As the old adage goes: What's inside matters most

BY CHRIS HART

What do you imagine when you hear the words "a new law school"? Bricks and mortar, right? Shiny, high-tech classrooms? Big spaces that encourage the best and brightest to explore the law in all its many facets?

How about changes in management structure?

No successful institution, not the Louvre, not Camden Yards, can succeed just by looking great on the outside. There has to be substance on the inside, talented people who are willing to take on a variety of tasks to achieve a vision. A strong mix of give-and-take, lateral communication, counterintuitive thinking and pragmatic leadership is required for any organization to improve.

At your School of Law, the desire to accomplish is most visible in the Building Campaign. But that’s not where it all starts.

Quietly, without the fanfare that accompanies the campaign, Dean Donald G. Gifford has retooled the leadership of the school in preparation for a “rebirth” in a new facility. He asked both veteran and recently hired administrators and faculty members to take on new tasks, to look at novel ways of making the operation run more efficiently and more attractively for students and teachers, current and future. He fine-tuned in certain places, rebuilt from scratch in others. He sought out an enthusiasm to match his own—and got it.

You could say that it all started in Career Development, or Career Services, as it was previously known. That peculiar little office used to be stuck in the parking garage across Paca Street, unexplored by most students and alumni until panic struck. By the time they discovered what the office offered, usually they were already on a career path or in the middle of a job search. Complaints about the service were often the result.

“As I see it, career development is the single most important student service of any law school,” Gifford says. “I agreed with a lot of the complaining. So, three years ago we started working to change it. We moved the offices into the Thurgood Marshall Library, hired great folks, and today it’s nothing like it was. Now it’s a model for other schools and a valued resource for law firms and all sorts of businesses.”

Indeed, under the guidance of Assistant Dean for Career Development José Bahamonde-González, Director Dana Morris and now Director of Judicial Clerkships and Public Interest Programs Teresa Schmiedeler, Career Development has begun to take the University of Maryland name into some of Washington, D.C.’s most prominent firms. It’s a move that would have been untenable only a few years ago.

With the market for new lawyers on the rebound, is Gifford satisfied to have his employment operation humming along undisturbed?

Hardly. Recently, he asked Morris to spend serious time looking at ways to better market the institution, as well as to expand her role in Career Development by becoming Assistant Dean. Fans of the unstoppable Bahamonde-González were left wondering: Where does he fit in all this?

They kicked him upstairs, so to speak. Relying on Bahamonde-González’s past experience in finance, the Dean appointed him Assistant Dean for Administration. In that role, Bahamonde-González keeps tabs on the business of the school, watching the books and the budgets. (It sounds dry, but if anybody can make it fun it’s José.)

Meanwhile, Schmiedeler provides a boost to the career team, putting together events like the Public Interest Law Job Fair, an annual gathering that attracts public interest employers and law students from across the country.

If Career Development is the most important student service, then education and academics are the core mission of the law school. Next year will see changes in the position of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, traditionally regarded as the “second in command” at the law school.

After serving as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs for four of the seven years of Gifford’s tenure as Dean, Associate Dean and T. Carroll Brown Scholar David Bogen will return to his first loves of teaching and scholarship.

“There is no one as universally respected in this law school,” Gifford says of Bogen. “He has been so important to our program as well as a partner and a good friend to me. I think he has done more as an administrator that he ever wanted to
The School of Law's leadership team is comprised of (back row, left to right) José Bahamonde-González, Tricia O’Neill, Donald Gifford, James Forsyth, Trishana Bowden; (middle row, left to right) Dana Morris, Teresa Schmiedeler, Shelley Gitomer; (front row, left to right) Diane Hoffman and Jana Singer.

When the new School of Law opens early in the next century, it won't be just an elaborate puzzle made of wood, steel, and stone. It will be the product of an imaginative group of individuals who have made major contributions to the new building.

do. I know how badly he wants to get back to teaching,” Gifford is not quite ready to let Bogen off the hook, “Dave will serve as the school’s official shaman,” Gifford jokes, but only a little. He calls Bogen “the wisest person I have ever met.”

So where does one find a suitable replacement for “the wisest person?” Well, at the University of Maryland School of Law for next year, it will take two wise and experienced faculty members to fill in as faculty Associate Deans. Gifford has named Associate Professor Jana Singer as Associate Dean for Academic Programs, and Professor Diane Hoffmann as the Associate Dean for Faculty Affairs. Associate Dean Singer, who recently published a casebook on family law, will run the academic program—the course scheduling, the student and faculty concerns and the scheduling of the adjuncts. Associate Dean Hoffmann, a key partner in the school’s nationally acclaimed Law and Health Care program, will focus on matters that include recruitment and development of superb teachers and scholars, enhancing the intellectual life of the School of Law and representing the school in a variety of University functions.

These additions to the School of Law’s leadership team join others who performed key roles at the School of Law. For the past two years, Professor Tricia O’Neill, a 1987 graduate of the School of Law and formerly Director of Academic Support, has served as Director of Student Affairs. O’Neill is a virtual ombudsman for student concerns, working with the academic and personal needs of individual students, offering sessions for students on exam preparation, but also serving as a liaison to a host of student organizations.

Meanwhile, the school’s Development-Alumni Office is operating full speed ahead as it never has before. Now in their third year leading the school’s development function, Assistant Dean Shelley Gitomer and Director Trishana Bowden have raised the School of Law to one of the top 10 public universities in the country in terms of charitable giving.
And then there is the admissions function, which continues to be run by a real professional in the person of Associate Dean for Admissions and Registration Jim Forsyth. The competition for the best and brightest law students has reached new levels, and Gifford finds nothing so frustrating as seeing a bright and talented Maryland resident leave the state, pay more money at a private institution and get a lesser education.

"Very few administrators in legal education," claims Gifford, "perform the dual role that Jim Forsyth has, both as the lead person in the admissions process and a leading administrator of our academic program in areas such as registration, the exam process and course scheduling." That is why, this year, the Dean brought Gary Wimbish on board to serve as Director of Admissions Programs. Wimbish, formerly with the financial aid office at the Georgetown University Law School, will search for outstanding students and help them find the way to the University of Maryland School of Law.

The faculty plays an important role in the leadership of the University of Maryland School of Law as well. Throughout the last couple of decades, faculty committees have been chaired by a wonderfully talented and dedicated group of leaders with familiar names like Quint, Tomlinson, Reynolds and Bogen. Their wisdom and their dedication to the law school remain critical components of the school's success. Increasingly, however, faculty committees are chaired by those who have joined the law school faculty more recently: Hellman, Hoffmann, Ifill, Singer and others. Gifford points especially to Professor Deborah Hellman, who chairs the Faculty Appointments Committee this year. "I put Deborah in that position because I knew that she personally understood the values we were looking for in new faculty members—a commitment to quality teaching and to quality scholarship." Gifford continues, "I now realize that she is an adept and effective administrator as well."

There is much that is new and different about this leadership team. It is younger, more racially diverse and a more gender-balanced group than ever before. But listen carefully to what they say about quality education and caring for students, and you hear the echoes of former Dean Roger Howell. Their aspirations for academic and intellectual excellence mirror the lessons of Mike Kelly. More things change, the more they stay the same.

Professor Marc Feldman died last September, after more than a year-long battle with cancer. With his death at the age of 49, the University of Maryland School of Law community, the world of legal education, and the legal services bar lost a unique lawyer/teacher whose singular vision and enormous talents enriched all who knew him.

Marc was my teaching partner at the law school. He was also my dear friend. For a number of years, we jointly taught a first-year course entitled Legal Theory and Practice: Torts. For several consecutive summers, we took a house together at the Delaware shore, where we would repair to work on our respective scholarly projects. The evenings were spent sharing what we had produced during the day, and, over good food and wine, we offered one another encouragement and honest criticism. I am proud of the work that emerged from our collaborations.

I "met" Marc in 1985—the year I began my law teaching career at a small law school in the Midwest. I remember the event clearly. I was at my desk working on a lesson plan, when two colleagues rushed into my office waving a copy of the "Pedagogy and Politics," authored by Professors Marc Feldman and Jay Feinman, of the Rutgers School of Law in Camden, N.J. They insisted that I put aside what I was working on to look at this most rare of all objects, a genuinely useful law review article.

I took "Pedagogy and Politics" home with me that evening and discovered in it the key elements that characterize all of Marc's work. At the very least, the article was a description of an experimental course that Professors Feldman and Feinman had taught at Rutgers. But, it was really much more. Importantly, it was a clarion call for a vision of teaching that I had not seen discussed by legal educators or attempted in law school classrooms. As Jay Feinman said in his remarks at Marc's memorial service at Westminster Hall on Oct. 7, "Marc believed that students could learn, really learn, intensely and in a way that would alter their lives. He believed that students could excel, not just a few students, but many students, most students. He believed that we had the capacity to teach them..."