On September 15, 2018, future generations of forensic psychologists and forensic psychology post-doctoral fellows lost a teacher, a mentor, a future colleague and, very likely, a friend they were yet to learn they had. The passing of Albert J. Grudzinskas, Jr., was indeed a significant loss to the field of mental health law, to his friends, family, and colleagues across Massachusetts, and to his former students and colleagues across the United States and Canada – and there are many. Albert, or “Al,” led the Landmark Case Law Seminar series in the University of Massachusetts Medical School (UMMS) Forensic Psychology Fellowship program, and we are his former students. To this date, including ourselves, there are upwards of 80 graduates from the UMMS Forensic Psychology and Psychiatry Fellowship program that are indebted to Al for his teaching and mentorship on mental health law. Thus, we would like to take this opportunity to honor his contributions and to highlight the impact that his gracious and collegial teaching style had on the students who were so fortunate to have worked with him. Before discussing his approach to the Landmark Case Law Seminar, we would like to introduce our teacher:

Al was born in Worcester, Massachusetts, where he spent most of his life. He attended Northeastern University from 1969-1974 and graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science (B.S.) in Journalism. When asked how he obtained a “B.S.” (rather than a B.A.) in Journalism, he explained that he enrolled in engineering but was convinced by the institution that journalism was a better fit for him. Although this may have been perceived as a sharp turn in his career trajectory, ultimately, it was a prudent decision given the many years he would spend writing as a lawyer and scholar. Following his undergraduate degree, he obtained his Juris Doctorate from the College of Law at Syracuse University in 1977. He then embarked on what would be a successful and rewarding career in law. During his first 20 years, he established a private practice focused on criminal, domestic relations, mental health, and real estate law. Considering his criminal cases alone, he represented 500 defendants and participated in 175 trials – 60 of which were jury trials. When he described this period in his career, one student asked him how he felt about defending clients who may truly be guilty. He explained, in a secure and confident fashion, that he did not view the job of criminal defense attorneys as attempting to get guilty clients “off the hook.” Rather, he believed his job was to ensure that the prosecution presented their case accurately and fairly; if they did not, his clients should be free. Al’s values were clear in his teachings regarding the law – whether discussing landmark cases or his own practice, Al believed that the law should be fair.

In 1987 Al became an attorney for the Department of Mental Health in Massachusetts. In eight short years, he argued 1,500 commitment hearings, 150 civil and criminal competency determinations, and 280 guardianship hearings at Worcester State Hospital. In 1995, Paul Appelbaum and Thomas Grisso conducted a national search for a new mental health attorney for the Law-Psychiatry program at UMMS. Al applied for this position and was quickly recognized for his practice-related skills and academic potential. His acceptance of this position marked the starting
point for the next 20 years of his career as an academic and mental health law scholar. At UMMS, he wore many hats: Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry; Director of Legal Studies, Law and Psychiatry Program and Center for Mental Health Services Research; Associate Director for Operations, Center for Mental Health Services Research; and Director of Program Development for Massachusetts Mental Health Diversion and Integration Program. One hat that he will always be remembered for is that of the “Law” in the Law & Psychiatry program (as he is fondly remembered for saying). During this latter half of his career, Al spent much of his time teaching and supporting students. In addition to leading the UMMS Law & Psychiatry seminars on landmark cases, he provided many grand rounds presentations at UMMS, delivered numerous lectures for the annual Massachusetts Department of Mental Health conferences, and taught at various institutions, including: Roger Williams School of Justice Studies; the University of Massachusetts Lowell School of Criminology and Justice Studies; the New England College of Law; the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth Law School; and the Quinsigamond Community College Criminal Justice Program. He was also very active in both the American Psychology-Law Society and the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law. It is not an overstatement to note that there are thousands of individuals across Massachusetts, the United States, and even Canada who benefited from Al’s dedication to teaching. And for this, we are thankful.

At UMMS, Al’s approach to teaching mental health law to budding psychologists and psychiatrists was both applied and accessible. Law classes can often be sterile experiences that are difficult to translate to the perspective of mental health practitioners; Al’s approach was the antithesis of this. The structure of his Landmark Case Law Seminar was designed to map onto clinically relevant issues. Didactics were dedicated to an entire day of the week, broken into two parts. Mornings consisted of a presentation on some topic of psychology and law, typically from the perspective of a forensic mental health professional who spoke about issues such as competency evaluations, risk assessment, response style and malingering, or child custody evaluations. The second part of the day was Al’s wheelhouse. It consisted of a review of three to six landmark cases which were specifically selected to augment the morning’s subject matter. If a forensic psychologist spent the earlier part of the day discussing instruments for assessing competency to proceed, Al would review case law suitable to that topic in the afternoon: Dusky v. United States (1960), Jackson v. Indiana (1972), Godinez v. Moran (1993), etc. This structure may seem commonplace to current forensic-focused interns or postdoctoral fellows, but Al was among the forerunners in formalizing this approach. Afternoon sessions on case law would last anywhere from 90 minutes to three hours. Cases were generally assigned and trainees would divide them as they saw fit. We were tasked with reading them and writing a one-page brief (similar to traditional briefs in law courses). This consisted of a summation of the facts of the case, the procedural history, the legal issues being considered, the holding of the court, and (most importantly) the legal rationale behind the decision. His approach was not just to teach cases but to integrate them into the practice of forensic psychology – he emphasized how these cases changed or informed our practice. Al sought to understand the perspective of practitioners and made an effort to tailor his teachings to an applied mental health context. He would discuss the holding of a case and then ask us, “How is this relevant to what you do?” It was never just an academic exercise.

Behind the structure of Al’s teaching style was his vast understanding of the law. He was keen to point out common misperceptions, such as the guaranteed rights of life, liberty, and property within the Constitution—not the pursuit of happiness (that would be the “penumbra” of the Constitution). If ever Al asked a seemingly simple question about the law, you would be fool-hearted to reply with any answer besides, “It depends…” A trainee became regularly bemused by his persistent reminders about legal fundamentals, such as “fundamental fairness” and “knowingly, intelligently, and voluntarily” waiving Constitutional rights. He hand-delivered balancing tests and decision trees to aid in
following legal analysis. “Is there a fundamental right at issue? If so, which one? Does the government have a compelling interest in overriding that right? Looks like it. So is it a substantive or due process right?” So on and so forth.

What made Al such a cherished contributor to learning the law was not limited to what he knew or how he taught it; it was elevated by his humor and kindness. His seminars were evenly dispersed with legal discussion and laughter. He made learning the law fun (if you can imagine) by hosting Landmark Case Law Jeopardy twice a year – and we are convinced that he derived, at the very least, some enjoyment in seeing collegial forensic psychology fellows turn a competitive corner. As his student, you truly appreciated the way in which our enjoyment of his exercises brought him enjoyment – he taught to us, and for us. His instruction was Socratic, context-driven, and exceptionally comprehensive, but is perhaps best described as generous. He was not only replete with knowledge, but selflessly poured his time, energy, and person into our learning process. This is demonstrated by his frequent invitations to observe him in court proceedings, which he would swiftly transform into immersive pedagogical exercises. A notable instance was a high-profile commitment hearing that he prepared for extensively. Despite inherent pressure in the occasion, he enthusiastically held an impromptu 45-minute didactic session leading up to the hearing. Not only did this prime us for learning, but our investment in his performance made the issues in the hearing palpable.

He had a way of injecting context into our cases that led to organic internalization of concepts. When one would clumsily present a case that may seem bone-dry at face value, Al would go on to paint a vivid picture of the relevant historical, sociocultural, and sometimes “pop” cultural backdrop. He liked to point out that the psychiatrist in Roy v. Hartogs (1976) was previously famous for evaluating an adolescent Lee Harvey Oswald, or that Wyatt v. Stickney (1972) was the longest running mental health lawsuit in history (more than three decades) and cost an estimated $15 million in litigation. Whether discussing the civil rights movement, eras of the court, psychedelic drugs, or the writer of Wonder Woman, he made distant and perhaps dusty legal concepts come to life through contextualization. Justices of the Supreme Court became rock stars, and their opinions something personal with which to wrestle. These vivid illustrations set the stage for discussions of legal, clinical, and philosophical considerations that called for critical thinking and intellectual curiosity.

Al used a breadth of teaching methods that are known to promote learning, but the essence of his approach resided in the personal environment he cultivated. It’s likely that postdoctoral fellows do not expect to remember case law with a warm fondness, but it was inevitable if you learned it from Al. His human quality made the material a secondary product of learning, as our relationship with him fostered a frank desire to better understand law. He was always willing to help if you had a legal question, whether it was random intrigue or concerning a personnel matter, and he would go out of his way to unearth a legal quandary. A glimpse of Al’s jovial personality was premiered every year during fellowship interviews, where he would customarily ask each applicant to name each of the Seven Dwarfs (Sleepy, Sneezy, Bashful, Grumpy, Happy, Doc, Dopey). It would amount to insider trading if ever an applicant was warned of these marque questions ahead of time; however, it would be no betrayal to mention that he was always delighted if you named “Sleazy, the Lawyer Dwarf.”

Al was a dedicated mental health law professor, a respected and cherished colleague, and a kind teacher. His support was unwavering, and his teachings were both humbling and inspiring. As future forensic psychologists, with Al, we were simultaneously building a knowledge base of mental health law while slowly appreciating how much more we had to learn about our place in and around the law. We are indebted to him, and we are thankful for his time and devotion. He is greatly missed and will be remembered by many.
Dr. Brianne K. Layden is a Threat Assessment Specialist at Protect International Risk and Safety Services Inc., in Vancouver, BC.

Dr. Vera A. Klinoff is a Neuropsychology Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in Worcester, MA.

Dr. Heath Hodges is a Designated Forensic Psychologist and Fellowship Co-Director at Bridgewater State Hospital in Bridgewater, MA.

All three authors were Forensic Psychology Postdoctoral Fellows at the University of Massachusetts Medical School in the 2017-18 academic year. The authors would like to thank Dr. Ira K. Packer and Dr. Thomas Grisso for their kind support and thoughtful feedback in preparing this newsletter.