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Loyola law's new dean a familiar face

Michael J. Kaufman named dean after 31 years at law school

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Loyola University Chicago School of Law has named longtime professor and former associate dean Michael J. Kaufman as its new dean after a nationwide search.

Kaufman, who has been with the school for 31 years, began in the position as interim dean of the school last July. For 11 years until last summer, he served as the school's associate dean for academic affairs.

The decanal position became vacant last year after former dean David N. Yellen left to join Marist College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., as its president.

Loyola Provost John P. Pelissero, who conducted the search process for a new dean, said the school used executive search firm Witt/Kieffer to help find possible candidates for the position.

Kaufman was the pick among three finalists after the school's search committee and administrators considered more than 50 possible candidates identified by the search firm, Pelissero said.

"We ended up selecting Michael after doing this national search," he said. "We thought it was important to the validity of his selection that we take a look at the field to see if there were as equally qualified candidates out there, and everything that we learned through this process is that Michael was the best of the candidates and pretty much validated what we thought about his knowledge and skills and values that were so important for selecting the next dean."

Kaufman said he endorsed the school's decision to conduct a national search. Following interviews by the school's search committee, Pelissero and Loyola President Jo Ann Rooney approved his selection as dean. The appointment was announced Monday.

Kaufman said he first took the position as interim dean as a way to serve the school, which helped him to realize it was a role he'd like to have for the long run.

"I've been here for 30 years as a faculty member ... I love this law school, I love this community, and so I saw the interim dean [position] as really a service that I was performing to the law school and the community, but as I became interim dean and grew into the job I really grew to love it.

"It's a chance to affect tremendous positive change in the law school and in the legal community around the law school as well. I love working with this community. It's a wonderful community of very supportive faculty, students, administrators and alumni.

"It's really a very tight family and I couldn't be more thrilled and honestly humbled to be asked to lead it."

Prior to joining Loyola in 1986, Kaufman practiced securities and civil rights litigation at Sachnoff & Weaver Ltd., a legacy firm to Reed Smith LLP. He graduated from the University of Michigan Law School and clerked for Judge Nathaniel R. Jones of the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

He joined Loyola where he went on to teach courses including civil procedure and education law and policy. Kaufman founded the school's Education Law and Policy Institute and its Institute for Investor Protection, both of which he still oversees, and he was also instrumental in the creation of one of the school's newest programs, the Weekend J.D. program.

The program, which launched last fall, has been more successful

Michael J. Kaufman

than school leaders anticipated, drawing students from a variety of backgrounds and from around the country who take classes taught over the course of several weekends at the school, including a course taught by Kaufman.

Kaufman said he intends to keep teaching civil procedure on the weekends as he assumes his new role as the school's dean.

Kaufman is also a public arbitrator for securities disputes and teaches bar-exam review classes around the country. He is also frequently involved in research and writing on an array of topics, including jurisprudence, securities regulation and litigation, civil procedure and education law and policy.

Pelissero said he thinks Kaufman has the right attributes to lead the school during a time when law schools face a variety of challenges, including finding ways to boost admissions and adjusting curriculum to reflect the changing legal profession.

"Mike has the vision and the strategic planning that's necessary for this shifting landscape in the law profession and in law school education today," he said.

"Mike was there when the law school began developing its approach to online degrees for master's programs in law, and he was the architect of the Weekend J.D. program that was launched fairly quickly and from inception to concept to implementation was fairly short and was all done under Mike's guidance, and so he's already begun to implement plans that are helping to turn around the decline in our law school admissions and I feel that he is the right person with the right vision and values to lead the school into a very positive and successful future."

Pelissero added that it didn't hurt in the selection process that Kaufman is popular at the school, which he said was reflected in a report from the law school's search committee, which was led by Loyola professor Barry Sullivan, a former dean of the School of Law at Washington and Lee University.

"Everyone loves him. Every stakeholder group that was involved in the interview process ranked Mike No. 1 and, in most cases, he was the unanimous choice," he said. "I think the process was done very professionally and I'm very pleased with the outcome."

Kaufman said he still has some of the same goals for the school as he did when he began as interim dean last summer, which included finding ways to emphasize and build upon the school's strengths.

"I believe in leading from strength. Loyola law school has tremendous and distinctive strengths ... They include our incredibly vital Jesuit Catholic tradition and mission, our closely knit community of incredibly dedicated teachers and renown scholars, a wonderful university, our wonderful centers of excellence, a legacy of great decanal leadership and our presence in a really dynamic city.

"It is my goal to build on those strengths, which I think are distinctive and to work with the entire community to build a future of justice one client and one community at a time."

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