

# Widener University Commonwealth Law School

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From the Selected Works of John L. Gedic

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## Law and Government Institute: Rapid Growth in Faculty, Offerings, Speakers

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# THE LAW AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE

## RAPID GROWTH IN FACULTY, OFFERINGS, SPEAKERS

By John L. Gedid

*The School of Law's Harrisburg campus provides a perfect setting to teach government law. Guest lecturers, with national and international profiles, add to the educational experience.*

The Widener Law and Government Institute was founded in 1999 to improve government law and to enrich the education of Widener-Harrisburg students. The mission of the Institute is to educate citizen-lawyers to serve the public interest as government lawyers and private practitioners. The Institute makes available several government law certificate programs designed to make students into expert government lawyers and privately practicing attorneys in matters involving government. It also organizes symposia on government law issues, sponsors research and performs service for government.

Many—perhaps most—of today's major issues that concern us as lawyers and citizens involve government law, such as the environment, licensing, the right to a hearing, and drug and food safety. The Law and Government Institute seeks to address these crucial areas (and many others) and to prepare students to face them as attorneys. In the modern era much of legal practice is governed by complex rules emanating from legislative enactments, rules and decisions from administrative agencies, and executive orders. To be effective, the modern lawyer must understand how the decisions of these parts of government affect the interests of his or her client. The modern lawyer must further understand how to advocate before these institutions of government to achieve results for clients. The Institute provides educational experiences to our students that prepare them to practice law in these arenas.

During the last academic year, the Widener Law and Government Institute enjoyed remarkable growth. Our program is designed to increase the legal skills of students and, hence, their employment opportunities, and to lift the level of expertise in the sector of the legal profession practicing law involving the government. The Institute's expansion is largely a result of Dean Linda Ammons' commitment to the study of government law on the Harrisburg campus.

The mission of the Law and Government Institute is the improvement and development of government law through teaching, research and service in law,



## DIFFERING INTERPRETATIONS



*As an assistant district attorney, Erin Lentz '05 applies her Widener training in the analysis of laws and regulations.*

Erin Lentz '05 sports a resumé of surprising depth and breadth, considering that she has been an attorney for just two short years. Ms. Lentz credits many facets of her Widener experience with helping to shape her career path and to

prepare her for the various roles she has undertaken.

Currently Ms. Lentz is in the Appellate Division of the Montgomery County District Attorney's Office, and she cites the training she received through Widener's Law and Government Institute; her internship with the Pennsylvania Office of the Attorney General; and her clinical experience with the Harrisburg Civil Law Clinic for readying her to handle the numerous duties that come with the position she now holds.

Ms. Lentz previously was a judicial law clerk to the Honorable Robert G. Bigham of the Court of Common Pleas of Adams County. As a clerk in the family law and orphans court division, she drafted opinions, orders and bench memoranda; attended pre-trial hearings, conferences and trials; and advised attorneys and *pro se* litigants on procedural matters.

After a year of clerking for Judge Bigham, Ms. Lentz took on larger responsibilities—moving from a job within the local court system to a position within the state courts—by going to work for Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice Sandra Schultz Newman. During her stint as a clerk for Justice Newman, her workload included responsibilities such as analyzing petitions for allowance of appeal and briefs submitted for oral argument, as well as drafting allocatur reports, bench memoranda and disposition memoranda.

In her current role as an Assistant District Attorney, Ms. Lentz handles appeals to both the federal and state courts in cases involving homicide, rape, sexual assault, theft, burglary and robbery. She says she enjoys crafting legal arguments for appellate briefs and notes that one of the best and most challenging aspects of her position is that she often must “write and develop arguments on points of law that are unclear or have been interpreted differently by courts throughout the years.”

Ms. Lentz adds that she applies “the knowledge that she gained through the Law and Government Institute courses in legal writing and analysis of issues that arise when interpreting a statute or regulation.”

While at Widener Law, Lentz received the Outstanding Service Award, and she has continued to make a commitment to service well after graduation. In addition to her full-time career in public service with the District Attorney's Office, Ms. Lentz lends her legal skills to the indigent. Most recently she volunteered on behalf of the Montgomery County Bar Association to provide legal counsel to individuals in need of family law services.

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The mission of the Institute is the improvement and development of government law through teaching, research and service in law, policy and ethics.

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policy and ethics. This mission includes any area of law to which the government is a party, and involves particular emphasis on administrative law (broadly defined to include agency law), constitutional law (with particular emphasis on structure of government and the rights of citizens against the government), legislation and local government law.

### New Faces

The Institute has added two new associate directors whose backgrounds and skills have greatly increased its ability to create relevant programming for students. They are Associate Professor Jill Family and Associate Professor Wesley Oliver. Both have experience, as well as advanced degrees, in government law. They supervised students in the new Law and Government Student Group in preparing the first Law and Government Institute Newsletter and secured speakers in the field.

The Institute also formed a Board of Visitors. The Board consists of a distinguished group of public servants, including Pennsylvania Supreme Court justices and Commonwealth Court judges, legislators and government law experts. The new Board will provide the Institute with advice on government law needs, opportunities and developments. A special focus of the Board will be advising the Institute on how to improve government law.

In 2006, the Institute formed a Law and Government Institute Student Group. The students assisted with many Institute activities. In addition to some hands-on experience with government law, Group activities gave members an introduction to networking with attorneys and officials active in public service.

## Awards

The National Conference of Commissioners on Uniform State Laws formally praised and recognized the work of the Institute at its annual meeting in August 2007. The Conference, the national leader in the uniform law movement in the United States, consists of commissioners from all 50 states, Canada and Mexico. It seeks to produce uniformity in state statutory law and to promote the best, most modern state policy. The Conference formally thanked Adjunct Professor Vincent DeLiberato and Director Gedid for their supervision of Institute student-fellows in the legislation certificate program, who have conducted research and produced drafts that adapt Uniform and Model acts for use in specific states. Several states have adopted the student-produced work as statutes verbatim as written by the Institute fellows.

## New and Returning Law Certificates

In response to substantial student requests and a glaring need in the legal profession, the Institute added a new student specialty certificate in consumer law. Adjunct Professors Joseph Goldberg and Renardo Hicks, both of whom previously headed the Consumer Fraud Section of the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office, teach most of the courses in this new certificate program.

As a result of Professor John Dernbach's return from his position with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Institute reinstated the popular Environmental Law specialty certificate.

## Speakers and Symposia

Professor Family invited Federal District Judge John E. Jones III to speak on the "intelligent design" case, over which he had presided. Judge Jones' speech received considerable publicity, including a national broadcast by C-SPAN. Martin Toth, Associate Counsel of the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, spoke on the current controversy about disclosure of that agency's files to the public.

As a result of the efforts of Professor Oliver, the Law and Government Institute



Law and Government Institute Director John L. Gedid speaks at a spring symposium on the anniversary of the *Dred Scott* decision.

founded the John L. Gedid Lecture Series, an annual event that will feature young, rising academic speakers on government law topics. The first speaker was Melissa Waters, an assistant professor at Washington & Lee Law School. The United States Department of State selected Professor Waters to train Middle Eastern judges, and she trained the judges who presided over the trial of former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein. Her presentation described the training of judges and legal conditions in Iraq and disclosed numerous societal facts not covered by the media in this country. Her talk will be published in the *Widener Law Journal*.

The Law and Government Institute also sponsored a symposium on the 150th anniversary of the infamous *Dred Scott* decision. A distinguished panel examined current thinking about that opinion. The panel included Professor Robert Burt of Yale Law School and Charles Houston, Jr., the

son of the iconic Charles Houston, an early leader of the civil rights movement who promoted training of African-American lawyers and formulation of the strategy that led to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision. The *Widener Law Journal* will publish the symposium papers.

The Institute plans to build on this rapid growth by continuing to engage lawmakers, judges, students, lawyers, academics and the community. We welcome the participation and input of all Widener Law alumni. ■



John L. Gedid is Vice Dean of the Harrisburg Campus, Director of the Harrisburg Campus's Law and Government Institute, and Professor of Law. He teaches

and writes in the areas of federal and state administrative law, contracts, legislation, sales and leases, and conflict of laws.

## LAW AND GOVERNMENT INSTITUTE TO HOST MIDYEAR MEETING OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDICIARY

The Widener Law and Government Institute has been selected to host the midyear meeting of the National Association of Administrative Law Judiciary in June of 2008. The Association consists of administrative law judges from all 50 states as well as federal administrative law judges. The award of this convention and the educational function that it serves for administrative law judges are a recognition of the important work and growing stature of the Institute. Alumni will be welcome to participate in CLE sessions, for which credit will be given. More details will be forthcoming in the near future.