THE "REAL WORLD" ACCORDING TO ADJUNCT PROFESSORS

UMAB adjunct professors discuss the benefits, to students and themselves, of their practical lessons

BY TOM NUGENT

SUDDENLY, THE PROFESSOR STOPS PACING. HIS RIGHT HAND SHOOTS UP, POINTS DIRECTLY AT THE MOB OF LAW STUDENTS GATHERED HERE IN LECTURE HALL 401.

"ALL RIGHT NOW!" THUNDERS UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT JUDGE FREDERIC N. SMALKIN '71. HE GLARES AND BLINKS. "IF THIS THING GOES TO A JURY, WHAT DO YOU THINK THAT JURY IS GOING TO SAY? WILL THEY RULE IN FAVOR OF THE BANK, OR IN FAVOR OF THE SHERIFF AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UNSECURED CREDITOR?"

No response.
Frowning, several of the students steal quick glances at their textbook—Problems And Materials On Commercial Law, by Professor Whaley.
But Whaley can't help them now.
"Come on!" barks Judge Smalkin, a veteran adjunct professor here at the University of Maryland School of Law, selected by the 1996 graduating class as Teacher of the Year. "What about it? How many of you think the bank won in this case?"
Most of the hands go up.

He smiles affectionately at them. "Sorry, the sheriff won. Why? It's simple. The financing statement had not been filed properly!"

It is Thursday morning, and once again Adjunct Professor Smalkin is taking his class through the brain-snarling intricacies of his remarkably popular course in Commercial Law. Nodding and frantically scribbling notes, the students do their best to keep up. And then a moment later, he's firing off one of his famous one-liners, while illustrating a legal point, causing the class to roar with laughter.
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And so it goes, for a solid hour.

When the class finally ends, third-year law student David Leib takes a moment to describe his teacher: “He’s fantastic. He’s obviously very dedicated to teaching us everything he can about the law. And he also has a great sense of humor!”

Question: After nearly two decades as an adjunct, why does this 10-year veteran of the federal bench keep returning each semester to lead the way through the vast labyrinth that is Commercial Law?

Now the 50-year-old Smalkin pauses, thinks, and breaks into a delighted chuckle. “It gives me exercise in the morning, because I have to walk over from the courthouse, and I always pace around when I teach!” Then, more seriously: “I really do enjoy teaching a practical course in a practical way. And I also think that adjuncts like myself can bring a practical perspective—a bit of the ‘real world,’ if you will, to their classes.”

A moment later, with the textbook by the man he calls “Brother Whaley” tucked safely into his backpack, Judge Smalkin is headed out the door.

Class dismissed!

If you ask some of the 60 “adjuncts” at the University of Maryland School of Law to explain why they love to teach, most of them will quickly tell you that they’re wonderfully energized by the experience... and that they get a real charge out of bringing a bit of the real world to the busy campus at Baltimore and Paca Streets.

“I’ve been at it for the past 34 years,” says veteran attorney Shale Stiller, who’s been teaching law at Maryland longer than anybody else on the faculty, “and yet I still get energized every time I step in front of a class! You know, I’m usually in my office by 8 a.m.,” says the legendary Stiller, a partner at Piper & Marbury and named in the 1997-1998 edition of The Best Lawyers in America. “I work hard all day, and by the time I get over to the law school to teach my evening Taxation course, I’m usually pretty tired. But it never fails: As soon as the class arrives, it’s like somebody gave me a shot of adrenalin!”

Stiller, who has also taught Commercial Law, Constitutional Law and Federal Jurisdiction, says that he’s enjoyed watching the law school “get better and better” over the years. “There’s no doubt that we now rank in the top 25 or 30 law schools in the United States,” he points out. “And that certainly wasn’t true when I first started to teach. As far as I’m concerned, there are...”
two things required for good teaching: enthusiasm for the subject and a thorough knowledge of it."

Like Shale Stiller, Sandy Rosenberg, a 15-year veteran of the Maryland House of Delegates and Chair of an important appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Resources, also enjoys the adrenaline rush of teaching. He gets an enormous sense of satisfaction out of showing his students “how the legislative process actually works in Maryland.”

and a founder of the Hispanic Bar Association, gets “a real thrill out of taking my students through the trial process from beginning to end.” Tsaknis also tells her students that women and minorities can succeed in the courtroom: “I tell them that my Spanish accent sometimes counts against me—until everybody sees that I’m extremely well-prepared, and then I get respect in a hurry!”

Lewis A. Noonberg ’62, an expert on antitrust law at Piper & Marbury in Washington, and who

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Judge Andre Davis ’78

“I’ve taught legislation the past two years,” says Rosenberg, who co-teaches the class with Michael Davis ’85. “It is important that we expose our students to the legislative process because the bulk of their learning is by the case method. As a matter of fact, we tell them so much about the legislative process that we usually have to finish our lectures by warning them not to become cynical, and urging them to change the process for the better instead!”

Spend some time with the men and women who work as adjuncts at Maryland, and you’ll soon discover that their motives for teaching law are as varied as they are. For example, Mayda Colon Tsaknis, a Rockville private practice attorney of Puerto Rican ancestry, has been teaching antitrust courses at the School of Law since 1977, says he gets “enormously excited over the policy questions that come up in my Antitrust Law course. I love economic theory—and I dearly love to discuss economic issues related to antitrust”.

Judge E. Stephen Derby of the United States Bankruptcy Court in Baltimore, likes the idea of “giving back to the system” by spending time with law students: “When I’m teaching my course, Creditors’ Rights, I’m always reminding myself that as a person who’s been at the bar, and who now has the opportunity to be a judge, I want to ‘give back’ to all of the people who helped me in my own career.”

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Lewis E. Leibowitz ’75, a specialist in international trade law at Hogan & Hartson in Washington, D.C., says he gets a great sense of accomplishment out of sharing his specialized knowledge with young people. “I very much enjoy the interaction with the students, especially when I get to tell them about exciting new developments in the former Soviet Union or in China. And as a 1975 graduate myself, I’ve got a lot of affection for the law school.”

Linda Thomas ’91

Glenn Ivey

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Judge E. Stephen Derby

For Baltimore Federal District Court Judge Andre Davis ’78, teaching Criminal Procedure provides a “marvelous antidote” to an illness that he jokingly describes as “Black Robe Disease.” Says the veteran jurist: “Taking yourself too seriously is a real danger, once you’ve been on the bench for a while. ‘Black Robe Disease’ is a lethal malady, but teaching tends to bring you back to earth in a hurry!”

Baltimore civil and criminal lawyer Phillip G. Dantes has been teaching Trial Planning and Advocacy since 1982 and notes that he loves to “bring the real world into the classroom,” in part by staging full-jury trials and videotaping them. “It’s trial work that excites me, and I really get a charge out of watching students do it.”

Linda Thomas ’91, an Assistant State’s Attorney in Cumberland, taught her first adjunct course, Constitutional Law, last fall. “I really enjoy the students and the intellectual give and take of class.” She says that she does not mind the amount of preparation required: “I’ve found that I have to do at least four hours of preparation for each hour of class, but I love the intellectual challenge.”

Washington attorney Glenn Ivey, now the Chief Counsel to Democratic House Leader Tom Daschle (South Dakota), has been teaching Criminal Procedure part-time for the past two years, and says that he also loves to drag the real world kicking and screaming into his classroom: “As counsel to the Democratic leader of the House, I see the real world at work daily in the halls of Congress.

As the pundits like to put it, I ‘see the sausage [new laws] being made.’ And I dearly love to share that stuff with my students. Last year I had two police officers in my class, and it was extremely interesting to hear these criminal procedure issues discussed from their point of view.

I mean, how ‘real world’ can you get?”


Tom Nugent is a journalist in Baltimore and a former adjunct professor at many institutions, including UMBC.