

Briefs

The power of apology

A new book by **Nick Smith '97**, *I Was Wrong* (Cambridge University Press), explores the nature of apologies and the power of a simple statement of wrongdoing. From the apologies of politicians when they misspeak or misbehave, to collective national apologies for past offenses, to issues as intriguing as "Should I apologize to my dog for forgetting to fill his water bowl?" the book examines the theory and practice of this most human custom.

He got into the subject, Smith says, while considering the commodification of law – how harms ranging from racial discrimination to wrongful death are measured in dollar signs. Surprisingly, he found, expressions of contrition have become more common in our justice system, partly because "legal actors do in fact put a price on apologies. Studies suggest that a few words of contrition, regardless of their sincerity, can dramatically decrease the likelihood of costly litigation."

As he worked on the subject, says Smith, who now teaches philosophy at the University of New Hampshire, he came to realize that "apologies are everywhere. Just about every day I was working on the book, someone appeared in headline news apologizing for something."

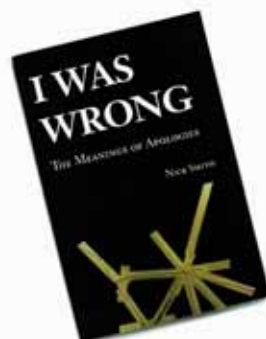
"Asking a few simple questions can take us to the heart of the meaning of an apology: Did the offender explain what she did with an appropriate degree of specificity? Does she accept blame? Does she make clear why her actions were wrong and identify the principles she violated? Does she promise not to do it again and



to redress the problem she caused? These questions tend to lead to further questions about the meanings of any given apology, but they are a good starting point."

So does he really apologize to his dog sometimes?

"I do," Smith says, "in part because I think my dog is an important member of my moral community. Likewise, some Native Americans give thanks to killed prey by blowing tobacco smoke into its nostrils, or ask forgiveness from a tree for harvesting its bark. Because such a worldview considers a broad scope of beings within its moral horizons, it extends opportunities for gratitude and contrition beyond most other traditions that strictly delimit the class of moral interlocutors deserving of apologies."



Compare and contrast

Students' opportunities to study law in a cross-cultural context will grow in the current academic year with the addition of visiting professor **Antoni Abad i Ninet**, who comes to Buffalo from another UB – the University of Barcelona, Spain.

Dr. Abad, a specialist in constitutional law, will teach a bridge course in Ancient Constitutional Law and a spring-semester course in Compar-

ative Constitutional Law. His term at UB Law School is under the auspices of the Edwin F. Jaekle Center for State and Local Democracy, and he says it grew out of a meeting of academic minds with Professor and Vice Dean for Academic Affairs James A.

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Gardner.

"I met Professor Gardner last year in Athens at the World Congress of Constitutional Law," Abad says. "After the conference, I wanted to congratulate him on his point of view about federalism and subnational constitutions and to dis-



Good for the neighborhood

Four Western New York nonprofits scrambled for a major grant from Buffalo's 21st Century Fund, but only one – the Massachusetts Avenue Project, with strong input from the Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic – went home with the cash.

The \$100,000 grant will be used to support the creation of a Community Food Resource and Micro Enterprise Center on Buffalo's West Side, where nearly half of residents live in poverty. The center will make affordable, nutritious food more available to residents, and increase their capacity to earn a living through business and job training.

Among its features: the Rise Up Cafe and catering business, a weekly youth dinner co-op, group meeting space, a commercial kitchen and program offices. The center will function in tandem with the Mobile Market, which was established in February.

"The Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic students have represented MAP for the past 10 years," said clinical instructor **Lauren Breen**.

"This new center is a very exciting model to build small businesses and, in the process, physically revitalize the West Side."

*"The Law School's Community Economic Development Clinic students have represented the Massachusetts Avenue Project for the past 10 years."
— Clinical instructor Lauren Breen*

cuss other ideas from the conference. The U.S. federal system is a mature system and a good source for the young Spanish constitutional system as we try to learn and improve it. Professor Gardner is a very open-minded professor and is interested in the Spanish constitutional system and comparative constitutional law, and that makes it easy to find connections between our works. We began an In-

ternet conversation about ways we might collaborate with each other."

The result is a planned joint project by the two professors, "based in a comparison between both constitutional systems but searching for a universal and international application. I am very excited to be in a position to work with someone like Professor Gardner."

Even in his personal heritage, Abad

exemplifies the cross-cultural nature of his legal academic work. "I define myself as a Mediterranean," he says. "I am a Catalan who was born in Valencia and grew up in Mallorca. My first surname is a Catalan name with Persian, Jewish and Arab origins – like my country, a mixture of ancestral cultures."