

PATENTLY PROFESSORIAL

Properly vetted in the high-tech world, GREG VETTER joins the
Institute for Intellectual Property & Information Law

WHEN GREG VETTER TAKES THE FLOOR as a law professor at the UH Law Center, he won't see a single student. The chairs instead will be filled by people he views as *clients*—and every one of them, he says, will deserve superior service. “That’s my business background coming through. It’s up to me to deliver a good product,” Vetter says with an earnest laugh.

Equipped with an undergraduate degree in electrical engineering, and a master’s degree in computer science from the University of Missouri, an M.B.A. from Rockhurst University, and a J.D. from Northwestern University, Vetter has the poise, pedigree, and professional experience to help students absorb the intricacies of intellectual property and technology law. He knows first-hand how business operates, and he is determined to show his students—er, *clients*—how attorneys fill a critical role in the business world. “Context is so important. Adding it makes the law come alive,” Vetter notes.

Other than an ingrained motivation to challenge himself, no single factor drove the self-professed Type A achiever to choose law as a career. The oldest of seven children, Vetter grew up in Missouri watching his father run a small civil engineering firm. With inherent strengths in math and science, he entered the University of Missouri to pursue studies in electrical engineering. After several years in the program, Vetter knew he held a unique outlook. “I was an engineer who cared about speaking and writing well, and it was obvious that this focus would provide intriguing opportunities beyond engineering work,” he says.

After earning his degree, Vetter first worked at a small engineering firm, then moved to a larger company that provided more opportunities to supervise and train other employees. In his spare time, he earned both an M.B.A. and a companion master’s degree in computer science.

As his job responsibilities increased, Vetter found himself thrust into the marketing process and doing presentations. He gravitated to issues involving law, contracts, copyright, and trademark issues, and he delighted in people who could take technical systems and describe them in a way that anyone could understand. One of his project assignments teamed him with an attorney who

was hired to secure the company’s first patent. “We thought a patent would provide us with credibility and a marketing advantage, and the entire process was interesting to me,” Vetter says. He took mental notes as the attorney carefully interviewed company employees, then processed the information into a coherent claims section—the key foundation for all patent prosecutions. In Vetter’s mind, law had trumped engineering as a career choice. After writing an admissions essay on “How the Law Works,” he quickly gained a slot at Northwestern University School of Law.

Armed with a law degree, Vetter worked briefly at a technology law firm before deciding that teaching represented his true calling. In his typical by-the-numbers approach, he reasoned that one more credential would open the doors to academia. “I clerked for a federal appellate judge in Washington, D.C. It’s a rite of passage for professors of law, and it really helped me understand how the system works,” he notes. With his résumé credentials complete, Vetter posted his name with the Association of American Law Schools—as part of a system affectionately known as the “meat market”—and quickly gained an interview with the faculty search committee from the UH Law Center.

“I’ve had to train myself to trust my gut reactions, something that engineers don’t do that well. I had a great reaction to the [UH Law Center] group, and I was attracted to a school that had obviously learned how to market itself,” he says. A key selling point was the opportunity to work in the UH Law Center’s acclaimed Institute for Intellectual Property & Information Law. “Three very strong scholars anchor the program, and the addition of a fourth faculty member lets the Institute expand what it can do. The infrastructure is there, and the UH Law Center wants to build on one of its strongest brands,” he says.

As Vetter assumes his new duties in Houston, he notes that academia puts him exactly where he wants to be. “I believe I am built to be an academic, and I know enough about the business world to convey how various entities rely on the discipline of law. My true goal is to do a great job and help the UH Law Center grow, expand, and strengthen,” he says.

Will the newly commissioned law professor experience any

butterflies as he prepares to start his new career in the classroom? “Not really,” Vetter says with the confident smile of an engineer who knows that everything stands solidly in place. “As a student, I would like to take a class from me. I’ve got the philosophy down cold. It’s all execution at this point.”

