



DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

Spring has come to Provo, albeit with some snow, and final examinations and graduation will be upon us shortly. New graduates and students will soon be heading off literally all over the world for jobs, summer clerkships, and externships. Most of us can relate to their feelings of anticipation, excitement, and uncertainty as they embark on the challenges that await them.

I have always viewed learning the law as something like learning to speak a foreign language. For the first few weeks of class, we can feel completely at sea and wonder whether it will ever be possible to communicate in this new language of the law. Even as we begin to develop a legal vocabulary and to learn a series of doctrines and rules, we still struggle with how to apply the rules to a particular fact pattern. We hear a story but don't simultaneously see the legal issues, ambiguities, alternative narratives, and potential resolutions to the problem described in the story. We read a contract but don't understand the risks or incentives associated with particular provisions. At the beginning, everything is halting translation.

Just like in every foreign language class, most of us remember those in our 1L classes who were stellar law linguists and who, for some reason, just got it. Translation seemed to come faster for them; their comments sounded more fluent; and, at times, they carried on a conversation with the faculty member that made us wonder whether we were learning the same language.

But the wonderful thing about learning a foreign language or the language of the law is that both yield up their secrets with enough effort. At some point we start hearing and seeing meaning without churning through a cumbersome translation process. For some this may come more quickly than others, but for all who are willing to work hard, it comes. Of course we continue to admire the gifted law linguists among us, but once we learn how to speak, the real question is how we use our language. Just like speaking a language doesn't make the missionary, knowing the law isn't enough to make the lawyer. It's what you do with the language and what you do with the law that matters.

For graduates and students that time is now upon them. Although legal fluency is a lifetime's project—which is part of what attracted so many of us to the law—I am confident that our students have all of the language skills they need to succeed.

Many of our 1Ls will be putting their legal and foreign language skills to use in international settings. This year 48 students will do an international externship with placements across the continents in Africa, Asia, Latin America, Australia, Europe, and the Middle East. What Professor Jim Backman began as a modest externship program in 1992 has grown into a worldwide program with a remarkable breadth of opportunities.

Our 3Ls will graduate and head off for jobs all over the country. Continuing in a long tradition at BYU, in 2011, 12 graduates (a couple from prior years) will start in clerkships with federal appellate and district courts, as well as state supreme courts. The geographical distribution of our graduates reflects our national presence. Typically, about 40 percent of our graduates end up in Utah and 60 percent elsewhere.

Frankly, as is the case in law schools across the country, too many of our 3Ls are still looking for work. In my conversations with other deans, I have sensed that we are comparatively well off, mainly because of a remarkable network of alumni and friends who recognize the quality of our students. Despite our relative strength, an increase in legal employment opportunities can't come fast enough for the students and for our Career Services Office, which has been working overtime. In addition to increased efforts there and a job initiative in which our alumni have been helpful, last year we created a public service fellowship that provides funds for 10 recent graduates to work part-time in public interest and public service positions for up to nine months while they continue to search for permanent employment. I appreciate the support of alumni and friends to make this possible.

More than that support, I appreciate the examples of alumni and friends who over the years have used their training in the language of the law to comfort, persuade, lead, and serve. As our students leave Provo and spread across the world, joined by a strong cadre of students in the Law Society, I am confident that they will continue in this great tradition and become not just impressive legal linguists but also committed practitioners of the ennobling work of the law.

Warm regards,



JAMES R. RASBAND

