

Program in International Human Rights Law Indiana University School of Law - Indianapolis

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World traveler brings human rights to Indiana University

After 6 years in Hong Kong, George Edwards is making Indianapolis home

Asia, Africa, Europe, Australia, North and South America - six of the seven continents - are all on the list of places George Edwards has lived, worked and traveled, and he's only 37 years old.

"The world is very large, but it's also very small," he said. "I could leave here and arrive in Antarctica 24 hours from now if I wanted to."

Edwards said he enjoys new, different, exciting and interesting societies and cultures.

"My blood starts flowing very briskly when I start thinking about hopping on a plane and going someplace else," said Edwards, who has just returned from living in Hong Kong for six years. "I enjoy the people I meet, the differences in culture and language, and opportunities to understand different dimensions of peoples' lives."

Now Edwards is making Indianapolis home and IUPUI his workplace, as the newest Associate Professor of Law. He brings with him a vast array of experience and the newest Indiana University organization: the *Program in International Human Rights Law*.

Noting Edwards' education from Harvard Law School, his multitude of internships and his extensive vitae, Lily Chiu said, "People with that type of a background find it seductive to make the transition into private practice and to become a lawyer who serves pretty stratified interests."

"George worked for probably one of the most well known firms on Wall Street," said Chiu, a corporate lawyer who met Edwards while living in Hong Kong. "He has consistently maintained and developed an interest in international human rights ... even though it has been very seductive for him to do other things, like work for a big corporate law firm."

Chiu described Edwards as a gifted teacher.

"I think that's his innate talent and I think he has been wise enough to recognize that," she said. "He has been very committed to his desire to teach and to be someone who excites students intellectually."

Edwards comes from a family of seven ambitious children - one is a pediatrician, another a plastic surgeon, one works for a manufacturing institution, another has a Ph.D. in psychology and the last three are lawyers.

"Certain values were instilled in us as children, to help us take a path that inspired," he said. "We were, maybe, just a family of overachievers."

Edwards "is a really dynamic, energetic, enthusiastic person. He's a very capable lawyer, very witty. He loves to bake and he's a pretty good tennis player," Chiu said. "He came to a dinner party and he brought biscuits. I've never forgotten that."

Edwards' first trip overseas came at age 17, when he won an essay contest, and the prize was a two-week trip to Lagos, Nigeria. His essay topic was "the relationship between culture and the struggle of Africans for self determination."

Edwards attended college in his home state of North Carolina, completing a bachelor's degree in economics and business management. Then, it was on to Harvard Law School, where it was not just all work and no play.

"George used to have beach parties in Cambridge during the dead of winter," said Greg Johnson, who is also a lawyer and a friend of Edwards' since the third grade. "You would come in your shorts, and they would turn the heat up high. You would have beach parties ... because the winters are just so dreary."

- Between North Carolina State and Harvard, Edwards worked as a law clerk in the Cleveland municipal courts. While at Harvard he had internships all over the world.
- During the summer of 1983, he served as an intern for Russian, Kaplan and Vecchi, International Legal Counselors, Bangkok, Thailand, where he researched corporate legal issues and drafted contracts.
- The summer of 1985 took Edwards to Washington, D.C., as a law associate researching international and domestic legal matters for *Arnold and Porter*.
- During the autumn of 1985, Edwards was an intern for *Interfam: Interagency Famine Information Project*. He gathered and reported famine and refugee data in Ethiopia and Sudan.

● The following summer he went to New York City, working as an intern for the *Ford Foundation*. He reviewed grant proposals, monitored grantees and assessed.

● Edwards spent the autumn of 1996 in Geneva, Switzerland, planning workshops for the *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees*.

“These are the sorts of jobs that I would like for students here to have,” he said. “Even if it’s only for two months it makes all of the difference in the world to have that limited exposure to the things that traditionally students only read about and learn about in the classroom.”

After law school, Edwards went to New York City, serving as a law clerk for Judge Cedarbaum, U. S. District Court Judge, Southern District of New York, for one year.

He then moved on to the prestigious Wall Street firm of *Cravath, Swaine and Moore*, where he worked as an attorney for five years. Then it was time to go abroad once again.

“I moved to Hong Kong to get some experience living permanently in a place, because all of the other times I had lived abroad were short periods of time, for a summer, for one semester,” Edwards said. “I never had to set up house in another country.”

He never expected to stay for six years.

“Even at four years I never thought I would make it to six,” he said. “Hong Kong is the sort of place that once you’re there, you have to do more than decide to leave. You have to go buy a plane ticket. You have to physically get out to the airport and get on a plane and leave, because it’s a place that people don’t want to leave once they get there.” Ten more entries were added to the “experience” portion of Edwards’ vitae while in Hong Kong, the majority of which include international human rights law.

Edwards emphasized his experience with the *Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor*, an independent non-governmental organization that focuses on legal issues and the promotion and protection of internationally recognized human rights.

On two occasions Edwards went before the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, to report on the human rights situation in Hong Kong. On the second occasion, he was honored to be asked to chair a meeting between the United Nations Human Rights Committee and Hong Kong non-governmental organizations.

Edwards was also the associate director for the Center for Comparative and Public Law, University of Hong Kong

Faculty of Law.

“I learned a lot about the U. N. system for the protection of human rights,” he said. “It was through the center that I gained most exposure to the divisions of the United Nations system related to human rights.”

While in Hong Kong, Edwards co-published a set of Law Reporters based on the Hong Kong Bill of Rights Ordinance “which may become the shortest lived bill of rights in the history of the world because it is slated to be gutted when the Chinese regain sovereignty in July.”

Edwards also lectured in and served as the director of the Santa Clara University School of Law program at the Hong Kong University School of Law for the past three summers.

“That’s good experience for me as I start to create and build the IU-I School of Law *Program in International Human Rights Law*,” he said.

Edwards is a walking resource of international human rights law.

“People are interested in hearing about Hong Kong and human rights and the change of sovereignty,” he explained. “People who ask me those questions are interested in my experiences, what I’ve heard, what I’ve seen, what I’ve done, because I’ve done a lot of work in those areas.”

Law Yuk Kai is a member of the Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor of which Edwards is also a member. He explained in a telephone interview from Hong Kong that Edwards “is a walking encyclopedia on Hong Kong human rights issues.”



Benjamin Cox/The Sagamore

Edwards discusses human rights

All eyes are on Hong Kong this summer with the change of sovereignty from Britain to China.

“What is going to be interesting and exciting is what happens during the first couple of years after 1997, when we see how the policies and procedures that we’ve been speculating about actually play out,” he said. “A year from now we don’t have to conjecture about what is going to happen. We’ll know and that’s going to be very interesting and exciting for the people of Hong Kong.”

Edwards said it was time to leave Hong Kong because “it just felt right.”

“I knew that I wanted to come back and get involved in academics as a professor back here in the United States,” he said. “The way to do that is to come back in September and join the crowds of other prospective U. S. law professors at this conference they hold in October of every year

in Washington.”


He came back and got involved in that process and had to wait to see where the chips fell and his “chip fell here in Indianapolis.”

“In the same way that I never thought when I was a law student that I would end up living in Hong Kong,” he said. “I never thought for a moment that I would end up being in Indianapolis ... teaching a course in international human rights law to a group of very energetic and exciting, interested and interesting, stimulated and stimulating students.”

Edwards is not only a tenure-track professor at Indiana University School of Law at Indianapolis, but he also is the Director of the new *Program in International Human Rights Law*.

The law school program will include many facets for students to be involved with.

- It will have opportunities for international human rights internships at the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations, and at non-governmental organizations abroad, for which stipends will be available.
- Edwards will organize seminars and conferences, related to contemporary and international human rights law topics, with participants and speakers from various parts of the world.
- Scholarship through publications will be included, with papers of publishable quality being written to raise the recognition of the law school.
- Edwards will start a human rights newsletter and eventually a human rights journal, published by the faculty and students.
- His own work will fall under the umbrella of the organization, including his research, writing and trips abroad to work on human rights issues.

He is sending announcements around the world about the IU program, to let other organizations know “that we’re serious and we mean business.” 

By Benjamin Cox

The Sagamore

Originally printed March 24, 1997
