





📍 No Boundaries: Connecting Global Experience and Legal Expertise

By Julie Sheldon

It's not often a law professor feels like a first-year law student again, but Commonwealth Professor of Law and Government Jill Family felt that way when she was studying English immigration law in London.

Our faculty are well known for sharing their expertise on hot button legal issues ranging from immigration to national security. But learning about global legal systems gives our faculty a new perspective on American law.



“My international experiences have helped me with my teaching and my scholarship. When I was studying English immigration procedures in London, I felt like a 1L again, learning all sorts of new terminology and concepts,” said Professor Family. “That experience helped me remember how daunting law school seems, but also reminded me that meeting the challenge is possible with perseverance. In my scholarship, learning about alternative legal systems has helped me to take a step back and view our legal system in a new light.”

Professor Family specializes in immigration law and has presented her work in England, Germany, Spain, and Scotland. She has published articles in Spanish and British law journals and was a visiting scholar at Queen Mary School of Law in London.

In 2017, she traveled to Spain to lecture about immigration law and presented on the topic of U.S. immigration law in Madrid and San Sebastian.

In San Sebastian, Family was the only American to lecture at a summer course organized by the universities and the Basque government focusing on European human rights law.

By participating in conferences and specialized groups that analyze legal doctrine, the faculty learn about global legal processes and help other countries analyze and improve legal procedure.

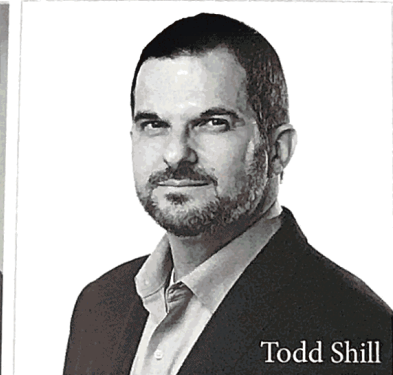
Recently, Professor Christopher Robinette was one of two Americans asked to participate in the European Group on Tort Law. The group meets in Austria and consists of experts on tort law from countries such as South Africa and Israel.

The group meets twice a year with a goal to contribute to the enhancement of tort law on a global level. Discussions about the issues around tort law liability and the future directions of tort law are the top priority.

Faculty aren't the only ones practicing law and learning about legal policies in other countries. Many alumni have chosen to practice in another country or address international legal issues right in their offices.



Tim Lavin



Todd Shill

“All the world is my school and
all humanity is my teacher.”

—George Whitman



Tim Lavin '03 was a practitioner and litigator in New York City when he unexpectedly had the opportunity to work for a law firm in Australia.

Lavin said the preparation in law school and experience from working at firms both before and after he graduated prepared him well for his time in Australia.

“It was very interesting to see how another country's judicial process works. I had the unique opportunity to interact with barristers and solicitors in Australia and collaborate together,” Lavin said. “It was enlightening to gain insight from practitioners in a country other than my own. Just getting to hear and talk about different perspectives on the law was probably the greatest experience that I've taken away from it all.”

Not all of the alumni that practice international law do so outside of the country.

Todd Shill '93, principal at Pillar+Aught in Harrisburg, developed an expertise in sports and entertainment law that has enabled him to learn about the law and culture in the countries where he has clients.

While he has traveled to other countries to practice, most of the legal prep for his television and film production clients can be done at his Harrisburg law office. Shill works extensively with clients who need legal assistance with intellectual property and privacy issues, as well as various issues surrounding the financing of television and film projects.

“My intellectual property courses provided an excellent foundation, but in truth it was the professors that encouraged me,” Shill said. “Not once did one of my professors say ‘Todd, you can't practice sports and entertainment law sitting in Pennsylvania.’ To the contrary, they gave me constant encouragement and made me feel that anything was possible.”

He added that having the perspective of how other countries operate legally is paramount for lawyers to understand the law better in all countries and provide them with arguments—interpretive or otherwise—to help build cases and advocate for clients.

Faculty not only encourage learning international legal policies at the law school in Harrisburg, but also teach law students and colleagues in other countries.

Professor Michael Dimino, a Constitutional law expert, taught two courses about U.S. legal processes while in Italy as a Fulbright Scholar during the Spring 2018 semester.

“Global learning is particularly important to combat U.S. parochialism—an assumption that whatever the United States does must be the best just because the United States does it. Therefore, students and lawyers who are involved in policymaking should be attuned to international issues and different societies' ways of doing things,” Dimino said. “And, obviously transactional lawyers must deal with foreign law all of the time because so many companies do business with foreign concerns.”

The courses he is teaching focus on political rights, electoral systems, national security law, and U.S. foreign policy. Both courses deal with areas where the United States has been influential, but other countries are skeptical of U.S. policy.

Dean Christian Johnson, who lectures frequently on OTC derivative reforms, capital markets, and the financial crisis, sees gaining a global perspective about legal issues as critical for law students.



Professor Michael Dimino with students

“Students need to understand and learn how the actions and economies of foreign countries can affect their work in the United States,” he said. “They will be surprised how global matters can influence their practice no matter where they practice law.”

Johnson most recently traveled to Saudi Arabia to lecture and meet with legal scholars and law students. He has visited more than 20 countries to learn about laws and legal doctrine across the world.

“Foreign lawyers and bankers have an extraordinary interest and curiosity in U.S. legal concepts, practices, and documentation,” he said. “Companies outside of the United States dealing with U.S. companies frequently are required to use U.S. documents governed by New York law.”

He added that despite the different locations across the globe, he always found it to be true that most lawyers are interested in developing fair practices that provide efficient and thoughtful solutions to legal problems.

“Global learning is an exceptional practice, and we can learn so much from colleagues across the world,” said Johnson. “The opportunity to learn about the law in other countries has expanded my knowledge of legal practices in many areas, but I have also made valuable friendships with colleagues all over the world.” ♥