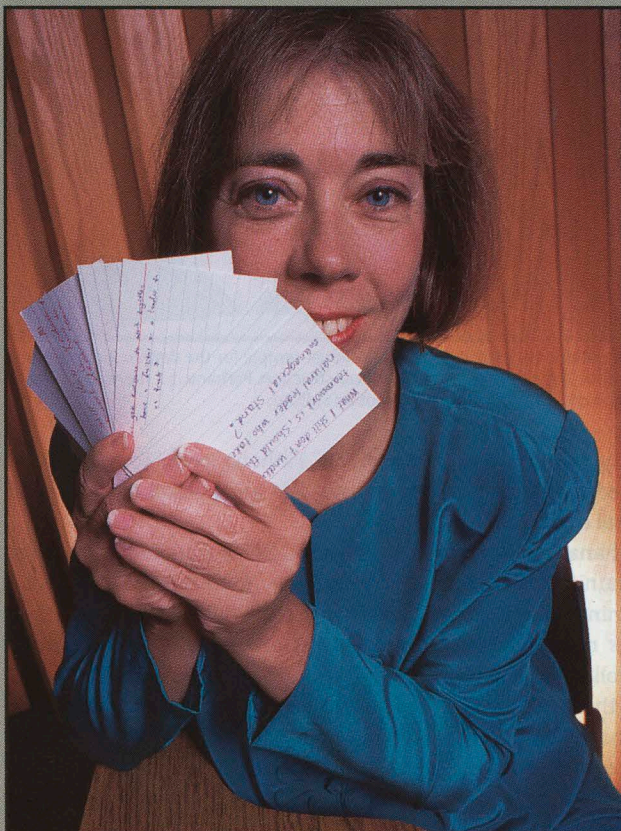


F o c u s

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School of Management professor Fran Zollers G'74 flashes a handful of her "muddiest-point" cards, which she uses to improve student learning.

"Peer review is a way to open up an ongoing dialogue on pedagogy and make teaching community property."

—Fran Zollers G'74

Enhancing teaching through peer review

Fran Zollers G'74, professor of law and public policy, is a no-nonsense person who doesn't mince words. Equally adept and highly regarded as a teacher and researcher, she rejects what she labels "the false dichotomy" between teaching and research. "They are the two essential, mutually reinforcing activities of a great center of learning," she asserts. "But for far too long, teaching didn't get equal respect."

Today, as teaching undergoes a great revival in higher education, Zollers plays multiple roles on a broad stage. A member of the select national Peer Review of Teaching Project, she helped launch the peer review movement and give it credibility. As a true believer, she proselytized on behalf of peer review in countless workshops and presentations from California to the United Kingdom. As a School of Management faculty member, she is a link to broader currents of change and a force for innovation. In her own classroom, she is an avid experimenter, constantly fine-tuning the techniques that bolster her reputation as an outstanding teacher.

Zollers's commitment to the concept of peer review in teaching rests on her conviction that it is perhaps the most effective way of elevating the status of the classroom art. "Until teaching shares the attribute of peer review with research, it's bound to take a back seat," she insists. "We talk with colleagues about our research and ask them to review it to make it better. Why not do the same with teaching? Peer review is a way to open up an ongoing dialogue on pedagogy and make teaching community property."

The "teaching portfolio" is a form of peer review Zollers helped to pioneer in the School of Management. A course portfolio opens with the instructor's intellectual argument for the course and a rationale for the approach. It documents the progress of the course and its outcomes using sample exams, student work, and student and instructor evaluations as instructive evidence. "Ideally, a portfolio displays my methods and effectiveness as a teacher," Zollers says. "It's something I can share with colleagues. It marks the beginning of that hoped-for dialogue."

School of Management faculty members adopted peer review two years ago, and teaching portfolios are a virtual must. By coincidence, Zollers currently serves as co-chair of the faculty's promotion and tenure committee, which plays a key role in defining the criteria for professional advancement. When she suggests that "You can't begin to make a case for promotion or tenure without a portfolio," her words carry special weight. "As teaching assumes greater importance, we've got to have the culture and prototypes in place to manage the shift," she says.

In the classroom Zollers draws on an eclectic repertory of strategies and methods—most of them inspired by or borrowed from colleagues. "Talking and working with groups and individuals focused

on teaching has raised my self-awareness tremendously—that's the great payoff of dialogue," she says. "I've become more conscious of every step in the teaching process. I'm continually probing the soft spots, determining who's getting the material and who's not—and finding all this out before the final exam, not after."

"Muddied-point" cards are a simple yet effective diagnostic tool—and a student favorite. When she completes a unit, Zollers passes out file cards asking students to complete this sentence: "I still don't understand (blank)." "If I get three or four similar responses, I know I have to go back over the material," she says. "I'm confident only when I can understand how they're learning, where the gaps are, and what it will take to fill them."

Among her students, Zollers is known as an exacting taskmaster. "She's dedicated, supportive, encouraging—all the things a great teacher should be," a former student recalls. "But she won't let you off the hook. She holds her students to the same high standards by which she measures her own performance." —TOM RAYNOR

Teaching law around the world

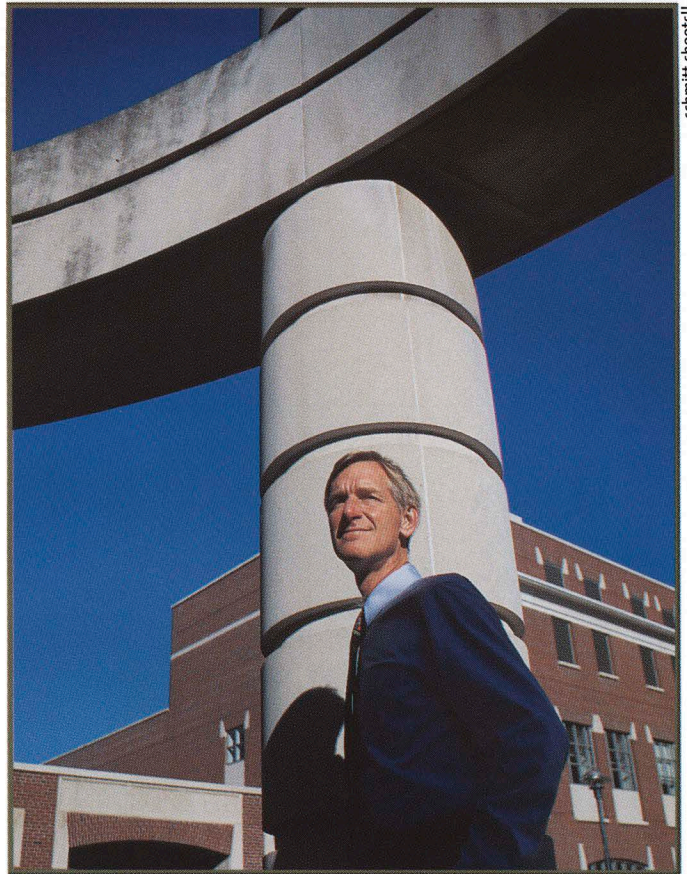
William Banks is arguably one of the most prominent professors at SU's College of Law. One-on-one, however, his quiet, unassuming demeanor belies his renown as a legal scholar. "Still waters run deep," College of Law Dean Daan Braveman says of his good friend and colleague, whom he has known since Banks came to SU 20 years ago from his hometown of Lincoln, Nebraska. "Despite his accomplishments, he's the most understated person you're going to meet."

Those accomplishments are many. Banks lectures around the world on his specialties of constitutional, national security, and administrative law. He co-wrote several books that are widely used in law and graduate schools throughout the United States. In 1994 he served as special counsel to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee during confirmation hearings for Supreme Court nominee Stephen G. Breyer. In April he was named a Meredith Professor at SU; part of his duties are to establish a campus-wide graduate legal studies program. And he currently teaches in the high-profile National Security Studies program, which the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs sponsors for high-ranking military and civilian Department of Defense officials.

"Constitutional law has been an interest of mine since high school and college," Banks says. "I've always been interested in how government works, what makes it effective, how government operates according to the rule of law." Banks's specialty in national security law grew out of an interest in civil liberties and individual rights. "Being a child of the Vietnam era, I remember going through that period wondering whether the government was playing by its own rules."

He has traveled to China three times to speak on administrative law as part of a joint Maxwell-College of Law effort called the Rule of Law initiative. Along with College of Law professor Richard Goldsmith, Banks is working with government officials and academics from leading universities in China. "What's going on there now is quite striking," Banks says. "This whole idea of moving toward a government based on the rule of law in the People's Republic of China—it's probably one of the most important developments in the world today. It's a symbol of the Chinese determination to join the larger world community—to play by rules that are similar at least in form to those that the rest of us play by."

"Because of the country's size, population, and recent history of party-based government, it's a task staggering in its magnitude. To see this transformation happen is really quite impressive. Syracuse



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College of Law professor William Banks lectures around the world on constitutional, national security, and administrative law.

University has a key role to play—we are among the leaders at working with the Chinese to develop the administrative structures and processes needed to have a rule-of-law-based system."

Banks took a sabbatical last spring to work on a writing project, but at a friend's request he ended up teaching at the five-year-old University of Asmara in the East African nation of Eritrea. "It was a fascinating experience," he says. "The country is only seven years old, having fought a 30-year civil war for independence from Ethiopia."

Banks's other international travels are sponsored by organizations ranging from the Fulbright Foundation to the U.S. State Department. Most of his lectures center on comparative constitutional systems. "For the most part it's an easy assignment because the U.S. Constitution is widely respected around the world," he says. "People in many other nations question our policies or our politics, our values in some key areas, but few would question the integrity and strength of our Constitution."

Braveman says Banks is one of the law school's finest professors. "He takes his teaching very seriously. He's very focused on our students, making sure they succeed. Through his writing and presentations, he brings a lot to the classroom."

Banks encourages his students to deal actively with real problems in their communities, society, and around the world. "I believe that teaching theory is very important and that theory is a useful part of a student's background for years to come," he says. "But at the end of the day, the critical thing is to teach students how to help other people solve problems. Legal theory is not doing anyone very much good unless you are effective at putting it into practice and solving problems. You can't just sit back and think—you have to do something." —GARY PALLASSINO