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Robel Settles into Interim Provostship

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Robel settles into ¹⁰⁵ 2-1-12 interim provostship

BY KIRSTEN CLARK
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It was summer in Hilton Head Island, S.C., and Lauren Robel attempted to do yoga on a stand-up paddleboard, falling into the water often.

While fulfilling her duties as president of the Association of American Law Schools, she saw an opportunity to try something new in her free time.

"I saw that they had this yoga class on a paddleboard and thought, 'What a wonderful thing to do,'" she said.

Paddleboarding involves standing on what Robel called a "gigantic surfboard on steroids" and using a large paddle for propulsion. It involves stability, she said, and it involves balance.

Much like paddleboard yoga, Robel's position as interim provost will require balance.

Robel's term began Jan. 17 after former provost Karen Hanson moved to the University of Minnesota, where she will become the senior vice president of academic

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Lauren Robel, Interim provost

affairs and provost.

"I understand that this position is really a critical one to have not lose a beat," Robel said. "You really need someone in the position on an interim basis who understands the campus well and has a good working relationship with the deans."

Robel has been with the University since she visited her younger sister, who was then a graduate student in the English department. Robel said she fell in love with Bloomington and applied to the law

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school.

"I thought, 'Indiana has a wonderful English department. If this law thing doesn't work out, maybe I'll just stay with my backup plan,'" she said.

Before Robel came to IU, she studied English literature at Auburn University alongside her younger sister and father.

Robel's father, a prisoner of war in World War II, decided to attend college in his 50s. He entered the Air Force when at 17 and couldn't pursue higher education.

"He had given a lifetime of service to the country and he thought, 'Well, maybe I'll get a business degree,' but very quickly realized what he really wanted to do was study literature," Robel said. "Both my sister and I were interested in that, so he'd take a class and we'd get the books. We'd hand the books around within the family. It was a wonderful way to go to college, really."

Robel said she never realized it at the time, but she sees

the courage it took for her father to sit in an English class surrounded by 18-year-olds. She now keeps his diploma on her desk at home.

Robel pursued law at IU and graduated in 1983.

After working in Chicago as a clerk for a federal judge, Robel was convinced to return to IU by friends who were faculty. She became an assistant professor in 1985.

She said there wasn't a thing she didn't enjoy teaching, and even when she became associate dean of the law school in 1991, she continued to teach. Robel became dean of the law school in 2003.

"She has a passion for IU that comes from the fact she's an alumna," said Joseph Hoffmann, a law professor who served as interim executive associate dean twice under Robel.

Under Robel's deanship, the law school experienced growth in a variety of ways, Hoffmann said.

"Probably the most visible change is that we have established the law school as one of the top public law schools in the country," he said.

On Robel's new desk is a picture of her grandchildren — Grace, 6, and Elliott, 4 — with whom she said she tries to spend all her spare time.

"They're the biggest IU basketball fans you could imagine," she said. "He could sing the IU fight song before he could say a complete sentence. I can throw out an IU basketball player's team number, and both of them can tell me the name."

A window overlooks the Old Crescent, where students pass by on their way to class. These students are a significant part of her job, she said.

"I was always very impressed with how she saw students as individual students and not just as a big undifferentiated group," said Hannah Buxbaum, who served under Robel as associate dean for academic affairs and is now filling the interim deanship.

Robel sees the provost position as a way to give back.

"I was happy to do it when President McRobbie asked me to do it," she said. "It seemed like something I could do in service to a University that has really given me my life."