



Stanford Law School, Palm Drive

**T**he Bay Area is home to several world-class law schools that produce terrific talent valuable to BASF and the legal community. In this issue of *San Francisco Attorney*, we conclude our series of profiles of the deans of some of these law schools in which we've featured the great work they're doing to train new attorneys.

## STANFORD LAW SCHOOL— DEAN LARRY KRAMER

Matthew Hirsch

**OVER THE YEARS, STANFORD LAW SCHOOL** has made itself a pipeline for Silicon Valley, sending newly trained lawyers on the way to key positions at top tech companies. The list includes general counsel at Google, Apple, Oracle, Cisco, and eBay. If Microsoft acquires Yahoo and starts calling itself a Silicon Valley firm, you might as well add another business to the list.

But Stanford Law School Dean Larry Kramer isn't content supplying great problem spotters to the business world. He is positioning the law school so it can train innovators

in all segments of society, not only in law. Through four years of Kramer's leadership, Stanford has indeed become a virtual laboratory for all sorts of innovation. One group of students formed an organization that's putting pressure on big law firms to boost diversity numbers among their recruits and partnership ranks. Another student group built an Internet venture that expects to do about \$6 million in business this year.

And yet, Kramer still is not content. The fifty-year-old Chicago native came to Stanford with a little innovation



*Stanford Law School, Crown Quadrangle*

of his own, a plan to overhaul the very model of legal education. Kramer's plan calls for tearing down traditional barriers between the law school and other graduate programs at the university. Stanford isn't the only law school testing out curriculum changes, but other schools seem intent on revising mainly the first year of study. Kramer is betting that an overhaul of the second- and third-year programs will be more effective. If he's right, the valley might be witnessing the arrival of its newest innovation. Call it Law School 2.0.

**WHEN LARRY KRAMER** was named as the twelfth dean of Stanford Law School in May 2004, his appointment didn't immediately signal big changes on the horizon. A constitutional scholar like his predecessor, Kathleen Sullivan, Kramer could hardly improve on the situation he inherited. Stanford was consistently ranked among the nation's top three law schools, with Yale and Harvard, throughout Sul-

livan's tenure. And the school seemed to have more than enough funding to flourish, thanks in part to a \$43.5 million donation from Mr. and Mrs. Charles Munger, which Sullivan helped secure before stepping down as dean. At the time, the Munger donation was considered the largest individual gift given outright to a law school nationwide.

Still, Kramer wasted no time establishing his own legacy at Stanford. In just his second year as dean, Kramer helped land a \$20 million donation from incoming San Francisco Giants Managing General Partner William Neukom, a

Stanford law graduate and former general counsel at Microsoft. The grant provided funding for a new academic building at the law school, but perhaps more significantly, it helped advance Kramer's vision of a new model of legal education. Housing clinics, classrooms, and faculty offices, the building is expected to serve as a physical meeting space so law students and faculty can collaborate with the rest of the university.



*Dean Larry Kramer*

All photos by Michael Johnson except as noted.

“Law schools have traditionally taught one thing: how to think like a lawyer,” Kramer says, explaining why he aims to shake up a system that’s served Stanford so well for so long. Most students learn to think like lawyers in the first year of school, meaning “it’s the second and third year where we are pretty much failing our students.” What’s missing from legal education? Clinical experience and the ability to work in teams, for starters. Just look at other professional degree programs as a comparison, and law school doesn’t exactly measure up: “You can’t become a rabbi or a priest without having worked under supervision,” Kramer says.

Kramer’s goal, in part, is to switch lawyers from being “problem spotters” to “problem solvers.” To do that, he believes you have to tweak some basic assumptions about law school. In fact, you have to reorganize law school around the larger university. Kramer says the general assumption in higher education has always been that universities are organized as a set of adjacent boxes: law school here, business school there, and medical school way over there. “The assumption is everything that’s essential has to be done inside the box. The problem is you can’t do anything that way. Even within the largest law schools, you can only do things marginally because . . . law only touches on a margin of society. What a proper legal education includes is pieces of every other school,” he says.

In some ways, Kramer has only begun laying the groundwork for a more collaborative experience that draws on the strengths of other graduate programs. Starting in 2006, the law school began moving students from a semester academic calendar to a quarterly calendar. The new system aligns the law school with the rest of the university,



*Stanford Law School Robert Crown Law Library*

making it easier for law students to pursue specialized expertise in Stanford’s newly minted joint degree programs. The transition won’t be complete until next year, but already the law school is bearing the fruits of its own innovation.

**NOT LONG AFTER LARRY KRAMER**

went to work revising the model for legal education, a group of Stanford law students started

a national campaign to improve the diversity profile at big firms and encourage firms to generally put people before profits. The group, which calls itself Building a Better Legal Profession, has generated a tremendous amount of attention in the legal community and the national media. Is it just happenstance that this reform movement got underway at Stanford? Not according to Andrew Bruck, who served as copresident of the group last year as he completed his law degree at Stanford.

Building a Better Legal Profession released a diversity report card late last year that ranked law firms operating in Northern California and other top legal markets around the country. The report reflected poorly on some firms that recruit at Stanford and might have put the law school in a difficult position when dealing with those firms. (See [www.betterlegalprofession.org](http://www.betterlegalprofession.org) to view last year’s results.)

Bruck says group leaders met with Kramer shortly before releasing the diversity data to the national media, and they were “pretty scared” about how he might react. “Certainly his reaction [was] really important to what we were doing,” Bruck says. “We didn’t want a reporter to go to Dean Kramer for a quote and have him criticize the work we were doing.” Instead of criticism, Bruck says the group got nothing but support from Kramer. When the students

wanted to incorporate as a nonprofit, for example, Kramer put them in touch with practicing attorneys who could offer advice.

Another entrepreneurial Stanford law student, Ross Chanin, says Kramer has been “integral in a number of stages of development” for his company, Reputation Defender. Launched two years ago, the company offers to manage its clients’ reputations over the Internet, by monitoring online content and removing negative or personally identifiable information. The company recently relocated to Redwood City to accommodate growth and expects to do about \$6 million in business this year, says Chanin, who begins his third year at Stanford this fall. Chanin says Kramer put him in contact with potential investors and advisors who work with online content management. Even seemingly small bits of help made a big impression, like a prompt reply to an email sent late one Friday night: “You can’t fake a 12:30 [email] on a Friday night to one of your students. That’s just real.”

Building a Better Legal Profession and Reputation Defender provide a glimpse at Stanford’s future, in which the law school harnesses its students’ creativity and gives them valuable real-world experience. “I think it’s great that my students took the initiative to do something they were interested in,” Kramer says. And he insists that he was never concerned about big firms or key donors feeling alienated because of the diversity rankings published by Building a Better Legal Profession. The law school’s biggest supporters are “part of the family. They understand there are disagreements and issues,” he says. “The only people who

send you letters saying ‘I will not support you any more’ are the people who’ve never supported you anyway.”

**LARRY KRAMER** discovered a passion for work in higher education as an undergraduate student at Brown University. But he wasn’t always so committed to law, not until partway through his training at University of Chicago Law School. There, Dean Edward Levi, a former U.S. attorney general, cotaught a course that showed Kramer how the law touches on so many aspects of society, more than he could appreciate beforehand. Kramer says that’s when he found a passion for the law to match his calling in higher education: “It was a subject worth spending one’s life on.”



*Dean Larry Kramer is also the Richard E. Lang Professor of Law.*

Kramer joined the Chicago Law School faculty in 1986, following clerkships in the Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals and in the U.S. Supreme Court, for Justice William Brennan. He also held posts at the University of Michigan and New York University law schools on his way to Stanford. Even now, Kramer hasn’t set aside his interests in teaching. He has taught courses on constitutional law and conflicts at Stanford, and when the next quarter starts, he will teach civil procedure for the first time in years. “It takes a certain kind of concentration to be a scholar. You have this kind of single-minded focus,” Kramer says. “I worry, or, I wonder if I’ll be able to recapture that mental discipline that makes scholarship work.”

Not that Kramer feels the pull to vacate the dean’s office anytime soon. The new model of legal education is still in the early stages of development. And, Kramer says, “I’m committed to finishing what I’ve started.”