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## Albuquerque Journal interviews Moore about the law of compassion

Jennifer Moore

*University of New Mexico - School of Law*

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# Law of compassion - UNM professor's track record with human rights inspires students

By Astrid Galvan

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Jennifer Moore's passion for refugee and humanitarian work began many decades ago, but it still influences her students at the University of New Mexico School of Law.

Moore, a law professor at UNM since 1995, has spent years working with refugees in various African countries, and this month she published a book based on her research there. "Humanitarian Law in Action Within Africa" is available online, and Moore plans to use it in some of her classes.

She teaches contracts and international law, and hosts annual seminars on refugee and human rights law.

A Harvard Law School graduate, Moore has inspired students to use their degrees to advance human rights.

Take Annie Sovcik, an advocacy attorney for Human Rights First, a Washington, D.C.-based organization. Seven years after Sovcik got her law degree from UNM, she still credits Moore for inspiring and guiding her to her current career path.

On a grand scale, it was Moore's connections with her former employer, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, that helped Sovcik land an internship with the office in Washington. She was later hired by Human Rights First, for which she coordinates legislative and administrative policies related to how U.S. immigrant laws affect refugees who seek asylum in the country.

But it was on a somewhat smaller scale that Moore helped guide her student.

"I would say that, and this is probably the most significant thing, is that I was a law student who had a variety of interests that were not going to fit well within a traditional law career," Sovcik said.

She said Moore "opened up my mind in a way that allowed me to think (of all) the ways I could use my law degree and all the fields that I could pursue. ... It was certainly her influence that helped give me a better vision for what I was going to do professionally."

Moore calls her own professional path "experimental."

Her travels to Africa began while she was an undergraduate at Amherst College in Massachusetts. Moore had had a curiosity about Africa since she was a child — her godfather is from, and lives, in Tanzania, and her parents lived in Liberia before she was born.

“So, you know, I was interested in migration and immigration and refugees from probably when I started learning those terms, but I also had a little bit of a pull to Africa from these family, friends, sort of connections,” Moore said.

Moore studied in Kenya during her junior year of college. After graduating from law school, she began traveling to various African countries. Her first job working with refugees abroad was with the United Nations, she said.

“I was in Rwanda after the genocide (in 1994) with the U.N., and that was very impacting, as you can imagine,” she said.

In 2002, Moore became a Fulbright Scholar and moved to Tanzania, where she taught international law at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Soon, she developed a more specific interest in how countries coming out of civil wars recovered and rebuilt. She decided to write a book about post-war Uganda, Burundi and Sierra Leone, focusing on how each country applied justice in the wake of human rights abuses.

Her book examines each of the countries’ ongoing recovery from war. Moore hasn’t taken any students abroad yet, but said she would like to do so in the future. For now, she hopes her international and human rights law classes will just help students become good lawyers.

“To me, it’s almost like it’s core for me that anytime you learn something about being compassionate and how to use the legal system as a tool of compassion, that’s going to help anyone no matter, what they do,” Moore said.

Brianne Bigej, who is simultaneously getting a law degree and a master’s in Latin American studies, first took Moore’s international law course in 2009, and has since taken her contracts and human rights law classes. Bigej said she plans to graduate this summer and is interested in working in human trafficking law, adding that Moore has been a great influence.

“It’s just great to listen to someone who has had that world view. That was just a big encouragement ... that if you really want to carry out an international law future ... it’s possible,” Bigej said.