Innovation in Action: The latest bold developments in O'Brian Hall and beyond

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INNOVATION IN ACTION

As the world of legal practice evolves, UB School of Law is innovating right along with it. Here are a few of the latest developments in O’Brian Hall and beyond.

1. Now accepting the GRE

More than 30 U.S. law schools now recognize Graduate Record Examination (GRE) scores in place of the LSAT in their admissions process. Beginning with this fall’s entering class, UB School of Law has joined them, accepting either GRE or LSAT scores as evidence of a student’s ability to succeed in law school. The move is expected to be especially beneficial to students considering dual-degree options offered at the law school, which is known for its interdisciplinary approach to education and offers degrees that include a J.D./MBA, J.D./MPH and several J.D./Ph.D. programs.

“We hope that this ultimately benefits those students who may not have access to the LSAT, but who have the talent and the necessary skills to succeed in law school. It may also encourage those talented students who are unclear about their next step to consider a career in law.”

– Dean Aviva Abramovsky

2. Entering the world of undergraduate education

The job market for legal services is expanding – but not just for licensed attorneys. In response to high demand for non-attorney employees who have some understanding of the law among other technical skills, the School of Law has begun offering an undergraduate degree: the bachelor of arts in law. The new major debuts this fall, with the expectation that it will one day rival the size of the J.D. program. UB is only the second law school in the nation, after the University of Arizona, to offer an undergraduate degree in law.

“Employers now expect non-lawyer employees in critical areas to have knowledge about the law and regulations. Whole new careers have developed to support legal work. The undergraduate major in law responds to this changing need and these new specialties.”

– Professor James G. Miles, vice dean for undergraduate studies

New energy, new ideas, New York City

Professor Stuart Lazar’s problem is a good one to have: so many talented and interested UB Law alumni who are available to lecture in the New York City Program on Finance & Law, and only 38 class days to work with.

Lazar, the newly named co-director of the program, will alternate planning and running the fall-semester program with Professor David A. Westbrook. This fall Lazar is taking the lead, and he says one challenge is to shape the curriculum as he selects the legal practitioners who’ll share their expertise with the 20 students in the semester’s cohort.

“A lot of our alumni are very happy to do it and are very interested in giving back,” he says. “They love working with and meeting students and helping them with their future careers.”

Lazar, who has practiced business law and specializes in tax law, is located in New York City for the semester. The class meets in space rented from Stony Brook University, in sessions from Monday to Wednesday; students typically pursue externships and project work on the other weekdays.

He has taught in the program previously and is teaching this fall as well – debriefing with students after the practitioners’ presentations, answering questions and filling any gaps in subject matter.
3. Live from the courtroom

The elegant Francis M. Letro Courtroom, on the first floor of O’Brien Hall, is familiar to many as the site of moot court and trial competitions. Throughout the fall, the courtroom will host an expanding roster of real-life trial proceedings, affording students an up-close opportunity to watch the justice system in action. The docket includes a whistleblower case before Sean M. Ramaley, an administrative law judge with the U.S. Department of Labor, and special-term proceedings throughout the fall heard by New York State Supreme Court Justice Ralph A. Boniello III ’69.

4. Driving legal innovation

Self-driving vehicles are coming. Is the legal system ready? The New York State Bar Association is tackling that question with a new Task Force on Autonomous Vehicles and the Law – and UB School of Law Dean Aviva Abramovsky has been named its chair. The task force is charged with examining the enormous effect that driverless vehicles will have on our legal system and our society, and recommending how New York can prepare for this technological revolution. The group’s work is expected to have an impact well beyond New York State.

Autonomous vehicles are already being tested in some areas of the country, but there has been little discussion about what laws and regulations need to be put in place, and the potential impacts on our justice systems and our everyday lives.

– Henry M. Greenberg, New York State Bar Association president

5. New York City – forever

The New York City Program on Finance & Law is one of the School of Law’s signature initiatives – a one-of-a-kind opportunity for students to learn the intricacies of high-financial practice in the heart of the Big Apple. Now a major new fundraising initiative aims to make sure that the opportunity will be there, no matter what, for the long term. The initiative seeks to grow the endowment for the New York City program to $3 million – but it doesn’t stop there. A stretch goal of $5 million would help expand the law school’s presence in New York City by increasing efforts to recruit students from the city, funding more internships there and creating a career placement satellite.

It’s an investment that already has shown demonstrated success. Students who have been part of the New York City Program find finance-related legal positions in the city at a much higher rate than other students, testament both to the program’s educational value and the contacts students typically make.

Gifts at all levels are being solicited for the endowment.

To be part of the endowment initiative, contact:
Karen R. Kaczmarski ’89
Vice Dean for Advancement
(716) 645–6429
krkacz@buffalo.edu

“I’ve made this a core commitment, on the theory that when one person or a broad array of alumni can help students find jobs in a targeted way, that will make their lives better and will make the reputation of the school even better.”

– David E. Fransasiak ’78, principal in Williams & Jensen, PLLC, and a leader of the NYC Program endowment initiative

2018 New York City Program participants with Dean Aviva Abramovsky (center), Professor David Westbrook (fourth from right) and Professor Stuart Lazar (far right)

“One of the interesting things about the program is that there’s not a set curriculum,” Lazar says. “There’s no material that we’re required to get through. If there’s a particular merger going on, I have the flexibility to adapt for that. If there were to be a huge bankruptcy, I could have someone come in and talk about the different steps in the bankruptcy.”

The New York City Program, he says, “is unique to our school. Because it is an introductory course, a lot of the students take it early on in their law school career. They can figure out if they’re interested in the world of finance, and come back to Buffalo and take additional courses that complement and add to their knowledge of business transactions.”