Perspectives
WESTERN NEW ENGLAND UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW

FALL 2013

A Conversation with the New Dean
Eric Gouvin
Dear Alumni/ae and Friends,

Thank you all for the outpouring of support on my appointment as Dean of Western New England University School of Law. It has been just three months since I took on the deanship on July 1, 2013, and I have much to share with you about our current state of affairs and future aspirations. Our work has just begun.

As I stated in the July issue of Law Digest, we are grateful to Dean Art Gaudio for 12 years of leadership and stewardship. He led us through two successful ABA site evaluations, major enhancements to the Blake Law Center, and the development of new programs and legal centers. We are fortunate that Art will be staying on our faculty to continue to teach and to mentor our students.

As I step into the role of dean, law practice today is evolving rapidly and the School of Law recognizes that we need to change, too. In this issue of Perspectives, I share with you my assessment of our challenges and opportunities at this time of transition and transformation.

One of our greatest strengths has long been our student focus, and I intend to redouble that effort. Moving forward, we must also continually evaluate what we’re offering, what we’re teaching, and how we’re teaching it to ensure that our students become not just scholars of the law, but legal professionals. By remaining true to our core values, yet strategically innovative, I am confident we can emerge with a stronger reputation for graduating students who are career ready.

Corporate law is one field in which that professional focus is key to our graduates’ ascension into leadership positions. In these pages, you will get a glimpse into corporate career paths at organizations that are major players in our region’s economy, such as Mohegan Sun, Yankee Candle, and Six Flags.

This issue also shares news about our outstanding faculty and their students who remind us why earning a law degree remains an important and noble aspiration. I am happy to report that we have enrolled an accomplished and diverse JD class and that scholarship awards played an important role in that effort. I thank you for your support of scholarships and the Annual Fund for Western New England University, and I hope that you understand how critical your continued gifts are to our ability to compete for talented applicants.

I also appreciate your friendship. In my 22 years on the faculty, I have gotten to know so many of our alumni and supporters whom I now consider good friends. In my new role, I will have greater opportunities to meet more of you on the road.

As I have learned from Art and others who have come before me, alumni play a huge role in the success of this institution. Your engagement, generosity, and feedback will help to shape my deanship and the School of Law. I look forward to sharing this journey with you.

Sincerely,

Eric Gouvin
Dean and Professor of Law
I want to broadcast that this is the lawyer’s law school. We give students an opportunity to understand why they’re learning what they’re learning and how it applies in the legal world.”
A Conversation with the New Dean

Eric Gouvin speaks about his vision for the School of Law

After 22 years on the faculty, Professor Eric Gouvin became Dean Gouvin on July 1. Perspectives spoke with him as he prepared to step into the position.

Are you excited to become the dean?

I am very excited to be taking on this role, although it is only now dawning on me what the job entails. I am reaching out to the folks across campus whom I know the dean regularly interacts with and it is a long list!

You bring an entrepreneurial background to the deanship, including as the founder of the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship. Is that something you will try to incorporate into your new role?

The Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship has been a model for how I think the School of Law can work. In the Center, we forged ties to many community groups throughout the Pioneer Valley, involved expertise across the University campus, found opportunities for meaningful involvement by the bar and other professionals—and delivered a quality experience for the students, which is always our top priority. I’d like to take that approach in the School of Law generally.

What might that focus look like in the curriculum?

I’m excited about some changes in the first year curriculum that we’ll be making in the next year or so. The idea is to have fewer courses per semester—so the courses will be more of a concentrated immersion experience—and to tie those doctrinal courses to practice and professionalism. The goal will be to have students learn the law in the doctrinal classes, but then to see why they learned that material in a new course we’re working on that will contextualize the doctrinal material.

Western New England has always prided itself on being the place where we prepare people to enter the legal profession. I want to broadcast that this is the lawyer’s law school. We give students an opportunity to understand why they’re learning what they’re learning, and how it really applies in the legal world.

There are also ways we can look across campus and offer interdisciplinary degrees that might be attractive, say, to human resources professionals or police officers or education administrators who might really benefit from having a certificate or degree geared toward their professional role. We have a lot of expertise on campus and if there are interdisciplinary opportunities, I think we should explore them. Every profession has significant interactions with legal issues. That’s the way the world works. In the modern world, whether you’re a lawyer or a businessperson or whatever your role, you can’t know just one thing, you have to know many things in order to do your job properly. That’s why I think interdisciplinary degrees could be attractive.

Like most lawyers across the country, the majority of our students will be business owners—their business will be their law firm. The ABA tells us that nationwide, of the lawyers in private practice, 70 percent practice in firms of fewer than 10 lawyers and about half are solos. They need to know about marketing, cash flow management, appropriate technology, and hiring and firing. I’d like to build more of that into the curriculum too.

Much has been written recently about the ways law schools are changing. How might our School of Law change?

Law practice today is evolving rapidly and law schools need to change too. Western New England University School of Law has always had a student focus and I intend to redouble that effort. We need to be always reminding ourselves that what we’re teaching, and how we’re teaching it, is geared toward the students. And geared not just toward the students becoming learned in the law, but toward becoming practicing legal professionals as well.

We can’t be everything to everybody. We should pick three or four things that we can do really well, and do those things really well. If someone wants to come here because they have an undying interest in intergalactic mineral rights law, well, maybe you ought to go someplace else where that’s really a strength, because we don’t have that talent on our faculty. On the other hand, if you want to study gender and sexuality, there’s probably no place better in the country than here.

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We’ve got some of the most respected people in the nation on this faculty. If you want to study criminal law, we have really deep offerings and really talented people who teach that topic. But we don’t have the resources to be a boutique, offering things that are kind of intellectually interesting, but don’t have a big enough market.

Like most law schools, we’re tuition-dependent. The degree can be very expensive. We’ve been aggressive in our scholarship policy. We’ve tried to make it as affordable as we can for our students. But we need to be thoughtful about what our size should be. We’re trying to think through, within our natural market, how many lawyers does our market need on an annual basis and how many can we supply?

Do you think the market for lawyers will increase eventually?

I think as the economy comes back generally, the law market will come back with it. I’ve been doing this 22 years. I’ve seen three down cycles. They eventually come back. This one might not come back to be as robust as it was during the early mid-2000s, but it will eventually come back. The population is growing in the United States, and just as a function of more people, there are going to be more legal problems. You’re going to need new lawyers to fill in the gaps. A huge portion of the existing lawyers in the U.S. are at or near the retirement age, and although they won’t be replaced one for one, some of them will need to be replaced by hiring new lawyers. So we have some demographic trends in our favor.

Where do you see the School of Law in five years?

I would like the School of Law to be seen as a distinctive place that is known for the excellence of its programs and for preparing students to enter the legal profession.

In all likelihood, it will be a smaller place. It will be a more focused place. It will be a place that takes better advantage of our natural assets. We have a monopoly in western Massachusetts on placements for externships. That’s a real asset. At schools in Boston, you’ve got six schools competing for the same spots. We should use our location to our greatest advantage.

Many of our students don’t want to be in a big city—even Springfield is too big for some. A significant number go back to practice in their small and medium-sized cities all across the northeast. I think we should embrace that. That’s always been the case. Why not focus on what they will be doing, and give them some tools that will make them more effective at that?

Will you keep teaching?

Not next year, but maybe after that. For now, I’m going to spend a lot of time learning the ropes and paying attention to the things that need attention. Obviously, though, teaching is what attracted me to the academy and it’s one of the things that I most enjoy about my job. I’m sure I’ll miss it, but I think I’ll be back in the classroom in a year or so.

What role can alumni play in the future of the School of Law?

I am hoping to find creative ways for the School of Law to draw on the talents of our alumni ranks. In addition to teaching law school courses as an adjunct, alumni and alumnae can be involved in many other ways—through guest lecturing, career services panels, programming in the Centers, CLE, mentoring of current students, and by sponsoring externships. Based on my experience recruiting alums to participate as presenters in programs for the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship or as guest lecturers or serving as judges in the Transactional LawMeet, our graduates are very enthusiastic about giving their time and talent to help train the next generation of lawyers. Our loyal alumni rank among the great strengths of the School and one I hope to develop.
Introducing Dean Gouvin

A native of Stonington, CT, Eric Gouvin is the eighth of nine children, the son of French-Canadian blue-collar workers with strong feelings about the importance of education. As an undergraduate at Cornell, Dean Gouvin thought about becoming a history professor, but instead enrolled at Boston University’s law school. After graduating he joined a large firm in Portland, ME, where he practiced corporate, banking, and commercial law. But he never forgot about teaching, and in 1991, he joined the faculty at the School of Law.

Dean Gouvin has taught contracts, business organizations, banking regulation, secured transactions, and other business-related courses, including an innovative course blending practice and theory called the Transactional Lawyering Seminar. In the 1990s, he coached the Corporate Moot Court team. More recently, he has coached the Transactional Law Meet team—a kind of moot court for business lawyers—and several of his teams have placed highly in the national competition.

Dean Gouvin has served as Associate Dean and as the Director of the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, which he founded. His diverse scholarly writing covers topics including entrepreneurship policy, corporate law, banking, and international issues. He is a coauthor of the treatise *Blumberg on Corporate Groups*.

An active member of the American Bar Association, Dean Gouvin is also chair of the Association of American Law Schools’ Section on Transactional Law and Skills. He has taught comparative corporate law in Paris and Lithuania, and has lectured in China as a Fulbright Specialist. His degrees include an LLM, also from Boston University, and a master of public administration from Harvard. Dean Gouvin recently received the Common Ground Award for inclusive leadership from UnityFirst.com, a leading newswire for diversity issues and news in the African American community, in recognition of the work done by the Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship.

Dean Gouvin lives in Longmeadow with his wife, an elder-law attorney, and their son and daughter.