

This column honors the accomplishments of ABA lawyers—especially those associated with Division committees and commissions — who are dedicating their time and energy to the public interest. Our [web site](#) also presents these profiles. In this issue, we are pleased to feature **Nicholas W. Allard**.

Nicholas W. Allard is President, Joseph Crea Dean, and Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School. Under his leadership, the Law School has launched numerous initiatives to make legal education innovative, accessible, and affordable. He also serves as Senior Counsel at Dentons, the world's largest law firm. Before joining the Law School in 2012, he was chair of the Public Policy Department at Patton Boggs in Washington, DC. Recognizing the increasing globalization of the legal



profession, Dean Allard has traveled to Russia, India, China, throughout Europe, and to the UAE to speak to prospective students and leaders in the legal field about new frontiers of law. He serves on the Rhodes Scholar selection committee and on the selection committee for the Schwarzman Scholars program, which strives to give the world's best and brightest students the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and professional networks through a one-year

Master's Degree at Tsinghua University in Beijing. A Rhodes Scholar, Dean Allard earned degrees from Oxford University, Yale Law School, and Princeton University. He worked on Capitol Hill for Senators Edward Kennedy and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. He is the recipient of multiple honors, including the *City & State* 2017 "Brooklyn Influencers" list.

We invited Dean Allard to reflect on his career.

At what point in your life did you know that you wanted to dedicate time and attention to public service?

I cannot remember a time when I did not want to be a lawyer. There were no lawyers in my family, but my

parents and relatives respected the profession and encouraged me to pursue it from a very young age. It may sound hokey, but I vividly remember being at the drive-in movies, sitting between my parents in the front seat of our car with my siblings sleeping in the back, and seeing Gregory Peck playing Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It was a thrilling moment for me and it solidified my decision to be a lawyer and work for the

greater good. I have always believed – and I have seen this to be true over the years – that the public and private roles of lawyers are honorable and provide limitless opportunities to serve others.

What were the major influences on your choices and career paths?

My grandmother Edna certainly was one of the biggest influences on my life. She was extraordinary. She came to Brooklyn from a big family on a small farm in North Carolina that she left to join the Navy as a nurse and see the world. She met my grandfather, a Navy Seaman, while stationed at the Brooklyn Navy Yards Hospital, where my mother was later born. Edna was a believer in joyful engagement with life and service to others – and she lived her life with energy, passion, intelligence, and a wicked sense of humor. She taught me to try everything, experience everything, and never to whine or complain.

I also have been privileged to work with, learn from, and be inspired by some of the giants of recent American history, including Senators Abraham Ribicoff, Ted Kennedy, Daniel Patrick Moynihan, and Vice President Al Gore; leading educators such as former Princeton President William Bowen, Yale Law School's incomparable Guido Calabresi, the former president of George Washington University Stephen Trachtenberg, several Wardens of the Rhodes Trust including Sir Colin Lucas and my Australian friend Don Markwell; in the private sector, Thomas Boggs, one of the founders of Patton Boggs, and brilliant, ground-breaking lawyers such as Ken Feinberg and Reed Hundt; Patricia Wald, who served as Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit; and the late Robert Peckham, who was Chief Judge of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California. And in the arts, another one of my passions, I must mention Michael Kahn, the legendary Artistic Director and Founder of the Shakespeare Theatre Company in Washington, D.C.

What drew you from the private sector to academia, and how did you manage that transition?

Politics. After three-plus decades in Washington, D.C., I leapt at the chance to jump into the big leagues ... academic politics. And then there's the money. The truth is, I have always had a foot in academia throughout my career as an attorney to academic institutions, a trustee, a teacher of law and business, an alumni leader, and, for my sins, a fundraiser. So, I was open to new opportunities to make a difference. People I respected

encouraged me, saying that I could be of some use in higher education at a time when it was experiencing transformational changes and challenges. They advanced my name for interesting opportunities at various institutions.

The chance to serve as dean of Brooklyn Law School was irresistible. Our Law School is a gem in the heart of the greatest city in the world. The mission of the Law School to use the power of law to make a positive difference resonated with my own career experience. I was attracted by the school's enduring legacy of inclusiveness, diversity, opportunity, and service, as well as the dedication of the school's community to these values, starting at the top with Board Chairman Stuart Subotnick, who heads up Metromedia. And, unlike Groucho Marx, the fact that they wanted me made me want to join the school.

What is your greatest satisfaction as Dean of Brooklyn Law School?

Every law dean enjoys many sources of satisfaction. The greatest, perhaps, is to be part of our students' journeys from often very nervous and excited new law students to confident members of the bar who go on to impressive jobs in top firms, District Attorneys' offices, government, public service, business and entrepreneurial ventures, and many emerging sectors where a law degree is an asset. I make a point of attending the swearing-in ceremonies of recent graduates when I can, and there is no feeling like witnessing this stirring event and knowing how far a student has come to reach their personal momentous milestone.

I also have a ringside seat on a daily basis to witness the extraordinary work of our faculty as teachers, mentors, and scholars. They change our students' lives while their work has a significant impact on the law and policy. Not a bad day at the office.

There is much more. For example, the achievements of our graduates – and their impact on the law, society, and on people's lives – are simply astonishing. I thoroughly enjoy hearing about their fascinating and inspiring work, connecting them with students, and engaging them more deeply in the Law School.

What do you view as your greatest professional challenge?

The greatest challenge is that there are only 24 hours in

a day. We are striving relentlessly to provide ever-better and innovative ways to educate and prepare students for a new world of law that is transforming rapidly because of technology, economic change, and the increasingly seamless global nature of legal practice.

What seem to be the most acute challenges facing legal academia?

The challenges are constant, but to single out the "most acute," I would say overcoming conventional wisdom and the self-serving interests of those who benefit from perpetuating the outdated status quo and those who oppose change that would strengthen legal education. For our law schools to continue to serve the best interests of our students, the profession, and our country, we must engage in the difficult but necessary enterprise of preserving what works and remains valuable while embracing needed improvements and innovations for the future.

To what extent has ABA involvement helped in your career and goals?

In the words of the great Jack Benny (my students have no idea who he is) when encountering a mugger who demands: 'Your money or your life' ... 'I'm thinking, I'm thinking.'

First, I know through my frequent international travels and interactions with lawyers around the world, that the ABA is a much-admired and much-envied organization. As a senior staffer for the Senate Judiciary Committee, I had daily interaction with the ABA and have, to this day, a deep appreciation of its service to all Americans.

My involvement with the ABA over the years has enhanced my career and presented opportunities to be of service. For example, I have always been passionate about libraries, so I thoroughly enjoyed serving on the ABA Standing Committee on the Law Library of Congress, and, in particular, being part of the Law Library's role in

the international celebration of the enduring legacy of Magna Carta in its 800th anniversary year. A library is the core of every law school, and the committee's work to educate and raise awareness about the evolving role of the law libraries is more vital than ever in the digital age.

I also was proud to be a member of the ABA Task Force on Federal Lobbying Laws, led by Tom Susman, the ABA's Director of Governmental Affairs. Our report,

“Lobbying Law in the Spotlight: Challenges and Proposed Improvements,” was an initiative of the Section of Administrative Law and Regulatory Practice. Composed of a cross section of distinguished lawyers, the task force reached broad consensus and made an important contribution to the public debate about ways to improve lobbying regulation to make it more effective and transparent and minimize conflicts of interest.

What advice would you give law students and young lawyers considering a career in public interest law and public service?

Come to Brooklyn Law School! I do not shy away from making that recommendation, because we are well-known for our tradition of excellence in public interest/public service law. I always tell students pursuing this area of law not to do so for adulation or congratulations, not to be self-righteous or self-satisfied, but, in the spirit of my Grandmother Edna, I encourage them to embrace the work with joyful engagement. Good lawyers will be needed more than ever in this area in the coming years, so law schools must attract and educate a new generation of talented and diverse people who are committed to using the power of law to make a positive difference.

Do you have advice for lawyers seeking to change course mid-career or in a late/senior career phase?

I will let you know when I get there; although I may have slept through my mid-life crisis. I would only counsel my contemporaries not to make a move because you are miserable in your current career, but do take the leap when there is something else you are longing to do.

What would you like readers to remember most about serving in academia?

This question got me thinking about possible tombstone inscriptions:

‘I tried’

‘I told you I was sick’

‘Now What?’

‘There goes the neighborhood’

The fact is, education changes lives, it changes families, and it changes communities. I have witnessed the power of education in my own family. My father was the first in our family to graduate from college and he became a pioneer in computer processing for financial services. My father-in-law, the son of a Polish immigrant who worked as a tailor, was a nuclear physicist who pioneered diagnostic isotopes that advanced women’s health. Then

there is Grandmother Edna, whose nursing education enabled her to care for and help untold numbers of people. America’s story always has been about the transformational power of education. Being part of that and doing what one can to help make that a reality for our students – even in a small way – is incredibly gratifying. As Edmund Burke said: “Nobody made a greater mistake than he who did nothing because he could do only a little.”

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