Creating Opportunity

The University of Maryland School of Law’s programs in the areas of law and health care, environmental law and clinical education are nationally renowned. Less visible, but deserving of equal recognition, are our comprehensive and innovative programs in business law. We are proud to feature some of these programs in this issue of the JD.

In the business law area, as in others, the opportunities available to students today dazzle those of us who graduated from law school decades ago. Imagine being a student editor of The Business Lawyer, the most widely circulated law review-type publication in the world, and working alongside “practitioner” editors such as Chief Justice E. Norman Veasey of the Supreme Court of the State of Delaware or George S. Frazier, General Counsel for Johnson & Johnson, a major multinational corporation.

Consider also the educational experiences of the students in our Law and Entrepreneurship Program. Last year Irma Robbins, a third-year law student, helped six entrepreneurs from inner-city Baltimore establish new businesses, including a billing service and a neighborhood restaurant. While in the Law and Entrepreneurship Program, Daniel Pugh, a 1994 graduate now with Piper & Marbury, helped a struggling biotech company merge with a stronger company, giving its owners, employees and technologies a new lease on life.

This fall the School of Law will couple a first group of students with Professor Max Oppenheimer, a former partner at Venable, Baetjer & Howard and one of the region’s leading intellectual property lawyers, in our new Technology Transfer Clinical Seminar. Professor Oppenheimer and his students will work with one client—the University of Maryland in Baltimore. Their primary task is to help remove legal obstacles to the commercialization of the many exciting technologies being developed on this campus.

The corporate and business law curriculum builds on traditional classroom training in a comprehensive set of courses. Courses in the core fields of corporations, securities regulation, commercial law and tax law are complemented by a broad array of classes that emphasize finance theory, experiential learning and the international aspects of business law practice.

Why has the University of Maryland School of Law made this major commitment to establishing the nation’s most innovative business law curriculum? We begin with the reality that much of the practice of law is not litigation, but rather transactional work. Despite the occasional hue and cry from the business community about lawyers, the business community uses and hires more law school graduates than anyone else. Transactional lawyering requires an unusual set of skills, and our law school is a pioneer in finding new ways to help students develop those skills.

Educating excellent business lawyers also is important for the well-being of our society. At UMB we have self-consciously tried to link business law and economic development by showing, in both theory and practice, how lawyers can not only remove legal obstacles to transactions but can positively help create wealth. The seemingly intractable social and economic problems of the late twentieth century require creating a “bigger pie” for all Americans. Well-educated business lawyers must play a crucial role in that process.

As interstate competition heats up in the economic development arena, it is essential that University of Maryland School of Law educate graduates with more than a general legal education and the ability to “think like a lawyer.” We recognize that an important part of our role as a law school is to educate the leaders of the future to promote responsible economic growth.

Donald G. Gifford, Dean