November 2013 E-newsletter Faculty Spotlight: Hillel Levin

Office of Communications and Public Relations
University of Georgia School of Law, lawcomm@uga.edu

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/profiles/35

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Archives at Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. It has been accepted for inclusion in Profiles of Members of the Law School Community by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Georgia Law. Please share how you have benefited from this access. For more information, please contact tstriepe@uga.edu.
Faculty Spotlight: Hillel Levin

Name: Hillel Y. Levin
Title: Associate Professor of Law
Hometown: Memphis, TN
Law school / graduation year: Yale Law School / 2002
Other degree(s) / institution(s) / year(s): B.A. in history / Yeshiva University / 1999

1. What did you do before entering the legal teaching academy?
After law school, I spent two years clerking—one for U.S. District Court Judge Robert Chatigny in the District of Connecticut, and one for U.S. Court of Appeals Judge Thomas Meskill on the 2nd Circuit. After that, I worked as a litigator at a major Connecticut-based firm named Robinson & Cole. During that time, I also worked on some research and publishing projects to prepare to make the leap into the legal teaching academy.

2. What made you decide to become a professor?
First, I wanted to have the time to think about and pursue my own ideas at the right pace and to remain immersed in the world of ideas that only the academy can offer. Second, although I loved law school, I also felt that there were some things about legal education that I didn't love—ways of teaching and thought that didn't prepare students for the world of practice. I wanted to play a small part in challenging and changing the perceived wisdom about these things.

3. What do you enjoy most about your job? What is the most rewarding aspect of being a professor?
My job is really two different jobs. On the one hand, I am a teacher. My job in this regard is to help students learn and to help prepare them for their careers. On the other hand, I am a researcher and writer. In that respect my job is to develop new ideas and participate in the legal discourse. At their best, these two jobs mutually reinforce one another. My students help me to develop new ideas and insights and always challenge me to improve them. My research and writing helps me to be a better teacher of the material. The more I think and write about an issue, case, concept or theory, the better I am able to understand and convey the material to my students.

The most rewarding part of being a teacher is when a student tells me that something I taught her or him helped in another class, in an internship or in a job. The single most rewarding event was receiving a teaching award from the students last year. I put a lot of thought and effort into my teaching—as do all of my colleagues—and I greatly enjoy it. Having the sense that my students appreciate the effort is priceless.

As a researcher and writer, the most rewarding thing for me is developing an idea into an article, it saying exactly what I want it to say and sending it out into the world to provoke or contribute to the exchange of ideas.

4. What type of influence do you hope to have on your students?
I hope my students will take some small part of what I have taught them to help people in the world who have real problems or needs and to do so in an ethical way.

Further, although I rarely tell this to students, my hope and dream for them is that they will find a profession and life situation that contributes to society and that they find rewarding—and that once they find it, they recognize and appreciate they have found it and are living that dream. They should live their lives according to their own yardstick of success, and not worry whether someone else has more money, more prestige, more friends or what have you. It is really difficult to set a goal, achieve it and then just appreciate having done so. Of course, it is always important to set more goals, but let those goals be truly your own rather than someone else's.

5. You have several areas of specialty. Which one is your favorite to teach about and why?
Do I have to choose just one? My favorite course to teach is my Legislation and Statutory Interpretation course. I took the class in law school from Bill Eskridge, my mentor and a giant in the field, and it consumed me. I enjoy teaching it because it offers students a nice blend of doctrinal material, practical lawyering instruction and legal theory.

6. Are you currently conducting any research? If so, what is its focus?
As usual, I am working on several things at once. My newest project explores the ways in which the strict doctrinal lines that have developed in the context of education law are currently being blurred. For example, the line between public and private schools is not as sharp as it once was. The line between religious and non-religious instructions is becoming blurred. The lines between school responsibility, parental responsibility and social responsibility for the health and safety of students is being worn down. The line between school speech and non-school speech is diminishing. Judges and scholars have been slow to appreciate the challenges that these developments pose.

7. What is your favorite thing about living in Athens?
Actually, I don't live in Athens. For personal and family reasons, I live in Atlanta. It has been wonderful for me and my family, and the commute back and forth isn't a big deal. But what I regret about not living in Athens is that I am not as fully immersed in campus life and in the friendships
8. What do you enjoy doing in your free time? What are your hobbies?
Outside of family and work, which aren't hobbies but my primary commitments, my main personal hobby is running. I love running. More precisely, I tolerate running so that I can enjoy having run. There are few things in my line of work that allow me to really track progress. When I run, I can see myself achieving goals—faster pace, longer distance, higher weekly mileage, etc. There is something immensely satisfying about that. Plus, I have developed some really close friendships with people through running. There's nothing like a three hour Sunday run from 5 a.m. to 8 a.m. with a friend or two. It is so easy to just talk and laugh and encourage one another. Beyond that, I am very active in my religious community, serving on synagogue and school boards. I also enjoy music, politics and reading.

9. What do you consider your greatest accomplishment in life?
Honestly, I don't think I've lived long enough or done enough yet to be able to crow about anything.

10. How do you stay up to date on legal issues and trends?
I read voraciously. Newspapers, magazines, blogs, practitioner publications, journals and books.