A Meeting of Minds: Baldy Center Working Groups Put Innovative Ideas to the Test

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A meeting of minds

Baldy Center working groups put innovative ideas to the test

“It is imperative today for people to be flexible and able to adapt to new ways of thinking. Having students exposed to that is vital.”

A brief tour of four well-established and productive working groups at the Baldy Center:

Law and Religion: “This is an exceedingly broad category, and it is wonderful because it is so open,” French says. Participants in the working group look at the ways that legal systems have been shaped by religious systems, either homegrown or imported. Members of the group, which incorporates French’s Law and Buddhism Project, helped to organize the 2006 visit to UB of the Dalai Lama, including a conference on Law, Buddhism and Social Change. They also sponsored this spring’s three-day conference “Re-Describing the Sacred/Secular Divide.”

Cultural Policy and Diplomacy: This working group “looks at the intersection of law, art, museums and politics,” French says—“what the political dimensions are, how they are understood in different contexts and what the legal implications are.” Examples include the 2005 controversy over a Danish newspaper’s publication of an editorial cartoon that depicted the Prophet Muhammad, igniting a furor in the Muslim world; and an incident in Stockholm when the Israeli ambassador disconnected the electricity to an exhibition of Palestinian art that he found objectionable.

The group is convened by Ruth Bereson, director of UB’s Arts Management Program in the College of Arts and Sciences. Says French, “She puts together fascinating people and intriguing ideas.”

Law, Place and Space: This working group looks at the intersection of law and geography—“thinking in a spatial way about how the law works,” French explains. “It is very exciting.” The group is planning a major two-day conference at UB in the fall, and in February sponsored a workshop called “The Hidden Places of Law: Exploring Legal Geographies.”

Among the Law School participants is Associate Professor Irus Braverman, whose scholarship has addressed the laws surrounding trees and house demolitions in East Jerusalem. “My doctoral thesis focused on the politics of natural landscapes,” Braverman says. “In particular, this work exam-
On the move

UB Law School celebrates the accomplishments of these faculty members whose professional lives are taking them elsewhere.

• Professor Lee Albert's major research areas have been law and medicine, constitutional law and the U.S. Supreme Court. He has retired.
• Professor Barry B. Boyer, an environmental law specialist, served as dean of UB Law School from 1992 to 1998. He has retired.
• Professor Markus D. Dubber, who studies penal law and comparative law, has accepted a position at the University of Toronto Law School.
• Kenneth F. Joyce, SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor, has taught and written on estates, trusts and taxes. He has retired, but will teach his last course in the fall.
• Professor Janet S. Lindgren, who taught several advanced writing courses, has retired.
• Judith Scales-Trent, a professor and Floyd H. and Hilda R. Hurst faculty scholar, has written extensively about race in America. She is retiring from teaching but will continue her research at UB Law through the fall semester.
• Amy Deen Westbrook has been director of UB Law's New York City Program in International Finance and Law. She is beginning a tenure-track professorship at Washburn University School of Law in Topeka, Kan.
• David A. Westbrook, a professor and Floyd H. and Hilda R. Hurst faculty scholar has taught and studied on business and international law topics. He will be a visiting professor at the University of Kansas School of Law and at Washburn University School of Law.

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An ambitious initiative of the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy is putting some of the best-known and most well-respected figures in law and humanities before UB Law audiences.

The Theorists and Jurists Series, new this spring semester, includes lectures by several such leading scholars. The participants are chosen by a faculty committee, and invitations have been extended to major theorists in such far-flung fields as urban planning, philosophy and anthropology, as well as to renowned jurists including U.S. Supreme Court justices.

"UB is a world-class institution," says Professor Rebecca R. French, Baldy Center director. "At the Baldy Center, we would like to bring world-class scholars in to present their ideas to the University, Law School and social sciences communities.

"The goal is to have the great thinkers here – people who are capable of changing the way we think about the world, the way we think about ideas and the way we think about ourselves.”

The spring semester lineup of the Theorists and Jurists Series includes appearances by three well-known figures:

March 17, "Normativity of Law," Jules L. Coleman, professor of jurisprudence and philosophy at Yale Law School. On March 18, Professor Coleman also discussed "The Accountability Theory of Tort Law." Educated at Brooklyn College and with a Ph.D. in philosophy from Rockefeller University and an M.S.L. from Yale Law School, Coleman teaches in the areas of philosophy of law; torts law; law, language and truth; political philosophy; and rational choice. His books include Hart’s Postscript: The Practice of Principle and Oxford Handbook of Jurisprudence and the Philosophy of Law.


Taussig, who has a medical degree from the University of Sydney and a doctorate in anthropology from the London School of Economics, is best-known for his work on Marx’s concept of commodity fetishism – the idea in some societies that commodities have inherent value, rather than acquiring value through labor. Taussig’s fieldwork in South America, especially Colombia and Bolivia, has been widely read and discussed.

April 24, “Housing Rights and Historical Wrongs: Gentrification and Neoliberalism, From the Eternal City to the City of Angels,” Michael Herzfeld, professor of anthropology at Harvard University.

Herzfeld, one of the world’s premier social anthropologists, specializes in the ethnography of Europe (especially Greece and Italy) and of Thailand. His most recent project is a documentary film, Monti Moments: Men’s Memories in the Heart of Rome, an intimate portrait of social change in a rapidly gentrifying neighborhood in the Italian capital. He drew on his research for that film in this discussion of the effects of gentrification in Rome and Los Angeles.