

# Alumni Spotlight: Mitchell Goldberg

Selecting which undergraduate institution to attend can be an overwhelming decision for just about anyone. And appreciating how the selection of an undergraduate major can potentially shape one's life choices and pathways generally seems murky at first. Yet given some time and some reflection, usually it becomes clear how these decisions, often made at a relatively young age, have so profoundly shaped, in a very individualized manner, our lives.

Mitch Goldberg received his Bachelor of Arts in History from DePaul University in 1996. He graduated from DePaul's Law School in 1999, and he now practices law in the Chicago area. Mitch was initially drawn to DePaul for several reasons. DePaul's small-class sizes were desirable as was the focus on faith, education, and respect for others. These values corresponded very well with the values that Mitch's family had instilled in him. "My maternal grandfather (of blessed memory) told me many years ago; before I could even internalize the message: 'that good family and true friends are the real treasure and greatest measure of success in life.' This definition of success has really been a large factor in my personal choices, including choosing DePaul, as well as my career path."

Selecting a major often defines a person's undergraduate education. For Mitch, his family's values once again offered both support and freedom for him to make his own decision. "When I first began at DePaul, I really hadn't thought about what I wanted to do. My father, who hails from Edinburgh, Scotland, is the first high school (let alone college) graduate in his family. To my father, attending college was not a means to an end (i.e., to get a job), but, rather, an end in itself. My father believes that education is its own reward. To him, an education makes us better citizens and people. He strongly favored a liberal arts education so that I could learn all the necessary problem solving tools I would need, regardless of my career path. As an undergraduate at DePaul, I remember once asking him about the need for a college education should I end up pursuing a career in something completely unrelated to any field of study. I used the example of fishing (at the time, a preferred avocation). My father responded with a slight smile (but

in all seriousness), 'Ah...but at least you'll be an educated fisherman.'" Mitch decided not to be a fisherman but rather to major in history. "While all of my [history] professors seemed to genuinely care about my development as a person, I found myself particularly drawn to (and strongly identified with) a common theme that I detected in their teachings: a



seemingly uniform desire to preserve and report accurate data and facts in its historical context, while clearly identifying biases – including their own."

The history classes did not disappoint Mitch's high expectations. "I very much enjoyed the large variety of topics and the passion of the professors in DePaul's History Department. While I truly enjoyed many of the classes I took, I can't think of any other subjects, which provided the same combination of entertainment and critical thinking. I was constantly challenged and taught to apply concepts and facts I had learned to answer difficult questions of possible cause and effect. However, I was, very often so riveted by class discussions and the artful descriptions of certain events that, when the professor announced the class had ended, I had to look at my watch in disbelief. Many times I couldn't believe that so much time had gone by so quickly."

Mitch sees parallels between his former history classes and his present work as an attorney. "This may sound strange, but when you think about it, the

practice of law in the litigation arena is really just history by another name. The writing of legal arguments before various courts is merely researching and compiling the history of those cases which came before and trying to organize the facts and reasoning of those cases into an argument supporting or opposing a position in a current case. The preparation for a trial, when it comes down to it, is the same kind of 'spade work' historians do in researching their various topics. A trial lawyer needs to dig deep – in the form of intense document review, witness interviews, and identifying and reviewing important evidence – to understand what happened at a point of time in history. Once a litigator has a clear understanding of the facts and circumstances, it is time to organize, coalesce, and distill that data into a coherent argument to explain what happened. This job description is pretty spot-on to the job of a historian. Just as historians owe a duty to posterity to be thorough in their often painstaking research, lawyers have a similar duty to clients, as well as to the broader concepts of justice and liberty."

The lessons learned in DePaul's history classes continue to resonate with Mitch. "History can also teach important lessons for life. History teaches an innate appreciation for academic honesty. As a discipline, it teaches us to be up front with the limitations of research and potential biases in source materials. Unlike many other purveyors of information, history, as a discipline, teaches us to stand against 'spinning' information to serve specific agendas. And those with a strong history background are usually at the vanguard of those poking holes in propaganda or mere opinions presented as news or facts." Mitch recalls a history professor advising him that it was "important to remember to take the time to give back. I have taken this message to heart. I offer my time and efforts to help support DePaul, including mentoring through the Alumni Sharing Knowledge (ASK) Program."

Looking back on his years at DePaul, Mitch concisely sums up his experiences. "At DePaul, I was never a number or a statistic: I was valued for being myself. I was seen as someone valuable." (TK)