

Who Are You? Class of 2020

I suspect each of you sitting here in the Moot Courtroom today is just a bit nervous, maybe wondering whether everyone around you is smarter than you. Each time you've entered a new school in your educational quests, you've felt that same mix of excitement and nervousness. Today is no different, except for many of you, this is truly the last time you will be the "new student." Today really is the beginning of your professional life. You've gotten a lot of advice about choosing a profession and selecting the perfect law school for you. You've talked to lawyers, prelaw advisors, friends, and your parents. You've referenced that very special rankings "bible," kept huge spreadsheets, and finally, here you are today. At the same time, lest you think you were the only ones seeking "the best" to sit in this courtroom today, those of us in the admissions office were doing the same: We travelled 102,000 miles by land, rail, and by air, to find and to invite you to join our law school family.

Each of you is sitting here because of the faith of the faculty that you "measure up" to those who have gone before you. We know that each of you is fully capable of being a star in life, in this law school, in the legal profession – and, ultimately, in representing your future clients. As has been our long tradition, I am here to issue to you – Class of 2020, Two-Year JDs, and LLMS – a challenge. Each of you has a unique story. The challenge is to discover, in the course of your years here, which story belongs to which of your classmates.

One hundred and sixteen first-year students make up the class of 2020. Entering the law school this year, along with our 1L students, are nine of you with law degrees from your own country. Nine of you are part of our third LLM class – more than double last year's LLM class. Three of you are international exchange students from Italy and Spain and two of you are visiting with us this year. Today we welcome a total of 26 international students who come from Austria, Saudi Arabia, China, Colombia, Russia, India, Canada, Singapore, Switzerland, Nigeria, Jordan, Mongolia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, and Sierra Leone. Eleven of you already hold an LLM – one of you two LLM degrees – and are now pursuing a JD. One of you has already taken and passed the California Bar exam. You have a classmate who, at 21, became the youngest lawyer ever, and at 25 the youngest to pass the bar in the northwest region of Russia. Wherever you are from, you are here today due to the sacrifices of those who love you.

You were admitted from amongst the 1,772 applicants who applied this year from 553 American and 28 foreign universities, from 31 countries and 46 states plus D.C. You, in the 1L class, are alumni of 63 American and six foreign universities; 65 percent of you have been out of school for at least one year and 35 percent of you graduated in 2017. One of you graduated in 1971. The average age for your class is 25. Four of you will graduate as Double Spiders. Forty-seven percent of the 1L class is from out of state, with 55 percent of your class being women. While each of you is diverse in your own way, 23 percent of your classmates are students of color. The youngest members of your class are 20 and the eldest is 68. You are a smart group: Three of you are Phi Beta Kappa, and 34 percent of your class graduated either Magna, Summa, or Cum Laude, and that doesn't count those who graduated with Distinction or High Honors. Thirteen have earned graduate degrees. Several of you have been elected to ODK and three of you are Eagle Scouts. Nearly 20 percent of your 1L class has shared with us that you are first-generation college students. One of you was home schooled and didn't graduate from high school but got a GED instead. The median LSAT of your class is 160 – ranking in the top 20 percent of the 108,830 who took the test for this admission cycle. Your median GPA is 3.57 – the highest in our history. The majority of you have been the recipients of undergrad scholarships, are members of Honor Societies, and have done countless internships. Twelve of you are married – or were when you filed your

applications – and some have just gotten married as recently as this summer. Several of you have children.

A great many of you have traveled extensively, lived, worked, done mission trips, studied and performed as goodwill ambassadors all over the world. You speak many different languages – one of you speaks four. Just in the 1L class alone you speak 17 different languages including Korean, Spanish, French, Tamil, Hindi, Arabic, Italian, German, Russian, Japanese, Kannada, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Taiwanese. Two of our LLM students speak Yoruba. Several of you are EMTs and give many, many hours in emergency service.

Twenty-two of you have been inspired to become lawyers by family who are members of the legal profession, including several of you whose parents are both lawyers – one whose mother is a judge. Sixteen of you have mothers, fathers, grandmothers, grandfathers, cousins, and a great-uncle who graduated from this law school.

We are especially proud and grateful for the service of those of you who have served in our country's armed forces. Five of you have served in the Army, Marines, and Navy. A woman in your class graduated from West Point and was appointed as an investigating officer in a suspected case of misconduct. She also coached intramural wrestling at West Point and wrestled herself – in the 103-pound competition! Another of you served in the Navy for 12 years and escorted an MV-22 Osprey carrying Osama bin Laden's remains across the Pakistani border. He said, "Now that I've seen the end result of international law first hand, with legal training I will use my experiences to shape the rules that are applied by the warfighters."

Politics seem to entice a great many of you, with you demonstrating your interest by working on political campaigns and being members of staffs of Congressmen and Senators. Legislative aides, judicial interns, senate interns – so many of you have made your political mark. I had to laugh when reading one of your narrative statements in which one of you confided that with great difficulty you had to "come out to your parents" and admit to being a ... Republican.

You've had some pretty amazing careers pre-law school. So many of you have been paralegals and have worked in law firms! Quite a few of you have been teachers – not just in the classroom but as tutors to inner city children, teaching children therapeutic riding, or teaching English as a second language both in foreign countries and at home. This probably shouldn't be surprising as there are a large number of you whose parents are teachers. You've had amazing internships: One of you did a summer fellowship in Poland as an Auschwitz-Birkenau Summer Fellow with over 80 hours of Holocaust education. One of you interned for the New England Patriots, another worked as a farm hand for nine years and yet another as a rancher on his family's cattle farm. The rancher wrote that, "It was my job to administer medical treatment to reluctant and sometimes violent cattle that do not know they need my help. Cows are giving birth and I must pull a dying calf from its mother in time to save its life." Another of you spent several years employed at a talent agency as a music coordinator. A classmate is leaving his fairly long career as a political reporter behind, probably very happily considering the times we live in. Not all careers were quite so glamorous – one of you wrote, "I scraped barnacles and sea salt growth off the inside of an intake pipe for eight hours in Florida summer heat. The air smelled of rotten shellfish and our plant-assigned supervisor refused to enter the pipe on the grounds that it was too dangerous. For this project I was paid \$58." I love a class populated by students with grit!

Your interests and talents are varied and you are accomplished in so many areas. A chemical engineer in your class was awarded the Cavalier Marching Band Heisman Trophy! We absolutely must put together a band – or several – as quite an amazing number of you have performed as singers, guitarists, trombone players, saxophonists, drummers, and keyboardists. Several of you sing – some professionally. We need to be certain the Irish Folk singer meets his classmate who has, for the last six years, organized the local Church Hill Irish Festival. One of you was First Chair flute and piano player for a University Wind Orchestra and another performs with a saxophone quartet. Amongst you is more than one professional ballet dancer. There is a man in your class who has been a ballet dancer since the age of 11, which he kept secret for years, until he received a full scholarship to the School of American Ballet.

A woman in your class juggled a full-time job, a child, and working out in the gym at least four hours a day leading her to place as a figure competitor in a natural bodybuilding competition, and another competed to represent the United States in Turkey as a member of the U.S. Karate Team. One of you is trained in Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu and holds a Blue Belt in that martial art. Watch out for the woman in your class who wrote, “My mentoring objectives are to carry, load, and press ridiculously heavy objects as quickly and efficiently as possible” – she is a professional strongwoman who represented the United States. I’m particularly looking forward to the fruits of the labors of one of you who received formal instruction in fine dining and cooking from the Culinary Institute of America. Perhaps I can introduce him to the professional bakers in your class.

Excitement isn’t missing from your lives, as you’ve played every sport imaginable. Many of you played a varsity sport – one of you three Division I Sports. Varsity soccer, basketball, lacrosse, swimming and diving, track and field, cross country, distance running – you are an active group. Two in your class have been varsity cheerleaders. They will be especially valuable as you, like others before you, take great pleasure in beating up on those poor undergrad soccer players who think you’re too old to compete with them. One of you is quite the bowler, winning second in the state at this sport. You’ve coached, taught, and lived out your dreams.

But life is a contact sport and some of the excitement has not been of the happy kind. A student entering with you wrote that she was forced to leave China for religious beliefs and spent 10 years growing up in a 200-square foot apartment which had no heat. One wrote, “My father watched a napalm bomb fall upon his house and my mother was forced to grow up under the harsh regime of a Thai refugee camp. The United States is a nation that has gifted my family and millions of others with a chance for a new life. I feel passionately about these issues and my family represents the prime example for my desire to serve others like them in need.”

One of you was homeless, another blind for a time, and yet another was temporarily paralyzed. Whether fighting for your own disabled child or the rights and health of children everywhere, your passion is clear and present. Your classmate, whose family fostered over 40 children, summed up what I read in so many of your narrative statements reflecting your passion to help the disenfranchised, especially underprivileged children: “Living with those kids as they go through what may be the toughest days of their lives has affirmed my inspiration to practice law, for even on the most devastating days and in the most difficult situations, they trusted the law to be on their side.”

We live in difficult times. However, I am heartened to see the hope, determination and integrity with which you have achieved success thus far remains intact. Words such as commitment, honesty, public interest, ethics, and loyalty abound in your narrative statements. The reason so many of you have

chosen to go to law school remains the altruistic desire to contribute to making our world a better place to be; to make a difference; to contribute to mankind.

As one of your classmates put it: "I promise you this: By the time I'm done here on this Earth and God calls me home, I will have left this world better than I found it and I will have helped as many people as I was able." It is our fervent hope that each of you feels that same commitment to the rule of law, to our country, and to its people. With the tools the faculty will bestow on you, we know you will be well equipped to make our world better for everyone. Each of you in this room today is our hope for the future.

I could go on telling you factoids about your class of 2020. There are 116 stories amongst your class, and all of them shed light on your personalities, your hopes and your dreams. But, half the fun of being in this law school is getting to know those who are going to become your life-long friends. And that, for each of you, is the challenge. I challenge you to use your time at law school to find out about that future best friend sitting beside you today, or at the end of the row. And there will be a quiz in three short years as you graduate and leave us to take your place in the noble legal profession amongst those upon whose shoulders you stand. I wish you good luck and good fun as you embark on the enviable adventure before you.