Message from the Acting Dean

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MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING DEAN

Faculty, students and alumni are frustrated by the time it is taking to find a replacement for Tom Headrick, and rightfully so. Yet all should remember in their frustration that while a law school deanship is an important post, it is hardly a glamorous or powerful one. Rather, it is roughly equivalent to a middle management position in a large corporation, the kind of job few lawyers or legal academics are likely to relish.

Buffalo is a very special school and its alumni and faculty are deservedly picky. Being picky, however, almost guarantees that the search will take a while. It would be misleading for me to promise that the search will come to a successful conclusion very soon. It may. But then again, it may not.

Meanwhile, it is not necessary to worry about the school drifting or decisions being made by default. A law school can do without a dean for fairly long periods of time once it has been set on the right course.

Stripping away the chaff of day-to-day matters, the most essential things a dean can do is create an atmosphere in which members of the law school community can work creatively and then encourage them to do so. A dean takes the good ideas of others, gussies them up a bit, trimming here, filling there, and presents them to the administration, alumni, faculty and students. But the critical task of delivering and improving legal education here at Buffalo is done by the faculty and students with the help of interested alumni. Once the right atmosphere has been created and the encouragement provided, which our last dean has seen to, that job can and does go on quite predictably, with or without a permanent dean. Two examples will explain what I mean.

About 15-years ago Buffalo, and most other schools in the country, belatedly began to create clinical programs. Our clinic has grown in the intervening years from one instructor to six. In recent years, relative stability in both personnel and program has helped the law faculty to accept this formerly experimental program as a regular, integral part of our curriculum.

Last year, an ad hoc faculty committee came forward with a proposal to establish standards for giving tenure to clinicians. The proposal, adopted by the full faculty this past fall, explicitly recognizes both the special, intensive nature of clinical teaching and the obligation of all university faculty to engage in regular scholarship.

We are the only major public law school that recognizes the special nature of clinical teaching in this way. Other schools either refuse to recognize that clinical instruction requires more time than classroom teaching, thereby limiting the amount of time clinicians can devote to scholarship; or they refuse to recognize that both kinds of instruction are necessary and valuable for a good legal education.

The former approach leads to granting tenure only to those extraordinary individuals who can carry on a full-time scholarly career while also engaged in clinical teaching; the latter, to creating a group of second class faculty members either by denying clinicians tenure altogether, or extending it on a “separate but equal” basis. I think Buffalo’s solution is substantially better.

Similarly unusual in the world of legal education is our general approach to curriculum, dubbed the Buffalo Model. Here we attempt to combine theory and practice by focusing attention not only on legal rules but on the social, political and intellectual contexts in which those rules operate. As
a result, our students develop a theoretical understanding of legal practice, a creative approach to problem solving and a practical understanding of the operation of the legal system.

Because most law schools and legal academics are content to parse rules and do little else, teaching materials for executing the Buffalo Model are not readily available. Progress in implementing the approach has had to come from various groups of faculty who work hard to integrate their courses and introduce new subject matter into a group of courses.

Currently that job, which regularly passes from group to group, is being actively pursued by the teachers in Section 1 of the first year: Lee Albert, Jim Atleson, Dianne Avery, Bob Berger, David Engel, Chuck Ewing and Fred Konesky. They have developed a series of problems designed to integrate the themes in their various courses which they discuss with the section in both large and small groups. They like the impact of the materials on their students and have begun to explore the possibility of offering a course in the Legal Profession.

In matters such as these, which are the intellectual and education life-blood of any law school, deans play a clearly subordinate role. And it is in these things that your law school shines. Morale is high and the level of intellectual activity is, as usual, unbelievable to people from outside our little community.

So please be patient a little longer. We will surely find the right dean. In the meantime, the place is running smoothly.

A TRIBUTE TO DEAN HEADRICK

Dear Editor:

Congratulations to you on the first issue of the UB Law Forum. This is good news for all alumni, who will now learn more about what's going on at the School, what the Alumni Association is doing, and what their classmates are up to.

Unfortunately, the good news comes with bad news. I am referring to the resignation of Thomas E. Headrick as dean.

The alumni first met Tom at a luncheon held in his honor at the Statler Hilton on Dec. 10, 1976. Robert P. Fine, alumni president at the time, called the affair “a tremendous success.”

The new dean attended the next regular monthly meeting of the Law Alumni Board of Directors and reported on activities at the School. Everyone’s reaction was very positive, which Tom undoubtedly sensed, because thereafter he made it a practice to attend the monthly meetings.

We all came to know Tom as a positive, sincere and friendly person, without any ego hang-ups, whose sole goal was to promote the welfare of the School, the students and the alumni.

His efforts bore fruit. The stature of the School is substantially higher today, in 1986, than it was in September of 1976 when he took office. The quality of the student body has also improved. And the Law Alumni Association has become a dynamic organization.

A partial list of accomplishments that were realized during Tom’s tenure are: the Career Day program, the One-on-One program, the Phonathon, the Dean’s Club and Carlos Alden Club, the Annual Convocation, the hiring of an Executive Director for the Alumni Association, and the publication of the UB Law Forum.

In Tom’s first year, annual contributions to the School were about $7,000. In 1985, gifts exceeded $100,000!

Some of the credit also belongs to the Board of Directors and the fine officers, particularly the presidents, who served during Tom’s tenure: Robert P. Fine, Hon. William J. Regan, Everett M. Barlow, Anthony Renaldo, James B. Denman, Leslie G. Foschio, Andrew C. Hilton, Jr., Paul C. Weaver, Rose H. Sconiers and Leslie M. Greenbaum. All would readily bear witness that Tom was a good friend and ally of the alumni.

On the personal side, many alumni in Western New York, including myself, enjoyed his company and that of Maggie, his talented wife, in such extracurricular settings as golf, cross country and downhill skiing, tennis, road racing, marathoning . . . and dining!

Tom is a fine athlete. No one knows this better than myself, because he just beat me in the 90th Annual J.Y. Cameron Turkey Trot held last Thanksgiving.

I know I speak for all of the alumni, and in particular for the officers and directors of the Alumni Association, in attesting that Tom Headrick was a fine dean and is a good friend. We all miss his leadership as our dean.

Very truly yours,
Robert Schaus ’53
Secretary

Robert Schaus practices law with his brother Maynard in the Buffalo firm of Schaus & Schaus. He has served as the Law Alumni Association’s Secretary for 24 years.