The Republic of Georgia:

THE JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE AND LEGAL EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

Washburn University School of Law was one of only two law schools selected to participate in the legal education component of the Judicial Independence and Legal Empowerment Project (JILEP) in the Republic of Georgia. JILEP is a four-year, $20 million initiative, funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and implemented by The East-West Management Institute. Washburn Law will receive $750,000 of the grant. As part of JILEPs legal education component, Washburn Law will be guiding and mentoring law professors at the Free University of Tbilisi in the creation of a new center for learning, as well as other legal education initiatives.

"The East-West Management Institute became familiar with Washburn by hearing about us through the Institute for Law Teaching and Learning (ILTL). They were looking for a school with strength in commercial law. Our Business and Transactional Law Center was a particular attraction for them because they want to develop commercial law in Georgia," Michael Hunter Schwartz said. Schwartz, professor of law and associate dean for faculty and academic development, is the law school's point person for the project. He is also co-director of the ILTL.

"Georgia is very much an area where the law is being created as we sit here today, in lots of areas but particularly in commercial, constitutional, and tax law. And legal education is being created as well," Schwartz said.

The Republic of Georgia was established in 1918, on the heels of the Russian Revolution, and became a Soviet Socialist Republic the following year. In 1991, before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Supreme Council of the Republic of Georgia declared independence from the U.S.S.R. With independence came ethnic and civil strife, and years of rebuilding and formulating a government structure. Tbilisi is the capital city.

"What makes it [their legal system] new is that they are so newly removed from Soviet rule," Schwartz explained. "Because Georgia was under Soviet control for so long, the country's development of commercial law and constitutional law and everything else, which would have happened 100 years ago based on the path that they had already chosen for themselves in the pre-Soviet era, got stifled."

The Republic of Georgia is slightly smaller than the state of South Carolina and borders the Black Sea. Its capital, Tbilisi, located in the picturesque Mtkvari River valley, is more than 1,550 years old. (©2008, Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.)

Schwartz noted that under Soviet rule, only one Georgian law school existed. Now, the republic has 20 law schools, nearly all of which are less than five years old. Washburn Law's immediate priority is to help create a commercial law center at the Free University of Tbilisi. Four Georgian professors visited Washburn Law in August to glean as much information as possible to assist them in launching the center planned for March 2012. While here, they visited classes and debriefed those classes with students and faculty; attended a series of workshops on teaching effectiveness, on how students learn, and how to assess learning; and also gathered information about Washburn Law's legal writing and clinical law programs.

"They generally wanted to get a sense of how American legal education works," Schwartz said.

Aïda Alaka, associate dean for academic affairs, Will Foster, associate professor of law, Thomas Romig, dean and professor of law, and Schwartz were the first Washburn Law delegates to visit Georgia and meet with Georgian officials and law professors.

Dean Romig conducted and facilitated a discussion group for the Georgian law deans to launch the project. "He

The Washburn Law delegation met with Georgian representatives during a visit to the Republic of Georgia.

did an incredible job and I think really kicked off our relationship with the Georgian law schools in a very, very, effective way," Schwartz said.

Alaka first visited Georgia in February to get what Schwartz described as a "big picture sense of the issues and strengths of Georgian legal education." In speaking to Washburn Law staff and faculty, Alaka shared her observations. "They don't have a robust professional code. We really have the opportunity to affect the law of a country, affect the law of an entire society."

Other elements of the project include providing expert advice in Georgia to strengthen law teaching techniques, particularly in the area of clinical legal education; to improve Georgia's law school accreditation process; and to introduce new subjects, i.e., commercial law, to be taught in Georgian law schools. "The project is definitely evolving; it's definitely beyond creating the center, although the central project is to create this center for learning," Schwartz said of the project's scope. "Certainly, an overarching goal of this project, and every other project we do at Washburn, is to also make a difference for our students," he added. "For example, we are looking for ways Washburn and Georgian law students can take classes co-taught as distance education courses."

"The more we get a national and international reputation as the school that trains law professors how to be good law professors, the better it will reflect on Washburn."

Currently, Washburn constitutional law students, under the direction of Professors Bill Rich, **Jeff Jackson, '92,** and Craig Martin, are researching the United States' courts' approaches to particular questions of constitutional law and assisting Georgian law students in advising the Constitutional Court of Georgia on these issues. "The court is very interested in getting insight how U.S. law handles certain constitutional issues from which they could borrow in making decisions about Georgian law," Schwartz explained.

Professor Amy Deen Westbrook will be traveling to Georgia in January to teach a week-long International Business Transactions course. In March 2012, for the opening of the commercial law center, Washburn Law faculty will visit Georgia to participate in a grand opening ceremony and give lectures on commercial law topics of interest to the Georgian commercial law community. Future plans may include having faculty exchanges with Georgia, offering a series of master classes in law teaching for the Georgian law teaching population, and potentially creating a semester abroad program, where "students can get the amazing experience I had of being in Georgia," Schwartz said.

Involvement in the project will reap rewards well beyond the walls of Washburn Law and the borders of Georgia. "It will expand our horizons and enhance our reputation with other law schools," Schwartz said. "It will expand the reach of the Institute for Law Teaching and Learning as we are slowly moving into doing international work. This is sort of a 'third front' where the ILTL, and more broadly Washburn, is expanding its reach. The more we get a national and international reputation as the school that trains law professors how to be good law professors, the better it will reflect on Washburn."