



DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

The school year is upon us. This fall, mixed with the usual excitement and anticipation, there is some relief as we come to the close of a summer filled with dust and hammering from three major building projects on the second floor of the Law School. With the support of the university, and with funds from alumni and friends, we have built a beautiful new trial courtroom, a spacious student commons, and a large, quiet, study area in our library, which replaces a similar area on the fourth floor that will now be used for Law School conferences and symposia. Each project addresses long-standing student and Law School needs, and—exciting to me—their functional value is matched by their aesthetic quality. I am eager for you to drop by the Law School to see the improvements. The trial courtroom is particularly stunning, with finely detailed cherry-wood millwork and all of the latest trial practice technologies.

It is hard not to feel excitement about the aesthetic and technical advances these projects represent, but I hope a summer of hard hats has not gone to my head. This school, after all, welcomed its first class to the St. Francis Elementary School on Ninth East. The core of a legal education is not found in the construction of courtrooms and commons but in the construction and development of critical and analytical thinking skills. That construction project, which likewise can involve disruption and indeed some hammering, is one that goes on every year and is surely the most important “construction project” this fall.

Understood in its proper frame, I hope, improving the quality of the space in which students learn can have important symbolic value. The careful workmanship of the craftsmen who have done the molding and carving of the cherry millwork is, perhaps, a reminder of the careful craftsmanship that is required of a successful lawyer. Attention to detail matters. Understanding both the narrow frame of a particular panel, as well as how one frame (or analytical point) fits the entire project, matters.

Perhaps I focus on the symbolism because I am eager to explore additional ways to improve the physical spaces in which students learn and engage at the Law School. I'd love, for example, to see more natural light. In fact, in arming myself for discussions with the university, I did some research on the value of natural light in learning environments and was interested to find studies suggesting that students in purely fluorescent-light environments were shorter on average and more prone to dental decay. All will likely be relieved to learn that I have not led with an argument for producing taller law students with whiter teeth, but the idea of bringing more light to the Law School is an appealing project. Ultimately, of course, any effort to bring physical light to the Law School remains secondary to the primary occupation of learning and discovering more powerful light and truth and then taking it from the Law School as the guide by which to serve and to lead.

The Law School continues to be blessed with extraordinarily fine materials for our long-term construction project. The class that joins us this fall is highly accomplished and capable of building with the same quality as those who have gone before them. As described in further detail in our forthcoming Law School Annual Report, our faculty continue to devote themselves to their craft, investing in the students and in advancing knowledge in their respective areas of the law. And, as my experience with graduates across the country attests, the service and leadership of our alumni are evidence that, in the most important sense, light has been incorporated into the Law School construction project.

Warm regards,



JAMES R. RASBAND

