A major appointment

Noted legal scholar accepts Law School's offer

Catharine A. MacKinnon

Catharine A. MacKinnon, a noted feminist and legal scholar, has accepted the U-M Law School's offer of a tenured professorship. MacKinnon has conducted groundbreaking legal and social research into issues involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, and pornography. She is currently a member of the Osgoode Hall Law School, York University (Ontario, Canada) faculty and a visiting professor at Yale Law School.

"This appointment carries enormous importance for the U-M Law School as well as for the legal profession in general," said Dean Lee Bollinger. "As the foremost scholar and teacher of feminist legal theory, Professor MacKinnon will incalculably enrich the teaching and scholarly program of the Law School."

In articles, books, and court briefs, MacKinnon has argued that sexual harassment is sexual discrimination, that pornography is sexual harassment, and that both are prohibited under the Civil Rights Act. With Andrea Dworkin, she has drafted and campaigned for local laws that define pornography as a violation of women's civil rights. MacKinnon has also been a consultant, expert witness, or co-counsel in eight American and Canadian court cases involving social issues that affect women.

MacKinnon refutes the view, common in virtually all theory and law, that gender is a matter of sameness and difference, arguing instead that the reality of gender difference is a system of social hierarchy imposed by force upon women.

"I think a lot of people initially feel threatened by her ideas," said Dean Bollinger. "But as you look at what she's written, the force of her scholarship and the quality of her mind become more and more apparent."

Professor Joseph Weiler, head of the Law School appointments committee that voted to offer MacKinnon the position, commented, "I cannot think of pornography, having read MacKinnon, the way I thought of it before. To the extent that feminist jurisprudence is becoming part of the legal culture, she is undeniably the leading figure. I consider her a major scholar, a major social theorist. And we know she's a political activist, we know she's an engaged scholar, and we're glad of that."

MacKinnon is the author of some 20 articles on feminist issues and four books, including the forthcoming Toward a Feminist Theory of the State. She received both her doctoral degree in political science and her law degree from Yale University, and has taught at the Yale Law School, the University of Chicago, Stanford University, and the University of Southern California, among others.

"My work has at times been regarded as a liability, based on its content rather than its quality," said MacKinnon. Regarding the offer from Michigan, she said, "It was kind of like being called to the priesthood. I have the sense that I will have the freedom to pursue my work [at Michigan]. I understand it as an expression of the seriousness with which they take the kind of work I do, and their willingness to recognize other models of scholarship than the traditional one."

MacKinnon will begin teaching at the Law School in the 1990-91 academic year, subject to formal approval by the U-M Regents.

Ross returns to private practice

Dennis E. Ross, J.D. '78, an assistant professor at the Law School, recently announced the end of his leave of absence to return to private practice as a partner in the New York office of the law firm Davis, Polk & Wardwell.

Ross's announcement marks the completion of a full circle in his impressive career. Ross began his academic career at the Law School in 1982, teach-