

Spotlight On



UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA

'Huge' part of Baron's work is teaching first-year law students

By Travis Gulbrandson
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Despite having won the John Wesley Jackson Memorial Award for Outstanding Professor of Law at USD twice before, Roger M. Baron admits to being blindsided on his third win this spring.

"I was really surprised, because I didn't know I'd been nominated," he said.

Baron's selection was made by a committee and based on criteria demonstrating excellence in the teaching of law, including effectiveness in the classroom, efforts to improve legal education in ways that serve the needs of the profession and of South Dakota and contributions to the profession through public service.

"Professor Baron is an entrepreneur of student experience, and events he has started here are now traditions," Dean Tom Geu said in a press release. "He is a marvelous teacher and scholar who cares deeply for students and colleagues on a personal basis. USD Law is a better place because Roger is here."

Baron said "a huge part" of his work at USD — where he has been on staff since 1990 — is teaching first-year students.

"One of the courses they have to take is Civil Procedure, and I teach that. It's three hours in the fall, three hours in the spring. So every first-year student is stuck with

me for (that time)," he said. "That's a real important part of what I do, and I value that."

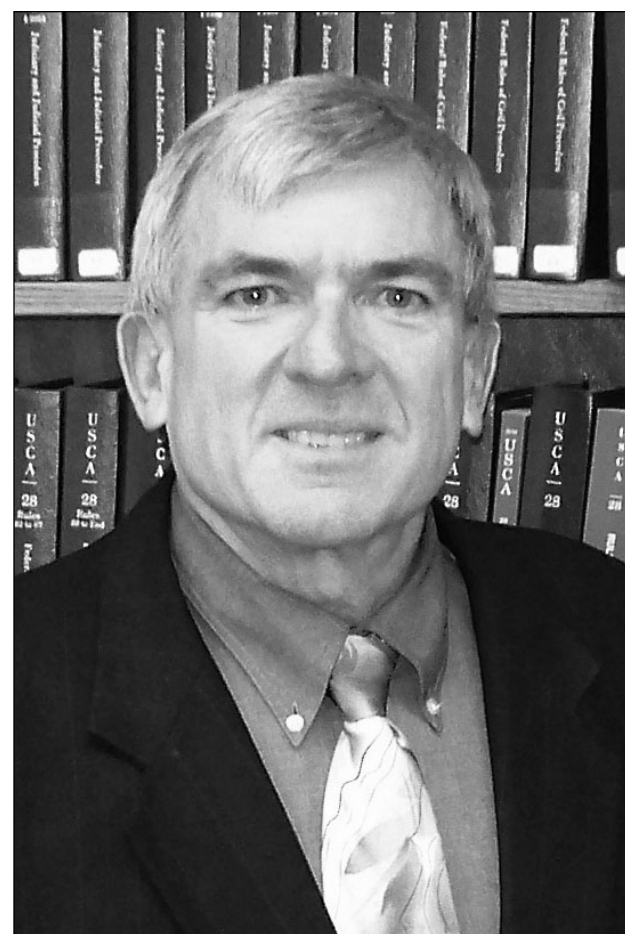
"Teaching in the first-year curriculum is good and bad, because if you're not doing well, it shows up," he said. "You can get adverse comments on your evaluations and run into problems, so I strive to do well there."

Baron also teaches two upper-level courses, Family Law and Insurance.

"Those are electives, so students don't have to take those courses, but I usually get pretty good enrollments in those courses, too," he said. "Those are important courses. They're not courses where, 'Oh, by the way, you might need this when you go out and practice.' You're probably going to need this, and you really should take it, even though they're not required."

Prior to arriving in Vermillion, Baron taught for an extended period in Houston, TX. He said both he and his wife, Claudia, a nurse at Vermillion Medical Clinic, are happy they came here.

"We like Vermillion. We like the college setting," Baron said. "The school I taught at in Houston was a free-standing school. In other words, it didn't have a university campus or anything. ... It was a good law school and I enjoyed that, but I kind of like the idea of being affiliated with a



university." One of the best parts about the USD School of Law is "the collegiality that exists," he said.

"A lot of schools have little political rifts that go on among faculty members," Baron said. "Here there's more a sense of support from all faculty members. An incredible sense of support, I should say. There's really a feeling of warmth."

When he's not at the university, Baron has become involved with the Employee Retirement Income Security Act, doing pro bono work "and trying to help people who are on the wrong end of an insurance situation."

In 2006, he helped a team of lawyers prepare briefs and oral arguments in the case of Sereboff v. Mamsi, which was argued before the Supreme Court of the United States in 2006.

Another high-profile case involvement was

that of Wal-Mart v. Shank, which saw the store sue an employee to recoup medical costs from an employee who used its insurance plan.

"Even though we lost in the Supreme Court and all the way through, there was a lot of publicity caused to be placed on Wal-Mart ... and they let this lady keep all the money, which she needed," Baron said.

Baron also operates USDLaw, an electronic list serve that allows the free flow of communications on matters of interest to South Dakota lawyers, judges and law students.

"I spend a lot of time here (at the university)," he said. "I don't really have any major hobbies."

The Jackson Award was established in 1981 through a gift by Horace and Dorothy Jackson of Rapid City in honor of members of the Jackson family.

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