ship with our children — enough so that we were able to take on a foster child for six months until she was adopted.”

Although Lehman found his work in Washington both “challenging and fun,” he always expected to return to academia. “What has always drawn me back,” he explains, “is the autonomy professors enjoy to determine which problems they will study.” For Lehman those problems include the tax laws and the welfare laws. He is presently teaching a section of the traditional course in basic personal income taxation. This winter he will teach a survey course on welfare law, and a seminar on wealth redistribution. The seminar will explore the philosophical question of whether wealth ought to be redistributed, as well as more concrete questions about how to manage the economic and social side effects of a redistributive program.

Kent Syverud

Finding exciting issues in insurance law

It’s not difficult for Kent Syverud to identify the moment he first became interested in teaching law. “It was halfway through my first year property class at Michigan,” he says. “I was being grilled on the fine points of constructive eviction, and during a rare pause when I wasn’t racing to think ahead to the next question, I was suddenly exhilarated by the thought that I might someday be the one asking questions.”

Syverud will be asking the questions this fall in his first-year civil procedure course. Next spring he will teach advanced civil procedure and a seminar on settlement of civil disputes. And a year from now, Syverud will become the first regular faculty member in over a decade to teach a course on insurance.

One of two recent Michigan graduates to join the faculty this year, Syverud graduated near the top of his 1981 class, and served as editor-in-chief of the Michigan Law Review. He also pursued graduate studies in the U-M’s economics department, earning a masters degree in 1983. Commenting on Syverud’s work as a student, Professor Emeritus Allan Smith said, “In 1983, when I recommended Kent for a Supreme Court clerkship, I indicated that he was the strongest candidate I had recommended in the past 20 years. I feel the same way about his teaching prospects.”

After finishing his graduate studies, Syverud clerked, first for Federal District Judge Louis F. Oberdorfer of the D.C. Circuit, then for U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Conner, and then practiced law at Wilmer, Cutler & Pickering.

His four years in Washington, Syverud says, strengthened his desire to teach. “In law school,” Syverud says, “I often assumed that the facts are given and the relevant legal principles are easy to identify. I was interested mostly in how judges and scholars tinkered with legal principles in applying them to given facts.

“As a litigator, I learned that there is often an infinity of facts and doctrines that can be molded and refined, discarded or highlighted almost at will by the advocate. The judgment of what facts and arguments to present — and when — was the measure of a good lawyer.”

Syverud initially plans to do research and write on issues of settlement and insurance law. His interest in insurance, he says, arose out of three observations. “First, insurance has had a profound impact on how a variety of cases are tried and settled. Second, insurance is an unusual product sold by an unusual industry. The product can be defined as any device that spreads risk. In practice, the product is often defined as much by judges as by buyers and sellers.

“Finally, I’m fascinated that Americans consume so much of a product that we understand so poorly. Many Americans pay directly or indirectly for insurance against risks to their home, car, life, title, health, retirement income, bank deposits, and almost everything else they value in life. Yet the vast majority of people’s eyes glaze over at any explanation of what they are paying for. I’m excited by the challenge of getting students interested in a subject people used to think boring.”

Syverud is also excited about returning to Michigan with his family. He and his wife, Ruth Chen, who earned her doctorate in toxicology from the U-M’s School of Public Health, have two children, Steven, 2, and Brian, who was born this past May.