By Lori Atherton

No less than International Court of Justice Judge Bruno Simma, a William W. Cook Global Law Professor at Michigan Law, calls the International Law Workshop (ILW) series a “lifeline to the world of international law.”

Another recent presenter, Lucy Reed, said that the speaker series “is as advertised—a true workshop, aimed at a broad range of law school and other students and faculty.

“I was able to choose a topic I was passionate about, namely international claims tribunals, which tends to capture the attention of a general audience because it involves so many real-life stories,” said Reed, a partner at Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer in New York, co-head of its global international arbitration group, and recent president of the American Society of International Law, who visited Michigan Law in fall 2010.

Michigan Law is known for hosting renowned presenters at the top of their fields, and for nearly two decades, the ILW has been a forum for many of these distinguished visitors to talk about pressing issues of global importance.

The idea for the ILW is to have leading people in the field of international law speak on topics of “compelling interest and generate excitement in the student body, particularly students who don’t know anything about the topics,” said Assistant Dean for International Affairs Virginia Gordan, who coordinates the ILW through the Center for International and Comparative Law.

“Its goal has always been to be of interest to a non-specialist audience as well as to a specialist audience.”

The ILW differs from other Michigan Law workshops in that it’s not for credit and doesn’t require students to read and discuss academic papers. Presenters speak for 30 minutes on a topic of their choice, then participate in a 45-minute question-and-answer session with the audience. The ILW attracts not only students and faculty from within the Law School, but also from U-M as a whole. Topics focus on traditional international law as well as comparative law, cross-border issues, and globalization.

While Michigan Law has long had a focus on internationalism in its curriculum, the ILW helps to foster students’ interest in global issues, which Reed appreciates.

“Although Michigan is the leader in requiring 1Ls to take international law, I felt the workshop gave me the opportunity to bring one avenue of international law alive for the students.”

Reed is among dozens of presenters who have participated in the ILW since its inception in 1995. They include prominent academics from American and overseas universities; practitioners from American and foreign government agencies, NGOs, and corporations; and judges from the European Court of Justice, the supreme courts of Israel and Japan, and the International Court of Justice, including Simma, who is joining Michigan Law’s tenured faculty.

Also invited to speak are Michigan Law faculty, whose interest and expertise in global legal issues help to expose the larger student body to the “incredible richness we offer here,” Gordan noted. Michigan Law Professor Michael Barr, for example, recently spoke on “The New International Financial Architecture,” while Professor Laura Beny has presented on Sudan; and Catharine MacKinnon, the Elizabeth A. Long Professor of Law, on prostitution and trafficking. Professors Nicholas Howson and Vikramaditya Khanna also have given talks related to their expertise on China and India, respectively.

“The ILW has really been a terrific environment for bringing faculty and students together,” Gordan added. “We have a longstanding tradition where we let the students be the first to ask questions. They feel very free to jump in, and they make us proud with the questions they ask. It’s a wonderful form of shared intellectual engagement.”

ILW: “A Lifeline to the World of International Law”

Judge Bruno Simma (above) and Susan D. Page, the U.S. Ambassador to South Sudan, give ILW speeches.