

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 159, No. 88

LAW SCHOOL NOTES

A 'quietly effective' leadership style

SIU School of Law dean uses innovative tools to inspire students

BY JENN BALLARD
Law Bulletin staff writer

Growing up in southern Indiana, Cynthia Fountaine's parents stressed the importance of education.

"They very much emphasized education in terms of me doing my best ... and wanting to provide good opportunities for others to get a good education," Fountaine said.

"That is partly why I ended up going into legal education."

Fountaine, the dean of Southern Illinois University School of Law since 2010, said she got the job because her philosophy on legal education aligns with SIU's mission.

"I try to emphasize experiential learning and positive student outcomes as well as having a commitment to student success," she said. "Our law school's mission also promotes public service and I very much believe in that mission."

Cindy G. Buys, a professor at the law school, served on the committee that selected Fountaine as the first female dean of SIU.

"As a female faculty member, I think that is exciting," she said.

"It's important to have a female role model. I think she brings a positive energy to the school and is interested in experimenting with new ways of delivering legal education."

After taking the job, Fountaine's main goals included improving the administration operations and expanding experiential opportunities for law students.

To do that, she has expanded clinics and created a new one — the Juvenile Justice Clinic. The clinic's

attorney, an appointed guardian ad litem, lets students help represent minors in neglect, abuse or dependency petitions.

"I want to provide students with a stronger and more effective law school that prepares students for their entire careers and not just their first job," she said. "I want to continue to see us be in front of the changes in legal education."

She also hopes to establish a transactional and entrepreneurship clinical externship program.

"By expanding our externship and pro bono opportunities for students, we enable students to get closer to what they hope to do in their practices — both geographically as well as in terms of developing the relevant skill sets," she said.

Mark F. Schultz, an associate professor at the law school, said Fountaine's innovative spirit has led to new specialties being offered, including intellectual property, health law and business law classes.

"Because she is the kind of leader who allows us to experiment and try new things, we've done more new things in the last few years than we have previously," Schultz said. "We'd been trying to add more classes for years and we were

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Cynthia Fountaine

quickly able to do so with her."

Fountaine, who grew up in Bedford, Ind., received a degree in business, economics and public policy in 1984 from Indiana University and a law degree in 1988 from the University of Southern California Gould School of Law.

Since beginning law school, Fountaine, 52, knew she wanted to teach law. But she wanted some practical experience first.

"I thought I would be a better teacher and a better scholar," she said.

For three years, Fountaine worked as an associate for O'Melveny & Myers LLP in Los Angeles. She handled civil and commercial litigation for plaintiffs and defendants.

Because of her time at the firm, Fountaine said she better understands the demands and challenges associated with it.

"The profession is changing a lot now, and without that experience, it would be difficult to understand," she said.

In 1992, Fountaine took her first teaching job at the University of Cincinnati College of Law and taught legal writing for five years.

From 1997 until 2010, she worked at Texas Wesleyan University School of Law in Fort Worth, teaching classes on civil procedure, federal courts, civil rights, jury process and complex litigation.

From 2005 to 2006, she also worked as a visiting professor at

Washington and Lee University School of Law in Lexington, Va.

From 2006 to 2008, she served as the interim dean at Texas Wesleyan University School of Law.

"I had a taste of administration as a faculty member," she said.

"But becoming the interim dean was my first real exposure to administration. And I really liked it and felt like it gave me the opportunity to really affect student success and impact legal education."

From 2009 to 2010, she taught classes about U.S. constitutional law and common law as part of the Fulbright Scholar Program at Universitat Bayreuth Faculty of Law, Business and Economics in Germany.

Fountaine said her previous experience as a professor helps her combat the challenges facing legal education.

"It helps me as an administrator make the decisions that create the most positive outcome because it has given me a broader understanding of the complexities of legal education," she said.

At SIU, Fountaine also teaches classes on professional responsibility and legal globalization.

Lucian Emery Dervan, an assistant professor at the law school, co-taught a legal globalization class in 2011 with Fountaine in which they attended a conference in Germany.

The students spent the first couple of months studying German legal institutions including the culture, language and history before attending the weeklong event in Heidelberg, Dervan said.

"It actually led to a new course at SIU, spearheaded by the dean," he said, referring to the legal globalization course the school now offers.

"She has such an innovative nature and really supports the faculty and the students."

Christopher W. Behan, an associate professor at the law school, said Fountaine's leadership style is "quietly effective."

"In my experience, she listens to ideas, figures out how to allocate resources and is very supportive," he said. "Every dean has their own way of leaving their mark, and I believe her mark will be very solid."

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