Toward warmer climes

Francis Allen accepts new chair at University of Florida

When the brisk winds and falling leaves of autumn herald in the 1986-87 school year, Professor Francis A. Allen will not be at Michigan to begin his third decade at the Law School. After 20 years at Michigan, the Edson R. Sunderland Professor of Law will be settling into a new home and a newly created chair at the University of Florida Law School in Gainesville. The offer to teach at Florida represents for Allen an unexpected opportunity to become established professionally and socially in a community where he will eventually retire.

"My wife and I had been planning on retiring in the Sunbelt in a few years," he explained, sitting in his sunny office on the ninth floor of Legal Research amid stacks of law journals and packing boxes. "The winters here seem to get colder and colder as you grow older."

A graduate of Cornell College (Iowa) and the Northwestern University Law School, Allen has had a far-reaching effect on the field of law. As a teacher, he served on the faculties at Northwestern, Harvard, and Chicago before coming to Michigan.

In public affairs, Allen chaired the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Illinois Sex Offenders Commission and served as principal draftsman of the modern Illinois Criminal Code, which at the time of adoption was widely regarded as the most advanced in the United States. During the Kennedy administration, Allen served as chairman of the Committee on Poverty and the Administration of Federal Criminal Justice, and was the architect of the Federal Criminal Justice Act of 1964.

A greatly respected scholar and author, Allen has written in the fields of juvenile delinquency, criminal law, constitutional law, and family law. His works include 10 books and numerous articles.

When asked which aspect of his career had given him the most satisfaction, Allen replied, "It's difficult to say that any one has been more satisfying than any other. The things that give a person satisfaction change over the course of a career. The formula for a good life at a university is variety."

Allen also devoted five years as dean of the Law School, during one of the most tumultuous periods in academic history, 1966-1971. He recalls, "I've often said that I was dean for 15 years." Of Allen's leadership during this time, Dean Terrance Sandalow said, "Throughout those difficult years, he never fell victim to the reaction that overtook so many who shared his commitments. The assault upon the university and the values it represents cut very close to the core of Frank's deepest beliefs, but in responding to it, he did not forget that those engaged in the assault often had legitimate grievances. Frank brought to the deanship the same qualities that distinguish his teaching and scholarship—breadth of perspective, balance, and commitment to the values that make up the liberal tradition, most notably a profound respect for the worth of individuals."

While today's students are obviously more conservative and goal-oriented than those 20 years ago, Allen feels that "they experience areas of unease not vastly different from those expressed more vociferously in the past. They're concerned about what financial success will do to them. They wonder if they'll become so involved with their clients, they'll lose the capacity to judge right from wrong."

Michigan's students are one of the things Allen will miss when he moves to Florida. "I'm going to miss people most," he said, "people on the faculty, students I was looking forward to having in class again, and friends in town. And, of course, both my wife and I will miss Ann Arbor. I can't think of a place north—or south—of the Mason-Dixon Line that has more amenities than Ann Arbor."

Yet, Allen is eager to get his new career under way. He points out, "the University of Florida has made as impressive a gain over the past 15 years as any school I know of. It will be very different from Michigan in that it will be less geographically diverse. But it has very high aspirations, and I'm convinced there will be some excellent students and that I can do some very worthwhile things there."