Spring 2013

GGU's New Dean, Rachel Van Cleave

Eric Christiansen
Golden Gate University School of Law, echristiansen@ggu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/deanvancleave

Part of the Legal Education Commons

Recommended Citation
GGU Magazine 7 (Sp. 2013).

GGU'S NEW DEAN, RACHEL VAN CLEAVE

by Professor Eric Christiansen, Faculty Chair, GGU School of Law

In her orientation address to first-year students, Rachel Van Cleave spoke about how the determination of Olympic athletes is rivaled by that of law students. She showed Nike's "find your greatness" campaign video from the 2012 Summer Olympics and encouraged our students to identify their specific passion for the law, assuring them that it would carry them through the hard work ahead. The university administration and law faculty saw a similar kind of greatness in Rachel when she was selected as the new dean of the Law School.

Indeed, colleagues in and beyond GGU have recognized Van Cleave's own Olympian qualities — discipline, focus and grace under pressure — as a scholar, professor and dean.

As a professor, Rachel has not only remained a highly productive scholar herself, but has also helped her students produce excellent work and get published in scholarly and professional journals. She has experimented with real-world curricula in her courses (including her innovative Hurricane Katrina and Disaster Law seminar). And, through presentations and publications aimed at transforming legal education, she has benefited other legal educators.

As academic dean, Rachel led a faculty committee that transformed GGU Law's first-year curriculum into a more practice-rich experience for students. The curricular changes were markedly successful in terms of student enthusiasm and academic outcomes. But such success is no accident. The

In December, President Dan Angel appointed Rachel Van Cleave to the position of dean of GGU's Law School. Her colleague Eric Christiansen gives a preview of the great things we can expect under Van Cleave's tenure.

photo by Charlotte Fiorito

Rachel Van Cleave

changes were collaboratively designed and implemented, combining current research on best practices in legal education, professors' passions and expertise, and students' interests. This kind of thoughtful, transformative leadership will serve Rachel — and GGU Law — well in the years ahead.

During her brief time as interim dean, Rachel has diligently worked to strategically leverage existing university and law programs. For our study-abroad program in Paris, we are working with Albany Law; together, we are increasing recruitment and sharing teaching resources so that our students may continue to study comparative law with American and French professors and students, and get real-life international work experience in Paris.

Meeting with veteran students and reaching out to regional law

school deans, Rachel has helped facilitate the creation of an intra-school veterans' organization that will collaborate to create awareness and support for veteran students and issues impacting them.

Our new dean's knowledge, strategic thinking, and talent for collaborating swiftly to adapt curricula and programs — all to benefit our students in a changing legal market — are remarkable. Although Rachel draws ideas from her work at other US law schools and a broad array of professional connections, she has a particular gift for adapting those insights to the unique mission and strengths of GGU Law. Because she has already done so much exceptional work leading a variety of successful law school innovations, we know we are in good hands as Rachel leads us into the next five years. ggu