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## Oral History Interview of Stephen Hicks (SOH-004)

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### Oral History Interview of Stephen Hicks

**Interview Date:** March 5, 2007

**Interviewed by:** Alain Duchemin, Suffolk University student from History 364: Oral History.

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#### Interview Summary

In this interview, Professor Stephen C. Hicks reflects on his career at Suffolk Law School. He discusses his educational background and early teaching career; his direction of Suffolk Law School's graduate programs, including the master's degree in global law and technology, a program which he founded; the importance of international legal education; and Suffolk's influence on other law schools. Professor Hicks concludes by discussing his hopes for the future of Suffolk Law School's international programs.



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### **Subject Headings**

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### **Table of Contents**

|   |                        |
|---|------------------------|
| <b>Background and education</b>                                 | <b>p. 3</b> (0:00:01)  |
| <b>Teaching career</b>  | <b>p. 6</b> (0:06:52)  |
| <b>Suffolk Law School's graduate and international programs</b> | <b>p. 7</b> (0:10:27)  |
| <b>Growth of Suffolk Law School</b>                             | <b>p. 10</b> (0:20:08) |
| <b>Suffolk Law School's influence on other law schools</b>      | <b>p. 12</b> (0:23:52) |
| <b>Relationships with Suffolk Law School graduates</b>          | <b>p. 12</b> (0:26:12) |
| <b>Hobbies and interests</b>                                    | <b>p. 13</b> (0:27:20) |
| <b>Goals for the future at Suffolk Law School</b>               | <b>p. 14</b> (0:28:38) |
| <b>Final thoughts</b>   | <b>p. 15</b> (0:33:06) |

**Interview transcript begins on next page**

This interview took place on March 5, 2007, at Suffolk University Law School's  
John Joseph Moakley Law Library.

**Interview Transcript**

**ALAIN DUCHEMIN:** All right, so it's recording. Professor Hicks, I just want to thank you for setting up this interview. I just want to ask you some basic questions. Like, what is your full name?

**STEPHEN HICKS:** Stephen Collingwood Hicks.

**DUCHEMIN:** Where are you from?

**HICKS:** Well, when people ask me that I usually say Marblehead and then they think, Wait a minute, something else is going on. (both laugh) So, I'm actually English. And I've lived in the States since 1972. But I grew up in England.

**DUCHEMIN:** You grew up in England?

**HICKS:** Yes. Married, I've got two kids, and one stepchild. They're twenty-five, twenty-three, and twenty.

**DUCHEMIN:** How is your family like? As far as growing up, did you guys grow up in the States, or did you grow up over in London?

**HICKS:** My kids are all American. So, you know, that's—this is where I live now. I have no desire to go back or anything like that.

**DUCHEMIN:** Where did you go to high school?

**HICKS:** I was born in the north of England, in Yorkshire, grew up for most of my life outside of London. But when I was sixteen we moved to Winchester. So I went to high school in Winchester, which is in the south. Probably heard of Winchester Cathedral?

**DUCHEMIN:** Yes.

**HICKS:** It used to be the capital of England in medieval times. It was a pretty interesting place. That's where I went to high school.

**DUCHEMIN:** Did you play any sports?

**HICKS:** Yes, I did. I played rugby and cricket. And then when I went to the university, I did rowing and squash, and rugby and cricket. Funny enough, when we moved and I was sixteen, it was really quite an upheaval. I lost all my friends, went to a small town, where people already had their cliques and their groups and their social life. So I threw myself into my academic work, and shone in a way, and finished up getting into Cambridge [University], which was a surprise, (laughs) for everybody, actually.

But I think that if we hadn't moved, I wouldn't have either worked so hard or achieved so much, and that getting into Cambridge was really a major transformation in my life and my opportunities. I studied French, Latin, and history at high school. And I originally studied history at Cambridge and then changed to study law.

**DUCHEMIN:** Did you have a teacher that inspired you to study law?

**HICKS:** I did, yes. The director of studies at Cambridge was quite an inspirational man, both with regards to law, especially international law, which was the first thing I was most interested in, but also with regards to teaching. And I think I would of liked the life of a teacher—a “Don,” as they call them at Oxford [University] or Cambridge (both laugh)—very much. I certainly like my life teaching now here.

**DUCHEMIN:** So what made you choose law? Was it that particular teacher, or was it a passion for teaching?

**HICKS:** I always had a passion for teaching. I think I always wanted to teach rather than to be a lawyer. At that time, at that time in the very early seventies—I graduated in 1971—there were very few opportunities. In fact, you had to pay to become a barrister. So you had to pay your teacher, to whom you were apprenticed. And my family had paid for me to go to Cambridge, although it wasn't paying like we pay now in the States, but my tuition was paid for, but no other expenses. So for my family, I was the first one to actually finish high school let alone go to college, or go to Cambridge; that was a stretch for them. So they couldn't afford and I couldn't afford—and you couldn't earn the money either without actually being independently wealthy in order to become a barrister.

So those kinds of opportunities were foreclosed to me. And I didn't really know what I wanted to do. But my father had seen the world as a sailor in the Second World War. He'd been to Boston even, but he'd been all over the world. So I grew up with these romantic tales, of (Duchemin laughs) distant shores, literally. But also with the attitude that, if there is nothing for you here then you go somewhere where there is. So I applied to do more graduate study. I took another year at Cambridge, while I really figured out that I couldn't afford to become a barrister and I didn't want to work in the city and wear a bowler hat and carry a rolled umbrella, (Duchemin laughs) and fit in like that. Never really been much of a conformist.

So I applied to Yale [University] and I applied to [University of] Virginia to do a master's degree over here. Yale turned me down and Virginia offered me a scholarship. So I went to Charlottesville, Virginia. That was 1972. Stayed there two years and then I got my first job in 1974. So I've been a professor since 1974.

**DUCHEMIN:** Wow! So you were at Cambridge College [sic – University] for two years?

**HICKS:** Yes, I was at Downing College, Cambridge University—oh, no, I was at Downing College, Cambridge University, in England for four years, '68 to '72. Then I went to the

University of Virginia in Charlottesville and did another master's degree. I stayed there two years. And then I got a job teaching at the University of Akron.

**DUCHEMIN:** Oh, nice. In Ohio?

**HICKS:** Yes, in Ohio, yes.

**DUCHEMIN:** And what were you teaching at those schools?

**HICKS:** I taught torts, international law, and comparative law. And that has really been my teaching load ever since, along with legal theory, which is actually what I am most interested in. The history and the philosophy of ideas about law.

**DUCHEMIN:** So over at Suffolk University, what do you—can you tell me about your position here at Suffolk University, as far as what you teach?

**HICKS:** Well, yes. I have tenure. I've been active in a lot of committees. I have taught first year torts, day and evening, since 1977. I was three years in Ohio, and I came to Suffolk in 1977. Legal theory, various kinds of jurisprudence, legal philosophy, legal history, and the western history idea of law. Various kinds of comparative law classes, and torts has always been the basic one that I've had.

And I always enjoyed teaching first year students. It is a real pleasure to see them mature and to play a part in that breakthrough of understanding that comes in the first year when students are first of all faced with something about which they have no idea, and enlightenment slowly (both laugh) appears.

**DUCHEMIN:** Do they stay more committed, or do they—as far as you inspiring them, do you feel like the students really enjoy being around you?

**HICKS:** Yeah, yeah. I think so. Yeah. I think that I earn their respect, both in regards to the content and with regards with the process. I am always there to talk to them. I am always there to give them encouragement about the learning process. And I think that I help them through understanding how abstract law is. Most people come to law school thinking that it's really rules and that you learn the rules. In fact, it's quite the opposite. It's not rules at all. It's ideas, concepts, concepts as tools that you work with to solve problems. And that there are no rules that you really have to learn. There are certainly some, but very few that you really have to learn.

So the process of teaching first year students is to disabuse them of this idea of what they have to do is learn and just cram their head full of stuff and gradually enlighten them that it's really about thinking and analyzing and argument and problem solving, which students at first are not fully cognizant of. So that's really what I enjoy about the first year.

**DUCHEMIN:** So is there a debate team at Suffolk University?

**HICKS:** Yeah, there are moot court teams. I mean, I was advisor of the International Law Moot Court Team for about twenty years. Advisor to the Transnational Law Review for about twenty years as well.

**DUCHEMIN:** Do you have any other positions here at Suffolk University?

**HICKS:** Well right now, I am the director of the graduate programs. So we have a master's degree in global law and technology, which I founded, which was my idea, and my initiative and is, in fact, now my institutional realization, my product. We also have an international LL.M.<sup>1</sup> in U.S. law, which we offer in the summers in Budapest for non-common law lawyer, for lawyers from around the world. And that is very successful as well. Both of those programs have

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<sup>1</sup> LL.M. is the abbreviation for a master of laws degree, based on the Latin name *Legum magister*. The LL.M. in Global Law and Technology program, founded in 2002, awards an LL.M. with a specialization in one of the following four areas: intellectual property and information technology law; biomedicine and health law; international law and business; and U.S. law and legal methods. The LL.M. in U.S. and Global Business Law international program, founded in 2006, is a unique opportunity to acquire an LL.M. without having to devote a full year to study. It is the first degree program of its kind, with cooperation between Suffolk University Law School and Eotvos Lorand University (ELTE) in Budapest, Hungary. The program is generally completed over the course of two or three summer sessions at ELTE.

established themselves firmly, have taken on a life of their own, and have added to our reputation abroad as well as locally, as well as in Boston. So I direct those two programs as an administrator. And also we have an international internship program, which is also my inspiration.

So in the last five years, I've been primarily responsible for the internationalization of legal education at Suffolk. Which has been really, not myself alone, but certainly I have been the instigator and organizer and energy behind that. And I'm really proud with what we've done. And happy at the successes that we've had. So I'm actually enjoying that now. I'm no longer teaching torts, having a hundred students as well as all of these administrative responsibilities. I did it for a few years. It was just too much. Because what I used to do was see every single Torts student after the midterm exam and talk to them about their work, which literally was in some cases an hour a student. I just didn't have the time to do that in the first half of the second semester. But I am enjoying administration. It's sort of given me another—a new lease on life.

I'm fifty-eight, and I have been teaching for practically thirty years. And no longer inspired enough to write very much. My original thoughts tend to be (laughs) quite simple. And I just don't have the desire to put them into book form or article form anymore. I'm much more of a practical man now I think than I used to be, when I was younger. So I've always loved teaching. For awhile I felt that my scholarship was sort of stale. And so the administration has given me a new lease of life. I'm really, really happy with what I am doing. I feel very fulfilled and proud to be able to contribute to Suffolk in this way. And I feel appreciated. I mean, I think that this is something that, to the extent people know about it—in a big school like ours there are lots of things that individuals do that other individuals don't learn about really. But the general knowledge, general awareness that we have these international programs, I think is—

**DUCHEMIN:** A benefit?

**HICKS:** —is out there, yeah, and that everybody really appreciates the benefit. I don't think everybody really appreciates how much (both laugh) work it is. I mean, it is constant.

**DUCHEMIN:** I bet.

**HICKS:** Constant. You know, because you're not only trying to always create new programs, new developments, whether they be on a big scale or whether it be fine tuning something that already exists, but everything that is involved with the programs generates its own problems, and its own difficulties, and its own little breakdowns, and unexpected (both laugh) twists and turns. It's a constant—I want to say nightmare, really. It's a constant process of adjusting to meet unforeseen difficulties. (both laugh) But it's a challenge that I actually welcome and enjoy and I certainly don't—

**DUCHEMIN:** Where did you get this idea from? Did you get it from another institution?

**HICKS:** No. Well—no, it began with a desire for us to have a graduate degree, just to have a master's degree, an LL.M., and it was my idea that we do it in global technology. What I realized from studying other law programs was that a lot of them have very specialized degrees, that is you could get a master's degree in health law, you could get a master's degree in intellectual property. But nowhere could you get a master's degree which sort of bridged those two. Where if you were interested in patent law, you would want to do patent law involving biotechnology as well as patent law involving engineering.

So the idea of having a global technology as a generic overview, description of everything, that was my idea and that worked very well. When I went to promote that degree—because one of my primary responsibilities is to get students to come to the program. And (laughs) they don't come unless you go out, persuade them with your PowerPoint presentation and your charm (Duchemin laughs) and free pens and business cards (laughs) that Boston is great, which most of them know, but that Suffolk with a new building<sup>2</sup> is great also, which it certainly is. They won't come unless you go out and do that.

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<sup>2</sup> David J. Sargent Hall, located at 120 Tremont Street in Boston, Massachusetts, is the home of Suffolk Law School and the Adams Gallery; it was dedicated on September 10, 1999. Featuring cutting-edge technology, including three thousand high-speed Internet connections and moot courtrooms equipped with advanced media capabilities, Sargent Hall ranks as one of the most technologically advanced law school buildings in the United States.

So what I learned was very obvious but easily overlooked, I think. And that is that in order for students from the rest of the world to come to the U.S, it has to be at a sort of perfect point of time in their lives for them to take a year off. When I left, I sort of emigrated and while it's true that a lot of people are willing to do that to the U.S, the rules have tightened up a little bit now. I mean, I emigrated and got my green card within three months and you just can't do that anymore. So coming to the U.S. for a year was difficult for many people, and then so, too, they had sticker shock. For us today, the price of law school at, call it thirty thousand dollars, is the price of a pretty good car. And we don't have sticker shock because we are used to buying education anyway. But in the rest of the world, they're not. So those two factors just made it clear, really, that we ought to do something else as well as have the LL.M. here. And that meant take it to them where it would be cheaper to deliver, in Europe, and to offer it in shorter time periods, so that people wouldn't have to commit to taking a year off.

So those two insights about the experiences people had coming here, led me to create a program over there, modeled really on a summer school. So we have this master's degree, which we offer in Budapest at the moment, in Hungary, over a number of summers, where lawyers or students can come to Budapest for two, three weeks at a time, work in the classroom all day long, and get credits and then accumulate the credits over a number of summers to get a master's degree. And that's unique. This is the first one of its kind. And I think it is a very innovative program. Given that we had thirty people in the first year, I think it's a very successful idea as well and attractive to people. So that was the origin of it, realizing that while people will want to come to the U.S., there are many people who want what we have to offer, that is, a U.S legal education, which is quite different, quite different from the legal education that I had in the U.K., quite different from the legal education that anybody else, really, in the world has. So they want it but they are not always able to come and get it here. So taking it to them sounds simple, makes perfect sense. But it was a bit of an insight breakthrough. And now we have made it happen. It's a great success.

**DUCHEMIN:** Back to Suffolk, I mean, do you have any concerns about Suffolk Law School?

**HICKS:** Well I think—any concerns? (both laugh) Not really. I mean, I think some fairly obvious ones—I think that our tuition right now is higher than BU [Boston University] and BC

[Boston College]. I don't think we can compete with them. We're not the Mercedes of legal education, and our tuition is that price. So I'm afraid that we are pricing ourselves out of our own market.

But no, I don't really have any concerns about Suffolk. I think the institution is really quite healthy. I think we've, not just obviously from my perspective in terms of the internationalization of Suffolk, but I think we've grown very positively. We've become very strong in the last ten or fifteen years. I think we have strengthened our intellectual core. We have young faculty who are scholars, dedicated to ideas, able to draw upon their practice. Which is not how Suffolk was when I came. When I started work here in 1977, I was one of a group of I think five faculty that they hired that year. They hired five the year before, and five the year before. So from about 1974 to when I came in 1977 the faculty had practically doubled from something like eighteen or twenty to as I recall when I started there were thirty-six or thirty-seven offers. Now the full-time teaching faculty is about sixty. The full-time faculty including clinical professors and writing instructors and professors is about eighty. So it's a huge faculty. But it's not only increased in numbers, I think it's increased in its, like I say, its professional, intellectual, academic, and practical strength as well.

So, I am actually quite happy with the direction that Suffolk has taken. I think that we are in a fairly strong place. I think that the building is magnificent. It is still giving us an edge in the community. I don't think we've capitalized on it really even to the degree that we should. I think that there is still unrealized potential here with the technology for us to do more. And that's good. And there's a direction in which we can still progress. So, I don't really have any concerns about the law school.

**DUCHEMIN:** How do you feel it impacts on other schools? Do you—

**HICKS:** Well I think actually—I think that we have been innovative and I think we've been copied. We were the first to have formal concentrations and to make them into paths, as it were, for students to take through the curriculum. And that's copied now by practically everybody. But we were the first. I think that our international internship program, which I also instituted, has

been copied again by others. And I am sure that the international LL.M. in Budapest will be copied by others.

So I think in some ways we have been influential. I know people come and look at the building to see what a state-of-the-art law school facility should be like. I think that our clinics and our writing programs are really outstanding. We have an [Center for] Advanced Legal Studies program which puts on something like thirty programs in the course of a calendar year. And that too has been a model for other schools to do—we call it advanced legal studies; it's sort of practical postgraduate training programs. So I think we've been innovative.

Obviously I could criticize about the ways in which we should have done more. But I think that we have been innovative. And I think that we've been copied when we have been innovative. Which suggests that the things that we've have done has been right. Yeah. Have been both successful, but also sound.

**DUCHEMIN:** A mentor towards other schools in a way. (laughs)

**HICKS:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**DUCHEMIN:** Are you still in contact with some of the graduates from Suffolk University Law School?

**HICKS:** Oh yeah, yeah. I mediate and arbitrate.

**DUCHEMIN:** Do they call you for advice a lot?

**HICKS:** Sometimes, yeah. Yeah. I often do a mediation or an arbitration and everybody in the room is a student of mine. (both laugh) Which is funny. But yeah, oh yeah. That's one of the nice things I think about—well certainly for me personally having lived here now for thirty years, but having taught for thirty years, there are thousands of people out there who had Hicks on torts who I'll bump into walking down the street or see in some professional capacity or at some

meeting, and that's nice. I mean, it makes it me feel very much a part of the legal community and a part of the city.

**DUCHEMIN:** Just a couple more questions. I'm just interested—I know that you're quite the author, but I was just wondering do you have a favorite book, class or did you have a favorite professor? (both laugh)

**HICKS:** No, no. (laughs)

**DUCHEMIN:** No? Okay. What are your hobbies?

**HICKS:** Well, I collect tribal art and I am a photographer. I've had a few shows of my—I call them photo mutations. So they're Polaroids that I mutate and develop and process into works of art.

**DUCHEMIN:** So like abstract photos?

**HICKS:** Yes. Yeah, they are—they're literally, yes, they're abstract photos. So I like art, I like photography, and I like collecting tribal art. Much to my wife's chagrin because I have about 250 pieces.

**DUCHEMIN:** Wow!

**HICKS:** Which (laughs) are so—

**DUCHEMIN:** Of photos?

**HICKS:** No, no, no, tribal art. Yes, which are sort of all over the place. I collect what are called headrests. They're traditional pillows. Usually they're a foot long and six inches high or something like that. But particularly from New Guinea. So that's my particular area of interest.

**DUCHEMIN:** What are your future goals here at Suffolk University?

**HICKS:** Well I want to—

**DUCHEMIN:** Or out of Suffolk University?

**HICKS:** Well, I'm very focused—I'm happy in my private life. I'm happy with my family. I'm happy with my hobbies and pastimes. My career is the primary focus of my life. I actually have finite dreams. That is, I think that we should mirror the program that we have in Hungary, in the western hemisphere. Whether somewhere like Mexico or Chile perhaps. And we should have a similarly structured, that is, of short duration and very intense, summer program in Boston. So that people are able to multiply their options, and not just go to Hungary for three or four years in a row, but actually come to Boston for one summer, and then go to Budapest for another summer, or come to Boston at the beginning of the summer, and go to Budapest, and then go to Chile.

But then I think we have—then I think we will have all the programs that we need. And after that, then it would be a matter of us reaching out to other institutions, in other parts of the world, like India in particular I think, perhaps China, South America, for student exchanges, for exchange agreements, so as to institutionalize the sort of channels between us and other schools, rather than randomly having—rather than randomly going to career fairs, or visiting schools to promote the programs.

I think that having solid agreements and actual functioning student exchanges and faculty exchanges is the way to ensure that students from those institutions will continue to come to Suffolk's master's degree or to go to our master's program in, certainly Hungary, but also where I would like, in Chile and Mexico. So then I think we would have it—we would have an international internship program, which blankets the world. We would have a master's program centered in Boston and a master's program for international lawyers in a number of campuses, which would enable candidates to take a number of different programs to get the degree quickly and easily.

Then I would say we were done. That would be a serious edifice of international education for us to maintain. Because it does take money and it does take commitment and energy on the part of someone and I'm not a young man! (both laugh) So I don't know how long I'm going to do it. (both laugh) But I am really enjoying it now, and actually with my kids grown I'm able to travel, which is what it takes. Although people say, Where are you going this week, Steve? The truth is that to be able to go and take ten days at a time when, for instance, it may not be the best time for you, but you have to go because that is when they are in school—school calendars vary the world over—that's actually a prime need for an administrator, and not everybody can do that. So I can and I'm happy to do that now. Although I can see that lugging luggage around the world, in perhaps in ten years (both laugh) is not something that I'm going to want to be doing! But right now, I don't mind it. (both laugh)

**DUCHEMIN:** Well you never know with that energy you'll probably go on for a while.

**HICKS:** Maybe, yeah. (both laugh)

**DUCHEMIN:** Thanks for your time.

**HICKS:** My pleasure, Alain.

**DUCHEMIN:** Is there anything else that you would like to add?

**HICKS:** No, I don't think so, thank you. It's been fun and I've appreciated it. I think that archiving interviews with faculty members, especially in the centennial—but especially because there are a number of faculty members, like me, who have a thirty year perspective now on the institution—is a really good idea.

**DUCHEMIN:** All right.

**HICKS:** Congratulations to you, and keep it up.

**END OF INTERVIEW**