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Bryant Garth (1986-1987 Acting; 1987-1990)

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### IU's New Acting Law Dean Favors Liberal Arts Education

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Maurer School of Law  
Bloomington

# IU's new acting law dean favors liberal arts education

IU News Bureau

It is easy to see a tie between business or political science and the study of law, but what is an English major doing in law school?

He or she is probably doing very well, according to Bryant Garth, law professor at Indiana University who this week became acting dean of the IU Law School at Bloomington.

In a recent interview, he offered some thoughts on law student education:

"A degree in English, or literature, can be extremely helpful for a lawyer. I think such study educates people well for reading texts, and lawyers do a lot of that. There is a whole body of scholarship which points out that reading a statute is not so different from reading a poem.

"I think students tend to take what they think is a more practical approach, such as studying accounting or business practices. These are helpful, but I favor the broader approach of a liberal arts education."

Garth, who is a specialist in comparative law, civil procedures and complex litigation, said practicing law today is a very competitive business.

"The market for legal services is getting more competitive and law schools are letting students know that a law degree is not an automatic ticket to economic success. You can't go back to your hometown and simply hang up a shingle and become a success.

"A part of the problem is a surplus of lawyers, although I don't see that in Indiana. In California, 10 percent of the lawyers are underemployed and some are doing construction work on the side.

Competitive pressures has brought the opening of law offices in shopping centers where people who normally don't see lawyers may be attracted."

Students must do more than merely learn the law and precedents, Garth said.

"I think one of the things a good law school does is shake students up a little bit and make them realize that law is a discipline that is becoming increasingly open to developments in sociology, political science and economics. Once, we could teach that the law is this or that and cite precedents to support it. Today, a judge may rule that the precedents are unclear and look at the law from a social policy perspective."

Garth, who teaches international law among other courses, urges all law students to take at least a couple of courses in this field. He pointed out that legal problems with international implications can arise in Indianapolis or Columbus, as well as in New York or Washington. It isn't necessary to be an expert on international law but it is helpful to know about legal procedures in other countries, he said.

International law is tied to corporate law and is not the glamorous activity some students may believe, Garth pointed out. Although it isn't required, it is helpful to know at least one foreign language and it is especially useful to know Chinese or Japanese, he said. An ability to read, write and speak European languages is also useful.

Personality may be a factor in getting a job in a few cases but, generally, Garth said a student's overall law school record is what employers look at. It is a plus, he added, to have worked on the law journal.