Saul Levmore, the William B. Graham Professor of Law, took office on July 1 as the twelfth Dean of the Law School, succeeding Interim Dean Richard Epstein.

"The exceptional academic standards of the University of Chicago's Law School demand a dean of great academic distinction, as well as one who can work effectively with the School's many constituencies," said University President Don Randel in announcing Levmore's appointment. "In Saul Levmore we are fortunate to have found just such a dean. I look forward to working with him to ensure that the School continues to define the highest standards in the study and teaching of the law."

On a sweltering July morning, 68 students are gathered in a lecture hall—though not at the University of Chicago, as it happens—for their first taste of the rigors of studying law. In the fall they will enter law schools throughout the country as first-year students; today they will begin a six-day "boot camp" aimed at jumpstarting their law school careers.

After a brief introduction, their first instructor takes his place at the front of the room. He is Saul Levmore, installed less than a week earlier as Dean of the University of Chicago Law School. Rolling aside the podium the better to interact directly, he introduces a preliminary topic: "How to succeed in law school without being too obnoxious."

Within fifteen minutes, the students are relaxed and even laughing...
a bit, as Levmore advises on ways to survive the dreaded Socratic method, poking gentle fun along the way at some law-professor stereotypes.

Then he settles into his assigned subject, contracts, which he will teach for the next eight hours. He is a bit hoarse this morning—the result of too much vocal exuberance at the swimming pool with his family over the weekend, he suspects—but it matters only to him. To the students, he is nearly mesmerizing, and by the end of the morning they are understanding that the study of law just might turn out to be the great intellectual adventure some have said it can be.

"I asked Saul Levmore to teach in this program because a friend of mine who attended the University of Virginia Law School [where Levmore taught for 18 years before joining the Chicago faculty in 1998] told me he was the best professor he ever had, anywhere," says program organizer Donald Macauley. Levmore hasn’t disappointed: at the first such session he taught, his evaluation from the students was 4.9 out of a possible 5 points—a feat no other instructor has approached, according to Macauley.

Says Levmore, "I like doing this program, particularly because so many of the attendees are re-entering academic life after substantial time away, like that fellow in today’s class who has been a police officer for six years. If I can give them more self-confidence, I think that’s a good thing."

"Besides," he adds with what seems to be a wink, "as their first official 'law professor,' I get to help set some of the ways they all will think about law for the next three years, and maybe even beyond that."

That implied wink is often present in the new dean’s interactions. In his teaching, it takes some of the “dreaded” out of the Socratic method. In conversation, it invites his listeners not to take what he says with absolute seriousness, to be willing to speak up, question, challenge—or else to wonder later where the interaction might have gone had they done so. It percolates ideas, rather than imposing them.

Professor Cass Sunstein, who chaired the search committee for the new dean, says Levmore’s commitment to teaching and mentoring was a significant factor in the committee’s recommendation: “Saul’s a person who really thinks ideas are fun. He’s an unbelievably accomplished teacher, one of the best teachers in the country, and also a truly outstanding mentor to students,” Sunstein says.

While he was still at Virginia, where he won awards for the quality of his teaching and the excellence of his scholarship, Levmore showed up on National Law Journal’s very short list of faculty members that other law schools would love to have for their own. The Law School landed him in its heralded 1998 “faculty raid.”

**Uncommon Zest**

Exceptional teaching and mentoring were not the only attributes that led to Levmore’s selection. Sunstein cites another: “I think he will do a great job at making student life joyful, which is not what the University of Chicago is famous for.”

If his own life is an example, Levmore should be just the person to make joy happen. He attacks what he does with uncommon zest. Some people jog; he runs marathons. Some people enjoy relaxing with a puzzle or a brainteaser; he wrote a book devoted to puzzle-solving, *Superstrategies for Puzzles and Games*. He is good enough at squash to have filled several shelves with trophies.

Anyone who observes him with his wife, Julie Rein (a Law School professor and renowned tax expert whom he met while they were both law students at Yale), and their two sons, Nathaniel and Eliot, sees how intensely he enjoys their company. That he may
have rendered himself nearly voiceless in boisterous family horseplay on a weekend seems wholly in character.

**Relentless Curiosity**

It would seem to go without saying that Levmore, as a member of the Law School faculty, is himself a distinguished scholar.

Love of the law came to him relatively late, and relatively suddenly. After graduating from Columbia in 1973, he was studying for a Ph.D. in economics at Yale when he met some law students and found their discussions interesting. So he went to the law library, picked up a textbook that looked promising—Marvin Chirelstein's *Federal Income Taxation*—and found it, he says (with what may be a wink), "the most fascinating, compelling thing I had ever read." He applied to Yale Law School, from which he graduated in 1980, completing his economics Ph.D. in the process.

When the American Academy of Arts and Sciences selected him for membership in its exclusive ranks last year, the electors emphasized "his relentless curiosity and wide range of interests" which, they said, "bring a fresh perspective to a wide range of legal questions."

Levmore says he feels fortunate to be a legal scholar today, when interdisciplinary and even cross-area approaches are highly valued. "Thirty or forty years ago, when you built a career on knowing one subject inside-out and writing twelve-volume treatises about it, I probably wouldn't have enjoyed it," he remarks. "But today, when you're always looking to see how some aspect of law might be applied to a wholly different legal subject area, I am completely energized. That approach fits me very nicely."

His recent works include a paper, "Beyond Majority Voting," and a talk, "The Value of Time in Biblical and Modern Law." There are few things that fail to interest him, few relevant connections that escape his relentless curiosity. At the Law School he has taught Public Choice, Nonprofit Organizations, Comparative Law, Contracts, Corporations, Corporate Tax, and Commercial Law (Secured Transactions).

**Applied Energy**

Top scholar, exceptional teacher, sterling colleague, great mentor, provocateur for joy. Anything else? "He has such a tremendous amount of energy," Sunstein says.

A native New Yorker who spent the better part of two decades in Virginia—not counting visiting professorships at Harvard, Yale, Toronto, Michigan, and Northwestern—Levmore nonetheless seems to embody the Chicago spirit characterized in architect Daniel Burnham's famous admonition, "Make big plans; aim high in hope and work." Perhaps some of that Chicago spirit is attributable to family ties: his in-laws include Law School alumni Dan and Howard Rein ('51 and '78, respectively).

To conserve some of his energy for the responsibilities of his deanship, Levmore has given up his squash habit. Aside from that, he doesn't seem to be pacing himself. In his first meeting with administrative staff of the Law School, he threw out some ideas for making students' experience richer (yes, he used the word "joy") and asked those in attendance to think of more. Within a week of taking office, he and Faculty Director for Academic Affairs Emily Buss asked for faculty reaction to plans for three possible new programs: a colloquium series, faculty-student discussion groups, and what he and Buss are calling, for want of a better term, "Chicago Initiatives."

The first colloquium, on criminal justice, has already been organized by Professor Tracey Meares, '91. A core group of scholars from area law schools—including Northwestern, Illinois, and Indiana—will meet for five seminars between January and May, focusing each time on an emerging criminal justice issue. Those issues will be set forth in papers presented by another group of leading scholars, from universities that include George Washington, NYU, and Yale. Attendance at the seminars will be open to members of the Law School community. Meares says, "This colloquium will accomplish a level of sustained, interactive analysis of critical issues that no single institution could achieve on its own. I'm very pleased that it's happening here at Chicago."

Levmore and Buss's second proposal is designed to stimulate closer interaction between faculty and students, something Levmore places high on his priority list. Faculty volunteers would host—in their homes—five-session discussion groups ("quasi-seminars," Levmore calls them) on topics that interest them. "I'm thinking of topics like five great trials, or five controversial Supreme Court cases..."
nominations, or five great writers' views on legal ethics,” Levmore explains, “and I'd love it if two faculty members with divergent views would team up to lead each discussion group.”

The new dean acknowledges that his and Buss's third proposal, the creation of “Chicago Initiatives,” is the most ambitious. He says, “The Law School has everything it takes to make a huge contribution to national debate on important topics. You name it—health care, uninsured motorists, secession claims, campaign finance reform, government accountability, immigration policy—and we have the expertise, the perspective, and the visibility to affect the discussion by offering a possible plan for others to think about and even put into place. I think we should be doing that; there's no reason why the policy agenda should be set only by government and ideologically committed organizations.”

There is no wink behind his words as he discusses these proposals, which are clearly among the kinds of puzzles he loves to tackle these days. Each Chicago Initiative would take two years or so to complete, and would not represent an official Law School position, just a reasoned analysis by very sharp minds, with plenty of room for dissent. Levmore sees conferences, seminars, research papers, visiting scholars, and a panoply of other mechanisms focused around the subject at hand. And he thinks it will be great for inspiring current students and attracting new ones, who will relish the opportunity to be part of “a larger, communal, vital intellectual exercise.”

It may be a sign of our times that the book titled The Joy of Work is just another sardonic volume in the dispiriting Dilbert series. For Saul Levmore, his “work”—whether it's teaching, scholarship, recreation, or the weighty responsibilities of a dean—seems to be just another word for “joy.”