

# Law School Dean Keeps His Distance

By Ross Hanig

Stephen Barnett may be one of the most far-removed law school deans in the world.

The Boalt Hall School of Law professor moonlights as the dean of the law department at American University of Armenia.

That's right, Armenia.

So how does he run a school 6,995 miles away? The answer comes in one hyphenated word: e-mail.

"Basically it's not a full-time job," he says. Barnett spends about a half-day each week running the school as best he can via the Internet connection in his office at Boalt and from home. He mostly works on finding people to join the school's faculty.

Still, when he took over for Richard Buxbaum, a Boalt colleague and founding dean of American University's department of law, at the American University of Armenia, he didn't think being a law school dean would take so much time.

"He presented it to me in a way that somewhat downplayed the time that would be involved," Barnett says. "I knew where Armenia was and not much else." Since assuming the post in January 2000, Barnett has twice traveled to the law school in Yerevan; once to teach a course in intellectual property, and the other partly because, well, as dean, he thinks it's a good idea to spend some time at the school. He said he's excited

about how the department has developed since opening approximately five years ago.

The law department traditionally has accepted a 15-student class every two years. Once the students in each class had completed either the department's two-year LL.M. program for those with a prior law degree or the masters of comparative legal studies (M.C.L.S.) program, the school would take on a new batch of first-year students and start the cycle all over again.

In February, the department took on about 20 first-year students to join the 15 entering their second year. And while some of the courses have a decidedly American pro-democracy flavor, the weirdly spaced academic year is distinctly Armenian.

The department offers courses such as "Comparative Jurisprudence and the Western Legal Tradition," "Comparative Constitutional Law," and "Comparative Judicial Systems" among others. The classes are all taught in English, which helps Barnett, who only speaks intermediate Russian.

The academic year is broken up into three parts beginning with a spring quarter that starts in late February and ends in mid-May. Summer quarter immediately follows and ends in July. The students then take August off and return in September for the final quarter that ends in November. Barnett isn't exactly sure what the rationale is for the months-long winter vacation, but guesses it has something to do with the weather.

"The academic year is very different," he says. "I think it springs originally from a lack of heat." *American Lawyer Media*

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