Richardson Law School

has one of the most dynamic and comprehensive programs in Pacific and Asian Legal Studies offered by an American ABA-accredited law school. As part of that commitment, Richardson faculty are heavily involved in international issues across the Pacific and Asia - offering our law students unique opportunities to work within those arenas as well. This Special Issue explores some of the Law School’s expertise.

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PALS
Pacific-Asian Legal Studies

FROM THE WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI‘I

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Pacific-Asia Focus Has a Global Reach

As UH Law Grads Make Their Mark

“Whenever you look at academic exchanges and research scholarship, you realize that nearly three-quarters of the Richardson instructional faculty have had some form of teaching or professional engagement in Asia or the Pacific in the past five years.” Asian labor law expert Prof. Ronald C. Brown, who is also part of the PALS faculty, sees Richardson’s offerings as an extraordinary opportunity for students. “Our program gives them extra insights and information into this area of the globe that the U.S. is tilting toward and getting more involved with. And the subjects are being taught by a large group of really expert people. In fact, we’re way ahead of the pack. Even the bigger schools don’t have the body of expertise we have.”

“When you do any kind of business overseas in Asia, you’re going to have to deal with people, with employees. It gives comparative insights into the way they do business. That course also gets into international free trade agreements, human rights, and labor standards, as well as the specifics in each country, focusing on China, Japan, and Korea.”

Levin, a specialist in Japanese legal studies, taught in the Law Department of Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan before joining Richardson in 1997, and his research areas include criminal justice and minority issues in Japan. He continues to do research on human rights in Asia. When she arrived in Hong Kong in 1999, it was still a British colony but it became a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997. Petersen now teaches International Law and Gender and Law at Richardson and she regularly draws upon her experiences in Asia during her teaching.

“Hong Kong has an independent judiciary and incorporated important human rights treaties into its regional constitution, making it the perfect laboratory for the application of international law in domestic courts,” notes Petersen. “In contrast, human rights treaties have little impact in Mainland China and lawyers who try to enforce rights in the Mainland are regularly harassed by the authorities.”

Those four were later joined by Chinese scholars Carole Petersen and Charles Booth, who spent years teaching in Hong Kong, Tae-Ung Baik, an authority on Korea; Diane Desierto, with expertise in Philippine legal issues as well as ASEAN, David Cohen, with social justice expertise in the ASEAN region; and David M. Forman ’93, with cultural and environmental resources expertise focusing on the Pacific; and Keiko Okuhara, a bibliographic services/systems librarian.

Prof. Petersen, who is also the Director of the Spark M. Matsunaga Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, taught law for 17 years in Hong Kong and continues to do research on human rights in Asia. When she arrived in Hong Kong in 1999, it was still a British colony but it became a Special Administrative Region of China in 1997. Petersen now teaches International Law and Gender and Law at Richardson and she regularly draws upon her experiences in Asia during her teaching.

“When we help shape the larger consciousness of the institution,” notes Levin. “And we brag that PALSO (the Pacific-Asian Law Student Organization) is one of the oldest because it goes all the way back to the founding of the Law School,” he added. Levin and our alumni would have been with Alison Conner and me arriving in the mid to late 1990s, which meant we had full-time language-capable faculty for both Japan and China. That was already pretty impressive, but then, look where we are now!”

In developing its Asia-Pacific focus, Richardson took both a spotlight and a floodlight approach. The former provides intensive coursework for those with an Asia-Pacific focus, while the latter allows spill-over benefits for the broader community of students. “We teach many students who aren’t necessarily coming to study Japanese or Chinese law,” said Levin. “Students can learn about this whether they arrive with a strong interest or just because it’s here. We want to broadcast an Asia-Pacific awareness to a large audience of students, and to the community beyond.”

Brown agrees “What our courses offer is an opportunity to spread their vision. For instance, I teach a course on comparative and international labor law. If you do any kind of business overseas in Asia, you’re going to have to deal with people, with employees. It gives comparative insights into the way they do business. That course also gets into international free trade agreements, human rights, and labor standards, as well as the specifics in each country, focusing on China, Japan, and Korea.”

Levin, a specialist in Japanese legal studies, taught in the Law Department of Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan before joining Richardson in 1997, and his research areas include criminal justice and minority issues in Japan. He has helped build the PALS Program along with Prof. Alison Conner, Prof. Lawrence Foster, and Prof. Ron Brown, who were its earliest faculty leads, and who all have a special interest in China.

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students to develop a comparative perspective on these important legal issues.”

Prof. Booth returned to the Richardson School of Law after teaching for 16 ½ years in Hong Kong. His expertise is in comparative and cross-border insolvency and commercial law and much of his research examines the development of insolvency and commercial law infrastructures in Hong Kong, China, and Asia generally. Over the last two decades he has been engaged in law reform work in Hong Kong, China, Vietnam, Mongolia, and Vanuatu as well as elsewhere.

“At the heart of my teaching and scholarship is a comparative focus that starts with an examination of what is necessary for commercial laws to take hold and prove successful,” said Booth. “I like teaching Asian-Pacific Insolvency Law at UH so my students and I can compare the insolvency regimes in several different jurisdictions and examine why some functions effectively but others do not. Even when teaching my U.S. subjects – secured transactions and corporate reorganizations – I often make comparisons with other legal regimes to demonstrate how a particular rule or approach in the U.S. system that we accept as the norm, is, in fact, quite unusual or unique.”

At Richardson, Booth also founded the Institute of Asian-Pacific Business Law (IAPBL) and he continues to serve as Director. “While PALS allows students to learn about Asian-Pacific Law,” he says, “I wanted to establish IAPBL to begin a dialogue among the members of the academic, legal, and business communities in Hawai‘i and throughout the Asia-Pacific region on business and commercial issues.” IAPBL has co-organized international symposia, conferences, and seminars in Hawaii, Hong Kong, and New York, most recently on Chinese restructuring and its cross-border implications (in Hong Kong) and Japanese insolvency law (in Hawaii). IAPBL has also sponsored talks at UH and appointed short-term Visiting Fellows and longer-term Research Fellows.

While the PALS program has long supported faculty exchanges, it has also offered numerous exchanges for students, sending UH law students to programs overseas, and bringing foreign law students to Richardson. Added to that are the many training sessions the Richardson Law School provides for Pacific Island judges, including ongoing training sessions over almost three decades for Micronesian judges, which bring groups to Hawaii for specialized courses in integrating western legal approaches with local cultural traditions, as well as sending Richardson faculty to Micronesia to teach and learn on home turf.

The student exchanges include externships through which UH Law students have gone to Yap, Pohnpei, Chuuk, American Samoa, the Republic of Palau, and Guam.

“The last 10 years we’ve just taken it to a whole new level,” says Levin. “Going back to the first exchanges as far back as the 1980s, it just shows how long the PALS program has been a vital force. The fact that so many of our graduates have taken on high level leadership positions throughout Asia and the Pacific, or jobs locally and on the mainland with Asia-Pacific businesses, is an indication of the importance of our program and its impact around this entire region.”

the PALS Program Director Prof. Mark Levin at the 2016 commencement ceremony with international Masters degree student Jae Young Lee from the Republic of Korea and Delhi Yuangcong from Bhutan.

GLOBAL REACH

The PALS Program Director Prof. Mark Levin at the 2016 commencement ceremony with international Masters degree student Jae Young Lee from the Republic of Korea and Delhi Yuangcong from Bhutan.

A faded Family Photo from Sri Lanka

And now, it’s all that’s left

For the grandmother who showed the photo to William S. Richardson School of Law Assoc. Prof. Tae-Ung Baik, it’s a precious memory of a family that boarded a government bus on May 18, 2009 in Kilinochchi, Sri Lanka and has never been seen again. As a member of the ‘Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances’ (WGEID) for the United Nations, Baik is part of an international humanitarian effort dealing with cases of forcefully disappeared persons in more than 80 countries around the world. He was appointed as one of five mandate-holders within the UN Human Rights Council mechanism, representing the Asia-Pacific region.

The situation in Sri Lanka is daunting, with between 80,000 to 100,000 people gone over the last three decades, tens of thousands of them around the end of the Sri Lanka government’s war with the revolutionary Tamil Tiger military seces-
The disappearance of this family occurred just as the civil war ended, as the government was promising amnesty to those who had been forced to work with the revolutionaries, or who had helped them in any way, even if for just a few moments. “Those five people were put in a bus together,” Baik repeats, studying the family in the picture, one of many photographs of the missing. “They have not returned. This is not an isolated case. This happened widely. The numbers of disappeared at the last moment of the war amount to tens of thousands. In times of war, the civilians or prisoners of war should be treated humanely. That’s international humanitarian law. But this is in violation of that and that’s a war crime. War crimes were committed here.”

Prof. Baik’s personal history as a political prisoner under a repressive former regime in his home country of South Korea makes his appointment and his work with the United Nations particularly compelling. In a powerful letter of recommendation in support of Prof. Baik’s nomination to the UN Working Group, Richardson Law School Dean Avi Soifer wrote: “Tae-Ung Baik has had to bear directly and at length what few of us would be able to bear at all. Nonetheless, he has emerged as a strikingly careful, wise, and effective human rights advocate.”

Baik’s personal story not only fuels his passion for social justice, but also serves as an inspiration for students in his classes and for his work with the United Nations. At Richardson he has formed the International Human Rights Advocacy Group inspiring students to create reports for submission to UN human rights mechanisms, on behalf of many who have suffered human rights abuses.

Baik’s own work is also an inspiration for his students. In Sri Lanka, for example, he was met with families, toured underground prison cells, glimpsed bone remnants scuffed in the dirt floors of torture chambers, he was overcome by the horror of atrocities that happened there. On a wall in one underground cell, prisoners had scratched lines with stones, a faint indelible record of long days of imprisonment.

He explained, “The underground prison cell facilities were the most shocking things I have seen. The Trincomalee, the name of the city where the Navy headquarters is located, had an underground facility inside the headquarters. The investigation of missing persons started in 2009, and there were clear indications that there were people in this facility in July of 2010. People were still put in this place while the move to find the disappeared persons happened outside. The criminal investigation division was looking for people but the Navy did not allow them access to this place until 2015. Furthermore, I have a feeling there are many more like this in there and in other parts of the country, but there’s no active search of the facilities, no investigation, and no proper search for truth by the government. In Sri Lanka there have been at least three different occasions (in the last 30 years) when disappearances happened,” said Baik. “The total number of disappeared would be more than 25,000. And the Working Group has transmitted to the government more than 12,000 cases, of which 5,760 are still outstanding.”

Baik said that from the research done by the UN Working Group, it is clear that the children taken away on the bus (referred to at the beginning of this story) were never members of the Tamil Tigers. “LTTE was forcibly drafting people to be their soldiers,” he said. “There were people who were forced to be sent to fight for them. They even kidnapped them and forcibly brought them to work for them. Not everyone was a voluntary fighter.”

There are other photos like the one of this family handed to him by a grieving grandmother; hundreds of them showing beloved family members who have disappeared, husbands who have vanished, sons never seen again. On its recent visit to Sri Lanka, the Working Group showed two mass graves, both poorly preserved. Few of the skeletal remains have been identified, and Baik said the government is leaving the sites as they were found, without securing them in any way or probing the nature of the mass killings.

“They are taking no pro-active measures to identify who they are,” said Baik. “The police officers say they are waiting for a court order, and reacting very slowly. Apparently there are more grave sites like this but after five or six years (since the end of the civil war) and so many disappearances, the government is not actively looking for places where bodies are buried and where the truth could start to be told.”

Some of that truth unfolded with the photos held aloft by families of victims during the Working Group’s visit. Even so, Baik said that one woman who met with the group told them how she had been threatened by a police officer because of her planned meeting with the UN delegation. “We will see you after your return from your meetings with the UN,” a police officer told her, said Baik. “We know you have three children. Police threaten them with serious revenge if they’re looking for family members, even when they meet with the UN delegation.”

Baik added, “Some of the people who had taken their husbands are still living in the same town. We raised this serious issue with the government.”

Sri Lanka is not the only country in which people have disappeared and never been accounted for. During February, for example, Baik and other members of the Working Group headed to Morocco to look into allegations of forcibly disappeared persons there. Sri Lanka and Morocco are just two of 43 countries with cases under investigation now by the UN group.
Unique Study Tour at UH Law Offers Law Students

From Japan an Invaluable Look at American Justice

HAWA'I STATE SUPREME COURT
Associate Justice Sabrina McKenna ’82 looks out at the eager faces before her, and begins to speak in Japanese, her native tongue. What she sees, says McKenna, are smiles and eyebrows lifting.

“And I have heard some quiet gasps and murmurs of what sound like surprise, appreciation, or perhaps relief,” adds McKenna, who spent her youth in Japan speaking both Japanese and English with native ability. Her father was an American serviceman; her mother a Japanese national.

For the visiting law students from five Japanese universities, it is a profound experience meeting a Supreme Court justice during the unique two-week law study tour sponsored by Richardson Law School.

Not only is it impressive to hear a Supreme Court justice speak in their own language, says program director Spencer Kimura ’96, but it’s a powerful message of how women have achieved the top ranks in the Hawai‘i judicial system.

“Having these role models has a big impact,” said Kimura. “It gets them to thinking that anything is possible, and that’s the most gratifying part.”

Adds McKenna: “Many students, especially young women, approach me afterwards, to tell me that they feel inspired to pursue justice in their country.”

Each spring for the past 15 years, Richardson Law School has invited up to 60 Japanese law students to the Mano‘a campus to learn about American and Hawai‘i law, meet local attorneys, visit and take photos with the Governor, witness various parts of the court system, drop in at the state legislature, and stop by the Women’s Community Correctional Center.

Included in the study tour are 15 customized lectures by Richardson Law faculty about a wide variety of legal subjects, including international human rights, American business law, environmental law, criminal law, and Native Hawaiian rights. Kimura said students are often particularly interested in Professor James Pietsch’s lecture on elder law because Japan is in the early stages of providing a wide range of legal assistance for its aging population. And they’re often surprised when Professor Mark Levin, director of the PALS program, offers up two full lectures directly in Japanese without translation.

The students have been excited for their visit with Governor David Ige, whose ancestors come from the part of Okinawa where one of the founding universities in the program is located.

Additionally, given that hardly any of the students have visited a law firm anywhere before, being hosted by the Good-sill Anderson Quinn & Stifel law firm opens their eyes to how an American law firm functions, including insider details such as how client billing works and what professional salary levels are.

“This study tour is invaluable,” notes McKenna, who has welcomed the students each year and shared, among other things, her reflections on justice in the U.S.; the huge difference Title IX made in women’s lives, including her own; and the latest numbers of women graduating from law schools across America.

McKenna points out that when U.S. Rep. Patsy Takemoto Mink initially authored the Title IX legislation before its passage in 1972, just 7 percent of U.S. law school graduates were women and just one woman was a Hawai‘i state court judge. Now the percentage of women law students from Japan are introduced to the UH Law Library.

Hawai‘i Supreme Court Associate Justice Sabrina McKenna ’82 meets with the visiting law students at the Old Courthouse.

PHOTOS BY SPENCER KIMURA ’96

““The Study Tour truly is a program that promotes Richardson and Hawai‘i to young future lawyers in Japan.""
school graduates is over 50 percent nationally, says McKenna, and 41 percent of Hawai i state court judges are women.

“WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW

“WILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW

“The program opens the students’ minds - not just to American and Hawai i law and culture,” McKenna says of the study tour, “but to so many wonderful Richardson professors and students, to be able to view law as a tool for social justice, and to see how committed, principled people working together, especially young people, can change the world for the better!”

The program has grown dramatically since it was first launched by former Richardson Law Dean Lawrence Foster. While it began with students from the University of the Ryukus, it now includes those from Aichi University, Aoyama Gakuin University, Meiji University, and Waseda University as well.

“The idea was to have 10 students and one faculty member from each university,” said Kimura, “but this past year we had 10 ‘extra’ students.” Several more universities wish to join the tour, said Kimura, but the program is already at capacity.

While the program offers the visitors an intensive view into the American justice system, and the political and legal systems in Hawai i at Richardson. Several former students have already participated in the LLM Master of Laws program, said Kimura, and he expects others will now choose among our newest advanced degrees at Richardson, the Advanced JD program (AJD) and Doctor of Juridical Science (SJD). All of these are specifically geared for foreign attorneys, although American-trained attorneys also may enroll.

“The Study Tour truly is a program that promotes Richardson and Hawai i to young future professionals in Japan,” said Kimura. “It provides them with an incredible opportunity to see what studying law would offer them if they were to branch out and apply to schools beyond Japan. “Richardson Law School is known for its diversity,” Kimura continues, “and many of the students are traveling abroad for the first time, and they are amazed by the unique cultural and personal environment of our Law School!”

Richardson Law Dean Avi Soifer added that the unusually welcoming atmosphere at Richardson attracts students from around the world.

“The LLM program alone has attracted students from more than 50 countries,” said Soifer. “They help create a rich environment for all our students, and they bring a wide variety of experiences and expertise to the Law School.”

During the program, the Japanese students often live in dorms on campus, but they have also been housed off campus and with host families. The universities in Japan are responsible for finding housing for the students and the faculty chaperones during their stay, while Richardson Law provides the daily programming.

Of particular interest to many of the students is the visit to the Women’s Community Correctional Center, said Kimura. During one visit, the incarcerated women chanted a special ‘oli to their Japanese visitors, and the law students sang several songs to the women in response. The moment was extremely touching, said Kimura, and many of the women prison- ers, as well as the students, had tears in their eyes.

“The law students are often touched deeply by their experiences in Hawai i,” said Kimura. “Many of these moments can be very emotional for everyone. They return home with new friendships among peers from across their own nation’s diverse regions, more richly understanding themselves, and the law as it’s practiced abroad. We hope they leave with a changed worldview and that they will return to Richardson someday.”

Many of these moments can be very emotional for everyone.

Part of the annual program includes time to enjoy Hawai i’s beauty.

 Meals in the Richardson Law School courtyard build friendships among the visiting students.
Outreach in Training Pacific Island Judges

Has a Long History at Richardson Law

ILLIAM S. RICHARDSON SCHOOL OF LAW has a long tradition of providing training for judges in Pacific island jurisdictions, going back to the early 1980s when Prof. Addison Bowman led a series of training workshops for judges mainly in Micronesia. There are numerous strong connections and, for example, Dennis K. Yamaue, ’91, is now Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the Federated States of Micronesia, as the substantial partnership continues in many different ways.

The idea of the Institute is to replicate in an intensive way what a lawyer might get in training in the first year of law school. It gives them the basics,” said Sally Pyn, who helped to start the partnership while serving as the Ninth Circuit’s Education Specialist. “This program is specifically for judicial education for the courts of the American territories and former American territories.”

Law Dean Avi Soifer said that it is particularly appropriate that the Richardson Law School provide legal training for the Pacific Island judges.

Soifer explained, “This actually was a key element in the founding vision of our Law School, shared by Chief Justice Richardson and his allies, who fought to make sure that Hawai’i had its own law school to serve the entire Pacific region. We have been committed ever since to educating people from these and other islands, and many of our graduates return to their homes in the Pacific to serve their communities.”

In addition to judicial training, the Law School has many other connections throughout the Pacific. For example, Dina Shek ’06, who founded the Medical-Legal Partnership for Children in Hawai’i, traveled to the Pacific with MLPC staff attorney Randy Compton ’02 to provide training about how to combine legal help with medical assistance.

Soifer added, “It is a real treat for us to learn from these judges. With major assistance from the Law School’s Director of Special Projects Minara Mordecai, I think both we and they have learned a lot and many people at Richardson have helped to make them feel comfortable in our community.”

Added Mordecai: “This is such an important way for the Law School to give back to the broader Pacific community. This program also strengthens our already strong Pacific connections.”
Conner Explores the Mysteries of Modern China
Through Art, Film, and Justice System

PROFESSOR ALISON CONNER remembers the moment well. “It was 2004, and I was with a friend during a Fulbright, and we were in this little shop in the antiques market in an area of Tianjin, very close to Beijing. It was just on a shelf with a lot of junk and it was a little dirty.”

Conner picked up the small figurine, rubbing away the dirt. “I’ve spent so many years looking in Chinese antique markets that I can spot what I want right away,” she says, reaching for the same small antique figurine that is now part of a tableau on a shelf in her UH Law School office.

Here, China’s Cultural Revolution has sprung back to life in the form of more than two dozen colorful figurines depicting theatrical characters from an idealized anti-intellectual proletarian past.

A China scholar, with a doctorate in Chinese history from Cornell as well as a law degree from Harvard, Conner has collected Chinese art and artifacts, assessed Chinese movies, and become an authority on contemporary Chinese society in the context of its social justice system.

“To me, why I believe in art and write about movies and expressions of culture. I’ve lived for maybe 15 years all over Chinese Asia and I’m always trying to balance law and Chinese culture,” she explained.

To Conner, art and film are not merely entertainment but serve as lenses through which to perceive a society’s legal and justice system, gender divisions, and civil rights.

Fascinated by the depictions of heroic characters from ‘approved’ plays and operas during the Cultural Revolution, Conner first discovered Cultural Revolution figurines by haunting junk stores and antique shops in Hong Kong and China in the early 1980s. Back then

Conner Explores the Mysteries of Modern China
Through Art, Film, and Justice System

China scholar Alison Conner specializes in both the law and culture of China.

roles in the creation and success of the LLM program that began in 2003 and has offered a Masters degree for foreign-trained lawyers and law school graduates from over 50 different countries.

More recently she has spearheaded an Advanced JD program for foreign law graduates through which, in as little as two years at Richardson, students learn enough to be able to take an American bar exam. “In the end they get a JD and can take any bar,” says Conner.

Add to that the VIP program for Visiting International Professionals and a reorganized Visiting Scholars program; and now she has led a multi-year effort to create an SJD degree, a doctorate in law, at Richardson.

“Our plan is to introduce it in fall 2016,” says Conner. “A number of LLMs say they would like to do a research degree, and we don’t offer it so they have to go somewhere else. We have people writing us to ask if we offer the SJD because they’d like to do it with us.”

Conner’s skill at developing programs isn’t limited to the Law School. She has been an important force in creating and participating in study abroad programs in China for the UH campus as a whole.

“I worked on the study abroad program for UH-Mānoa and I was the first resident director in Shanghai,” she explained. “It’s a terrific program for undergraduates and also wonderful for resident directors. Faculty members are able to go abroad and teach. Usually what happens in these programs is the UH resident director teaches courses either to everybody or separately to Chinese students as well.”

Conner spent the spring semesters of 2014 and 2015 in Shanghai as resident director for the new program based at Tongji University, teaching a general introduction to U.S. law specifically for Chinese students, and a course in law and society depicted in Chinese movies for UH study abroad students in the program.

“It’s still small,” says Conner. “A Study Abroad Council in composed of colleagues at UH help select the students and offer wonderful preparation for them. They check out all the courses and provide a comprehensive orientation.”

Conner’s colorful office on the second floor of the Richardson Law School building, with a view toward Diamond Head, is crammed with art, some pulled out of mailing tubes and spread out on the floor to flatten before framing. Joining the figurines from the Cultural Revolution

Figurines from eight approved plays during China’s harsh Cultural Revolution from 1966-1976 are now collectibles.
are papier mache vehicles from the Philippines, tapestries from remote corners of the Asian continent, and work by Chinese painters who are now gaining international renown. There is also a remarkable collection of colorful troupes in the form of cats.

Like the paintings, figures, and posters, early Chinese films from the 1930s and 1940s speak deeply to Conner’s interests. “There are also a number of films issues of their era, including criminal jus— and that’s why I got very interested and significant legal scenes. I couldn’t get over it special film festivals. They were all con— you could only see these old movies at “When I went to China to teach in 1983 and 1940s speak deeply to Conner’s attitudes, says Conner. “At the wife’s in— the husband and wife go to the lawyer’s office to ask him to draft the di— Carson’s ‘stuck in a patri—archal system, where husbands can have affairs, but wives cannot.”

One film in particular about divorce illustrates the changing law and social attitudes, says Conner. “At the wife’s insistence, the husband and wife go to the lawyer’s office to ask him to draft the divorce documents. The husband reluctantly signs the document and then it is the wife’s turn. The lawyer is their friend, and he sees that the wife is also hesitating to sign. ‘Divorce is hard on women. Have you really thought about it?’ he asks the wife. She replies ‘Yes, I want it.’ But then she can’t bring herself to sign and the lawyer rips up the document.

“He realizes that divorce isn’t what allows women for the first time to seek a divorce. If you were sitting in the audience, you’d say, ‘Oh, so that’s how I get a divorce.’”

The message from some of those early films, says Conner, is that filmmakers used legal settings to focus on justice and to explore whether justice was actually deliverable in the legal setting in China in that era. The woman in the film about divorce, for instance, is “stuck in a patriarchal system, where husbands can have affairs, but wives cannot.”

All art had to be linked to politics.

From the Start, The Pivot to Asia and the Pacific Has Been a Focus, and Nurtured by Larry Foster

Our program is absolutely outstanding.
Eric J. Piesner: Billion Dollar ‘Go To’

Corporate Attorney for Asia

From his base in Singapore, Richardson Law School alumnus Eric J. Piesner ‘92 handles real estate and corporate transactions worth hundreds of millions and often billions of dollars for the global entities he represents.

As Managing Partner for the Morrison & Foerster law firm, he launched the company’s Singapore office in January of 2013 after 12 years in the firm’s Tokyo office. With fluent Japanese, a bag packed constantly for travel, and a practice focused on cross-border transactions, Piesner covers a quarter of a million air miles every year handling the firm’s expansive corporate real estate business.

This involves representing large companies whose portfolios are based primarily on real estate holdings, as well as corporate and private equity work for major fund managers. Among other matters, he deals with fund formation, joint ventures, M&A, and a broad array of other corporate issues.

One of Piesner’s projects, for example, involved handling a $1.4 billion joint venture between Singapore-based Global Logistic Properties, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board, the China Investment Corporation, and the Government of Singapore Investment Corporation that combined to acquire 40 logistics properties in Brazil. In another, he worked with a group of German banks handling onshore and offshore debt restructuring for a large retail asset in Japan.

Piesner received his undergraduate B.A. degree at Colby College in 1988; his JD from the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai‘i in 1992, and an M.A. from the University of Hawai‘i in 1992.

“I chose Richardson Law School because of its strength in Asia-Pacific legal studies and because of its small size,” said Piesner. “I thought the faculty was fantastic and I really felt like my professors cared about the students and their progress.”

Piesner’s time in Hawai‘i – and now in Asia – has honed his skills at bridging sensitive cultural divides and bringing people together in common understanding. But he recognizes just how treacherous this legal terrain can be.

“It is pretty amazing how lawyers and companies in different countries look at legal risk and the role of lawyers differently,” Piesner explains. He recalls working on a project a few years ago with a company that also employed local counsel in a developing country. Tasked with producing a due diligence report on the target companies involved, the local counsel produced an 800-page document, little of which touched the risks that most concerned the client. It had nothing to do with how capable those lawyers were, Piesner points out, and everything to do with how someone from one culture can so easily misunderstand the needs of someone from another.

“They were smart lawyers,” he said, “but they just did not understand what was going to be important to our client.” Because of his gratitude to Richardson Law School, Piesner has recently worked differently.”

As we pivot to Asia it’s all the more important we have graduates who are interested to have the training and background to go to Asia to practice law.

“They wanted to reform the law schools, the judiciary, and bring back jury trials, and I got deeply involved in that as Dean,” Foster said. “I’d been going to Japan off and on already for some time, so I was asked to give a number of talks in Japan to law schools and Bar associations about American legal education. We hosted at the Law School a number of delegations in the 1990s, the largest being 200 Japanese lawyers.”

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Weinstein received his undergraduate B.A. degree at Colby College in 1988; his JD from the William S. Richardson School of Law at the University of Hawai‘i in 1992, and an M.A. from the University of Hawai‘i in 1992.

“I chose Richardson Law School because of its strength in Asia-Pacific legal studies and because of its small size,” said Piesner. “I thought the faculty was fantastic and I really felt like my professors cared about the students and their progress.”

Piesner’s time in Hawai‘i – and now in Asia – has honed his skills at bridging sensitive cultural divides and bringing people together in common understanding. But he recognizes just how treacherous this legal terrain can be.

“It is pretty amazing how lawyers and companies in different countries look at legal risk and the role of lawyers differently,” Piesner explains. He recalls working on a project a few years ago with a company that also employed local counsel in a developing country. Tasked with producing a due diligence report on the target companies involved, the local counsel produced an 800-page document, little of which touched the risks that most concerned the client. It had nothing to do with how capable those lawyers were, Piesner points out, and everything to do with how someone from one culture can so easily misunderstand the needs of someone from another.

“They were smart lawyers,” he said, “but they just did not understand what was going to be important to our client.” Because of his gratitude to Richard- son Law School, Eric has recently worked differently.”

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“Our program is absolutely out- standing,” he says. “We’re in the top 10 across the country. And one of the things that makes us outstanding is the breadth of our program. I don’t think anyone else teaches Philippine law on a regular basis. Or Korean law. Or Pacific Island legal systems. If you put that together with our ASEAN strength, and China and Japan, it’s pretty much a powerhouse.”

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with Law Professor Mark A. Levin, formerly on the faculty of Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan, to establish an endowment to support a Japan-focused scholarship fund. “I was grateful to the Law School for all it did for me and was looking for a way to give something back,” said Piesner. “A Japan-focused scholarship fund was a perfect fit given my background of working in Japan for many years and the central role Japan has played in my career.”

The first scholarship has already been awarded to a student, and the plan going forward is to award at least one each year.

With Hawai‘i’s close ties to Asia, and with the number of Asia-focused programs offered throughout the UH system as well as at the Law School, Piesner said he would hope someday to see more Asia-based alumni in senior management roles, in particular on the Board of Regents. That kind of commitment, said Piesner, would assist in focusing the UH academic community even further on the important role it can play in Asia.

Eric’s wife, Rae Piesner, is from Hawai‘i and the couple have three sons.

Prof. Mark Levin

**Named Program Director for PALS**

Professor Mark Levin, a Japanese law specialist on the William S. Richardson Law School faculty since 1997, has been named the Law School’s inaugural Pacific-Asian Legal Studies (PALS) Program Director. Levin is also Deputy Director of the Institute of Asian-Pacific Business Law at UH Law School.

In making the announcement, Dean Avi Soifer noted: “Mark has been a fixture in our PALS Program for nearly 20 years. He appreciates that the Program will be central to the school’s future in coming decades. We are fortunate that he brings a steady hand to help navigate the Program towards new directions.”

Levin said he was excited to take on this new responsibility and for the opportunity it offers to work more closely with colleagues, students, alumni, and friends.

“The President recently described America making a ‘pivot’ to Asia for the 21st-century,” he said, “but Richardson has no need to pivot. Asian and Pacific legal studies have been a part of what we’ve done from the start.”

Levin added: “Our PALS Program’s reach has geographic breadth from India, up through the ASEAN region, to all of East Asia and across the waters to the Pacific Island nations and territories. We have unique depth in our world-famous multi-faceted faculty of area specialists in the public and private legal spheres and with our student-led Asian-Pacific Law and Policy Journal, which is in its 18th year of publication.”