Mark West Named 17th Dean of Law School

Mark D. West, currently the associate dean for academic affairs at the U-M Law School and a highly regarded scholar whose research focuses on the Japanese legal system, will be the 17th dean of the Law School beginning September 1, 2013. The appointment of West, the Nippon Life Professor of Law, was announced in January by Provost Philip Hanlon.

“This is an exciting time to be at Michigan Law,” said West, who joined the Law School as an assistant professor in 1998. “We have spectacular new facilities. No law school has a finer faculty or a more outstanding student body. I am inspired by the dedicated community of alumni, faculty, administrators, and staff who are committed to facing the continuing challenges of legal education together. It is a tremendous honor to have been chosen as dean.”

West said one of the strengths of the Law School is its collegiality, which has shaped his scholarship and teaching.

“I came to Michigan in part because faculty here care deeply about teaching students and producing first-rate scholarship. People are interested in each other’s work, collaborate generously, and collectively create an atmosphere that is both intellectually rigorous and supportive,” he said. “I appreciate our unique culture, and I look forward to helping to foster the spirit of collegiality for all of us who share a connection to this special place and to its history and traditions.”

The Law School has built a reputation not only as collegial, but also interdisciplinary, diverse, and globally engaged. University leaders said West is the right person to build on that history and shape the School’s future.

“Mark West brings to the deanship the valued strengths of brilliant scholarship and strong academic administration,” said U-M President Mary Sue Coleman. “His global knowledge and experiences will be of great benefit to the future direction of Michigan Law. His overall expertise and insight make Mark an exceptional choice to lead one of the nation’s premier legal education programs.”

West will succeed Dean Evan Caminker, whose 10-year tenure will end on August 31. During Caminker’s time as dean, the Law School has expanded its physical space, as well as the depth and breadth of its academic offerings. The Law School has grown to include the new South Hall academic building, as well as the Robert B. Aikens Commons and Kirkland & Ellis Café. Caminker has been widely praised for the completion of the structures, not just because of their architectural grandeur but also because he was responsible for getting them built during an economic downturn.

Caminker predicted that West, with whom he has worked closely, will do a superb job at taking the School forward. “Mark West will be an outstanding new dean for the Law School. I’m confident he has the leadership skills and vision necessary to maintain and enhance the School’s greatness and reputation in the years ahead,” Caminker said.

West earned his JD from Columbia University School of Law, where he was an notes and comments editor of the Columbia Law Review, and his BA from Rhodes College. Prior to West’s career in academia, he practiced in the firm Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP in New York and Tokyo. He also clerked for the Hon. Eugene H. Nickerson of the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of New York.

In the past decade, West has authored or coauthored five books, including Law in Everyday Japan and the casebook The Japanese Legal System. In books and articles he has explored such diverse topics as shareholder derivative suits, the evolution of corporate law, the education and career development of Japanese lawyers, and the ways in which Japanese court opinions frame love, sex, and marriage. In addition to teaching Japanese Law, he regularly teaches Criminal Law to first-year students. He also teaches Enterprise Organization, a course that draws on his background as a transactional lawyer.

West has organized major conferences, presented research widely around the world, and has been a consultant to the World Bank and to various government offices in the United States and Japan. He has been an Abe Fellow at the University of Tokyo Faculty of Law, and has studied and taught at Kyoto University, where he was a Fulbright Scholar and Fellow of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science. From 2003 to 2008 he was director of the University of Michigan Center for Japanese Studies, and from 2003 to 2007 the director of the Law School’s Center for International and Comparative Law.

Colleagues say West’s range of experiences as a scholar and administrator will serve him and the School well. “I am delighted that Mark West will be the next dean of the Law School. He is a first-rate scholar, widely acclaimed for his creative, interdisciplinary, and comparative scholarship, and an accomplished administrator with energy, enthusiasm, and a comprehensive and far-reaching vision for the future of our School,” said Ellen Katz, the Ralph Aigler Professor of Law, who chaired the search committee for the new dean.

West has two children: a son who is a sophomore at the U-M School of Music, Theatre & Dance, and a daughter who is a first-year student in the U-M College of Literature, Science, and the Arts.—KV