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Alumni FORUM

In Memoriam: John A. Gorfinkel, 1905-1987

John A. Gorfinkel, dean of the Law School from 1960 to 1969, suffered a stroke in late July and passed away on Saturday, August 8, at the age of 82. Memorial services were held on Wednesday, August 12, at Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco. During his 35-year involvement with Golden Gate's School of Law, he had more influence on the career aspirations and career preparation of future lawyers than any other educator or academician. In that time he served as adjunct professor, full-time professor, associate dean and finally, dean of the School of Law. "A lawyer's lawyer," "the czar of legal education," "a fine scholar," and "a challenger" were the terms used to describe Dean Gorfinkel by colleagues and alumni.

"Moonlighting in the teaching of the law" was how former Dean Paul Jordan described his early affiliation with Gorfinkel. When Jordan and Gorfinkel first met in the early 1930s, both were in private practice full-time and part-time instructors at Golden Gate College at 220 Golden Gate Avenue. Jordan remembers Gorfinkel as a "tough but fair-minded administrator, respected and loved by his students, and willing to give all of them a chance to make it through law school. But if the student had not shown the aptitude nor the classroom performance required to make a good lawyer by the end of first year day or second year evening classes, then Gorfinkel was very firm in dropping the student from the program." In 1947 Jordan retained Gorfinkel as his associate dean; when



John A. Gorfinkel

Jordan retired in 1959, Gorfinkel was named to succeed him, becoming the first full-time dean in the history of GGU's School of Law.

His inspiration was nowhere more evident than in his Con Law classes, according to former SBA President John MacGregor, '64. In the early 1960s, "the Warren Court was just warming up, and remarkable things were happening in the California Supreme Court. Gorfinkel viewed the Constitution as a living organism, not just a piece of paper with a narrow, rote interpretation, and he pushed for the application of the Constitution in a contemporary setting." Classroom participation was inspired when Gorfinkel would take a controversial position on a Court decision and challenge students to critique his stand. Students looked forward to his Con Law classes and the free-form discussions which he inspired; often the debates were continued in

Gorfinkel's offices after class was over.

Besides Paul Jordan, noted MacGregor, Gorfinkel was the first person who took on the commitment to turn Golden Gate into an accredited law school. He worked tirelessly to build up the law library and pushed the students for more involvement with the Student Bar Association. In his work to obtain ABA accreditation, Gorfinkel saw student enthusiasm and recognition as an integral part of the School's development. He worked actively to increase the SBA budget for program development and for travel to national conventions. His efforts paid off when Larry Mayer, '66, was elected National SBA Vice President from the Ninth Circuit, outpolling candidates from Stanford, Boalt and Hastings.

As the Law School grew under Dean Gorfinkel's direction, and as he strove for ABA accreditation, the composition of the faculty slowly turned from that of 100 percent part-timers to a mix of full-time and part-time instructors. The first full-time faculty members were Jim Smith, Roger Bernhardt, Mike Golden and Larry Jones, the latter three hired by Gorfinkel. Larry Jones remembers the Dean for his "take-charge mentality. He had an outstanding view of the big picture" in working to obtain accreditation for GGU, Jones reflected. Jones remembers Dean Gorfinkel constantly grappling with the issues of how to attract high-caliber students in order to build up the School's reputation, and how to enhance the reputation in order

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to attract the students. He kept costs down very carefully, Jones commented, and it was "basically his guidance that made Golden Gate emerge as a law school."

Catherine Sherburne, '56, was one of Gorfinkel's Con Law students. After graduation she was invited back by the dean to teach law, and in 1957 became the first woman member of the faculty as well as the first GGU law graduate to teach at the school. She remembers Dean Gorfinkel as a brilliant individual who devoted himself to furthering high standards for legal education. In addition, "he had a definite concern for people. He was always there for students when they needed him." Her sentiments were echoed by Contra Costa County Superior Court Judge Norm Spellberg, '65, who emphasized that "I've attended a lot of universities in my time, and have never found a person more interested in assisting students than Dean Gorfinkel. He was the most caring person I've ever known in my life."

John Gorfinkel's dream of ABA accreditation for Golden Gate Law School was finally realized with the granting of provisional approval in 1956. Final approval came in 1972, followed shortly thereafter by AALS accreditation in 1980. The process that he had carefully initiated and persistently nurtured in the 1950s and 1960s by increasing the number of full-time faculty, increasing the resources of the law library, and insisting on strict academic standards, had been fulfilled.

Gorfinkel left Golden Gate in 1969 when he was asked by a number of colleagues at the State Bar to establish a program for the Committee of Bar Examiners to assist California law schools with the accreditation process. As a consultant to the State Bar, Gorfinkel was tireless in his travels around the state, and became the most respected professional with full knowledge of California legal education.

According to Jim Tippin, executive director of the Committee of Bar Examiners, during his 18 years as a State Bar consultant Gorfinkel also helped develop the Multistate Professional Responsibility Exam for use in California, and subsequently encouraged the National Committee of Bar

Examiners to adopt it for use in other states. Gorfinkel served as Chair of the Torts Committee of the Multistate Bar Exam, and at one time chaired the ABA Standards Committee, which oversees law school accreditation.

"John Gorfinkel put more energy into his work in legal education at the age of 80 than anyone I've met 30 years his junior," stated former Dean Judy McKelvey. During his 58 years in the legal profession, Gorfinkel rose to national prominence in the field of legal education. A graduate of the University of California at Berkeley School of Law, he was admitted to the California Bar on October 15, 1929, the day the stock market crashed. His goal of practicing law in the corporate securities market was crushed and he entered the practice of law in San Francisco. He will be missed by all who knew him.

Class of '86 Photo Directory Released

The long-awaited photo directory of the Class of '86 was released in September. Thanks are due to Bruce Roberts for his work in coordinating the publication. Class members who missed out on the opportunity to order the directory may obtain a copy now by sending a check for \$10 to: 1986 Law Directory, Alumni Office, Golden Gate University, 536 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94105. Checks should be made payable to "GGU Alumni Association."

Appellate Advocacy Finals

The Law Student Division of the American Bar Association held its national Appellate Advocacy finals at the University in August, in conjunction with the ABA's national convention. Regional competitions resulted in a final field of 17 teams composed of two law students each. Each team argued a case concerning the capacity of an individual to decide whether or not his or her life support

system should be turned off. The Appellate Tribunal which heard the arguments was composed of the Hon. Jean S. Cooper, U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development; the Hon. Jerome Farris, U.S. Court of Appeals, Seattle; the Hon. Richard Jones, Supreme Court of Alabama; and the Hons. Milton Mollen and William Thompson, both of the Appellate Division, Brooklyn, New York. The victorious student team was from Capitol University in Ohio.

In addition to providing the students with an opportunity to practice appellate advocacy, the competition also served as a forum for students to meet each other and compare legal education at their respective institutions. All of the participants were very enthusiastic about Golden Gate's facilities. Students commented that GGU staff members were very hospitable, and each participant was grateful for the opportunity to use the Law Library for case preparation. The judges were particularly impressed by the University's Board Room and the Law School's Moot Court facility. Assistant Law School Dean Robert Coleman, GGU's representative at the event, noted that the 74 participants will be a very valuable source of publicity for GGU's School of Law.

Telethon Alert

Law School alumni will be telephoned in mid-October and early November in the School's second annual Telethon. You will be asked to consider membership in Clubs that range from Lecturer's Club (\$25-\$99) to Distinguished Alumni Club (\$10,000 or more).

Last year's phoning to alumni raised nearly \$17,000 with gifts from more than 300 alumni. Most of the calls this year will be made, as they were last year, to business offices.

Last year approximately 900 alumni were contacted during the Phonathon. Because of improved records made possible by publication of the Alumni Directory, the School expects to reach nearly twice that number this year.