

## No Debate About Scoville's Sharp Focus on Foreign-Relations Law

When Ryan Scoville was a student at a high school just outside Boise, Idaho, he got involved in competitive debate. As he puts it, the debate team became his life. "The other team members and I attended tournaments across the country, spent summers at debate camps, and immersed ourselves in an incredibly diverse collection of ideas. We probably didn't understand half of what we were talking about, but I loved it." And the debate question on which his team focused one year involved American foreign policy toward China.

"That was the point where I really became interested in foreign affairs," Scoville says.

The high school also had a strong program in foreign languages, which enabled him to sign up for three years of courses in Japanese. This further encouraged his interest in foreign countries and U.S. interactions with the rest of the world.



Ryan Scoville

Jump the story ahead a couple decades, and you'll find Scoville on the faculty of Marquette Law School, still with a strong interest in American foreign policy, which is bringing him a rising profile as a legal scholar. And you'll find him teaching courses on U.S. foreign relations law and international law, as well as general-curriculum subjects such as civil procedure.

### How Did Scoville Get from a High School Debate Team in Idaho to Eckstein Hall?

After attending Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, where he graduated as valedictorian, Scoville attended Stanford Law School. Upon completing his education, he served as a law clerk for Judge Neil V. Wake of the U.S. District Court for the District of Arizona and then for Judge Milan D. Smith, Jr., of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. He also worked for two years on transnational litigation in the Denver and Tokyo offices of Morrison & Foerster.

But Scoville had hoped to become a law professor ever since law school, so he seized the opportunity when he received an offer to join the Marquette law faculty in 2011. Scoville is a very well-regarded teacher, according to Dean Joseph D. Kearney, who says, "Our students have expressed their wry admiration for his focus in the classroom: He is impossible to get off topic." There's a professional lesson in that, of course.

In his research, Scoville focuses primarily on foreign-relations law, including the domestic law that regulates U.S. diplomatic activity. Scoville says that he likes using "nontraditional" sources and methods for legal research, such as interviews with government officials and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests to federal agencies. For example, the data involved in the preceding excerpt from a *Duke Law Journal* piece on the qualifications of U.S. ambassadors stem from a FOIA request to the State Department. It took him about five years to get the information, which came in the form of thousands of records requiring review and analysis.

Scoville says that he tries to avoid politics in his scholarship. He is "more concerned with discovery and the production of knowledge." He likes "the pursuit of interesting questions" and thinks that "historical and empirical inquiry, for example, is interesting and worthwhile regardless of the political implications of the results."

"I think back to my debate experience as the primary explanation for why I'm doing what I'm doing today," Scoville says. He sees many parallels between engaging in debate and being a lawyer. Both are known for the need to gather and present evidence, for the use of adversarial formats, and for verdicts that come from judges.

To add to that, both require the kind of intellectual curiosity, rigor, and just plain smarts that Scoville brings to his work. ■