

Chicago Daily Law Bulletin®

Volume 164, No. 85

Serving Chicago's legal community for 163 years

Loyola dean emerita will retire in May

Appel's 20 years at helm of law school still record for women deans, according to ABA

BY SARAH MANSUR
Law Bulletin staff writer

Nina S. Appel, who was Loyola University Chicago School of Law's first and longest-serving female dean, is retiring later this month in a much different era than when she began her legal education.

During her first year at Columbia Law School in the late 1950s, one of her professors announced at the beginning of the semester that he had never called on a female student and had no plans to break his record. He proved a man of his word.

"In those days, I don't remember that we were offended. We were relieved that we wouldn't get called on," Appel said.

That announcement would be "unimaginable" in a law school classroom today, she said.

It's hard to imagine that happening today, in part, because the percentage of female law students has exploded since the 1950s. Appel and her female classmates were only about 1 percent of her graduating class. In 2017, women made up more than 65 percent of the law students entering Loyola as first years.

Appel, 82, was the first female dean of Loyola's law school, serving from 1983 to 2003, and the longest serving woman dean in the American Bar Association's history, according to the ABA.

She will retire after this semester, having taught at the law school for more than 40 years.

Appel was born in Prague but she and her family fled Europe for the U.S. during World War II to escape the Nazis.

"That certainly did shape my sense of the vulnerability of democracy and the importance of people standing up against evil," Appel said. "That was a very profound influence on my life and probably my career."

She graduated from Cornell University in 1956, and then went on to earn her law degree from Columbia Law School in 1959.

Her sister Carol Rothschild said Appel's experience as a refugee has greatly influenced her life's work.

"She feels she lived the American dream, and she wants that for other families," Rothschild said. "And she feels this university gives that opportunity."

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Appel joined Loyola's law school faculty in 1973. She served as an associate dean from 1976 until 1983, when she was named dean. During her entire 20-year tenure as Loyola's law school dean, Appel worked with the same three associate and assistant deans: Thomas Haney, James Faught and Ellen O'Gallagher.



Nina S. Appel, former dean of Loyola University Chicago School of Law, greets friends and colleagues at her retirement party on Thursday. She will retire after this semester, having taught at the law school for more than 40 years. Photo provided by Loyola University Chicago

As dean, Appel founded the Institute for Health Law and shepherded the Civitas ChildLaw Center. She was also responsible for creating a tutoring program for first-year law students.

After stepping down as dean, Appel assumed the title of dean emerita, the first such title to be conferred in university history.

Thomas G. Mathews, who earned his law degree from Loyola in 2010, took a tort class taught by Appel in 2007.

Mathews, who spoke at Appel's retirement celebration last week, said Appel cautioned her students against filing frivolous lawsuits.

lawyer responsibility and what goes with that," he said.

Gabriela Hidalgo and Kate Goodwin, first-year law students who were in Appel's final tort law class, described her as a legend.

"She's very caring and brilliant," Goodwin said.

Hidalgo said Appel paved the way for other female law students and leaders in the legal profession.

"Just having someone like her as a role model for female law students, is unreal," she said.

Goodwin said she was impressed by the encouragement Appel offered as the class prepared for their first law school finals.

"You don't really know what you are doing, or what you are walking into and she was just very reassuring," Goodwin said. "I feel so fortunate that she was one of my professors."

Appel will no longer be teaching but she has no plans to leave the classroom.

Appel said she plans to begin classes at Northwestern University's Osher Lifelong Learning Institute. She is also looking for opportunities to volunteer and already has plans to do so at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel.

"So, I will keep myself busy," smansur@lawbulletinmedia.com