Douglas G. Baird

Tenth Dean of the Law School

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On March 31, Douglas G. Baird, Harry A. Bigelow Professor of Law and director of the Law and Economics Program, accepted University President Hugo F. Sonnenschein’s appointment as tenth dean of the Law School effective July 1, 1994. “I am delighted that Douglas Baird has accepted appointment as dean,” said President Sonnenschein. “His intelligence, good judgment, collegiality, and commitment to excellence superbly equip him to guide the Law School. He is an outstanding scholar, a wonderful teacher, and one of our most devoted University citizens.”

Baird first saw Chicago when he was five years old. It was 1958 and the young Philadelphian joined his parents on a trip to Chicago, where they were both attending a medical convention. He fondly remembers that trip, and his childhood thrill at being in a new city, gazing about the plush lobby of the Blackstone Hotel where they stayed, and the trip’s highlight—seeing Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs at the State-Lake Theater. On his next visit to Chicago, some years later, Baird was appointed to the Law School faculty.

During his fourteen years at the Law School Baird has taught Civil Procedure, Commercial Paper, Secured Transactions, Contracts, Bankruptcy, and Corporate Reorganizations. As a young teacher Baird recalls that senior faculty were very supportive of him. He cites Walter Blum as an invaluable mentor. Baird audited Blum’s Corporate Reorganization class. Blum reciprocated by sitting in on Baird’s classes and evaluating his teaching. This spring, in Walter Blum’s absence, Baird is teaching corporate reorganization. “After fourteen years, this is the second time I will be ‘in’ that class. It’s really quite wonderful to go full-circle.”

Baird, one of the nation’s leading experts on bankruptcy and corporate reorganization, served as associate dean

After majoring in English literature and graduating *summa cum laude* from Yale College in 1975, Baird entered Stanford Law School. His interests eventually turned to secured transactions and bankruptcy.

"I was interested in private law in areas such as copyright and intellectual property. I saw secured transaction law being conceptually like that, because you are dealing with 'Who Owns What?' which, after 'Is There A God?' is one of the big questions you can ask. If you are interested in secured transactions, you are naturally lead to worrying about bankruptcy."


While clerking at the Ninth Circuit, Baird was recruited for the Law School faculty. Before leaving for his interview at Chicago Baird recalls receiving this shrewd advice: "If you really don't know the answer to a question," one of his teachers said, "answer in a way that gets Epstein and Posner into an argument."

Baird describes his professional identity as "very much that of a lawyer who trains lawyers. Teaching law and practicing law are great ways to spend your life. The great charm of practice is that you are working with real problems and events turn on whether you make a right or wrong decision. On the other side, as a teacher you form the big picture to understand how principles connect with each other."

Baird is a longtime resident of Hyde Park. He serves as a member of the Board of the Renaissance Society and the South East Chicago Commission. Last year he received the South East Chicago Commission's President's Award for Outstanding Service to the Hyde Park-Kenwood Community.