

MAGAZINE

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MARYLAND CAREY LAW



JUGGLING ACT

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JUGGLING ACT

By Chris Quirk

Maryland Carey Law enables busy professionals to earn a JD part-time

WHILE STUDYING FOR HIS MBA, Bruce Villard '12 became captivated by the intricacies of law. “The thought processes behind the law, the different ways of analyzing legal problems, cases, statutes, and secondary sources—it was a rich intellectual exercise,” he says. “Taking all that input from different places and coming up with a recommendation was attractive to me.” Villard resolved to go to law school, the only problem was, at the time he had a thriving career and a satisfying full-time job at a major information technology company.

As an undergraduate political science major at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County (UMBC), Ahmed Eissa '22 recognized the uncharted terrain at the nexus of politics and cybersecurity. “The professors were starting to highlight the importance of cyberspace as a kind of fifth domain of conflict or diplomacy,” he says. After graduating, Eissa went into the private sector. Soon his thoughts turned to law school, but he did not want to leave his post at a cybersecurity firm. “I’ve been working with a general counsel at my job who is a titan in the field.”

Katrin Hussmann Schroll '09, assistant dean for admissions, hears stories like this on a regular basis, and cites them as the reason that the Evening Division of the University of Maryland Francis King Carey School of Law was created. “From its inception, it was intended for the working professional who couldn’t do the full-time program.” Schroll says the Evening Division was crafted to fill a need for a top-quality law curriculum for people with active careers. “We have all these great people and great talent in Maryland. Some of them may be part of the legislature or in business, so they can’t really unplug from their current career for three years to earn a JD. They want to continue to grow, so we created a law program that supports them.”

A four-year JD degree, the Evening Division is customized for ambitious, accomplished part-time students. The shape of the curriculum and the kind of support students have available on campus recognize the particular needs and challenges of part-time students in a demanding law program. “We spread out what would normally be the first year of courses in the full-time day program through the first four semesters,” says Crystal Edwards, assistant dean for academic affairs. “We also know that some of our evening students may have particular areas of interest. That’s why we offer some electives as early as the second year, so the students have the opportunity to engage with areas that are aligned with why they came to law school in the first place. Or they have the chance to explore something new.”

The motivations for earning a law degree in the program can be as varied as the applicants. The students can be at almost any point in their careers, in virtually any field.

Rachel Iacangelo '21, a current Evening Division student and vice president of the third-year evening class, is a law clerk with the Environmental Protection Agency. She began her professional career as a field geologist six years ago. “I worked on an oil rig right out of undergrad. After that, I flipped to the other side of the environmental coin and worked as an environmental specialist for a nonprofit, where I gained knowledge about the Clean Water Act.” Iacangelo wanted to work with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (better known as Superfund), but on the legal end rather than in the field. She researched law school options for a year. “It was important that a law school have a good environmental program, and be close to home, so the Evening Division was an obvious choice,” she says.

The location of Maryland Carey Law in the Baltimore-Washington corridor plays no small part in the character of the school, according

to Schroll. “I think because of where we are, the school attracts a diverse group of people from across the region,” she says. “It’s a big commitment. Students come here after working all day, and they’re making big sacrifices, so it has to be a strong program for people to be willing to do that.”

In need of a part-time law school, Villard applied to the Evening Division. “I was able to attend sample classes at two of the schools where I was admitted, and the class here was much more robust,” recalls Villard. “It wasn’t just a lecture. There was an exchange between the professor and a student who was very experienced, and the professor incorporated the student’s ideas into a discussion that lasted the rest of the class. That stood out.”

Now a supply chain specialist with a leading aerospace company, Villard found that his experience in the sample class wasn’t a one-off once he began the program. “We had two police officers in one evening class, and they had a lot of observations when we talked about criminal law. We also had patent agents and students with a background in finance. So, absolutely, they brought a lot to the table.”

Iacangelo’s experience so far has been similar. “There are so many different backgrounds, and everyone is juggling different things in their life — it is really impressive,” she says.

The Maryland Carey Law Evening Division is ranked fourth in the Part-time Law Programs category of the *U.S. News and World Report 2020 rankings*, a rating Schroll attributes in large part to the quality of the school’s students. “Among our incoming class we have an engineer with 10 years of experience, a major business account executive, a university professor with a PhD, a human rights advocate, an intelligence analyst, an officer in the army reserves, and an executive for a global consultancy,” Schroll reports.

As Villard found, one of the ancillary benefits of the Evening Division is the knowledge that the students themselves share. “It creates a very unique situation,” says Schroll. “When you are working with students who have 5, 10 or sometimes 15 years of work under their belts, they enrich the conversation in the classroom. Students here also have the ability to network within the program.”

Eissa was drawn to the Evening Division in part because of the opportunities to focus on cybersecurity. Now in his second year, he too has been struck by the level of discourse among his classmates. “I’m in my career and everyone else is too. There are people in the military, in law enforcement, and we have a pharmacy student. There’s such a wide variety of people from different fields in the room that invariably, when we talk about subject matter A or subject matter B, nine times out of ten somebody has real-world experience with that. And it makes the conversation and the lessons so much more concrete,” he says.

One of the evening program’s most notable graduates is Chief Judge Mary Ellen Barbera ’84 of the Court of Appeals of Maryland. Barbera, who attended an earlier incarnation of the evening program, recounts working as a teacher full-time at Patapsco Elementary School in Baltimore. “I witnessed the struggles of the young children in my classroom and their families, the challenges many of them had living in an impoverished community. It inspired me to think how I might better influence positive social change, and I realized the law might be a viable way to serve the public. That’s what brought me to law school,” says Barbera.

The path was not an easy one. Barbera continued to teach full-time for the four years that she studied for her law degree at night, finding a way to manage the three heavy responsibilities of law school, teaching, and caring for her young daughter and son. “The only way forward for me in pursuit of a law degree was to go to school at night,” she recounts. “As I look back, I’m not precisely sure how I balanced all three. I certainly had support from my family. I was committed to being energized and engaged as a teacher in the classroom and as a mother to my children—and I was also committed to the study of law: preparing for class and being an active participant in the classroom.”

To help students surmount such challenges, the Evening Division has features that ensure part-time students get the advising and support they need, and make them feel a part of the academic community. “For example, you can find graduation requirements on the website,” Edwards says, “but instead of students arbitrarily trying to figure out what they’re going to take in any given semester, we have academic advisors talking with them from the beginning. We try to look at how this will really work for you as an evening student. What are we going to do in each semester? How are you going to satisfy certain requirements? When are you planning to take certain courses that you need or want?”

Evening Division students also have peer advisors, explains Edwards, and support each other in the program. “Talking to other students who are living this experience and have thrived helps students adapt, and helps make the program stronger.”

“I think the evening students are very close,” Eissa says. “People get dinner together, and after a final exam we might go out to eat and celebrate. There’s plenty of camaraderie.”

Villard recalls taking frequent advantage of the opportunities offered outside the classroom. He became managing editor of the *Journal of Race, Religion, Gender, and Class*, and was co-president of the Maryland Intellectual Property Student Association. In addition, Villard traveled to Orleans Parish in Louisiana with the Maryland Law Service Corps Organization, to volunteer with the public defender there. “It was a really good extracurricular experience, and I learned a lot about working with all kinds of different people,” Villard says.

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"I'm not going to pretend that it isn't difficult to navigate the demands of work, law school and other commitments all at the same time," Edwards says. "Because of that, we spend a lot of time structuring the curriculum in a thoughtful and deliberate way, to make sure that evening students have a chance to take advantage of so much that we offer."

"I love the class structure," says Iacangelo. "I always really disliked undergrad because I don't learn well by being talked at and hand-fed answers. Many of the law professors cold-call, which forces you to think on your feet and know the material really well. It's a good exercise in doing research and being competent when coming to a discussion."

After a hectic start, Eissa is getting his sea legs. "Anybody who has just finished their first year of law school will tell you it's trial by fire. It's a new professional world and a new concept of working and understanding things," he says. "At first, it's overwhelming, but, you know, I'm completely happy. I'm here and I love it."

"I continue to believe that the law provides a broad array of opportunities to serve the public," says Barbera. "I would suggest that those who are considering a career in law school know that, with hard work, diligence, and commitment, doors of opportunity will open." ■

