

Civil Rights Movement Motivated Marvin Krislov to Pursue Legal Career

GCC Profile

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By Jen Woods

Marvin Krislov grew up in the 1970s, a time when social activists challenged the government and, consequently, influenced social and political change. After witnessing the civil rights movement firsthand, he knew he wanted to pursue a career in law. "Law can be an instrument in bringing about social change and greater opportunity for all people," said Krislov, who is now Vice President, General Counsel, and Adjunct Law Professor at the University of Michigan.



Even as an undergraduate, Krislov felt strongly about civil rights. In fact, his passion for affirmative action won him a first-place prize in a debate competition as a freshman at Yale University.

Krislov, a Rhodes Scholar who earned his M.A. from Oxford University's Magdalen College, completed his J.D. at Yale Law School. While attending Yale, Krislov worked as a law clerk for Judge Marilyn Hall Patel of the U.S. District Court in San Francisco.

After graduation, Krislov accepted an associate counsel position in the Office of Counsel to the President, where he handled litigation and policy issues. As a

trial attorney, Krislov prosecuted individuals charged with racial or religious violence and acts of police brutality for the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Justice Department.

Krislov continued his career in government and later accepted a position in the U.S. Department of Labor. His experience as the primary legal advisor to the Secretary of Labor was very rewarding, he said.

Advice to Young Lawyers

Krislov, who teaches a class called "The Role of In-House Counsel," was surprised that so many of his students wanted to work in-house. "I found that many, many students, particularly those who wanted to balance career and family, aspired to work in-house," he said.

Since most law school graduates do not land in-house jobs fresh out of college, Krislov recommends that students pursue in-house internships. There are many "excellent" in-house summer jobs, Krislov said. However, students need to take the initiative to find corporate counsel openings because they are not publicized as well as law firm positions. "Students shouldn't just consider the jobs that are advertised and well-publicized," he added.

"I would recommend the federal government as a great employer," Krislov said. While the salary may not be as lucrative as it would be in private practice, the level of responsibility is much higher than in other settings, he said. Plus, he said, there is an "incredible sense of satisfaction and pride you get when you can work for the United States government."

Despite his positive experiences in government, Krislov said he enjoys working within an organization "to provide people with help and support to achieve their goals."

As General Counsel of the University of Michigan, Krislov is responsible for all

of the school's legal affairs, and he serves as Senior Legal Counsel to the Board of Regents and the university administration and its units. Krislov's tasks vary daily, ranging from handling IP issues to dealing with risk management, he said. "Every day, there are new issues that come up, some of them quite significant," he added.

His job is challenging, considering that the school is one of the largest universities in the country, with a student body of more than 40,000. In fact, "some people compare it to a small city," Krislov said.

One of the most prominent legal battles Krislov has been involved in resulted in a historic Supreme Court decision. He led the university's legal defense of its admissions policies, which considered race as a factor in acceptance decisions. In 2003, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that universities could consider race in admissions in order to achieve student body diversity. "We were very gratified by that result," Krislov said. "Diversity and the achievement of it continue to be very significant issues."

"It's gratifying when people feel that we have helped them achieve their goals, and there's a fine line between telling people what they can do and telling people what their options are," Krislov said. As a lawyer, it is important to be seen as a problem solver and not a roadblock; people tend to feel anxious working with lawyers, "and it's nice to break down those barriers," he explained.

Working for such a large university, it is no surprise that his job can be stressful at times. But Krislov said he is able to manage his stress and maintain a healthy balance between his work and personal life. "I exercise regularly, and I have a family that I prioritize, which gives me good perspective on my work life," he

said.

Throughout his career, Krislov said, he has looked up to people who work in the public sector because they can influence social and political change. As a law clerk, Krislov worked with and admired Judge Abner Mikva because he dedicated much of his life to public service.

Several people who work in higher education are also role models for Krislov, including President of the University of Michigan Mary Sue Coleman, President of Columbia University Lee Bollinger, and Syracuse University President Nancy Cantor.

Krislov co-chairs the presidential taskforce on ethics in public life and has served on the athletics department's transition committee. He has also taught at George Washington University's National Law Center.

In addition, Krislov has published several scholarly articles, including one entitled "Affirmative Action in Higher Education," which appeared in the *University of Cincinnati Law Review*, and he coauthored (with Assistant General Counsel Jonathan Alger) "You've Got to Have Friends: Lessons Learned from the Role of Amici in the University of Michigan Cases," which appeared in the *Journal of College and University Law*.

On the Net

University of Michigan

www.umich.edu

U.S. Department of Labor

www.dol.gov

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