To borrow from the parlance of biology, Lecturers in Law and students have a symbiotic relationship. The students get real-world knowledge from experts in fields as varied as the practice of law: everything from private equity transactions to Islamic law to the Supreme Court to human trafficking. Students also get to rub shoulders with leaders of law, business, and politics; most famously, President Barack Obama was a Lecturer in Law and a Senior Lecturer at the Law School for 12 years.

The lecturers get the satisfaction of passing on their knowledge to a new generation of lawyers, and the energy and inspiration that come with educating Chicago Law students.

Long story short: Everybody wins.

"I love it. I wouldn't be doing it otherwise. I enjoy the opportunity to work with very bright and interested law students," said Robert A. Helman, who has been a partner at Mayer Brown since 1967 and a Lecturer in Law for more than five years. He was Chairman of his firm from 1984 to 1998. Spring Quarter he will teach Developing Law Practice Skills through the Study of National Security Issues.

"There are times when the students are more stimulating than clients," he joked. "They're interested and lively."

Helman is one of 20–25 lecturers who teach each quarter at the Law School, in the format of weekly two-hour seminars. Once they are here, they tend to stick around: about 15 percent of the Law School's master list of lecturers has been here 10 or more years.

Professor David Zarfes, Associate Dean for Corporate and Legal Affairs and Schwartz Lecturer in Law, said the lecturers enrich the Law School because they "fill in the holes of the Swiss cheese," so to speak, in both style and substance. "They expand the range of offerings we as a law school can offer. No one faculty can cover everything."

Zarfes looks for lecturers who have both proven expertise and strong teaching skills. If they’ve taught before, he reviews their evaluations. If they haven’t, he must rely on instinct about what makes a good teacher.

Many of the lecturers see it as a dream come true, he said.

above: Lecturer in Law Elizabeth Duquette, an experienced teacher who has lectured as far away as Germany, teaches a writing class for the Law School’s LLMs.
They’re usually quite flattered. Sometimes they say they’ve always thought about it and never got around to it,” Zarfes said. “In some cases, they’ve said it’s the highlight of their week.”

Lecturer in Law Tom Cole, ’75, Chair of the Executive Committee at Sidley Austin and a University Trustee since 2001, loved teaching so much that he has decided to come back to it after 15 years. Cole taught a corporate governance seminar from 1993 to 1998, but stopped when he became Chair because of the huge demands of that position. In April, he is stepping down as Chair, but he will continue to be partner and maintain an active practice. He’ll finally have time to teach his seminar again, and he’s not wasting any time; it’s scheduled for the spring quarter.

“I’m very excited about it. I enjoyed it when I did it. I’m sorry that other commitments kept me from being able to continue,” he said. “The students are so terrific and stimulating. And, when you teach something, you actually learn it better yourself. It forces you to think more deeply.”

For obvious reasons, Cole said, his class will be much different in 2013 than it was when he last taught it in 1998. Back then, there was no Enron scandal, no Sarbanes-Oxley Act, and no Great Recession, among many other changes, including developments in shareholder activism and duties of board members.

“‘The whole point of a great legal education is not only that it teaches you some law, but also teaches you to be responsive and reactive to changes not only in the law but in markets and policy.’

She says, ‘You’ve been doing this for 50 years, you ought to be relaxed about it.’ But no, you can’t be,” he said, because the students and the material continue to challenge in new ways.

“That’s one of the peripheral benefits: As a teacher, you’re really a student and a teacher.”

One lecturer who isn’t too many years from his own time as a student is Sean Z. Kramer, ’10, believed to be the youngest Lecturer in Law. He helps Zarfes run the Corporate Lab, a transactional clinic that allows students to work closely with legal teams at major companies. He remembers taking classes from lecturers himself.

“They were fun, and they were practical,” he said. “They were more of a conversation.”

Lecturer in Law Elizabeth Duquette said that conversational quality is what makes teaching so much fun. She started a new class for LLMs this quarter, Writing and Research in the U.S. Legal System. Previously, she has taught European Union law, evidence, and American trial law at Chicago and other local and international law schools, as close as Northwestern Law and as far as Germany.

“I find students are very energetic, and they’re in that phase of their life when they’re learning as much as they can every day, and that’s fun to be around,” she said.
She also feels great satisfaction at filling an important need, which is teaching future lawyers how to write, she said. “I think most law students really need to improve their writing beyond the first-year writing class they all take,” she said. Throughout the course, she sees a huge improvement. “I think they really get it. And what’s fun is that throughout the course they’ll bring me examples of really lousy legal writing they find. I think it stimulates them to notice good writing and recognize bad writing.”

Duquette designed the new LLM class from scratch, keeping in mind that English is the second, third, or even fourth language for these particular students. Her goal was to distill the essential concepts of American legal writing and teach the students to use them in a way that is effective and natural using American English.

She feels like she contributes a perspective beyond academic life, she said. She worked in private practice in London before deciding, after she had children, to devote her working hours to teaching.

“Every year, I’ll get students who ask me for career advice, and how to balance work and family life. I think lecturers provide a different perspective than the academics.”

Many lecturers, including Judge Virginia Kendall, of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois, and Lecturer in Law Cynthia Shawamreh, ’88, are motivated by their love of their respective topics. Kendall, who has taught at her alma mater, Loyola University School of Law, for 20 years, and Northwestern Law for eight, started at Chicago Law this year. She teaches Child Exploitation and Human Trafficking. She said she commends the Law School for having such a class because they are rare.

“I am passionate about teaching this area of law to young minds, because I see their excitement in wanting to make a difference in this area of law and continue to improve it,” Kendall said. “And when it comes to protecting the rights of women and children, this is an area of law that can always be improved.”

Similarly, Shawamreh feels strongly about teaching Islamic law, Islamic finance, and Middle Eastern politics, which she’s been doing since 2008 at the Law School. She’s also Senior Counsel for the City of Chicago Department of Law, Finance and Economic Development Division, where she specializes in multilayered financing transactions designed to provide affordable housing and economic incentives to stimulate job creation.

“This is my intellectual passion, studying about the Middle East,” she said. She especially enjoys the classroom discussions between students who are lifelong devout Muslims and Kendall, who has taught at Loyola University School of Law and Northwestern Law, squeezes in two hours a week away from her work as a U.S. District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois to teach at Chicago Law.
those who know little to nothing about the faith.

Does this lead to political debates? “Oh, sure,” Shawamreh said. “I intentionally structure them.”

For example, she said, around the time the Arab Spring was making headlines, she divided the class into three groups. The first two groups were to role-play as lawyers, advising the president on policy. The first group argued for promoting democracy in the Middle East, while the second group argued that the United States should not invest the time and resources. The third group judged the winner.

Helman, who teaches on law and national security, also encourages a lot of student discussion. At the beginning of each quarter, he has students break up into teams of two to four and select from a list of problems. Each group will present on those problems, which are posed as questions:

Should we continue to use, and under what if any limits, drone warfare and assassination in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen, and elsewhere?

What is the future defense of the United States against cyber warfare?

Should alleged terrorists be tried in civil courts or before military tribunals?

“I’m trying to teach them how to develop the skills needed for successful law practice, which means learning to analyze a problem, do research on it, and discuss it persuasively in English sentences, standing up straight and prepared to answer questions,” Helman said.

Lecturer in Law Jack S. Levin, a partner at Kirkland and Ellis, has taught Structuring Venture Capital and Entrepreneurial Transactions every spring since 1988. The course may have the same title each year, but it’s never a repeat, he said.

“The world keeps changing, so it could be the same topics, but you might be saying completely different things,” he said. A typical class is about 60 percent law students and 40 percent business students from Chicago Booth. The students go through a series of seven or eight transactions that build in complexity, from a new business start-up to a growth equity investment to a leveraged buyout to a turnaround financing for a distressed company, and so forth. He teaches the same course every winter at Harvard Law and has written a widely used textbook on venture capital and private equity.

Levin’s satisfaction comes from educating the next generation of lawyers, he said.

“Once I know something and can do something, I want to teach others how to do it. I want others to benefit,” he said. “I want to educate those who come after me.”

Duquette designed the new writing class for LLMs with the knowledge that English isn’t many of these students’ first language.