





# Leading

## With Purpose and Passion

BY BROOKE KENNY

GW professors of international and comparative law know that being a good lawyer extends well beyond the stacks of the library and the pages of casebooks. The law, they say, is an evolving profession that requires its practitioners to use discretion and judgment. This article, the fourth in a series, highlights the work of four professors who use their experience to shape the next generation of attorneys while also going beyond the classroom to make a difference in the lives of our fellow world citizens.

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### Alberto M. Benítez

*Professor of Clinical Law and Director, Immigration Clinic*

Alberto Benítez says he has always had an intimate connection to immigration law.

The son of Mexican immigrants, Benítez grew up as part of a vibrant Mexican community in South Buffalo and Lackawanna, N.Y. His family friends, like his father, had emigrated there to work in the steel mills.

While pursuing his education, Benítez found he could combine his rich culture with a cause. In college, when civil wars were raging in Central America, Benítez says he first learned about asylum rulings biased against Central Americans—rulings that immigrants from Cuba, Russia, and Eastern Europe did not face. It inspired him to take a stand: “That triggered my interest in immigration law and in law school itself,” he says.

Today, Benítez helps immigrants achieve asylum, while working on other complex immigration issues, as director of the GW Law School Immigration Clinic. Established in 1979, the clinic serves clients at no cost, while students and faculty take on cases to help immigrants achieve permanent asylum or keep others from getting deported. Over the years, Benítez’s students have also been involved with such controversial issues as torture and freedom from detention for aliens. Immigrants represented by the GW Law School Clinic win their cases—it’s that simple, Benítez says.



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JESSICA MCCONNELL

“Immigrants are often low-income, don’t speak English, and may act in ways contrary to their own interests on account of fear, bad advice from friends, or lack of formal education,” he says. Students and faculty members at the clinic, he explains, help them navigate a complex legal system.

Many of the Immigration Clinic students are immigrants themselves, or they come from immigrant backgrounds and have gotten involved in the clinic to make a difference in people’s lives, Benítez says. He focuses on teaching his students about their professional responsibility to defend their clients passionately.

For instance, many people don’t realize it is easy for legal immigrants to lose their status because of criminal conduct or convictions, Benítez says.

“Everyone agrees that people should be held responsible for their conduct by the criminal justice system,” he says. “But Congress has made it virtually automatic that immigrants will be removed because of criminal conduct or convictions, regardless of the number of years immigrants have lived here, their U.S. citizen children, and other ties.”

This is not only mean-spirited, he says, but also contrary to the fairness inherent in the U.S. legal system.

Benítez, who earned both his B.A. and his J.D. from the State University of New York at Buffalo, joined the GW Law faculty in 1995. His casebook, *An Introduction to the United States Legal System*, was published in 2006 by Carolina Academic Press. Before arriving at GW Law, he was on the faculty of the legal clinics at both Chicago Kent College of Law and Northwestern University. He served as a staff attorney at the Chicago Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law and at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Chicago. He also has taught law at the Universidad Panamericana in Mexico City and at the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México.

Benítez preaches passion because he is driven by it himself: He has an innate desire to help people, he says. His other main

motivation is working with law students, many of whom he keeps in contact with after they graduate. When asked what he is most proud of in his career, neither answer could be listed on his résumé.

“Helping people,” he says, “and that many of my alums remain in contact with me. I’m flattered that many former students...invite me to their weddings, they introduce me to their kids, and so forth.” He jokes: “It makes me think I know what I’m doing!”

## Susan L. Karamanian

*Associate Dean for International and Comparative Legal Studies*

Susan Karamanian, a former litigator with extensive experience in complex commercial disputes, now spends a lot of her time helping shape the minds of law students—here at GW Law and across the globe.

Karamanian, who travels extensively for major initiatives of GW Law in India and Asia, is currently working with law professors in the Middle East to improve course offerings and teaching in commercial law.

“The ability to meet students and faculty in their home institutions and to share with them my ideas and learn from them is one of the most exciting aspects of my current work,” says Karamanian, who gives lectures at universities around the world.

In GW Law’s classrooms, Karamanian stresses the importance of developing analytical skills along with excellent written and verbal communication. Dedication, she says, is also key. But some of the most important skills in law are not learned in school, she says.

“Above all, [students] need to be able to understand and work with people, and that requires listening, patience, and empathy,” she says. “It’s odd that law school probably didn’t add much to the skills that I admire in the best lawyers in this country. Instead, these lawyers learned them at home, grade school, place of worship, camp, or other social gatherings.”

JESSICA MCCONNELL

Susan L. Karamanian



Before joining the faculty of the Law School in 2000, Karamanian worked in private practice for 14 years, representing clients in commercial disputes at the Dallas firm then known as Locke Purnell Rain Harrell. Karamanian, who earned a B.S. from Auburn University, a B.A. from Oxford University, where she was a Rhodes Scholar, and a J.D. from the University of Texas, has also served as vice president of the American Society of International Law. She currently serves on the boards of the Center for American and International Law, the Friends of the Law Library of Congress, and Texas Appleseed, and she was recently named president of the Washington Foreign Law Society.

While in practice, Karamanian says she often dealt with high stakes cases—where finances, or a person's life, were on the line.

"Managing the pressure while performing at a high level was an enormous challenge," she says.

In addition to her commercial work, Karamanian represented Texas death-row inmates on a pro bono basis in their post-conviction appeals. When she began this work in the late 1980s, she says the Texas row was full of inmates who had the legal right to pursue post-conviction appeals but lacked attorneys to represent them. In 1996, she represented a putative class of Texas death-row inmates, ultimately obtaining Texas' concession as reflected in a federal court consent decree as to when death-sentenced inmates should file their habeas petition in the Texas courts. In 1998, she accepted representation of Paul Richard Colella, who was scheduled to be executed in four months and whose court-appointed attorney had missed the deadline for filing the habeas petition in state court.

"After five years, and after overcoming many procedural hurdles, we saved his life as the state confessed error," she says. "Paul is still in prison as he pled guilty to a lesser offense, but the result is perhaps one of my greatest victories as we overcame so much to establish serious flaws in his original trial."

The hurdles she faces at the Law School are different from those in private practice. In addition to teaching, Karamanian organizes conferences and lectures and helps students with competitions, among other activities. She also works to stay ahead of her students, who she says are very active in promoting international and comparative law activities.

At any moment, she adds, GW Law faculty members are working on a variety of exciting issues, ranging from the best way to structure an agreement between the United States and Iraq on the status of U.S. forces, to the international claims arising out of the war between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

"The biggest challenge," she says, "is managing the large number of very diverse issues that come across my desk on a single day."

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## Gregory E. Maggs

*Senior Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Professor of Law*

Gregory Maggs, an Army Reserve officer who has long taught contracts and commercial law, was inspired to pursue counterterrorism law after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Today, Maggs's work examines how the government responds to terrorism. This includes general criminal laws, criminal laws



Gregory E. Maggs

aimed at terrorists, civil liability, sanctions, immigration restrictions, intelligence gathering, and military force.

"The government has expanded its approach since 2001," Maggs says, "and there is still considerable uncertainty about the constitutionality of many counterterrorism measures."

An officer in the U.S. Army Reserve for the last 18 years, Maggs says he is proud, and humbled, by the contributions the group makes to the country.

"Most reservists have sacrificed far more than I have; many are serving right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. But the burdens of being a reservist have always been worth it to me for the honor of being part of the total force that makes up our great Army," he says.

In addition to being an expert on counterterrorism and military law and serving in the U.S. Army Reserve as a judge on the Army Court of Criminal Appeals, Maggs wears many hats at the GW Law School. He recently became the senior associate dean for academic affairs. As if that's not enough, he teaches in three other distinct areas of law: constitutional, commercial, and contracts.

Maggs earned his B.A. and his J.D. from Harvard University before clerking for U.S. Supreme Court Justices Clarence Thomas and Anthony M. Kennedy. He was also a clerk for Circuit Court Judge Joseph T. Sneed of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 9th Circuit. For two years, he was an assistant professor at the University of Texas School of Law, and he worked as a special master for the U.S. Supreme Court.

Maggs says he developed his interest in constitutional law because of his work as a clerk for the U.S. Supreme Court.

"The Law School has been generous in allowing me to fit additional courses into my teaching schedule," he says.

He was also a consultant to Independent Counsel Kenneth Starr, BA '68, during the infamous Whitewater investigation; an experience he says gave him a lot of faith in the federal judiciary.

"Much of our work was very unpopular in the press and in public opinion," Maggs says. "But the federal courts consistently upheld our legal positions. At one point, I believe we had won 17 out of 17 appellate decisions before very diverse judicial panels. It was encouraging to see that the rule of the law would apply, even against the very powerful and politically well-connected."

In 1993, Maggs joined GW Law's faculty, and he says he enjoys taking advantage of the many resources in the nation's capital. As senior associate dean for academic affairs, Maggs is responsible for determining which classes will be taught and by whom. He hopes to use his new position to continue to improve the Law School's stellar reputation, he says.

In his own classroom, Maggs makes sure that all of the cases students read involve actual people in real situations. It is important for them to learn the context of cases, he explains.

"The law," he says, "is not an abstraction divorced from its practical consequences and effect."

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## Peter Raven-Hansen

*Glen Earl Weston Professor of Law*

Peter Raven-Hansen isn't just an expert in the field of national security and counterterrorism law—he helped create it.

In 1989, Raven-Hansen co-authored the casebook *National Security Law*, which offers a broad exploration of both constitutional and domestic law issues in national security. At the time, there was only one other current casebook on the topic, and it wasn't widely used. As pioneers in the discipline, Raven-Hansen and his co-authors helped define and popularize a subject that is increasingly relevant in the post-9/11 world.

"That was a big intellectual challenge," he says.

The field of national security law is an intersection of human rights and security. Practitioners deal with complex cases, such as whether alien detainees at Guantanamo Bay have the right to go to U.S. courts to apply for habeas corpus. The field also covers such subjects as civil rights challenges to preventive detention, electronic surveillance, and data collection, as well as challenges to military trials, torture, and the state secrets privilege. Raven-Hansen, who teaches the discipline to eager law students, describes attorneys in national security law and counterterrorism law as "special patriots" who work in a relatively low-paying area of practice in order to provide a necessary service for the government. New issues constantly develop, and Raven-Hansen finds it a daily challenge to keep up as the laws evolve.

"There's no field that changes as rapidly," he says. In fact, as recently as 2007, he co-authored a casebook on counterterrorism law for classes in this subspecialty.

Before coming to GW Law School, Raven-Hansen was in private practice for the Washington, D.C., firm Hogan & Hartson, where he worked on large-scale litigation. In one pro-bono case, Raven-Hansen was assigned to work on the landmark case *Nixon v. Fitzgerald*, where



government employee A. Ernest Fitzgerald claimed he lost his job as a civilian cost analyst for the Air Force because he blew the whistle on a billion-dollar cost overrun on an aircraft development project. Fitzgerald sued President Richard Nixon, seeking damages for wrongful termination. The case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, and the Court ruled 5–4 that the president could not be sued for damages based on his official acts. The case helped shape Raven-Hansen's scholarly agenda, he says.

"It gave me an interest in the law of the presidency," Raven-Hansen explains, and he became fascinated with issues of presidential power. This parlayed into his interest in national security law because, as he says, more national security decisions fall to the president than fall to Congress given the need for swift and discreet decision-making. "[Presidents] need to make real-time decisions for national security," he says.

Raven-Hansen, who received both a B.A. and J.D. from Harvard University, also teaches civil procedure and evidence and has served as academic dean of GW Law School. He joined the faculty in 1980. In addition to having published various articles on national security law, he also co-wrote the monograph *National Security Law and the Power of the Purse*, *First Use of Nuclear Weapons*, and the student hornbook *Understanding Civil Procedure*.

Raven-Hansen says one of the rewards of the job is watching his students graduate and pursue careers in national security law. In 19 years of teaching this subject, he estimates that roughly 800 students have come through his classes, and some of his former students are now practicing national security law, while others are teaching it.

In the classroom, he tells students that the law is not just about analyzing and advising based on what the rules say. The law does not lay out everything for attorneys.

"There's still room," he says, "for moral judgment and for common sense, which, if they can't always be taught, must at least be nurtured." 