Legal Advice

Evan Caminker, associate dean for academic affairs and professor of law, details the makeup and function of the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) in the U.S. Justice Department during a lunchtime program last fall. Caminker served as a deputy assistant attorney general with the OLC during part of the Clinton administration. "The basic role of the office is to be counsel to other lawyers" through advising the U.S. Attorney General, White House Counsel, Congress, and others, Caminker explained. For example, in one case that Caminker worked on, President Clinton wanted to use his computer for signing a bill authorizing the signing of contracts via computer, but officials were uncertain about the legality of such action. Asked to research the constitutionality of the proposal, Caminker found that the President's computer signature would be valid but the electronic copy of the law did not satisfy the U.S. Constitution's requirement that the President sign the actual, original copy of the law as Congress passed it. OLC represents the history, tradition, precedent, and future of the office of the presidency, Caminker explained. The White House Counsel, in contrast, works directly with the currently sitting president. The different perspectives create "a healthy tension within the Executive Branch," he said.

Scarnecchia becomes dean at New Mexico School of Law

Suelynn Scarnecchia, '81, the Law School's first associate dean for clinical affairs, has become dean of the University of New Mexico School of Law in Albuquerque. She assumed the deanship January 1, replacing Dean Robert Desiderio.

"This opportunity to build on the fine tradition of legal education at the University of New Mexico is a true privilege and I am honored to receive it," Scarnecchia said last spring when she was named dean. She is the UNM School of Law's first woman dean.

"You have made an incalculable difference to all of our lives," Dean Jeffrey S. Lehman, '81, said in remarks at the Law School's farewell dinner for Scarnecchia in December. "I consider you to be the consummate advocate for a cause."

Scarnecchia joined the University of Michigan Law School in 1987 as a clinical assistant professor with the Child Advocacy Clinic. She became a clinical professor of law in 1993, and the same year represented the prospective adoptive parents in the high profile custody dispute over "Baby Jessica." In 1994 she became the clinic coordinator and in 1996 was named the Law School's first associate dean for clinical affairs. Under her leadership, the Law School's clinical programs have gained national recognition for faculty and program excellence.

Most recently, Scarnecchia has been on special assignment to the University of Michigan's Office of the Provost.

Scarnecchia also has been an active member of the University and professional communities. She has been a member of the U-M's Interdisciplinary Research Program on Violence Across the Lifespan and the Campus Safety and Security Committee, and served as chair for the latter. She is a member of the Association of American Law Schools' (AALS) Committee on Sections and the Annual Meeting, AALS' Resource Corps, and has co-chaired AALS' Clinical Section Committee on Dealing with Difference. She also is a past president of the Women Lawyers Association of Michigan.

Scarnecchia earned her bachelor's degree in history from Northwestern University. After graduation from the Law School, she practiced for six years and became a partner with McCroskey, Feldman, Cochrane & Brock in western Michigan. Her practice specialized in employment discrimination litigation on behalf of plaintiffs.

Her research interests include bias in the courts, children's rights, and corporal punishment of children. She has published articles on children's rights and race bias, and, in addition to clinical courses, she has taught Negotiation and a course about civil legal services for the poor called Access to Justice.