



Gates Garrity-Rokous

Greetings, Wiggin and Dana Alumni!

We are pleased to bring you this Alumni Spotlight on Gates Garrity-Rokous. Gates is a 1992 Yale Law graduate. After law school, he clerked for a D. Conn. judge and a Second Circuit judge with Connecticut chambers. Gates worked at Wiggin and Dana in the New Haven office from July 2001 to April 2007 as a partner in the Litigation Department and the White Collar Crime Defense, Investigations, and Corporate Compliance Practice Group. He joined Wiggin and Dana after serving many years in the U.S. Attorney's Office in Connecticut. He departed the firm to go in-house as the Chief Compliance Officer of GE Capital Americas. Gates then moved to Columbus, Ohio in 2012 to take on his current role as Vice President and Chief Compliance Officer at The Ohio State University.

Two of our litigation partners, Jeffrey Babbin and Robert Hoff, had the opportunity recently to discuss with Gates his experiences at Wiggin and Dana and his post-Wiggin and Dana career. Below is a summary of their conversation.

Gates' experience at Wiggin and Dana

Gates continues to harbor fond memories of his Wiggin and Dana days. He was impressed with the collaborative work environment, which he felt was conducive to building a culture of success sustained through generations of lawyers. He mentioned that an environment focused on teamwork and intentionality in maintaining the right culture was central to the Wiggin and Dana experience. He especially called out then-Managing Partner Jack Dunham and then-chair of the Litigation Department Shaun Sullivan as really caring about the firm; and he recalls working with Tim Diemand and James Bicks as younger lawyers working hard to create a sense of continuity in the development of the litigation practice. As part of Gates' compliance work, he also collaborated with our health care lawyers, including Maureen Weaver and Melinda Agsten, who he felt were his mentors in that field. Summing up his time at Wiggin and Dana, Gates described good lawyering, a strong culture, and an ethical approach to practicing law.

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Comparing private practice to Gates' current role

Gates misses having clients from his days in private practice and the building of ongoing relationships, which gave him opportunities to prevent problems and not just be reactive. Gates had once worked overseas with the Peace Corps, which taught him the value of being a change enabler and building a sense of community.

He enjoys his work overseeing compliance at Ohio State. He arrived on campus at a time when the law governing Title IX was fast developing. Ohio State is the largest single campus in the country, giving Gates a vast constituency including a cancer center, an academic medical center, and the athletics department. He is proud that in athletics, the university has had a track record of values-driven leadership and continued development and growth.

Gates' role at Ohio State and his approach to compliance work

In his current position, Gates is tasked with solving problems with the university's interests in mind. Gates described himself as a "facilitator of positive change." Before he was hired, the university's compliance efforts were spread across many different units, which made it more difficult to ensure that problems were always solved consistent with the university's best interests as a whole. He now oversees an independent compliance function and program that is proactive and not just reactive.

Several areas at the university, like health care, are regulated, and the university's Board needs to know that important regulations and issues are being addressed. Gates focuses his compliance department on three key concepts: (1) "maintain structure" (ensuring an orderly system is in place so decisions can be made when issues arise); (2) "be proactive" (putting in place systems that can be measured and, because they are measurable, can be improved); and (3) "centralize" (acting as a central authority to engage with leaders of the university's constituent units to facilitate "positive change" and ensure they take responsibility for the integrity of their systems). He also finds time to teach regulatory compliance at Ohio State's law school and supervises law student externships in a regulatory area of the student's choice.

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Advice for young lawyers and the future of the profession

Gates' advice to young lawyers is to take advantage of mentoring opportunities by articulating objectives as well as frustrations that need to be addressed. He once thought that career change was a needed process but now realizes that he did not always need to change jobs to experience professional and personal growth.

He also posed a challenge to Wiggin and Dana: AI is changing the nature of work and the problems that lawyers must face and solve. AI threatens the structures supporting institutions, which can lead to changes in lawyers' career trajectories. He believes it's our professional obligation in this changing environment to find ways to protect the strength of the institutions we're engaged with.

Gates would welcome hearing from Wiggin and Dana lawyers and alumni at garrity-rokous.1@osu.edu.

Thank you to Gates for participating in this Alumni Spotlight. If you would like to suggest a Wiggin and Dana alum for a future Alumni Spotlight, please submit your suggestion [here](#).