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Faculty Spotlight: Paul Kurtz

News @ Georgia Law September 2011 Faculty Profile

Name: Paul M. Kurtz

Title: Associate Dean for Faculty and Student Affairs

Courses taught: Criminal Law, Family Law

Hometown: Spring Valley, N.Y.

Law school/graduation year: Vanderbilt University/1972

Other degree(s)/institution(s)/year(s): B.A./Vanderbilt University/1968 and LL.M./Harvard University/1974



1. What influenced your decision to go to law school?

- I am one of those who had been told from an early age that "you ought to go to law school." Looking back at it, I have come to realize that this was shorthand for "you talk too much and too fast." Thank goodness I don't do either of those things any more.

2. What did you do before entering the legal teaching academy?

- I clerked for Chief Judge Harry Phillips of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit. Then I earned my LL.M. and taught Legal Research and Writing at Boston College Law School and at Boston University School of Law.

3. What made you decide to become a professor?

- After some clerkships during law school, I realized that while I loved the law school experience, I didn't think I would love the practice of law. That suggested I needed to find a way to remain in law school ... and I figured it out.

4. What do you enjoy most about your job? What is the most rewarding aspect of being a professor?

- The most rewarding aspect of being a professor is being in a classroom with a group of really bright people and being there to see the light go on as I help them find their way through the thicket that is the law. Beyond the classroom, the most rewarding part of being a professor (especially at one place for a long time) is to see one's former students establish themselves professionally and personally.

5. What type of influence do you hope to have on your students?

- I hope I can convey the fact that the law is not cut and dried and that imagination is an important part of being a successful attorney. I also hope I can demonstrate that enthusiasm and commitment to doing a job right are essential to being a professional. I also would hope that they would see that one can take one's work seriously without taking one's self too seriously.

6. Are you currently conducting any research? If so, what is its focus?

- My job as associate dean has not left much room for conducting traditional legal research, but I am now in the midst of a major drafting project for the National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws (which brought you, e.g., the Uniform Commercial Code). The statute is entitled the Deployed Parents Custody and Visitation Act. It is designed to provide a roadmap for handling an all too-common scenario where a parent with either custodial or visitation responsibility for a child is deployed overseas. It is designed to balance the interests of the deploying and non-deploying parents and, most of all, the child. I hope for the conference to promulgate it next summer at its annual meeting in Nashville and that it becomes law in as many states as possible.

7. What do you consider your greatest academic contribution?

- I am proudest of my work as reporter for the Uniform Interstate Family Support Act, which is now law in all 50 states, and my work as reporter for the Georgia Supreme Court Blue Ribbon Commission on Indigent Defense, which led to the creation of Georgia's first state-wide indigent defense delivery system.

8. What is your favorite thing about living in Athens?

- The small-town atmosphere, the thriving nonprofit sector, the cultural amenities, which have grown considerably since our arrival here, and the wonderful people, both town and gown, who Carol and I have come to know and love over the years.

9. What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What are your hobbies?

- I enjoy politics, sports, travel, exercise, reading (mostly non-fiction that has nothing to do with law) and online Scrabble.

10. What do you consider your greatest accomplishment in life?

- Winning the hand of my college sweetheart, Carol Porter Kurtz, who has now been my bride for 40 years.

11. What book/resource do you find yourself referencing the most?

- The Wisdom of Yogi Berra (uncodified)

12. What advice would you give to current law students?

- Enjoy the time you have together here in law school. You likely will never again have this much time and opportunity to think about and talk about the law with such a large group of smart people like your schoolmates.

13. If you could share an afternoon with anyone, with whom would you choose to spend it?

- Assuming that means living or dead and I can have one extra guest (I'm a law professor and am experienced in changing the hypotheticals), I would love to spend the afternoon with my parents, both of whom are gone. I'm not sure I ever thanked them sufficiently for the lessons that they taught me and I would like to have one more family day with them.