

Weich, UB's Law man

Dean talks curriculum, tuition and the slow pace of academia

By **KRISTI TOUSIGNANT**

Kristi.Tousignant@TheDailyRecord.com

As the **University of Baltimore School of Law's** new building opens this month, its dean, Ronald Weich, sat down with The Daily Record editors and reporters to discuss long-term goals, the future of legal education and what, exactly, he does during those long car rides between Baltimore and his home near Washington, D.C.

Almost 10 months into his term, Weich is still concentrating on his goals of expanding experiential learning and

Maryland NEWSMAKERS

Conversations with leaders
from across the state

revamping curriculum. He also plans to decrease the incoming class size by 15 percent to roughly 280 students.

Short term, he is focused on opening the \$114 million **John and Frances Angelos Law Center**. Weich, along with Vice President Joe Biden, Gov. Martin O'Malley and other officials, held a preview celebration of the 190,000-square-foot building Tuesday night.

Weich said he is still adjusting to the academic aspects of the job after leaving a post as assistant attorney general for legislative affairs in the United States Department of Justice, but he loves the constant interaction with students and eventually hopes to teach classes.

Weich said he has enjoyed the slower pace of academia when it comes to making decisions, but concedes he sometimes gets impatient with the pace of change at a university.

When he's not meeting with faculty, students and alumni, he is throwing balls at professors in dunk tanks at student events and dining at Aloha Sushi on Charles Street.

Following are excerpts of his conversation with The Daily Record.

What is the law school's plan for decreasing class size?

It's absolutely true the jobs are not as plentiful today as they were, say, 10 years ago. As a result, applications are down and we are taking account of those factors and this coming year, in 2013, we intend to shrink our class size probably by about 50 students. We will see how it goes. ... This is all a natural



MAXIMILIAN FRANZ

Ronald Weich says the pace of academic life is much slower than what he experienced working on Capitol Hill. But he likes that. "The pace is more realistic and deliberate," he says.

level of evolution and we are evolving with the times.

Is that going to affect the (funding) agreement the law school and university hammered out last year?

The funding agreement remains in place. The university has fulfilled its responsibilities. We are now sort of moving in a different direction. Obviously admitting that many fewer students has a significant revenue impact, and the university is helping us cushion the blow financially.

What does that mean in terms of tuition for students?

We are very cognizant of the concern that tuition is high, and we are doing our best to limit the tuition increase. If there

is one, it will be a nominal increase.

How are you evaluated in your position and what do your superiors consider to be success when evaluating your position?

Well, put broadly, I feel like the job of the law school and therefore my job as dean, is to graduate successful, effective, ethical lawyers. That's our mission. I think I'll be judged in whether we are providing a quality education. There are certainly markers to look to — bar passage, employment success — we also want to get recognized for the kind of school that we are.

The law school is in process of adjusting its curriculum. What do you think needs to be changed?

There are a couple things we want to do better. We want to make sure students are being supervised in legal writing throughout their career. ... We are also interested in capstone courses. ... We also want to make sure the externships students are in truly pedagogical, truly learning experiences.

Do you see a place for distance learning in the future?

Yes. Obviously the Internet changes everything. ... One thing that's happening in higher education is it's much less necessary for professors to lecture and provide facts that students can get in advance on an online program. Instead, the classroom becomes the occasion for more interactive learning and more dialogue between professors and students.

When you won the position, one of possibilities that was mentioned with your connections to Washington was that there would be more opportunities for externships. How is that going?

It's going pretty well. I've identified probably a half a dozen internship, externship experiences for students just by having friends in federal agencies and groups in Washington.

Identify a few for us.

One of our promising students is going to be working this summer at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Another student is working now at People For the American Way.

What do you think legal education will look like 20 or 30 years down the road?

One thing I would say is law school in 20 years might look like University of Baltimore in September because our new building is about 20 years ahead of its time. That's both symbolic and practical. ... Clearly online education is going to grow in law schools in colleges and in other professional schools, so we will work through those changes, ... More and more lawyers are going to need to be conversant with other disciplines to be effective.

“

I feel like the job of the law school and therefore my job as dean, is to graduate successful, effective, ethical lawyers. That's our mission.

RONALD WEICH

What are the main differences between being a dean in law school and working on the Hill?

The pace is slower, and that's a good thing. ... The pace is more realistic and deliberate. It's a very different thing being around students. I obviously wasn't in that milieu in the Justice Department or Capitol Hill or my law firm. Last week, we had a block party in the plaza in front of the law school. Some of the professors were in a dunk tank and I took a turn. It's a lot of fun, student activities.

If you were your boss looking at

your tenure thus far, what is the thing you are most proud of and the thing you most wish you could change?

I'm proud of the relationships I have developed with every law school constituency. I really have worked hard to meet people to get to know people in every setting. ... Things go slowly. We haven't in any sense overhauled the curriculum in 10 months. I guess the pace of change is slower. It's not exactly a regret, but I am constantly maybe a little bit impatient with the pace and want to see change sooner.

What is best advice you ever received from Ted Kennedy? (Weich worked for Sen. Edward M. Kennedy [D-Mass.] from 1990 to 1997.)

I don't know if he ever said this to me, but [taught] by example; I am willing to work with anybody to the advancement of the agenda of my enterprise, which is now legal education. I also saw the importance of personal relationships. He had a great sense of humor, and he would find a connection with everybody.

Where are you living?

I live in two places. I guess it's not bicoastal, but whatever you would call (Interstate) 95. My family is still in the D.C. area. My kids are in school there

and my wife runs a nonprofit in downtown D.C., but I have an apartment in Baltimore. I stay over a number of nights in the week.

What do you listen to in the car back and forth between the two cities?

Mostly books on tape. I love music and I do listen to a lot of music but that doesn't seem like the most productive use of that 50 minutes. So since I don't get enough time to read non-professional material at night, I've been using the drives to do that. Are you going to ask me what I'm listening to right now? It's great. It's called "The Last Lecture" by Randy Pausch. You may have heard he was a Carnegie Mellon [University] computer science professor who was dying of cancer who decided at the end of his life to lecture students about what he was going through, what his life meant, and it's very optimistic and it's especially interesting for me, especially in higher education, to hear why he wanted to take this route.

*Reprinted with permission of
The Daily Record Co. ©2012*