up shop in O'Brien Hall, following in the very large footsteps of a cohort of well-respected senior faculty who have retired.

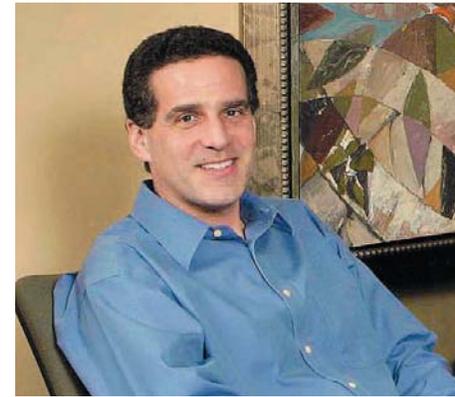
"Over the past four years, UB Law has undergone a profound renaissance in many respects," says **Dean Makau W. Mutua**, whose vigorous advocacy for the Law School on the University level has made possible these hirings even in tight budgetary times. "The biggest change has been in the face of the faculty. One-third of the tenure-track faculty has been hired within the last four years. This is the deepest transformation of the faculty since I have been here."

These new professors bring new energy and new ideas to the school—and quickly learn that, as Jack Hyman has said, "Times may change, but the values of UB Law remain constant."

It helps to remember that the school's nearly 125-year history has been marked by several such large-scale transitions. **Professor Robert Reis**, currently the longest-tenured member of the faculty, notes several that have taken place in his four decades-plus at the Law School: the growth in the size of classes, which have gone from the 60s and 70s in the



Professor Errol Meidinger and SUNY Distinguished Professor James A. Gardner



1960s to around 200 students now; the school's experiment with the Q/H/P/F grading system; the burgeoning of elective options rather than a mostly required curriculum; the University's becoming part of the State University of New York system; and perhaps most challenging, the school's move to the UB North Campus in 1972. The Law School has not only survived but flourished through each transition, and each has become part of the history on which the next generations of scholars and teachers have built.

Change is never stress-free, and "an amount of turnover at this rate and magnitude is stressful for any in-

stitution," acknowledges **Professor James A. Gardner**, vice dean for academic affairs. Yet administrators, senior faculty and members of this new cohort of professors say the transition in the faculty brings significant advantages to what **Professor Errol Meidinger**, head of the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy, and the Law School's vice dean for research and faculty development, calls the institution's "community culture."

This culture, Meidinger says, "can be both a strength and a potential liability. The challenge is to maintain the strengths that historically we have had, and adjust those areas that we see as weaknesses."



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TRADITION

UB Law propels a proud legacy into a promising future

Like a highly intellectual variant of Match.com, the process of identifying and attracting faculty with star power to UB Law is part science, part chemistry. Meidinger notes that “for every person we hire, we typically look at four or five people.” An important consideration is ensuring that core areas of the legal curriculum are covered. Where the school has in the past pursued a “best available athlete” policy – bringing on board talented scholars largely regardless of their area of specialization – “we’ve swung further in the direction of trying to hire for curricular needs,” Gardner says. “We try to balance the needs of the curriculum with the general degree to which a person would be a desirable member of our community.”

Part of the give-and-take of faculty recruiting is to help candidates understand the norms and expectations of that community, to be sure their values and intellectual curiosity are consistent with long-held institutional values. It’s a matter of fit, and when a promising candidate accepts an offer, it’s with the expectation on both sides that the match will be both comfortable and fruitful.

“Broadly speaking,” Meidinger says, “these faculty are likely to continue to exemplify the distinguishing hallmarks of our community” – such

characteristics as going beyond black-letter law to understand how the law works in society; education and experience in one or more affiliated intellectual disciplines, such as sociology, history or philosophy; and an emphasis on interdisciplinary analysis of legal issues, long a nationally recognized strength of UB Law.

In addition, Dean Mutua notes, “We teach law with a social conscience, and that is an identity we will nurture. My biggest challenge as dean is to make sure that we retain the institutional identity of great critical scholarship as the faculty turns over.”

But the shaping goes both ways. Because there is strength in numbers, the recently hired faculty have a larger say in governance issues than they might otherwise. Says Meidinger: “We have to explain how we do things, and sometimes that leads us to re-examine our practices. That is a good thing, because we can look at whether the old ways of doing things are still the most effective. We need to be open to

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— Dean

Makau W. Mutua



TRANSITION *and* TRADITION

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that kind of change.”

One of the advantages that the new professors bring is, for many, recent work in law practice, both private and public service. In a rapidly changing legal world, there is just no substitute for boots-on-the-ground experience.

“The new faculty, who are younger, have brought vitality to the school,” Dean Mutua says. “Their perspectives on law and the legal profession were forged in the 1990s and 2000s. As the legal profession changes – because of market pressures and social upheavals at large – our new faculty stands to play a large role in shaping those changes both at UB Law and beyond. That’s because they better understand these forces because they are part and parcel of them.”

“It’s very fortunate that we’re bringing in so many relatively young, energetic, intellectually searching people as we are,” Meidinger says. “It increases the Law School’s capacity to understand and adapt to these changes.”

“We needed an infusion of new blood,” Reis says. “I’m in awe of these young people – they are so bright, so caring, and so prolific in their scholarship. They put an enormous amount of pressure on me to publish and to teach more courses. They have a different perspective on things, and it’s the perspective of the future.”

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Indeed, many observers say that the relative youth of the new faculty forms a natural commonality with their students, most of whom, despite trends toward later-in-life law school enrollment, are young people themselves. (The average age of this year’s entering Law School class is 25.)

“They are tech-savvy and relate very easily to students who are getting younger every year,” Dean Mutua says. “The new faculty has been very engaged with students – partly because of the age factor, but also shared cultural dynamics in processing current social trends.”

“These professors are much more closely in tune with our students generationally,” Gardner says. “Certainly they have the same set of cultural references as their students. And they are natural technology users in their work and in the classroom.”

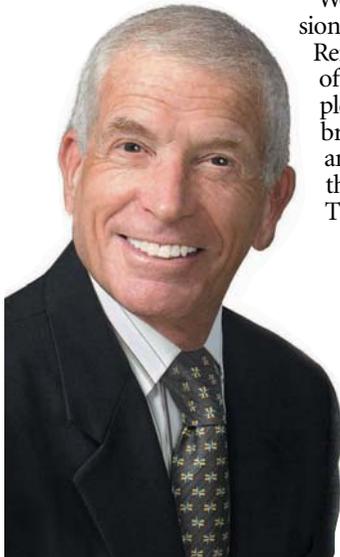
Adds Meidinger: “They just bring a lot of experiences and energy. It’s invigorating. The senior faculty gets a lot from the infusion of fresh energy and ideas that the junior faculty bring.”

Beyond the ways that this new group of teachers and scholars is changing the Law School now, perhaps more significant will be the ef-

fects of this transition as the school progresses through the next decade of its history.

“UB Law is now positioned because of younger faculty members to enter the next two decades with a core group of great talent in faculty,” Dean Mutua says. “They are all prolific writers and scholars who are plowing new vineyards. They project an image of vibrancy and academic vitality for UB Law to outsiders. And they make UB law an attractive and seductive place that faculty elsewhere want to visit or join.”

Adds Meidinger: “If we can keep all these people – and they will be in demand – it’s going to be a very dynamic, stimulating and insightful place. Looking ahead 10 years, I think this will be a great place to be.”



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