

## The Pleasures of Adjunct Teaching

Ralph Capio  
August 2020

I was at my desk in the US Embassy, Rome one day in 1991 when the phone rang. I answered, in typical military fashion, by rank and last name. An ever-so-slight pause ensued, and then the as-yet unidentified caller, quizzically, stated my first name. Somewhat surprised by that, I confirmed that was, indeed, who I was. He then identified himself as a naval officer, a judge advocate, stationed at the US Naval Air Station, Rota, Spain, and that he, many years earlier, as an Air Force enlisted man, had been a student in one of my University of Maryland Business Law classes at Lindsey Air Station, Wiesbaden, Germany.

He went on to say that he was so impressed by his University of Maryland experience, that, when his term of enlistment was up, he separated from active duty and went back to school full time to complete his undergraduate degree. Thereafter, he went on to law school, took and passed the bar exam, was admitted to the practice of law, and applied for and was given a commission in the United States Navy as a judge advocate. He was calling my office in Rome regarding a transnational NATO legal issue not knowing, of course, that I would be the attorney answering his call.

He went on to say that my interaction with him as his classroom instructor had motivated him to become an attorney himself and, eventually, to become a judge advocate, as am I. If, as the old adage says, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, I was certainly flattered that he had taken my guidance so much to heart. Knowing that my efforts, and example, in a University of Maryland classroom, had such a life-changing impact on this young man was astounding. Teachers don't often have the benefit of seeing the direct impact they may have had on the long-term interests of their students. This was one of those rare, and gratifying, moments. And it helped justify my decision so many years ago to become a teacher.

I started my military career as an active duty Air Force officer, first as a Navigator in the B-52 aircraft, then as a judge advocate, retiring after 35 years in uniform. But, early on, I also was called to teach, thinking that it would be a satisfying experience. Little did I know at the time just how true that would be. From my first teaching experience in 1974, I would teach (primarily Law and Government classes) more or less continuously, for the next 26 years" in the University of Maryland's far-flung global campus in Asia (Misawa, Japan), Europe (Lindsey AS, Wiesbaden, and Sembach AB, Kaiserslautern, Germany), and the Middle East (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia). If I'm not mistaken, given my military assignment in-Kingdom, I may have been the first UMUC faculty member to have "boots on the ground" in Saudi Arabia.

As a member of the UMUC adjunct faculty, I had the distinct pleasure of interfacing with full-time UMUC faculty that would periodically come to our bases, generously committing to teach our military personnel and their family members, giving them the possibility of earning college credits even though they were so far from home. Being part of the UMUC team was a career broadening experience beyond description for me.

Who could forget having a collegial relationship with Leo Buscaglia, at the height of his popularity as a best-selling author, during his Maryland teaching assignments in Misawa, Japan? Interactions with talented UMUC

administrators, such as Joe Arden and Rosemary Scholl, who graciously welcomed me as a full-fledged member of their adjunct faculty, was refreshing each and every time. Base Education Officers (ESOs) like Bill Berlin were not only knowledgeable in delivering quality education services in a not-so-easy-to-deal-with overseas environment but were a cast of characters in their own right. And, from the perspective of our students, how could one measure the unique value of taking an Art History class and then visiting Florence soon thereafter or a Geology class and then hiking through the Alps?

In addition, as an active duty military officer, teaching for the University of Maryland gave me the opportunity to see and work with our airmen in a completely different way than my day job ordinarily provided. I got to know them, and they, in turn, got to know me, in ways that military members don't often interact, more as a mentor/protege relationship than the traditional military relationship. I would also like to think that as a practicing military attorney, with hands-on professional experience, I brought additional credibility and insight to the University's classrooms abroad.

My experience with the University of Maryland was professionally enriching and personally rewarding in so many ways. I look back on that long experience with very fond memories of exotic places and interesting people.