



How should we think about the future of the Law School? Like all organizations, law schools must consider the balance of stability and change. BYU Law School has cultivated a penchant for experimentation, positioning us as a leader in legal education. If we want to retain the innovative culture of the Law School, we should be skeptical of detailed vision statements because we cannot see very far into the future. Instead, I offer a heuristic that has been useful to me in encouraging creative thinking: “What would a great law school do in our situation?”

Over my 15 years working at BYU Law School, I have often contemplated many iterations of this question. How would a great law school improve admissions? How would a great law school promote student employment? How would a great law school engage alumni? Evaluating the Law School’s needs through this lens has influenced our hiring of new assistant deans. It has affected our efforts to remodel the law building. It has changed how we fundraise. And most salient to our students, it has led to aspirational new ideas for Law School programs, including the Refugee and Immigration Initiative, the Academies Program, the Legal Technology Initiative, the Inspiring Leadership Initiative, the Washington Law Seminar, the Global Law Seminar, and the Global Business Law Program.

The many ways we have enriched our Law School community and enhanced student experience and training are reflected in the rankings of the Law School. This year we were once again named the no. 1 Best Value Law School by *preLaw* magazine, and last year we achieved our highest ranking ever of no. 23 in the *U.S. News & World Report* Best Law Schools list.

As we consider the future of the Law School, I hope our thinking will be animated by the following values: love of ideas, desire for influence, and loyalty to our mission.

FIRST: Great law schools value ideas.

Great law schools generate new ideas. At the core of BYU Law School resides a community of scholars who are driven by a passion for ideas. As legal scholars, we seek to understand and create enduring and influential scholarship about the role of law in society. We are ambitious for our ideas. We disseminate those ideas to students, policymakers, and other scholars in the hope that they will apply them to solve problems. Our community of scholars enhances every aspect of the Law School.

The administrators and staff of the Law School have an equal enthusiasm for new ideas, primarily aimed at improving the professional development of our students. The educational objectives of the Law School refer to our

“whole-building approach” to professional development, with which we seek to engage “every member of the BYU Law community in developing the professional competencies, character, and diversity of our students’ gifts.”¹

Creating new ideas is a form of worship. Doctrine and Covenants 4:2 proclaims, “O ye that embark in the service of God, see that ye serve him with all your heart, might, mind and strength, that ye may stand blameless before God at the last day.” We spread new ideas to the world in the hope that we can contribute to the building of the kingdom of God.

SECOND: Great law schools are influential.

Great law schools are engaged with the world. The J. Reuben Clark Law School held its first class in the Pardoe Drama Theatre of the Harris Fine Arts Center on August 27, 1973. Speakers included Marion G. Romney, second counselor in the First Presidency of the Church, and Dallin H. Oaks, then president of BYU. In that first class session, President Oaks told the founding faculty and charter class of the Law School, “We are privileged to participate in this great venture. It is our duty to make it great. He who builds anything unto the Lord must build in quality and flinch at no sacrifice toward that end.” He set the bar for “greatness” high, requiring eminence “in the eyes of legal educators, scholars, the judiciary, the legal profession, the business world, officials of local, state and federal government, and citizens at large.”²

Over the past six years, I have reflected repeatedly on this charge, and I have concluded that President Oaks was not encouraging the Law School to seek the honors of the world as ends in themselves but rather as means to gain influence. We want the members of our BYU Law community to be influential where important decisions are made, and many Latter-day Saint attorneys are exemplary in this regard. As doors of opportunity open to you, I hope you will continue to have the courage to step through and change the world for the better.

THIRD: Great law schools pursue important missions.

Great law schools are animated by a compelling mission. In the summer of 2020, I appointed a mission committee chaired by associate dean Michalyn Steele and comprising Law School faculty, staff, and students. I charged the committee to propose for approval by the faculty of the Law School “a new mission statement that articulates our core values, identifies our unique strengths, and directs our future development.”³ In short, I wanted the mission statement to answer the question, “Why does BYU Law School exist?” In answering this question, the committee engaged a broad representation of the Law School community and created a document that expresses a shared sense of meaning about the overall purposes and effects of our work. The Law School faculty unanimously approved the mission statement in 2021.

I invite you to read and ponder the [new mission statement](#), which is found on the Law School’s website. The Law School is part of a university whose mission is “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life.”⁴ At the Law School, our starting point is to recognize “the inherent dignity and equality of each individual,” and we should work tirelessly to welcome “people from the full range of human experience.”⁵ The Law School should be a place where every member of the community brings their diverse gifts “that all may be profited thereby” (Doctrine and Covenants 46:12). By sharing our gifts, each of us contributes to the community, and from each other we learn, as the poet John Milton wrote, “to know God aright, and out of that knowledge to love him, to imitate him, to be like him.”⁶ This is the sort of Law School our new mission statement imagines—and if we can create this sort of Law School, our mission will be our comparative advantage.

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Dean, BYU Law School

NOTES

- 1 “Mission and Objectives,” BYU Law School, law.byu.edu/about/mission-and-objectives.
- 2 Dallin H. Oaks, untitled address delivered at the opening ceremony of the J. Reuben Clark Law School in Provo, Utah, on August 27, 1973; in *Addresses at the Ceremony Opening of the J. Reuben Clark Law School* (August 27, 1973): 5, 7.
- 3 D. Gordon Smith, “Dean’s Message,” *Clark Memorandum*, Fall 2021, 3.
- 4 Mission of Brigham Young University (November 4, 1981).
- 5 “Mission and Objectives.”
- 6 John Milton, “Of Education: To Master Samuel Hartlib,” in *The Prose Works of John Milton* (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1866), 98.

