U of C’s new dean plans to debut massive fundraising campaign

By Jerry Crimmins

The new dean of the University of Chicago Law School, Michael H. Schill, plans to launch a fundraising campaign to raise between $150 million and $200 million, and he hopes to expand the faculty.

In an interview, Schill also said:
- Neither of his parents went to college.
- He is a great believer in scholarships made possible by alumni donations.
- The “disconnection ... between what lawyers do and what is done in law schools has grown over time.”
- He is a “TiVo fanatic” and is in mourning over the cancellation of his favorite TV show, “24.”

Schill said he plans to launch his major fundraising campaign even though U of C law school recently finished a $100 million fundraising campaign linked to its 100th anniversary in 2002. That centennial campaign didn’t end until mid-2008.

“It’s going to be a bigger campaign than that,” he said. “We’re incredibly ambitious.”

As dean of UCLA School of Law, Schill said he raised participation of the alumni in giving back to 30 percent from 16 percent.

“Our average, annual fundraising ... tripled” at UCLA law, he said. “It went from about $5 million a year to about $15 million a year.”

At UCLA law, Schill said he started a $100 million fundraising campaign in 2006 that was 75 percent completed by the time he left last year. It is expected to wind up in 2013.

“We’re going to expand our faculty,” he said. “We’re not going to expand our student body. ... We will further reduce class sizes and expand the learning environment.”

The student body at U of C law is about 550, and the full-time, tenured or tenure-track faculty numbers only 35. “We’re small and elite.”

“We want to go to 40” full-time faculty “within five years. At least 40,” Schill said.

On legal education, he said:

“What elite law school people sometimes think is that the world of lawyers is sort of outside what we’re focusing on. And that disconnection, that lack of connection between what lawyers do and what is done in law schools has grown over time.

“I think it’s a fake dichotomy. What lawyers do and how they do it is every bit as intellectually interesting as the types of activities that are more abstract. They’re just different.”

He said one of his biggest intellectual challenges was drafting a 100-page real estate contract when he was a real estate lawyer at Fried, Frank, Harris, Shriver & Jacobson LLP in New York from 1985 to 1987.

“In order to be a good lawyer you need to understand what motivates your client,” he said. “If you’re a real estate lawyer, you should understand accounting, real estate finance. Otherwise, how are you going to understand your clients?”

He said he wants to encourage U of C law students to take courses on business subjects like finance and accounting.

“You can take a contract 100 pages long, break it down, analyze it, figure out why various clauses are there, and that can be enormously interesting,” he said.

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He recently hired attorney Joan E. Neal from the law firm of Morrison & Foerster LLP to teach intensive contract drafting and analysis.

Asked if he expected resistance to more practical courses in a school that is thoroughly intellectual, he said, “We’re not talking about trade school. We’re talking about deep understanding of transactions ... that’s analytically rigorous.”

To hatch the next big idea in the law, Schill said he wants to create interdisciplinary workshops that mix teachers from the law school and teachers from other disciplines at the University of Chicago. Law students would attend to observe, participate and earn credit.

“We have our own internal workshops, Law and Philosophy, a Constitutional Law workshop, another one on Public Interest Law. What we don’t have are workshops that cross school boundaries,” he said.

Law and economics, “the single most influential idea to shape law over the past 50 years, was born out of our unique workshop culture here,” Schill said.

He said he wants “bring back the workshop that gave birth to law and economics” that was held among the law school, the economics department and the business school.

“The giants” he listed as former participants in those workshops were four economists Gary S. Becker, Ronald Coase, Aaron Director and Milton Friedman along with Richard A. Posner, who is a judge on the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, and also still a senior lecturer on the law school faculty.

Schill, 51, said his father was was the assistant manager of a clothing factory in Amsterdam, N.Y., and the family lived in Schenectady.

“My mom was a nurse” trained in the U.S. Army. She served in the Pacific during World War II.

“My sister and I were the first in our family to go to college,” he said. “From the time I was a little kid, my dad told me, ‘You’re going to Harvard. You’re going to Harvard. You’re going to Harvard.’ I ended up going to Princeton.”

“We didn’t have a lot of money,” Schill said. He said Princeton was for him even cheaper than the State University of New York “because of generous financial aid. That is something that always impressed me. ... I wouldn’t have been able to go to Princeton if it had not been for the generosity of the alumni.”

He became a lawyer, with a degree from Yale Law School, he said, because, “when you’re the son of Jewish parents, there were three jobs open to me. One was doctor. One was dentist. And the other was lawyer.”

He knew from the time he was 10 or 12 he would be a lawyer.

Schill said he has four TiVos to record TV shows and is a beta tester for that company. His favorite shows are “24,” “Damages,” “Mad Men” and “Law and Order.”

But he said he works so much and spends so much time on e-mail, “I end up storing a lot of television shows that never get watched. You just end up recording, recording and recording and never watch anything.”

“I do watch ‘24’ when it’s on” though, he said. “That’s my No. 1 show!”

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