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Law School Notes

Professors teach, cook and eat

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The food law course at the University of Chicago Law School is taught by two chefs, and every class starts with dinner.

The chefs are law professors Douglas G. Baird, who is the former dean of the law school, and Omri Ben-Shahar, who has a PhD in economics and is a former member of the Antitrust Court in Israel.

They teach the seminar for 12 students in their homes six times a year.

"That's one of the reasons I came to the law school," said third-year student Oren Lund, 30. "A lot of top schools have professors that are smart. That's the business."

At the University of Chicago "they all live in the neighborhood, so they're there all day, so doors are open," Lund said. "You just talk, or go after class and have drinks with them. It's fantastic."

Baird got his chef training at la petite folie, a classical French restaurant on 55th Street in Hyde Park where he worked from 2001 to 2004, one day a week.

At his high point, Baird said, "I was actually working the stove on New Year's Eve cooking everybody's dinner."

"Omri did a similar stint at a restaurant in Israel," Baird added. "He's at least as competent as I am."

"Omri's polenta is really amazing. I can still taste it."

Ben-Shahar made this polenta for a previous class 18 months ago.

This year, "I had a butternut squash soup that they really liked," Baird said.

The food law class is from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Wednesdays. It is one-credit, pass/fail, and the intellectual component is rigorous, Baird said.

"There's no written work, but there's a fair amount of reading for each class. ... If you're in a room and you have



Omri Ben-Shahar



Douglas G. Baird

two professors asking a question in front of 11 other students, it's impossible to hide. ...

"You can't miss any class. Your presence is felt. ... The idea is to give students an opportunity to interact" with faculty and each other, "in a much more intimate setting with a much freer flow of ideas."

Baird said the course covers such things as "rules that govern importation of food from China" that might not be subject to Western standards. "It's very scary."

Other examples, he said, are labeling requirements for genetically modified organisms and organic food.

Lund is a former professional chef from The Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Naples, Fla., and often cooks with Baird for other events. He is scheduled to join Kirkland & Ellis LLP in corporate law after graduation.

"I love talking about food," Lund said, "the intersection of food and law. It's right up my alley."

"Virtually every member of the faculty" teaches a small seminar course in his home at some point, according to Baird. This year, there are seven such seminars, called the Greenberg Seminars, each taught by two professors. They are funded by Daniel Greenberg, class of 1965, and Susan Steinhauser. The idea was established by former Dean Saul Levmore.

'Illegal Defense' champs again

"Illegal Defense," a team of U of C law students, won the graduate student, intramural basketball championship at the U of C this month — and for the second year in a row.

They beat a team of fourth-year medical students.

Richard Leverett and Jason Owens are the tallest players on the team at 6'3", according to Leverett.

Nevertheless, "Jason can jump out of the gym, and I was a college football player for Butler," Leverett said. "I'm enforcer down low."

Another player, Jonathan Stratton, was point guard at the University of Miami and played in the NCAA tournament, Leverett said.

Intramural basketball games at the U of C have two, 20-minute halves with a running clock until the last two minutes.

Games start at 8:30 p.m. or 9 p.m., and some team members didn't get out of class until 8 p.m. "I think maybe this season we started off slow in some games. Maybe it was because of the class right before the games."

"It makes law school easier," Leverett said of basketball. "We go to the gym once or twice a week. We usually go together. We go to the library together afterwards."

"It's an outlet. ... It's always good to get de-stressed, unwind."

Leverett, 28, plans to be a transactional lawyer. He is from Gary, Ind., and commutes every day on the South Shore Railroad.

West Side High School in Gary is Leverett's alma mater; in the fall semester, he was one of the assistant football coaches at West Side.

The other members of "Illegal Defense" are Adrian Milton and Chuck Baxter, both third-year students; and Tyler Beas and Michael Holecek, second-year students.

"Adrian put us together," Leverett said. "Adrian is the architect of the team."