IF I HAD TO CHARACTERIZE MY ACADEMIC LIFE in one word, it would be “schizophrenic”: my work has an American and a European side and the two never quite match. I am the only permanent member of this faculty who is at home in the common law as well as in the civil law tradition, and I continue to teach and write in both legal cultures. In the 1998-99 academic year, for example, I will teach Jurisdiction as well as International Litigation at Michigan, the basic Private Law course as well as European Legal History at the University of Trier in Germany, a short course on American product liability law at the Sorbonne in Paris, and give a few lectures in Italy and Austria.

This may sound like a glamorous jet-set life, but the reality is much more sober. Not only does it involve a burdensome amount of traveling and an endless juggling of tight schedules. It also requires constant gear shifting since the topics, teaching styles, and customs of writing and publishing are quite different here and there. So why do I do it? There are essentially two reasons.

First, perhaps the most important contribution I can make at Michigan is to maintain existing ties and to build new bridges across the Atlantic — through teaching, contacts between scholars, conferences and workshops, etc. This is important not only because of the rapidly intensifying transatlantic intercourse but also because American and European lawyers can learn a lot from each other. In order to help them do that, I need to stay involved in both worlds.
Second, I am deeply interested in the relationship between the common law tradition and the civil law culture. I am trying to understand where and why they overlap, differ, converge, and diverge. This requires a thorough knowledge of their historical background, their major characteristics, and current developments. Sometimes I despair because it all seems way too much to grasp, but often I am thrilled at what I find and think I begin to understand.

In the last two years, I have spent a lot of time and energy trying to overhaul the study of comparative law in the United States. The discipline, founded by the immigrant European scholars in the 1940s and 1950s, has aged and is in dire need of reform. Comparative law is perhaps more important than ever, but it has to develop new methods and agendas to meet modern needs. My efforts have been threefold. With regard to teaching, I have developed an agenda to integrate comparative and foreign law aspects into the curriculum as a whole (see 11 Tulane European & Civil Law Forum 49 [1996]). All students need to understand that there is a world out there beyond the United States—a world that will affect their work whether they like it or not. On the side of scholarship, I organized two conferences together with an Italian colleague, one in Ann Arbor, the other in San Francisco, on “New Methods and Directions in Comparative Law.” The papers will be published this fall in a symposium issue of the American Journal of Comparative Law and hopefully will stimulate further discussion. Finally, as a member of a Long Range Planning Committee, I have helped to develop a reform strategy for the American Society of Comparative Law. The measures enacted at the society’s annual meeting in Bristol, England, are important steps in the direction of greater diversity and more attractiveness for younger scholars as well as practitioners.

Thus it is, and will remain, an academic life marked by schizophrenia. Yet, I take comfort in the fact that this schizophrenia is as inevitable as it is rewarding.