

# EMORY

# lawyer

SPRING 2013

## Complex Litigation: Emory's Leading Players

### ALSO INSIDE

- Mary Dudziak Joins Faculty
- Emory Law's "Evangelist"





# Building a 21st-Century Curriculum

*A consummate scholar and leader, Emory Law's vice dean is committed to fostering student learning that leads to professional success.*

by Jennifer Bryon Owen

**R**obert Ahdieh's work as a scholar started sooner than most—and earlier than even he might have wished. Only days after completing his senior thesis, Ahdieh received an email from his advisor: “Enough relaxing. Time to get back to your carrel and turn your thesis into a book.” Two years later—at the end of his second year of law school—he sent his adviser the printed copy.

This was just the first step toward Ahdieh's success as a scholar. He has published nearly 25 articles and book chapters, including in some of the nation's very top law reviews. Several are recognized as among the best in the field and have been translated and republished overseas. He is invited regularly to teach and speak at campuses across the country and around the world.

At Emory Law, his command as a scholar has not gone unnoticed. Prior to being named vice dean, Ahdieh was associate dean of the faculty, a leadership position in faculty research and scholarship. From his earliest days on the faculty, though, he was active in the school's decision-making and planning, making him the obvious choice to oversee the curriculum, a primary task in his role as vice dean.

Ahdieh now focuses his attention on the educational experience of Emory Law students, making sure they have the best curriculum possible. For many scholars of his caliber, this would have been an impossible choice. But for Ahdieh, it came easily.

“For those who don't have the privilege to teach, it's hard to convey the energy and excitement of the classroom,” says Ahdieh, who teaches first-year courses in contracts and in legislation and regulation, as well as upper-level classes in corporate law, emerging markets law and international trade law. “Obviously, we have an incredible scholarly community here at Emory, but when it comes to the enthusiasm to learn and engage new ideas, the students are my source of energy.”

Taking the lead on curriculum design and working with the faculty's Curriculum Committee, Ahdieh identified gaps and opportunities for enhancement in the curriculum and began developing strategies to address them. Also, as vice dean, Ahdieh has helped guide development of the law school's non-JD programs, including the SJD, LLM and innovative JM degrees, and played a leadership role

in international studies, new program development, and marketing and communications. Along with Professor William Buzbee and Dean Robert Schapiro, he also co-directs Emory's Center on Federalism and Intersystemic Governance.

Curriculum changes are being made and will continue, as the Curriculum Committee and Ahdieh evaluate the school's offerings. The increasing distinctiveness of Emory Law's curriculum is best captured, he says, by contrast with the traditional model, which still prevails at most law schools: After students complete the first-year required curriculum, they are largely left on their own to determine the courses and credentials that will best situate them professionally.

“At Emory,” says Ahdieh, “we're developing curricular pathways that will give students much more robust insight into potential courses of study. Two years ago, we redesigned the curriculum, to introduce an elective into the spring semester that would help students begin thinking about their curricular and professional goals as early as their first year,” says Ahdieh. “Not to decide anything, but to begin to think about it.”

Beyond that, as students start to consider different areas of law, Emory Law helps them identify the foundational and enrichment courses available in that area and determine the optimal course sequencing for advancing their professional development.

While this approach is still a work in progress, its implementation promises to put Emory Law well ahead of the curve, says Ahdieh.

“It situates our students to bring greater substance to the table and thus compete more effectively with students at other schools who don't have the





benefit of this thoughtful approach to what they bring to an employer.”

The challenge for Ahdieh is to continue thinking about today’s curriculum while also envisioning what it will look like five or ten years down the line. Only in this way can the law school remain ahead of the curve.

**“When it comes to an enthusiasm to learn and engage new ideas, the students are my source of energy.”**

It was a very different set of interests—in the former Soviet Union—that brought Ahdieh to academia. “I became, by virtue of fortuitous timing, one of the world’s experts in Russian constitutional law,” says Ahdieh, whose scholarly interests also include transactional law, law and economics, international financial regulation, administrative law, and federalism.

As an undergraduate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, he began writing papers on the political and economic transformation of the Soviet Union. But his primary focus was law.

“The secondary sources on legal reform were limited, so most of my research consisted of interviews. I interviewed [Mikhail] Gorbachev and most of the members of parliament involved in drafting the new constitution,” says Ahdieh, who also worked for Gorbachev, writing speeches and conducting policy analysis. “It was largely because of this source material that I got the opportunity to turn my thesis into a book. For the first two years of law school, I was a student by day. And at night, I wrote.”

In addition to Russian law, Ahdieh brought to academia a broad range of interests that included comparative and international law, emerging markets law, and contracts, which were the courses with which he began his teaching career. From these, Ahdieh’s interests have evolved in the direction of regulation and, more broadly, into the nature of government in modern, industrialized economy. Drawing on the insights of game theory, for example, his recent work calls for more systematic thinking about the origins of financial crises—and the implications for how these might better be prevented.

These scholarly interests are never far from his mind. For now, though, Ahdieh finds satisfaction in bringing the scholar’s analytical skills to bear on developing a 21st-century law school curriculum—and, in the process, seeing Emory Law students identify and pursue their own interests and success.

[www.law.emory.edu/faculty/faculty-profiles/robert-b-ahdieh.html](http://www.law.emory.edu/faculty/faculty-profiles/robert-b-ahdieh.html)