New SIU associate dean comfortable with people

BY JACK SILVERSTEIN
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Christopher W. Behan took what might be called the LeBron James approach to having kids: “Not one, not two, not three, not four ... ”

But unlike the professional basketball star’s championship prediction, Behan’s numbers are a reality.

He and his wife — Southern Illinois University School of Law adjunct professor Valery Behan — have seven children, a total that helped him learn to deal with a variety of personality types.

“It gives you a perspective on life that you can get through anything with a little bit of patience, understanding and a sense of humor,” he said.

Behan, 45, brings that perspective along with his military background and eight years of teaching experience at SIU’s law school to his new position as associate dean of academic affairs.

He replaces the retiring Frank G. Houdek, who has held the position since 2007.

“Frank was highly regarded by our faculty and did a great job as associate dean,” Behan said. “I want to make sure there isn’t a drop-off in the quality of services provided by the office.”

At SIU, those services include:

• A host of academic programing responsibilities, such as academic advising, creating class schedules, monitoring and enforcing academic standards, reviewing and approving faculty requests for grade changes and overseeing the preparation of course syllabi.

• Speaking with prospective students and newly admitted students about the academic program.

• Reviewing and approving student disability requests.

• Providing faculty support by preparing and revising manuals for new faculty and adjunct faculty as well as scheduling faculty meetings at the start of each semester.

• Supervising daily operation of the registrar’s office and its staff members and preparing written evaluations of the registrar.

• Creating and maintaining Web pages for each faculty member on the school website.

All told, a six-page document that Houdek made for Behan lists nine areas of responsibility with 56 specific duties.

Dean Cynthia Fountaine views Behan’s role as academic adviser as his most important responsibility.

In that role, Behan’s will oversee the school’s co-curricular programs such as the law review, moot court and trial advocacy teams — the latter of which Behan is the director.

“Chris has big shoes to fill, but I have every confidence in Chris’ abilities to do that,” said Fountaine, who appointed Behan.

“He’s a fantastic law professor and has a wonderful rapport with the students. And he has the administrative experience that’s going to enable him to do this job very well.”

Along with his work in the school’s trial advocacy program, Behan has taught nine classes during his tenure at SIU with focuses on trial advocacy, criminal law and military law. He will continue teaching during his time as associate dean, though with one class per semester instead of two.

In the fall, he will teach a course on evidence; in the spring, criminal law.

Behan grew up in the Midwest and received his bachelor of arts degree in 1992 from Brigham Young University and a J.D. there in 1995.

His background in military law as well as his administrative skills stem largely from the 11 years he spent as a judge advocate in the Army.

He received an LL.M. from the Judge Advocate General’s School in Charlottesville, Va., in 2003 and joined SIU in 2007.

“When I came into academia I really enjoyed teaching, but I’ve always been interested in administration,” he said.

“I really enjoy problem-solving and having something different to do every day. So I’m excited for that.”