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INDIANA UNIVERSITY
Maurer School of Law
Bloomington



New Maurer dean to create buzz about school

Marilyn Odendahl January 1, 2014

It would be an understatement to say Austen Parrish, the incoming dean of Indiana University Maurer School of Law, has big shoes to fill.

He follows the leadership of former long-time dean Lauren Robel, now IU Bloomington provost, and interim dean Hannah Buxbaum. Moreover, he will be moving from a small, independent law school to a Big Ten university that has a number of campuses throughout Indiana and another law school in Indianapolis.

Yet, in the field of candidates who applied for the IU Maurer position, search committee members said Parrish stood out because of his energy and enthusiasm to meet the challenges ahead. Colleagues in academia praised his scholarship as well as his administrative skills, calling particular attention to his vision, creativity, intellect and ability to build relationships.



Parrish

John Applegate, IU executive vice president for University Academic Affairs and chair of the search committee, said Parrish is going to fit in well at IU Maurer.

“He is enthusiastic about looking change in the face and figuring out a way that we can still provide a superb education in a new environment,” Applegate said, describing Parrish as someone who exhibits the full range of the good that a legal education can do.

Parrish is coming to Bloomington from Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles. In addition to being a professor of law, he served as the school’s vice dean from 2008 to 2012 and was responsible for the overall academic program. From July 2012 to November 2013, Parrish was interim dean.

During his tenure in the dean’s office, Parrish oversaw the construction of a \$20 million student-housing complex, established connections with local and international universities, and guided the school’s capital campaign from its silent phase to its public mode.

Parrish will officially begin his duties at IU Maurer Jan. 6.

In the short term, he wants to enhance the Bloomington law school’s ability to shoulder the dramatic decline in applications that law schools around the country have been recording. He credited Robel with positioning IU Maurer in a wise way that insulated it from the crisis in legal education, and he intends to strengthen that position by focusing on incoming and outgoing students.

He wants to create pipelines with the top U.S. undergraduate institutions so the Bloomington law school can have a consistent pool of candidates. Also, he plans to create relationships with law firms, especially those in major metropolitan areas like Chicago; Washington, D.C.; New York and Los Angeles, to give graduates greater opportunities for jobs.

Parrish viewed the drop in people studying to become lawyers as cyclical. In his conversations with undergraduates, he has heard them acknowledge their bachelor's degrees are not getting them where they want to be and they see law school as a way to improve their situation.

"I think ambitious, smart, intelligent people still want to go to law school and they're still going to go to law school," Parrish said.

Although Southwestern Law School, a private ABA-accredited institution that is not a part of any college or university, is markedly different from IU Maurer School of Law, Applegate does not anticipate Parrish will have any difficulty implementing his goals. Parrish will have opportunities rather than challenges, Applegate said, because IU has resources that Southwestern does not have.

While in California, Parrish reached out to undergraduate schools and graduate departments at universities to try to make the connections that are already available at IU. The law school in Bloomington is deeply embedded in the campus and has collaborations and relationships with other academic disciplines at the university, Applegate said.

Faculty and staff at IU Maurer are equally excited to have a new dean in place, Applegate said. They are eager to seriously examine the legal education landscape and begin to plan for the future.

Parrish sees similarities between Southwestern and IU Maurer in their approaches to teaching students. The curriculums at both law schools include professional competency concepts along with legal analysis and doctrine.

Traditionally, Parrish said, the career path for lawyers has been seen as graduating from law school, clerking for a judge or joining a large law firm then, as he put it, "ruling the world." However, he said, that is misleading because only a small number of graduates follow that track. Instead, lawyers today have to be entrepreneurial and have to know more than just how to think about the law.

IU Maurer faculty, Parrish said, have been doing good things to teach students about the law as well as preparing them to be good lawyers. Long-term, he wants to expand and bring more attention to the school's extraordinary law centers, such as the centers for cybersecurity and intellectual property, and he wants to build on the foreign studies program.

His first order of business will be to meet with each faculty member individually and build a consensus as to the direction of the school. He said he wants to create a buzz about what is happening at IU Maurer that is not happening elsewhere.

His sense is the law school has had a greater impact on the Midwestern legal community than other schools and he wants to tell the narrative of the institution by showing all the different activities and accomplishments of the graduates.

Lisa McKinney, past president of the IU Maurer alumni board of directors and member of the search committee, said the school's graduates are ready for the next step.

“I think there is a strong core of alumni who want to give back, want to help students coming out of the school,” said McKinney, a partner at Bose McKinney & Evans LLP in Indianapolis. “If (Parrish) reaches out and talks about his vision for the school, I think there’s going to be a lot of enthusiasm coming back at him.”

The leadership of Robel and Buxbaum has created a lot of excitement among the alumni, she said. But the alums are an incredible resource that could be tapped more not only for support of the school, but also to provide assistance to the students.

Before coming to Bloomington, Parrish was familiar with the law school. Both Southwestern and IU Maurer were among the schools that participated in the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching’s consortium on the future of legal education.

Also, Parrish knew Buxbaum, having appeared at academic conferences with her. In fact, when he first heard of the opening at IU Maurer, he did not bother to apply because he was certain she would be selected as the next dean. However, he said once the two had a conversation and Buxbaum made it clear she was not seeking the position, he decided to apply.

Parrish, a native of Canada, earned a bachelor of arts in political science and economics from the University of Washington and a law degree from Columbia University.

He is an expert in transnational litigation and a leading scholar on issues related to cross-border disputes. Prior to entering academia, he practiced complex business litigation at O’Melveny & Myers, a global law firm based in Los Angeles. •