



## ASK DEAN MUTUA

*A few questions for the Law School's new leader*

**What are your goals as the 18th dean of UB Law School?**

An excellent public law school is defined by four important factors: a faculty with star scholars and great teachers; an academically strong student body; supportive alumni with a committed tradition of philanthropic giving; and a vital relationship with the central university and the state. Luckily for me, UB Law has a long history and

tradition in all these key areas, even though we have been buffeted by some challenges in the recent past. But my mission for UB Law is clear and straightforward. I will return the Law School to glory and put it among the top 50 law schools in the country by building on our strengths and addressing areas that require attention. I will recruit and hire faculty with star potential, raise the academic profile of

our student body, and build stronger relationships with our alumni and the state. I will invest in building the Law School of the future in which technology, endowed chairs, faculty scholarship and cutting-edge education will be the centerpieces.

**What role can our alumni play in helping to achieve these goals?**

No U.S. law school has ever achieved academic greatness without a critical mass of dedicated alumni who are generous, devoted and proud of their alma mater. In this respect, philanthropic commitments by the alumni are the difference between successful and lackluster law schools. With a shrinking base of state support for education, it behooves UB Law to create a bond of partnership with its alumni. Happily, we already have active alumni. But we will have to do more to increase participation and support if we are to become competitive with our peers and be counted among the top 50 law schools in America.

**How can we reverse our recent decline in the national rankings?**

The first thing that I have done is to recognize that rankings matter to the alumni, prospective applicants, employers and the general public. Even though the matrix used to calibrate rankings is highly questionable, it would be foolhardy to pretend that they do not impact the Law School. As a law school, we operate in the marketplace with about 200 other competitors nationally. That is why I am working hard with our faculty, staff and alumni to raise our reputation by hiring more and better faculty, raising the academic profile of the students we admit, making sure that the vast majority of our graduates are placed soon after graduation, and letting the world know about the great and innovative things that are happening at UB Law. I am confident that we are doing all we can to arrest the decline and that we should see some improvement in our rankings soon. An example is the class that entered in September. It is one of the strongest we have ever admitted and is a very important step in the right direction.

**How does philanthropy affect our rankings?**

Philanthropy is the critical factor in the development of academic excellence for a law school. Philanthropy gives the resources to invest in your academic programs and attract great faculty. It is the source of endowed chairs without which it is difficult to attract and retain faculty who are sought-after. Currently, we have no chairs at UB Law. We have two endowed professorships, which is a good start. However, chairs attract faculty who will raise our reputation in the legal academy and among practitioners. Similarly, philanthropy will allow us to give more tuition scholarships to attract students with higher LSAT scores, a variable that is critical to rankings.

**You have been critical of proposals to create three new law schools in New York State. Why?**

There cannot be an objective mind in the State of New York who thinks that we need additional law schools in the state, beyond the 13 privates and the two publics. New York has more law schools than it needs. The law schools within the state educate more lawyers annually than can be absorbed by the state economy in six years. Besides, there is not a single applicant who is qualified to go to law school who fails to gain admission within the state. In short, there is neither professional justification, nor market demand, for more law schools or lawyers in our state.

**Please describe your work as a leader in international human rights.**

This is really for others to talk about. All I can say is that I have been very fortunate to enjoy some success as a scholar and practitioner of international law and human rights. My plate in this regard is overflowing with commitments to write, speak and consult with governments, NGOs and the private sector. But for me, it is a labor of love.

**Will you maintain your teaching responsibilities?**

Of course. This year I will teach Human Rights, the International Law Colloquium and the Human Rights Externship. But I must say that I never

thought – until just last year – of becoming a dean of a law school. The thought had never, ever entered my mind. And I was very skeptical when the issue was first raised. However, service in reform of institutions is an important part of my psyche, and I treasure UB Law, which has been my intellectual home for a decade. That is why I eventually took on this responsibility.

**How is the state's budget crisis affecting the Law School?**

Clearly, the budget crisis is a drawback for UB Law, and comes at a time when we are faced with other challenges. But it is also a wake-up call and opportunity for us to reach out to our alumni and strengthen those ties. While there will be some cuts, I do not expect them to affect our ability to hire tenure-track faculty or to interfere with our core functions. We will use our resources wisely, save where we can, stretch our dollars and emerge stronger.

**What have been your greatest challenges so far during your time as dean?**

The work itself is not really difficult, even though the volume of demands is high. I have a collegial and consultative style of governance which helps legitimize decisions and involve the entire Law School in the life of the community. I have an extremely able senior leadership, including Professor James Gardner, the vice dean for academics; James Newton, the associate dean for administration; Professor Errol Meidinger, the vice dean for research and faculty development; Professor Isabel Marcus, the director of international programs; and Professor Rebecca French, the new director of the Baldy Center for Law and Social Policy. I have delegated authority with responsibility – and clear benchmarks – to our senior staff in development, external relations, IT, career services, admissions and the registrar. Because we have a shared vision and consensus about the direction of the Law School, the job of being dean is manageable and occasionally enjoyable! But ask me again in a year, and see how I feel then.