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Alumni Clout Ripples Across the World

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WHAT IS THE MEASURE OF A LAW SCHOOL?

The answer goes far beyond campus. It reaches deep into legal scholarship, the bar and bench, the realms of education and business, government and the nonprofit world, and beyond the borders of the United States.

To measure the impact of UB Law School, one has to begin with its alumni. In those areas and more, graduates of our Law School are doing work that will last. As Terrence Connors ’71, chair of the Advocacy Institute board of directors, said in accepting this year’s Jaeckle Award: “Seeing some of the faces that are here today reminds me of the impact that our Law School has had on Western New York and throughout the state. You see all the people who have gone to our Law School who made such great impressions in the law, who have done such wonderful things. … Education allows you to make a difference — a difference in people’s lives.”

Meet a few of our accomplished alumni who are making that impact real, and doing us all proud.
Judiciary

Hon. Paul L. Friedman ’68:
Steady presence on the bench

“I want to be a gladiator,” his trial lawyer friends would say to Hon. Paul L. Friedman ’68. “I don’t know how you can sit there and say very little and be neutral.”

But his transition from litigator to judge was a matter of temperament. “I very much liked trial work, but I didn’t feel that I had to be in court every minute in order to enjoy being a lawyer,” Friedman says. “The intellectual work of legal analysis and brief writing and arguing the law to judges was more exhilarating to me,” including arguing to judges in the Supreme Court of the United States on several occasions.

A former partner with White & Case, Friedman has served since 1994 as a judge on the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia. He has presided over such high-profile matters as supervised-release requests for John Hinckley, who shot President Reagan. Before his judgeship, he also served as associate independent counsel during the Iran-Contra investigation.

In the eye of the Washington legal storm, Friedman has been careful about his public presence. He will speak to trusted reporters to provide background and context, for example: “If you help a good reporter understand what’s going on and therefore help the public understand better, that’s helpful,” he says. He also is an active member and secretary of the American Law Institute, the national law reform organization, and is proud of his work on issues of disparities in federal sentencing.

Reflecting on his long career, he thinks about the people, most immediately his law clerks. “I watch their careers and how they blossom and what they do,” he says. “That’s tremendously rewarding.”

And he thinks as well about people he has sent to prison. “Sometimes I’ll get letters from defendants whom I’ve sentenced, saying ‘Thank you for treating me fairly and with respect.’ One of the things we need to do as judges is to make people feel that you’re listening, that you’re open, that you do treat people with respect and you’re fair.”

Alexander W. Hunter Jr. ’74:
From appellate judge to the United Nations

Alexander W. Hunter Jr. ’74 was on his way to teach English in South Korea, with the Peace Corps, when, he says, “UB Law intercepted me by giving me a full-tuition scholarship.”

It changed his life. Hunter flourished as part of a close-knit group of minority students at the Law School. “We helped each other out,” he says. “We formed study groups, and I met a lot of people I am still friends with. Not too many of us didn’t make it.”

Hunter made it, all right. After stints as an assistant district attorney in his native Bronx and as a state Supreme Court law clerk, he became a judge – first in New York City criminal court, then in Supreme Court, and since 2009 as an associate justice of the Appellate Term, First Department.

Now Hunter is leaving that court to take on a new challenge, as a judge of the United Nations Dispute Tribunal. The six-month deployment, which begins July 1, will start at UN headquarters in New York, then move to Nairobi, Kenya, in January. He’ll adjudicate internal agency matters that include employee-employer disputes and actions on hiring, firing, pension and leave.

It’s a late-career switch for the jurist, who writes and lectures widely. But he measures his own impact by the students he has taught as an adjunct professor at Pace Law School over nearly three decades.

“I love being in the courtroom – not advocating for a side, but giving new lawyers some direction in how they should proceed,” Hunter says. “I usually have five or six interns during the summer and a couple during the school year. I want them to see that how I am in the courtroom is not any different from how I am in real life. It’s about having the temperament and the knowledge to succeed.”

250 Members of the judiciary
Government

Richard M. Tobe ’74: Leveraging the public good

Richard M. Tobe ’74 knows coming of age in the ’60s and ’70s was a time of exciting possibilities. The Law School fostered that. He tells of a seminar with Law School Dean “Red” Schwartz, a sociologist. “There were maybe 15 of us,” Tobe says, “and he asked, how many of us imagined we would be traditional lawyers in courts or boardrooms or doing contracts? Nobody raised their hand. And we weren’t a shy bunch! That then became the subject for the seminar. We all worked on questions relative to the law and our ambitions. I think the Law School was just terrific for that.”

Tobe has used his law degree for the public good in a series of high-profile positions. He worked with the late legendary Buffalo Assemblyman William B. Hoyt on major environmental legislation, including New York’s Freshwater Wetlands Act. He ran Erie County’s Department of Environment and Planning; served as vice president of the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo; was commissioner of Buffalo’s newly created Department of Economic Development Permit and Inspection Services; did some business consulting; and until recently served as deputy Erie County Executive. He has also taught as an adjunct at the Law School.

Now, as Director of Upstate Revitalization for New York State, Tobe is responsible for $1.5 billion awarded through a competitive process to three of upstate’s eight economic development regions.

“It’s a capstone position for a lawyer who has spent his career making the law work for New Yorkers. And despite his familiarity with the political process, Tobe says, “I’ve never been super-interested in politics in the campaign sense. I’m interested in what you can do when campaigns have been won.”

Celeste M. Murphy ’97: Keeping the markets honest

“Our financial markets are the envy of the world,” says Celeste M. Murphy ’97. In her position with the federal Securities and Exchange Commission, she works to keep it that way.

“Our work impacts lives around the world,” she says, “in terms of investor protection, capital formation and fair markets, which are all critical foundations of a strong, healthy economy. I take personal pride in being part of that.”

Murphy, who recently joined the Law School’s Dean’s Advisory Council, is a legal branch chief for the SEC’s Division of Corporation Finance. She manages a staff that ensures compliance with the agency’s disclosure and financial reporting requirements for the technology, media and telecommunications industries.

“This is a job where you learn something new every day,” she says. “But what is a luxury is to be able to step back and take a closer look at what you’re doing. There are constant policy considerations for transparency in corporate SEC filings and careful thought is given as to how those drive good information for capital markets.”

Murphy says her move to Washington, leaving behind a high-powered legal firm in New York, was partly driven by family life. “It’s exciting, high-profile work, and it’s also possible to have a family and be able to raise my children in a way that is healthy for everyone and keeps me completely engaged in my work.”

She has become an advocate as well for other women lawyers in the nation’s capital. She’s on the board of the Women’s Bar Association of the District of Columbia, and co-chaired that group’s Government Attorneys Forum for many years. “These women who have taken on very high-level work,” Murphy says, “have a passion to improve the world in the areas in which they work for the federal government. We are an amazing group of dedicated professionals who accomplish incredible things.”
Bridget E. Niland ’98:
Competing in the court of sport

Four miles from UB, a small college with a rich history is poised to make some more: Daemen College is joining the ranks of NCAA Division II athletics. That’s no simple process. And Bridget E. Niland ’98, Daemen’s athletic director and special assistant to the president, is sweating all the details.

“My experience working for the NCAA at the national office in Indianapolis gave me a solid background on that organization’s expectations of Daemen,” Niland says. “As we move into active Division II membership, we still have to ensure we comply with NCAA rules, but the legal side also broadens to include a lot of contract work with sponsors and donors.”

A gifted runner, Niland first got involved in sports administration in her last undergraduate year at UB when she was named to the NCAA National Student-Athlete Advisory Committee. The committee work became an independent study when she entered the Law School.

She says she’s still “tremendously proud” of that experience: “We gave real voice to college student-athletes. We changed several NCAA rules that were far too restrictive on student-athletes and their ability to make the most of their college studies. It was sad to see the NCAA dismantle that committee and dilute its media presence in 1999, but it did motivate me to stay involved in college sports and attempt to keep the focus of any college sports program on the student-athlete’s experience.”

Niland also teaches as a Law School adjunct. “It’s a great experience to share what I do with UB Law students,” she says. “We discuss and analyze college sports through an entirely different lens. Some students have joked with me that they enjoy watching college sports less after the course because they notice issues with their favorite teams that they didn’t notice before.”

Christine Haight Farley ’94:
Teaching on the cusp of IP law

You’ve heard about trademark litigation over the Washington Redskins’ logo? Christine Haight Farley ’94 has written amicus briefs on that and worked with the lawyers involved. You’ve followed the easing of U.S. trade sanctions with Cuba? Farley is part of a program to prepare Cuban lawyers for the end of the embargo and help them understand U.S. commercial law.

That’s the nature of intellectual property law – as the world changes around us, IP specialists are on the case.

Farley rides that wave as a professor at American University’s Washington College of Law. She teaches IP law to first-year students, writes copiously in the field, lectures, travels, speaks at conferences, appears on television. Her resume runs to 15 pages.

As an entering student at UB Law, she says, “I hoped to become an academic, and Buffalo Law really cemented that goal. The faculty were so engaged and engaging. I got to know so many faculty so well – I went to their houses for dinner, I got involved in their research as a research assistant.”

After graduation, she taught legal writing for a year at UB Law, earned master’s and doctoral degrees at Columbia University, and practiced in New York City for two years. She joined Washington College of Law in 1999, and notes, “I’ve taught over 2,000 students by now.”

But that’s only part of the equation. “Being an academic,” Farley says, “I’ve had a great ability to have an impact on the development of law through my scholarship, my teaching, my speaking, my pro bono activity. Not only has IP law grown in importance and in practitioners, but the trend has been to protect intellectual property at a stronger and stronger level. I’ve been a voice for balance and a voice that asks us to consider the cost of stronger rights.”
BUSINESS

Anne M. Noble ’92:
Generating billions for the Connecticut lottery

Even in Law School, Anne M. Noble ’92 was drawn to the idea of politics and public service. Those passions, while not at the forefront, remained alive while she practiced labor and employment law as a partner with two firms in Hartford, Conn. Then the governor of Connecticut called, and Noble became the state’s deputy counsel.

Now, as president and CEO of the quasi-public Connecticut Lottery Corp., she oversees an enterprise that annually generates approximately $1.2 billion in revenue and more than $300 million for the state’s general fund. She’s proud that the lottery has recorded six straight years of record profits.

“Gaming is a pretty important part of almost every state’s economy,” Noble says, “and it’s important that state-sponsored gambling is run efficiently and responsibly. I believe I’ve helped define what that means in the State of Connecticut.”

As CEO, Noble manages a staff with responsibility for legislative and government affairs, legal issues, human resources, marketing and sales, finance, information technology, security and business operations. She also interacts with stakeholders including the Lottery’s Board of Directors and state legislators. For example, she testified recently in front of the General Assembly about whether daily fantasy sports might affect games of chance, an area reserved for the lottery.

Her legal training helps. “It’s a highly regulated industry, so understanding, interpreting and complying with the regulatory structure in which we work is important,” Noble says. “At the heart of running a business are the supplier relationships and the business partnerships you enter into. Legal training is invaluable in assessing such ventures.”

Negotiating skills help, too, as when the Lottery introduced Lucky for Life, the first-ever collaboration among all New England states that operate a lottery and that has expanded to include 18 more lotteries nationwide. “I understood how those relationships had to fit together legally in order for that business idea to come to fruition,” she says. “But one of the challenges for lawyers who become CEOs is to not allow their legal knowledge to impede developing the business. We’re taught to be risk-averse and sometimes that’s not beneficial. It’s all about balance and having the talent around you necessary to succeed. I have a great team at the Connecticut Lottery Corp.”

Adam K. Rizzo ’03:
Building a company on green principles

Of the Earth’s 7 billion people, Adam K. Rizzo ’03 points out, more than 2 billion have no access to electricity. That, he says, is why renewable energy is much more than an environmental issue—it’s a matter of human development.

Rizzo brought that commitment to UB Law expecting to practice environmental law. But in classes and internships, he became interested in solar power. After graduation he did practice law for a couple of years, but he had a side project with his brother, a little company that supplied solar panels, especially to the German market. They sold on eBay and financed the business on their credit cards.

Now that company, Solar Liberty, which Rizzo founded with his brother, is a fast-growing installer of solar electric systems with 75 employees. They also created the Solar Liberty Foundation, headed by sister Paige L. Mecca ’99, which provides solar energy systems and solar cookers to people in rural areas of developing nations, such as Haiti and Tanzania. Even replacing air-fouling kerosene lanterns and installing solar lighting so kids can do their homework at night can change lives.

“I like to think that the business is helping improve the world and the people in it,” Adam Rizzo says. “Instead of producing electricity from coal or natural gas, we’re producing it with the sun; it’s non-polluting, and it’s there for us to use. I like to think that we help to improve the families of those whom we employ, and all the vendors we work with, as well as our customers. It feels great to be able to eliminate a customer’s electric bill from their yearly budget.”

25+ Corporate CEOs and presidents
Karen M. Andolina Scott ’09:
Extending a welcome

I’m exactly where I was hoping to be,” says Karen M. Andolina Scott ’09. Who could ask for anything more?

Scott, a graduate of the Law School’s joint program in law and social work, is executive director of Journey’s End Refugee Services, which each year serves as many as 500 refugees seeking to make their home in the United States. Scott practiced immigration law in a firm and with Journey’s End, serving as managing attorney, before she accepted the top job last year. Now she oversees administration, programs and the agency’s strategic plan, and is the public face of Journey’s End to the community.

The Journey’s End legal services department has six staff attorneys, supplemented with Law School externs and a few volunteer lawyers. They serve low-income clients who are applying for permanent residency and naturalization, or fighting deportation.

Her legal training still pays off, Scott says, “in thinking about ways to approach a problem, making sure I’m looking at every possible outcome. In advocating for our clients and agency staff, it’s certainly useful to know to put your strongest argument first, and to look at counterarguments and be prepared for those.”

It can be difficult work, she acknowledges; refugees and other immigrants often come with tragic personal stories that need to be documented. But the impact of the work is its own reward.

“I hope to be able to educate people on what the refugee process is, who refugees are, how they benefit our community, and show that refugees want to work, want to bring their families here, want to become citizens,” Scott says. “For the clients themselves, I love seeing those moments of success when we have been able to reunite families, or watch clients or staff members become citizens and now feel that they are a part of something again. It’s truly remarkable work.”

Karen Nicolson ’89:
Advocating for the elderly

As a high school student, Karen Nicolson ’89 met a legal services attorney helping farmworkers on her native Long Island.

That, she thought, is what I want to do: make the law work for poor people.

Now, as CEO of Legal Services for the Elderly, Disabled or Disadvantaged of Western New York, she leads an organization that provides free legal help to low-income senior citizens, and trustee and guardianship services for disabled persons.

The issues range from physical and financial abuse, to scams targeted at older people, to eviction and other housing concerns. For disabled persons, LSED is a trustee for a pooled trust, which has about 400 beneficiaries, and the court-appointed Article 81 guardian for more than 100 low-income individuals.

It’s all in service of one goal: to help clients live independently and with dignity.

“The Law School did prepare me for my position here,” Nicolson says. “I’m doing non-traditional legal work – I deal with personnel issues, lobbying, fundraising. But there’s a legal component to a lot of it.” In addition to helping supervise 15 attorneys, she manages contracts with funders, keeps up on labor law, and as a registered lobbyist, works to comply with state reporting requirements.

“We have such a wonderful staff,” Nicolson says. “It’s so inspiring to see them come in with this great passion and see how hard they work. There’s always a hum of activity, people talking about cases and strategy and victories. It’s a great place to practice law.”

Beyond the direct benefit to clients in real need, she says LSED has been in the forefront of identifying issues that affect seniors. They saw the foreclosure crisis coming, and noticed the trend toward financial abuse of elders before it was widely reported. “Our staff is out in community, they’re on boards, they talk to people,” she says. “We’ve been able to help bring a better focus on elder issues.”
Lutz Eidam ’03: 
Seeking a deeper vision of criminal law

It’s a long trip from Germany to Buffalo. But, says Lutz Eidam ’03, that journey became an important part of his professional development. His experience at UB Law, where he earned the master of laws degree with a focus on criminal law, “opened the door to a different legal culture which still has an impact on my scientific work.”

Now Eidam is back home in Germany as a law professor at the University of Frankfurt. (The German term is privatdozent, denoting a professor who has the qualifications to teach at the university level and to supervise Ph.D. candidates.) After his study at UB Law, he went on to earn a doctoral degree at the University of Frankfurt and to serve as a research assistant at the private Bucerius Law School in Hamburg, Germany. But his students are reaping the benefits of that fruitful year he spent in Buffalo.

Eidam is a specialist in criminal law, and he has written as well about criminal procedure law, white-collar crime, medical criminal law and legal theory. He currently serves as an assistant professor in the criminal law department at his law school, a position he assumed in 2015.

In addition to his teaching, Eidam works as a defense attorney in private practice – “in chosen cases,” he says.

Legal education in Germany happens at the undergraduate level, and Eidam says he finds the most satisfaction in “sharing my scientific insights with young students.” Two important impacts can be seen, he says: “the education of young students to be critical-minded lawyers who do not accept anything that politics demands from the law; and, as a defense lawyer, I have (in many cases) been the guardian of legal and procedural standards.”

Seung-in Hong ’05: 
Oiling the wheels of trade

The vast machinery of the international economy doesn’t run by itself. It needs continual attention from people who understand how markets work, how negotiations can succeed, how the law both supports and constrains free trade.

People like Seung-in Hong ’05. A South Korean citizen, since 2014 he has served as that nation’s deputy chief of mission to Peru. “I cover almost everything for my embassy here in Lima, with a focus on economic matters,” he reports. (South Korea exports cars, cellphones and other electronics to Peru; in turn, Peru mostly exports mineral resources and fisheries products.) “There are some trade issues, bilateral and multilateral, but much more important are issues of economic cooperation in the areas of energy/mining, infrastructure, information technology and environment.”

That means using the traditional skills he learned at UB Law School in non-traditional ways. “My current work here in Peru is slightly outside traditional law practice,” Hong says. “As we move up the ladder of hierarchy of any organization, we need more political judgements and insights rather than detailed legal knowledge and analysis. However, even the day-to-day management of my embassy, for example, requires some level of understanding of various legal matters, such as labor, tax, pension and diplomatic immunity.”

Before his posting to Peru, Hong served as a trade diplomat for South Korea. In that role he spent three years in Geneva, Switzerland, handling World Trade Organization matters, including WTO dispute settlements and negotiations over the organization’s Doha Development Agenda. Over a five-year period, he was involved in more than 100 rounds of bilateral trade negotiations.

“Korea’s free trade agreements have been important legal and economic instruments for boosting Korea’s trade with the United States and the European Union,” Hong says. “Investments are liberalized and protected under those instruments as well. I am proud of the contributions I made during the negotiations.”
Jessica Ortiz ’05:
Making the federal case

As co-chief of the Narcotics Unit for the U.S. Attorney’s Office, Southern District of New York, Jessica Ortiz ’05 sees defendants who have made terrible choices. But she also tries to see beyond their crimes.

“People who end up in the federal system, in the cases I deal with, are often people who didn’t have a support system that allowed them to escape the conditions they were raised in,” she says. “Sometimes a federal prosecution can help somebody, because it takes them out of an area, or it can save them from violence or help get their life back on track. My job is to look at each individual defendant and say, what is a fair and just outcome for the crime committed by this person, and how can we ensure that our prosecution is part of the solution?”

Her work extends as well to trying to find solutions when drug abuse threatens communities.

“We are trying to figure out how best to deal with public health crises and use the tools that we have to combat those issues,” she says.

The current focus is on heroin, but last summer a synthetic cannabinoid called K2 surfaced in New York, in the form of tea leaves sprayed with chemicals from China. “The chemicals were a controlled substance, but you could walk into any bodega and buy it and you had no idea what you were smoking,” Ortiz says. “People were having horrible reactions to it.”

“State law didn’t cover the drug, but federal law did — and her office initiated an action that led to the arrest of a number of manufacturers and distributors.

“I think our job is one of doing justice and helping the community,” she says.

“We do a lot of proactive work, identifying areas we can help improve or help take action. That’s the fun part of the job.”

Ortiz won the 2016 Top Lawyers Under 40 award from the Hispanic National Bar Association.

Kevin M. Comstock ’87:
Serving his country on two fronts

“I think there’s value in public service,” Kevin M. Comstock ’87 says with understatement. “That’s what my career has been, both in the U.S. Attorney’s office and with the military, serving the country and furthering the rule of law.”

Comstock has made public service his life on two fronts: as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in Norfolk, Va., and in his extensive service in the United States Navy Reserve as a Judge Advocate.

In more than 25 years with the U.S. Attorney’s office, Comstock estimates he has represented the United States in more than 1,500 court appearances, over 500 motions, and over 250 search, seizure and surveillance warrants. He has litigated over 750 felony cases leading to convictions, sentencing and forfeiture of over $10 million in assets. His cases have ranged from counterfeiting to Ponzi schemes to cybercrimes, though he now is mainly assigned to drug and firearms cases.

“The other front grew out of his four years of active-duty service with the Navy right after law school, where he served in the JAG Corps. He has served for more than a decade in the Navy Reserve, and currently is the executive officer for a 30-person unit — lawyers and legalmen (para-legals) — based in Jacksonville, Fla.

As a reservist he spent half a year in Iraq, working as a Rule of Law Attorney to help the Iraqis reinstitute their legal systems. He traveled widely, assessing the security of courthouses and jails. “Obviously it has proven to be difficult because of the various factions that exist there,” he says of the overall task. “But I felt very good about supporting my country’s national security efforts.”

His service has not gone unnoticed: Comstock recently received the Rear Adm. Hugh H. Howell Jr. Award of Excellence for Meritorious Service, the highest honor given in the Navy Reserve Law Program, and was selected for promotion to the rank of captain last year.

“Super Lawyers,” as named by Super Lawyers magazine