

Alan Dershowitz stepping down at Harvard Law

By [Matt Rocheleau](#) | GLOBE STAFF DECEMBER 14, 2013

Alan M. Dershowitz was only 25 when he joined the Harvard Law School faculty in 1964, and three years later he became the youngest full professor in the law school's history.

Now, 50 years later, the internationally known scholar and high-profile defense and civil liberties lawyer plans to step down at the end of next week. No one, including Dershowitz, seems to think that the word retiring accurately describes his future.

“Yeah, I’m really retiring,” he said with a laugh. “My retirement consists of reducing my schedule down to only about 10 things at any given time.”

Dershowitz, 75, spoke by phone Friday from Israel, where he was speaking at a conference. He said his trip has included dinners with the country’s prime minister and a former student, actress Natalie Portman.



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Alan Dershowitz may return to Harvard Law School to teach some courses.

He said he plans to continue to juggle between two and three legal cases at a time, write books — he’s in the process of penning his 31st — and said he may have more time to walk along the boardwalk near his winter home in Florida.

Dershowitz also said that while he plans to take a break from teaching for a year or two, he may return to Harvard Law to teach freshman seminar courses.

“The word retiring has many meanings, and Alan Dershowitz is not a retiring person,” Harvard Law Dean Martha Minow said. “We expect and hope he will continue to be involved here.”

The Felix Frankfurter Professor of Law, he is well known for his work in criminal and constitutional law. He has also made a name appearing on television shows and working as a defense attorney on famous criminal trials, including the O.J. Simpson and Claus von Bulow murder cases.

He said he recently got a letter from President Obama, a Harvard Law School alumnus, congratulating him on his lengthy teaching career.

“He wished me ‘many years of continued mischief,’ ” Dershowitz said.

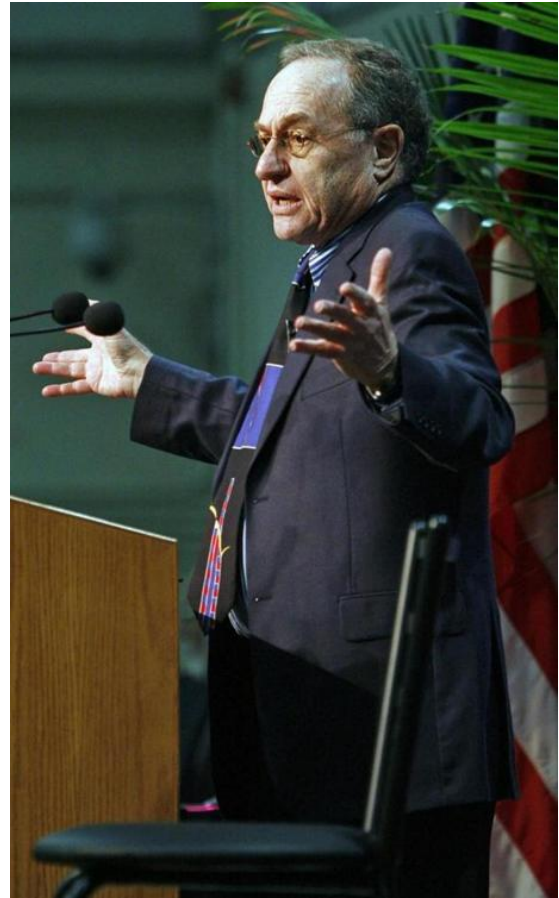
“The idea that someone as controversial as me can have one job for 50 years without getting fired is amazing,” he joked.

Dershowitz has indeed attracted his share of critics and criticism. He has written that there might be times when torture is a legitimate part of interrogation; and the vocal supporter of Israel has frequently sparred over Middle East policy, including with former president Jimmy Carter.

He said he taught 10,000 students over the course of 100 semesters at Harvard. In all that time, he said, he was never late to class and missed just one because his train ride from New York was delayed eight hours.

“I remember vividly my first class. It’s all gone by in a wink,” he said. “If there’s one bit of advice I can give to my students, it’s to live life to the fullest because it goes by so quickly.”

Martin G. Weinberg, a prominent Boston attorney, was a student of Dershowitz and later worked alongside him as a co-counsel on several big cases, including defending the group known as the



JIM DAVIS/GLOBE STAFF/FILE 2007

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Chicago Eight, later known as the Chicago Seven, who were accused of conspiring to incite riots during the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

“For 50 years, he’s consistently defended the rights of the least popular citizens of the United States of America,” Weinberg said by phone Friday. “Few people can be counted on to take the right side of something so consistently and no matter how unpopular it is. He’s the most courageous advocate I know, to both clients and causes.”

Weinberg said Dershowitz, a Brooklyn native, is most proud and focused on passing on knowledge. “He was the mentor and the guiding light for any students during my generation who wanted to be criminal defense lawyers or trial lawyers,” Weinberg said.

Weinberg was among a group of former colleagues, students, judges, and legal analysts who gathered at Harvard Law School in early October to celebrate Dershowitz. Minow helped lead the event, which she called “Dersh-fest.”

“There’s only one Alan Dershowitz,” she said. “There really is no one who has been so effective in challenging injustices.”

She described Dershowitz as a good friend.

“One thing many people don’t know and don’t get to see from his public persona is how wonderful of a friend he is,” Minow said. “His loyalty and compassion are very genuine.”

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