Celebrating Four Decades of Interdisciplinary Scholarship

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introducing sociology to law

By Luke Hammill

The Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy might not exist if the University at Buffalo School of Law hadn’t made the audacious decision at the dawn of the 1970s to hire as its dean a man who was not a lawyer.

The late Richard D. “Red” Schwartz, a sociologist, was appointed in 1970 and began as dean at the law school the next year. In an interview taped in 2005, 12 years before he died last year at 92 years old, Schwartz recalled that he was the first-ever dean of an American law school to lack a Juris Doctor degree, save for one non-lawyer who had led Yale on an interim basis in an earlier decade.

Schwartz’s arrival and acceptance at UB was an example of the law school’s “Buffalo Model” in action, an institutional philosophy that encouraged interdisciplinary research exploring how the law actually interacted with the society around it.

Such research was at the core of the Law and Society Association, which had been founded in 1964 and sought to knock down the figurative walls law had built around itself. Schwartz was one of the association’s founders and served as the first editor of its journal, the Law & Society Review.

Buffalo has played a crucial – and often overlooked – role in the Law and Society movement, from its early days to the current era. And that role has a lasting legacy at UB that continues to evolve today at the Baldy Center, which this year celebrates its 40th anniversary.

A serendipitous combination of events, including the hiring of Schwartz, made the center possible, and since then, it has taken advantage of the opportunity, making its mark in the sociolegal world through research, education, conferences and publications.

But why is it called the Baldy Center?

Shortly after Schwartz arrived on campus, UB learned it would soon be the likely recipient of a generous bequest from a man named Christopher Baldy, a well-known Buffalo attorney who had died in 1959 at the age of 73.

Baldy was a 1910 graduate of the Buffalo School of Law, in the days when UB was the private University of Buffalo. In 1911, he joined the firm then known as Kenefick, Cooke, Mitchell & Bass as a law clerk, eventually becoming a partner and specializing in tax and corporation law. Today, the firm is Phillips Lytle LLP.

Baldy, a bachelor, became wealthy, and when he died, he was generous with his money toward his alma mater. His estate was initially valued at more than $1.4 million. In his will, he left relatively small amounts to his church, the Erie County Bar Association, his Masonic lodge, and his two sisters-in-law. Nearly all the rest went to his three brothers, and when they died, whatever was left over was to be given to UB for a scholastic building or residence hall.

By the early 1970s, the amount in the fund for UB had grown...
to somewhere between $1.5 million and $2 million, according to a university memo from that period, and the last surviving Baldy brother was nearing the end of his life.

UB was about to get the money, but circumstances had significantly changed since Baldy died.

UB had become a public university and a part of the State University of New York, which at the time was spending generously on the construction of new buildings at its campuses, including the new North Campus that was then being built in Amherst.

University and law school officials felt that the Baldy money would be better used for an academic program and were able to convince a judge to allow it to fund research on one of Schwartz’s favorite subjects: the intersection of law and social policy. In return, a new building next to the law school (which had already been named for John Lord O’Brian) was named after Baldy.

Under the deanship of Thomas Headrick, the research program was eventually formalized in 1978 as the Baldy Center, and it has been on the fifth floor of O’Brien Hall ever since.

“I’m very proud to have had some small part in the development of the Baldy Center,” Schwartz said in the interview he recorded late in his life.

Luke Hammill is a UB graduate and Buffalo-based journalist whose work has appeared in the Chicago Tribune, The Oregonian (Portland, Ore.) and The Buffalo News, among other publications. This article has been adapted and excerpted from a forthcoming monograph Hammill is writing in commemoration of the Baldy Center’s 40th anniversary. The monograph will be available at the Anniversary Celebration event.

**KEY DATES IN BALDY CENTER HISTORY**

**1910**
Christopher Baldy graduates from the Buffalo School of Law.

**1959**
Baldy dies, leaving a substantial gift to UB, to be delivered after his three brothers pass away.

**1970**
Richard D. “Red” Schwartz, a sociologist with no law degree who had co-founded the Law and Society Association, is appointed as dean of the law school.

**1973**
With the passing of the three Baldy brothers, Erie County Surrogate Judge William J. Regan, a graduate of the law school, signs a decree allowing Christopher Baldy’s endowment to be used for an interdisciplinary program in law and social policy.

**1975**
Buffalo hosts the first-ever formal meeting of the Law and Society Association.

**1978**
The program is formalized into the Baldy Center for Law & Social Policy under the deanship of Thomas Headrick. Barry Boyer of the law school and Jim Brady of the philosophy department are named co-directors.

**1981**
Brady leaves the co-directorship, and Boyer becomes the sole director.

**1986**
The Baldy Center’s “working groups” – consisting of faculty interested in a specific subject who collaborate on research – debut.

**1992**
David M. Engel takes over as director of the center following Boyer's appointment as dean of the law school. The working groups have evolved into more formal Baldy Programs.

**2001**
Engel leaves the directorship and Errol Meidinger takes over as interim director.
2002

Political scientist Lynn Mather is appointed as the next director, the only time UB looked outside its walls to find a leader for the Baldy Center. Mather, who had just completed a term as president of the Law and Society Association, came from Dartmouth College.

2006

The law school and Baldy Center debut a complete renovation of space on the fifth floor of O’Brian Hall. The $1 million-plus project, funded partly with Baldy money, created a suite with a major conference area and a smaller seminar area, and an elegant new faculty lounge attached to a faculty reading room. Also, the Baldy Center helps organize a conference during which the law school hosts the Dalai Lama.

2008

Rebecca French becomes director of the Baldy Center.

2010

Errol Meidinger becomes director of the Baldy Center.

2011

Meidinger replaces the working group structure, which had again become less formal, with a new program that hosts post-doctoral fellows and visiting researchers.

2018

The Baldy Center and the UB School of Law celebrate the center’s 40th anniversary by hosting a Mitchell Lecture – scheduled for November – on critical challenges of Law and Society research. The featured speaker will be John Braithwaite of the Australian National University.

Mark your calendars for November 9 & 10, 2018 when the Baldy Center will celebrate its 40th Anniversary with the Mitchell Lecture and a conference on critical contributions and the challenges of law and society research. For more details, visit buffal.edu/baldycenter.
The following highly cited publications provide a good sense of the important work carried out by Baldy-affiliated scholars over the years.


