Words with the Dean

Dean Danielle Conway on her career and her vision for leading Maine Law

By Trevor Maxwell

Maine Law, meet your new dean. Danielle Conway is an accomplished teacher, lawyer, scholar, and innovator.

Professor Danielle Conway was hired as dean at the University of Maine School of Law in January 2015, and formally assumed her new role on July 1. Conway is the seventh dean at Maine Law since the founding of the modern day law school in 1962. She is also the first African American to lead Maine’s public and only law school.

Prior to coming to Maine, Conway was the Michael J. Marks Distinguished Professor of Business Law and Director of the Hawai’i Procurement Institute at the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa, William S. Richardson School of Law. During her 14 years at Hawai’i, Conway earned a reputation as a leading expert in public procurement law, entrepreneurship, and as an advocate for minorities and Indigenous Peoples. She has 25 years of active and reserve duty service with the U.S. Army (see story on Page 12), and also has experience as a lawyer in private practice.

She is a graduate of the Stern School of Business at New York University, Howard University School of Law, and earned her LL.M. degree from The George Washington University Law School. She was the Godfrey Visiting Scholar at the University of Maine School of Law in 2008.

Maine Law Magazine writer Trevor Maxwell recently sat down with Dean Conway for an interview about her life, her new job, and her vision and goals for the law school.

ML: Taking over a deanship is a major step in the career of a law professor. What are some of the qualities about Maine Law that convinced you this was the right fit?

DC: I was looking for an opportunity at a premier public law school. Public law schools have two essential functions – achieving excellence, while at the same time providing a high level of access to the community. Maine Law does both. It offers significant access, while still maintaining high standards.

Another factor was the experience I had at Maine Law in 2008 when I taught a bridge course in Licensing Intellectual Property. It left a strong impression on me that this was a school that really personified the term ‘student focused.’ I could see it was a flexible school, will-
ML: You arrived on campus in the spring of 2015 as Dean-Designate. What has impressed you most about Maine Law and its students so far?

DC: I was struck immediately by the high level of engagement of Maine Law students in the academic enterprise. Maine Law students are obviously studying and taking their work seriously. But these students are special. They are engaged with the Offices of Admissions, Students Services, and Advancement as fellows doing the ever-important work of building relationships and keeping the Maine Law network strong and vibrant.

Another impressive quality of our students is their commitment to the state of Maine. These students are already self-determined. They want to be in Maine, they want to create a socially and economically sustainable infrastructure, and they genuinely want to serve their communities. They are socially entrepreneurial. Many of them find and create their own externships. Maine Law students have a strong public interest resolve, and they consider that part of the calculus of becoming a lawyer. That has a great deal to do with the excellent faculty here, and how the students are taught, but to be fair, the students come to us with most of these traits firmly intact.

ML: Can you characterize the style of leadership you bring to Maine Law?

DC: My style of leadership is to find value in the people around me, and to nurture their strengths. I then attempt to identify with people to find our degrees of sameness. So in identifying with people, I also share my strengths and my vulnerabilities. I share what I believe to be those fundamental principles and values that create credible expectations for and among the professionals in the Maine Law organization. Finally, I am explicit with my colleagues that I hold myself to those values, principles, and expectations, and that I am learning and growing alongside them in developing new skill sets and meeting new challenges in the law school environment. In short, I value the people around me, and I’m open to learning from them every step of the way.

ML: What are some of the biggest challenges facing Maine Law?

DC: People do not know what we offer. People from inside and from outside Maine do not know how engaged we are in the community, they do not necessarily know how fabulous our faculty is, how engaged they are in scholarship, teaching, and service. So the greatest task for me is to get the word out.

Another challenge is enrollment. We want to maintain our level of enrollment, and ultimately grow it in a sustainable way. But that is a challenge nationally, and we have to figure out how to navigate that challenge, because our entire community, not just Portland, needs good, ethical lawyers.

There is also a more nuanced challenge that we need to meet head-on. We need to rewrite the narrative of what a lawyer is, and what the law means to a community. We have to educate the public about the vital role a lawyer plays in doing justice in a community, and the
A Decade of Success - Dean Pitegoff’s Legacy

As dean at Maine Law from 2005 to 2015, Peter Pitegoff successfully navigated the school through turbulent waters for legal education.

By Trevor Maxwell

In 2005, Peter Pitegoff arrived at Maine Law as the school’s sixth dean, following an outstanding tenure as a law professor and vice dean at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo. Over the next decade, Pitegoff charted a steady and successful course for Maine Law, heightening its reputation in the state and around the nation, despite a historic recession and a whirlwind of changes in the legal profession. Pitegoff stepped down as dean in July of 2015, and assumed a new role as a full-time professor at Maine Law.

During his time as dean, Pitegoff recruited top-notch faculty and staff; expanded collaboration with Maine’s judiciary, the organized bar, and public and private institutions; and oversaw numerous enhancements to the school’s program of legal education.

“Maine Law is well positioned to thrive in the coming years. I am grateful to numerous colleagues – faculty, staff, students, alumni, volunteers, university leaders, and supporters – who share credit for Maine Law’s recent progress and success,” Pitegoff said. “We will continue to train and nurture the next generation of lawyers and leaders, building on the traditions of academic excellence, civic engagement and public service that have long been at the core of a Maine Law education.”

As a professor, Pitegoff will focus his teaching and

role the law plays in maintaining an ordered and civilized society. We have somehow strayed from that, and we have allowed others to define lawyers in ways that don’t accurately capture who we are and what we do.

ML: What can alumni do to support the law school?

DC: Engage. Promote. Give. Maine Law needs its alumni and friends now more than ever to become intimately involved in sustaining the legal education enterprise in Maine. At the same time, we need our alumni and friends to serve as mentors to the attorneys of the future. We need them to serve as open door ambassadors, to attend our admitted students day, vigorously participate in the MAPIL auction, and of course hire Maine Law students.

ML: What are your plans for your first year as dean?

DC: I mentioned that one of the things that attracted me to this law school was the culture of being student-focused. This year I want to bring that approach to the center of everything that we do. That includes our anchor programming, such as the Frank M. Coffin Lecture on Law and Public Service and the Justice for Women Lecture series, visiting scholars, and student exchanges. The school established two new post-professional degree programs, the Master of Laws (LL.M.) and Doctor of Juridical Science (J.S.D.).

research on the legal profession and ethics, business associations, corporate governance, nonprofit organizations, and community development and finance.

Here are some selected accomplishments under Pitegoff’s leadership:

- Maine Law expanded experiential learning opportunities for students, including the creation of the Juvenile Justice Clinic, and the Refugee and Human Rights Clinic. There also has been steady growth of field placements in the externship and summer fellowship programs.
- A record number and amount of scholarships have been awarded to Maine Law students in recent years, supported in part by generous contributions from alumni, law firms and friends of the law school. New endowment funds included the Vincent McKusick Diversity Fellowship and the Charles A. Harvey Trial Immersion Fellowship, among others.
- Pitegoff built a strong administrative and leadership team, maintained a collaborative organizational culture, and achieved vital further autonomy in Maine Law’s budget and management control.
- Maine Law expanded interdisciplinary opportunities and career services, guiding students onto new career tracks as well as to traditional law jobs. Pitegoff amplified the school’s role in succession planning for the Maine bar, targeting outreach to communities with a need for a new generation of lawyers and opportunity for Maine Law graduates.
- The law school has strengthened its global connections through a number of programs, including the Justice for Women Lecture series, visiting scholars, and student exchanges. The school established two new post-professional degree programs, the Master of Laws (LL.M.) and Doctor of Juridical Science (J.S.D.).
very smart on each other’s areas of expertise and provide more explicit connections between substantive content among and between related courses. The idea is meant to demonstrate to students how concepts are related from one course to the next, or from one experiential activity to the next.

There are also three initiatives, in various stages of development, that are high priorities for me, and all of them are focused squarely on student success.

ML: Can you tell us a little about the three initiatives?

DC: The first is the Opportunities Through Law (OTL) program. It connects our faculty, students, and alumni with high school and undergraduate college students statewide, through a range of events and activities. The goal is to educate young people about the role and impact of law, while introducing them to the range of careers available to J.D.s. The signature program will be a summer immersion experience at Maine Law for college juniors and seniors. It will be called the DiscoverLaw.org Pre Law Undergraduate Scholars (PLUS) program, and we were thrilled to learn in January that we received a $300,000 grant from the Law School Admission Council to help fund the program over the next three summers. By encouraging young people, particularly those of diverse backgrounds, to explore careers in law, we open pathways to achievement they might have never considered or thought possible.

The next is what I call e2e, the Enrollment to Employment initiative, and the goal is to make sure our students receive the real-world experience they need to succeed in the field of their choice. Upon graduation, students will have opportunities to rotate through short-term work assignments at law firms, corporations, public agencies, and non-profit organizations, so they can truly be career ready. The rotation concept is especially helpful to new graduates who are interested in more than one career path, and would like to test the waters before seeking a long-term position. I’m recruiting employer-partners to pilot this program, and we want many of the fellowship opportunities to be in rural communities, in order to benefit our graduates as well as communities throughout Maine.

The third initiative is called LEAP, for Lawyers and Entrepreneurs: A Partnership. This initiative addresses the shift in the way law school graduates are using their degrees. More than ever before, students and graduates are pursuing and creating opportunities outside the traditional legal profession. We are embracing this shift, and we want our students to learn about the management and operation of businesses, non-profit organizations, and other entities. One major component of the LEAP initiative will be an incubator capstone project. This will allow third-year students to take part in the creation of a business from the ground up by contributing value-added legal, decision-making, and risk management services. Another option would be for students to collaborate on the creation of a “micro law firm,” where the focus is on transactional practice and business development. The LEAP initiative fits well with the Professional and Graduate Center Initiative that is in development within the University of Maine System.

ML: What does the job market look like for today’s law school grads?

DC: The job market seems to be ticking upward. It’s a slight upward trend. The number of employers searching for law graduates has increased, but much of that could be a function of having fewer law students in the pipeline. In Portland and the rest of Maine, we are relatively flat for those traditional legal jobs. However, in Maine, law students and recent graduates are quite entrepreneurial in creating their own opportunities, either in the traditional practice of law, or in other law-preferred, or law desirable positions, such as in corporations or small businesses. Specifically, the law desired opportunities include risk managers, compliance officers, government contractors, specialists in health organizations, non-profits or NGOs. That is actually a more healthy market. The difference at Maine Law is that, through the LEAP incubator initiative, we are going to be in it with our students. We are going to assist them with thinking and acting entrepreneurially to create real career pathways prior to and after graduation.

ML: U.S. News and World Report rankings still play a significant role as applicants consider their options for law schools. How important are rankings, and what would you tell prospective Maine Law students about the factors they should consider?

DC: When I was looking at law schools, I didn’t even know about U.S News and World Report. I chose my law school based upon what I wanted to get out of my legal education, and that’s what I would urge all students to do. If you look at U.S. News and World Report, look at it as a starting point to acquire information. However, it is not an ending point. Now it’s every prospective law students’ responsibility to put that data in context. As a prospective law student, you should think about whether the law school you are considering provides a community of which you would be proud to be a part. You should also think about whether the program of legal education fits what you want to accomplish.

ML: What are you looking for in Maine Law applicants?

DC: Every law professor looks for something different, and I’m sure every dean looks for something different, but I want students who love the law. I want students who appreciate that the law, and adherence to the rule of law, can solve so many problems: societal, business, and institutional. I want students who see themselves as lawyer-leaders. And that doesn’t necessarily mean a vocal student, or a competitive student. A lawyer-leader means someone who will get involved, invest in a community, and do the hard work needed to improve society for all of its members.

ML: If you have time to step back into the classroom while at Maine Law, what would you like to teach?

DC: I certainly will step back into the classroom at some point during my time as dean. When the time is right, I will work with our faculty’s curriculum committee to determine the most pressing un-
met curricular needs and decide whether my background and areas of expertise are responsive to those needs. I have had the opportunity to teach courses ranging from legal research and writing to Indigenous Peoples Rights & Intellectual Property. Notwithstanding the needs of Maine Law, I would jump at the chance to teach first-year Contracts as well as a course I developed over a decade ago, but update annually, called Internet Law & Policy.

ML: You are the first black woman, and first person of color, to lead Maine Law. Does this hold special significance for you?
DC: I’m pleased, I’m heartened, and I’m impressed that I was selected on the merits as the best person for the job. In addition, during the selection process, no one ignored the fact that I’m a black woman. No one was afraid to talk about it, and that impressed me. I feel proud to be chosen, to be recognized, and to be identified as a black woman. For other people of color in Maine to see a black woman in a leadership position, in a position of influence, that is empowering. I feel that people here have embraced me.

I also have the benefit of my military experience, in which I have met and worked closely with people representing diverse backgrounds. When a new team comes together, there is always a great deal of learning to be done. You have to learn how to understand one another, whether it is language, political ideology, race or ethnicity, or sexual orientation. You learn how to power through difference, not to ignore it, to arrive at a place where trust and teamwork rule the day. That is how effective teams are built.

ML: You often speak about your mother as your greatest influence. She earned an accounting degree, and then a law degree, all while working multiple jobs and raising her own children and younger siblings in Philadelphia. What were her goals for you?
DC: My mother’s goals for me were neither lofty nor extreme. She wanted her children to be good people, good citizens, and hard workers. It’s funny. The one mantra my mother did have – and I don’t mind sharing this with you – she would tell me, “Whatever you do, don’t get pregnant, but if you do, you must be able to take care of you and yours.” My mother, like so many other strong, black women, refuted commonly held stereotypes ascribed to black women. My mother wanted me to be in a position to take care of myself, without having to rely on others or the state. She didn’t want me to have to struggle the way that she had to empower an individual to command self-determination of knowledge, and to become an elected Municipal Court Judge in Philadelphia while taking care of herself and her own. As dean, I just need to follow in my mother’s footsteps to take care of Maine Law as my own.

My mother always talked about how vital it was to have an education, so I said OK I have to go to college. I didn’t really know what college was or what it meant. I just knew it was something my mother insisted I do. I knew my mother believed in education. And much later I realized why my mother believed in education. She believed in the power of education to level the playing field, to empower an individual to command her own destiny through the attainment of knowledge, and to become self-determined and self-actualized. Of the many gifts my mother bestowed on me, I cherish her resolve to motivate me to take knowledge and to use it for the amelioration of society. ML

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*Serving her country*

**Maine Law’s new dean has 25 years experience in the U.S. Army, Army Reserves, and now the Maine Army National Guard**

On a parallel track with her standout career in legal education, Maine Law’s new Dean Danielle Conway also developed a successful career in the military. Conway has 25 years of active and reserve duty service with the U.S. Army, and currently serves as a Lieutenant Colonel (LTC). On Aug. 18, 2015, Maine Gov. Paul LePage swore in LTC Conway to the Maine Army National Guard, completing a transfer from her previous assignment in Hawai‘i. She is slated to serve as the contract and fiscal law expert for the Maine National Guard.

“The decision to serve in the Army and to continue my service in the Reserves were among the best decisions I have ever made in my professional life,” Conway said. “In my experience as a reservist, I’ve had a chance to see how supportive people can be to one another in furtherance of a larger mission. The kind and quality of work I’ve witnessed is extraordinary.”

Conway received an ROTC scholarship that funded her undergraduate studies at New York University Stern School of Business, and an educational delay that allowed her to attend Howard University School of Law before commencing active duty service. She completed her active duty obligation by serving in the Headquarters, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chief Counsel’s Honors Program, in which she practiced public procurement law as a Judge Advocate, deciding disputes that contractors brought against the agency. The COE underwrote Conway’s Master of Laws degree, which she earned from the George Washington University Law School. As a reservist, Conway later taught at the Judge Advocate General’s Legal Center & School in Charlottesville, Virginia.

“Over and over again, what I experienced from the military was constant investment and reinvestment in me as a person, as an officer, and as a valued resource,” Conway said.

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