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Fond Goodbyes: Amid Music, UB Law Memorializes Former Dean Hyman

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Faculty



JACOB D.
HYMAN
1909-2007

Fond goodbyes

Amid music, UB Law memorializes former Dean Hyman

With tenderness and words of appreciation, flute interludes and intervals of laughter, the UB Law School community gathered to pay tribute to a man whose work influenced the school for more than half a century.

Jacob D. Hyman, who came to the Law School in 1946 and would teach there through 2000, spent a critical 11 years as dean beginning in 1953. He died April 8 at his home in Edgewater, Fla., at age 97.

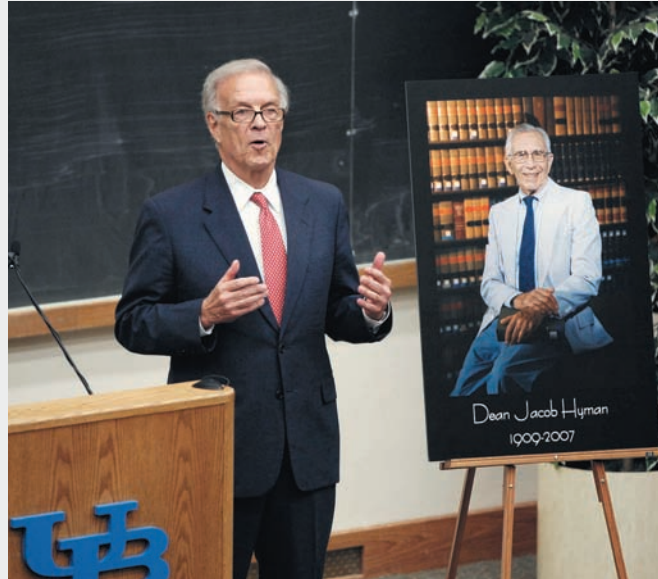
The Oct. 13 gathering in his honor featured colleagues, former students and friends of all stripes, led off by current Dean Nils Olsen.

"In his 54 years of faculty service at the University, Jack more than any other person exemplified the values that we seek to achieve at the University of Buffalo Law School," Olsen said. "He was a good and decent man with a lifelong commitment to apply the legal skills first learned at Harvard Law School to achieve the betterment and advancement of society."

Hyman was "passionately committed to real diversity in the bar and in the student body," Olsen said, and was a pioneer in teaching and studying the law in its social and political context. "He was loved and respected by his former students in a manner that the rest of his colleagues could only aspire to. In many ways, the efforts of those of us who followed him were informed by his values, contributions and aspirations for the school."

Hon. Hugh B. Scott '74 pointed to Hyman's interest in the civil rights movement, and to his care for students of color as the Law School become more diverse. "He would always stop me and ask, 'Just how are things going?' That was not just 'How is it going?' He really wanted to know. He showed that kind of interest, and I will never forget it.

"Jack Hyman made us learn how to learn. He taught us to seek objectivity and reasonableness, and how to advocate with a respectful voice. If you took any time to



Richard F. Griffin '57 eulogizes Dean Hyman.

observe Jack Hyman the teacher, the lawyer, the mentor, the friend, you saw the person each of us as lawyers should strive to become, and that is lawyers with the highest standard of professionalism, decency, compassion, wisdom and, above all, civility."

Professor Thomas E. Headrick, himself a former UB Law dean, spoke of a school that was in trouble when Hyman became dean, with a sparse, poorly paid faculty and sinking enrollment. In Hyman's first report to the University administration, he discussed moving away from the case method as the only teaching construct; foresaw the advent of legal topics growing from new public policies; emphasized the changing role of lawyers in society; and argued that legal education had to incorporate the understandings of the social sciences and other disciplines.

"Most law schools have a culture, a set of shared desires and beliefs that shape their development and their place in legal education," Headrick said. "UB today is

smile and say, 'Hi, man!' Walking that tall walk of his, he would smile back every time. He never commented on whether the appellation was novel, I think because he saw how pleased I was with how funny I thought I was."

Later, Hyman asked her to co-teach with him a legal reasoning course for non-traditional first-year students. "As I watched him in action in the classroom," she said, "I gradually learned the full measure of the substantive breadth of what he was teaching. I learned something every time Jack spoke. These were the students who had not met all the traditional standards for Law School admission. Most of them thought that a shot was all they needed. Jack always made sure that they, and I, always thought that way."

Law Professor and former UB President William R. Greiner said he met Hyman when he first interviewed at the Law School in 1967: "I was charmed, but I was impressed. I was impressed by intelligence, which was on display at a very high order.

Dean Hyman's Law School, much larger, more expansive, better financed than the one he led in the 1950s and 1960s. It is the Law School of his vision, with the culture of the unconventional, of the borderless understanding of the law. His spirit inhabits its very essence; it sits at its very core."

Vivian Garcia, who served as an associate dean during the Hyman era, told a self-effacing story: "Believing myself to be the only person who ever thought of doing so, I would greet him with a big



And I was also impressed by the dignity of the individual. He combined great humanity with great wisdom.”

Greiner cited Hyman’s commitment to social justice, both in fostering diversity at the Law School and in larger contexts. For example, he said, when the building of the North Campus was to begin, Hyman wrote an open letter insisting that a portion of the construction contracts be awarded to minority-owned firms.

“On a regular basis, Jack demonstrated personal qualities that were extraordinary. He leaves us a legacy of that,” Greiner said. “More than anything else, I think of the dignity and the human compassion that Jack would display even-handedly and equally. He was always the formidable presence, the dignified Dean Hyman, but you knew that underneath that somewhat austere de-

meanor, there was this great human being ready on a personal level to help if he could.”

Buffalo attorney Richard Griffin ’57 followed the theme of Hyman as “investor extraordinaire,” saying the dean “invested big time in the law, its practice, civil and human rights, our Law School, its students and our alumni.” That extended, he said, to attending Law School class reunions, even into his 90th year – and he was a drawing card to get people to come.

He also invested in his health, Griffin said: “How do you live such a long and full life?”

In addition to his great intellectual health and constant exercise of the mind in his activities, he was physically fit. One day by coincidence I was walking along the beach over in Canada. I looked out and who

emerges from the lake but Jack Hyman, probably 88 or 90. I said, ‘Jack, I didn’t know you were such a famous swimmer!’ And we had a great chat.”

Finally, Professor John Henry Schlegel said of Hyman, “Ours was a love affair of the head, not of the heart.

“Jack was one of my wrestling partners, someone with whom I could wrestle about ideas. The object was doing something as well as one could. Jack always pushed me to think as well as I could, and in that way he tried to be not just a wrestling partner, but a teacher. Like most good teachers, he could never stop teaching.

“It is fun to play seriously with ideas. Jack loved to play with ideas. He played quite seriously. The playing was fun for him, as it was for me. The point was always improving each other’s thought. Ours was an activity that each could engage in separately that somehow worked better together.”



Clarice Lechner-Hyman accepts condolences.