

A photograph of Adjunct Professor Gerald Petruccelli, an older man with white hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and purple tie. He is standing in a classroom with rows of wooden desks and black chairs. The background is slightly blurred.

The value of experience

Adjunct Professor Gerald Petruccelli in the 1L Classroom.

Adjunct professors share real-world lessons

“The adjunct faculty can draw lessons based on the cases they are currently working on in their own practice. This immediacy makes things exciting and relevant for our students.”

Dmitry Bam, Interim Dean

By Liz Woodbury

Among the wealth of resources available to Maine Law students, one of the most valuable is access to adjunct instructors who are passionate about teaching and dedicated to the school’s mission. Talking with just a few of these seasoned professionals makes it clear how much real-world expertise they offer to their students.

“Because nearly all of our adjuncts are practicing lawyers or sitting judges, they can really focus on the practical aspects of law,” says Maine Law Interim Dean Dmitry Bam.

When it comes to experience and a dedication to teaching, it would be difficult to match Adjunct Professor Gerald Petruccelli, who joined Maine Law as a professor in 1968. What began as a one-year substitute position evolved into a career-long relationship with Maine Law. After a recent four-year hiatus from teaching, Petruccelli returned in 2019 to divide his time between his busy practice and his Civil Procedure class.

“From the time I was a kid, I never thought about any career but teacher or lawyer,” Petruccelli says. After graduating from Boston College Law School, he fell naturally into the teaching side of this equation, first at the University of Toledo and then at Maine Law, a position that moved the New England native back to “what felt more like home.” He began practicing law in 1973 but continued teaching part-time, initially as a lecturer, and later as an adjunct professor.

IN THE CLASSROOM

Maine Law is fortunate to have deeply experienced and dedicated adjunct faculty. Here are a few who are making valuable contributions to the education of our students.

Hon. Peter G. Cary was sworn in as the District of Maine's fifth United States Bankruptcy Judge in January of 2014 and presently serves as the Chief Judge of the Court. He is also a panel member of the United States Bankruptcy Appellate Panel for the First Circuit, treasurer of the Maine State-Federal Judicial Council, an advisory director of the Nathan & Henry B. Cleaves Law Library, and a member of the First Circuit Workplace Conduct Committee. He received his undergraduate degree from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and his law degree from Boston College Law School. He is certified in both consumer and business bankruptcy law by the American Board of Certification.

Jamesa Drake earned a B.S. in Industrial and Labor Relations from Cornell University and a J.D. from George Washington University Law School. She has argued before the U.S. Supreme Court; litigated hundreds of appeals including cases before the First and Second Circuit Court of Appeals and the state supreme courts of Maine, Kentucky, and Oregon; and represented seven people on death row. Drake lectures and writes about criminal appellate matters and is the president of the Maine Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers.

Diane Kenty is a full-time court administrator who manages statewide rosters of mediators for the Maine courts. Previously, she practiced law in Boston and trained as a mediator at the Harvard Program of Instruction for Lawyers. After mediating small claims cases, she began to mediate in the Multi-Door Courthouse program in the Middlesex County Superior Court, the U.S. District Court, and the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. She also served as an arbitrator on the Commercial Arbitration Panel of the American Arbitration Association. Kenty

has served on the boards of national and state ADR organizations.

Virginia (Ginny) Lee, who graduated from Maine Law in 2005, followed her career to the West Coast, where she worked as director of global privacy at Starbucks, senior attorney for privacy/security at Intel Corporation, director of platform and product privacy at Yahoo!, and head of global data privacy and director, senior corporate counsel at ServiceNow. She returned to Maine in 2018 to open her own practice. Lee is admitted to practice in Maine, Washington, and Oregon and is a registered patent attorney.

Gerald Petruccelli has taught at Maine Law for more than 40 years, as a professor of law from 1968 to 1975, a lecturer from 1975 to 1979, and since 1979 as an adjunct professor. His course offerings have included Civil Procedure, Evidence, Contracts, Commercial Law, Bankruptcy, Torts, Constitutional Law, Copyrights, and The Legal Process. In 1971 he was a special assistant attorney general in Maine, and from 1973 to 1980 he practiced law at Preti Flaherty. Since 1980, Petruccelli has worked for Petruccelli, Martin, and Haddow, LLP in Portland.

Kaighn Smith '86, leads Drummond Woodsum's nationwide Tribal Nations Practice Group, working as a civil litigator in the field of federal Indian law and in civil rights, labor and employment, and contractual disputes. He represents Indian nations in tribal, state, and federal courts, including the U.S. Supreme Court. After graduating from Maine Law, he clerked for Judge Frank M. Coffin at the U.S. Court of Appeals and for Justice Louis Scolnik at the Maine Supreme Judicial Court. Smith has won cases in areas ranging from sovereignty disputes, gaming matters, and labor relations to fishing and water rights.

Looking back, Petruccelli believes his work as a practicing attorney clearly benefited his teaching. "I taught evidence courses both before and after I had practiced as a lawyer, and I have no doubt I did better after I had actually tried a case," he says. He also acknowledges that balancing the two can be challenging. "It's demanding," says Petruccelli. "What I decided at an early point was that I needed to treat every class like it was a difficult deposition or important motion hearing. They really do require a comparable kind of preparation."

The varied experience of Maine Law's adjunct professors is reflected in the breadth of their specialties, which range from bankruptcy law and privacy to federal Indian law. Bam says that while every professor at Maine Law has practiced prior to teaching, "The adjunct faculty can draw lessons based on the cases

they are currently working on in their own practice. This immediacy makes things exciting and relevant for our students."

Adjunct Professor Ginny Lee '05 has a background in business and engineering, along with more than two decades in the tech industry. Her work in information privacy law has included stints at Starbucks, Intel, and Yahoo!, and it's this experience as in-house counsel that she considers most useful to her students. "The fact that I can give them practical advice from that perspective, rather than as someone who's worked at big law firms, is hugely beneficial to them," Lee says.

Bam notes that many adjuncts act as mentors, forming close bonds that persist after graduation. In fact, since Lee began teaching in 2018, she has fielded many phone calls from students seeking advice as they launch their careers. "I always encourage

them to contact me for advice afterwards, and they take me up on it,” she laughs.

Since 2013, appellate attorney Jamesa Drake has balanced her own busy, highly specialized practice with adjunct teaching at Maine Law, most recently Criminal Procedure — Investigations. She says the best part of teaching is “watching former students transition to active practice,” particularly the fact that “many keep in touch and regularly reach out to knock around ideas.”

The main benefit of learning from an adjunct, in Drake’s opinion, is that “practicing lawyers know where doctrine ends and practicality begins.” In her experience, “criminal cases are affected by a client’s resources, political leanings of decision-makers, and myriad other factors.” She tells her students that managing these aspects of a case is at least as important as understanding and applying the law. “Adjuncts are uniquely situated to convey these realities.”

Students in Adjunct Professor Kaighn Smith’s classes have the rare opportunity to delve into the realities of an unusually complex legal area. “Federal Indian law is a process of this country coming to grips with its colonial history, which is fundamentally unjust,” says Smith ’86, who stresses his perspective as an advocate, both in practicing and teaching this area of law. “There are so many things about this field that turn notions of the law on its head. It tests a lot of the operating assumptions that students come into the field with and challenges them in unique ways.”

Current action in the Maine Legislature to enhance tribal sovereignty makes this a particularly exciting time for Smith, who typically spends the first two-thirds of the semester on federal law before focusing on Maine. “This is about history that is so often ignored,” he says, as well as challenging the implicit bias that students frequently bring into the classroom. At the same time, it’s important to Smith that his students understand “there is absolutely no such thing as a dumb question.”

Although he’s only been an adjunct professor for two years, Peter Cary, Chief Judge of the District of Maine’s United States Bankruptcy Court, has a longstanding relationship with the Law School. He’s been a visiting speaker in many classes over the years and has hosted several externships. “I love teaching a small group of dedicated students on a topic that is near and dear to me,” says Cary. “The thrill of engaging with smart people in the application of an incredibly complex piece of legislation — the United States Bankruptcy Code — to real world situations is so rewarding.”

Cary describes a “good day in teaching” as one in which he and his co-instructor, Barry Schklair, are able to bring their combined decades of experience in bankruptcy practice into conversation with the more scholarly aspects of the law. He especially enjoys conveying the fact that a bankruptcy lawyer’s job is essentially “designing a path to an optimistic future — an amazingly hopeful thing.”

Cary considers this direct, day-to-day experience to be a “dramatic advantage” for adjunct professors. He also believes that teaching has helped his work life: “I’m a better judge by having taught — I can really drill down into the statutory structure, because I had to in class.” Adjunct Professor Diane Kenty echoes this: “Teaching the Mediation Practicum has helped me



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be a better mediator. It prompts me to articulate concepts that I might not otherwise crystallize so clearly, and, of course, I feel compelled to practice what I preach!”

Kenty is a full-time court administrator who manages state-wide rosters of mediators for the Maine courts. “In my full-time job, I have the opportunity to be in mediation a lot, and I try to bring that experience into the classroom though real-life examples to illustrate important learning points,” she says. She describes Maine Law students as uniquely “smart, funny, and caring,” adding that the collaboration mediation requires is a natural fit for many of them. “When I accompany students to court as they mediate small claims cases, I’m always impressed at how they rise to the challenge. I see their skills as mediators strengthen and progress in just the short span of a semester.”

There’s no shortage of admiration for Maine Law students among these instructors, and both Smith and Lee mention their pleasure at having the opportunity to “give back” to their *alma mater*. Smith adds, “I love the Law School — its size, intimacy, and community feel. The Maine Bar is unique, and I think it has a very high caliber of lawyers thanks to the high standards of Maine Law.”

As for Petrucci, he’s fulfilled his childhood dreams in full. “I’ve found the student experience to be terrific, and I have so many interesting and talented colleagues. Mainly, I feel so lucky to get the opportunity to do both things I wanted to do from the start.” [ML](#)