Roopal Shah, ’95, Named New Assistant Dean for International Affairs

By Katie Vloet

Roopal Shah—a 1995 graduate of the Law School who has a background practicing law for the government and in the private sector, as well as starting a nongovernmental organization in India—has been named the Law School’s assistant dean for international affairs.

“One reason I was drawn to Michigan as a law student was that Michigan was well regarded in the international community,” Shah said. “Since then, the Law School has done even more to increase international coursework, added the International Transactions Clinic, and helped students find work abroad for the summers. It’s exciting to me that Michigan is heading in the right direction, and that we have an opportunity to impact broad international happenings—not just in the law, but in treaties, global leadership, and other areas as well.”

Shah will replace Virginia Gordan, the longtime assistant dean for international affairs, who is retiring, and who helped to build Michigan Law’s global engagement and international reputation.

“Virginia has been at the very center of the strengthening of our international and comparative law programs and activities,” said Steven Ratner, the Bruno Simma Collegiate Professor of Law and a leader in the field of global law. “Finding a worthy successor was a challenge, and it required a worldwide search. The level of interest in the job and the extraordinary candidates who applied show how well Michigan is regarded in international law.”

Shah, he said, “has everything we want in this position, from her varied work experience to her strategic vision for where we need to go in the future. She really wants our students to be leaders around the world, and she wants to help get them there.”

After graduating from Michigan Law, Shah clerked for the Hon. David Alan Ezra of the U.S. District Court for the District of Hawaii, then worked as an associate at Shearman & Sterling in Washington, D.C. She followed that with a job as an assistant U.S. Attorney in the border crimes, major narcotics, and terrorism divisions in San Diego; there, she conducted 24 criminal trials from jury selection to verdict, attaining convictions in 22 of them.

In 2001, she cofounded and served as executive director (2007–2010) of Indicorps in Ahmedabad, India. The nonprofit works to provide Indians from all over the world with a channel to reconnect with the country of their heritage and with the means to contribute to its development, while fostering a new generation of socially conscious global leaders. Among its accomplishments was the successful partnership with community-based organizations to create sustainable rural initiatives, such as a clean drinking water project that reaches more than 70,000 people in 120 villages. She remains on the board of directors.

She also served in 2012 as a consultant to Ashoka, a nonprofit that supports social entrepreneurship, and in 2007 as a member of the professional staff at the University of Michigan Provost’s Office, where she provided strategic guidance on efforts such as the “Expect Respect” campaign.

As a student at Michigan Law, she was a two-term president of the Law School Student Senate. One of her legacies is the institution of a “Day of Service” as part of every new Law School student’s orientation. She also advocated for grading reform, a new approach to the mandatory 1L legal writing program, and other innovations. Then-Dean Jeffrey Lehman, ’81, created the Dean’s Exceptional Service Award and awarded it to her in 1995.

“Roopal was a distinguished student when she attended the Law School, and she has been a highly accomplished alumna since her time here, making her mark in important ways around the world,” Dean Evan Caminker said. “I have no doubt that she will continue to build Michigan Law’s global reputation, and that she will do so with the great energy and verve she has brought to the earlier chapters in her career.”

In addition to Shah’s professional achievements, she also is a fearless adventurer. She has run the Marine Corps marathon twice and, when she lived in San Diego, surfed every day for more than 400 days, “even when the rain was terrible, when the waves were over six feet tall, and when we really shouldn’t have been out there,” she said.

Shah said she looks forward to returning to Ann Arbor. “One of the things I have loved from a lot of the places I’ve been is the idea of building and being in community. Ann Arbor is exciting because there already is a strong sense of community.”

True to her community-building instincts, she also is excited about helping the Law School “continue to build on and extend its global networks, and ensure that it is just as engaged, connected, and energized as our community in Ann Arbor.”