Why Do Alumni Return to the School of Law to Teach?

Susan Middagh

"There is a satisfaction of trying to teach what you know, of coming back and sharing with the students your knowledge and experience."

—Michael P. Brockmeyer '77

I was asked," answers the Hon. Frederic Smalkin '71, a judge of the U.S. District Court for the District of Maryland. Smalkin, 54, has been a member of the School of Law's adjunct faculty for more than 20 years. He teaches Commercial Law, a two-semester, six-credit course which focuses on understanding the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC). Smalkin places emphasis on the UCC, which governs most transactions in personal property, as it is interpreted in Maryland. His course covers commercial paper, sales and secured transactions with some reference to federal bankruptcy statutes and other federal laws and regulations.

Like all of the adjunct faculty members interviewed for this article, Smalkin was recruited because of his expertise in a particular field. The process for choosing adjuncts is driven by courses added to the curriculum. School of Law administrators then set out to find experts who work full-time in those particular specialties. This approach is consistent with the School of Law's goal to educate and train students with instructors who practice what they teach.

Notes Jana Singer, professor of law and associate dean for academic programs, "Our talented adjunct faculty members provide depth and breadth to our curriculum. The 'real-world' experience they bring to the classroom gives students a window onto the world of law practice and exposes students to cutting-edge legal and professional responsibility issues."

Smalkin, one of 64 adjunct faculty members, began teaching in the evening program, but switched to the day program about 10 years ago. An early riser, he's usually in his office by 7:15 a.m. and in class for an hour, beginning at 8:45 a.m., three mornings a week. Two factors help make Smalkin's demanding work schedule logistically possible: the law school is within easy walking distance of the federal courthouse in Baltimore and the earliest starting time for most trials is 10 a.m.

What keeps him coming back year after year? "I have a natural devotion to the school where I received my education," Smalkin explains. In addition, he notes, "It's a pleasure to work with James Forsyth, associate dean for Admissions and Registration, and Robin Stewart, who handles all the administrative details so well."

What's more, he says, working with students is a "refreshing experience. Each class seems to have a different personality," Smalkin describes. "It's fascinating to me the unique questions they ask and what they find interesting and humorous." One difference he's noted from his early days of teaching is that today more and more students have worked between college and law school. It's not unusual, he attests, to have a certified public accountant in class and others with backgrounds in retail or commer-
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—the Hon. Frederic Smalkin ’71 (pictured left)
law programs in the country, he says Percival and Mrozek have gone out of their way since he graduated to offer professional advice and job leads. "It's hard to say no to Bob and Laura," Groseclose says. "They're very nice people."

Logistically, team-teaching appealed to Groseclose and Wing for a number of reasons. Because both men are in positions that require out-of-town travel, they have arranged their schedules to back up one another. They also have different specialties—Wing's background is in national and international issues, whereas Groseclose is an expert on hazardous waste regulation. "Team-teaching takes the pressure off," Wing explains. They draw on one another's strengths. "It's important to your students to look at the issues from different perspectives," Groseclose notes. Both men have worked in the public sector and in private practice; Wing has also been a law clerk to a federal judge.

"Teaching is a humbling experience," Groseclose confirms, "it's also an opportunity to deepen your own knowledge."

What appeals to his teaching partner is the challenge of "connecting with the students, making the topic interesting and exciting, and explaining the law clearly and simply," Wing says. "I enjoyed law school very much, I wanted to try teaching."

**Giving something back**

Teresa K. LaMaster '95, an associate with Bowie & Jensen, a Baltimore-based business and intellectual property firm serving privately held companies doing business in national and international markets, explains that she became an adjunct professor in the School of Law for her own professional development. "Teaching is a great way for a practicing attorney to keep current," notes LaMaster, who has represented a variety of clients in trade secret, patent, trademark and copyright matters in state and federal trial and appellate courts in Maryland and around the country.

She and three of her colleagues—founding partner Robert R. Bowie '77, Mark Jensen and Michael Oliver—use a team approach for their course, Introduction to Intellectual Property Practice, a first-time offering in the evening program during the fall 2000 semester. The team gave an overview of the protection, enforcement and commercialization of intellectual prop-

"writing the best exam I ever had to take—a multiple choice," she remembers. "I tried to learn from his example and wrote a multiple choice exam for our students."

Fortunately, LaMaster affirms, "Bob and Mark were 150 percent behind what we were doing; they were committed to our devoting time to the course." Bowie explains that one of the themes and expectations of his law firm is teaching and education. He remembers the training he received in Professor Michael A. Millemann's clinical program during his third year at the law school. "We received good, practical real-world experiences—Social Security, landlord-tenant disputes as well as criminal cases," Bowie says. He praises Millemann for introducing him to the concept of lawyer as servant and adviser and for impressing upon him the need to work with people from every level of society, guiding principles that he values to this day.

LaMaster echoes similar sentiments. "Karen Rothenberg and Jana Singer were both examples to me of women who were real leaders, combining a career and a family," she says. LaMaster and her husband, John O'Brien, have a five-year-old daughter, Helen, who is autistic. In addition to teaching and private practice, LaMaster is an advocate for the educational needs of children with disabilities. She serves as chair of the Baltimore County Board of Education Citizens' Advisory Committee for Special Education and as a member of the State Advisory Committee for Special Education.

Another motivation for teaching in the School of Law was the "opportunity to give something back" to her alma mater. LaMaster notes, "I want to see the law school succeed."

"For the many adjuncts who are also alumni, teaching provides a way of remaining connected to the law school," explains Singer. "The school, in turn, benefits from their commitment and expertise. Having alumni on the faculty ensures the School of Law's success and the success of its future graduates."

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