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### Meet Indiana Law's New Dean, Austen L. Parrish

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*Indiana University Maurer School of Law*

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Maurer School of Law  
Bloomington

# MEET INDIANA LAW'S NEW DEAN, AUSTEN L. PARRISH

→ **Austen L. Parrish** joined the Maurer School of Law on January 1, 2014 as dean and James H. Rudy Professor of Law. He met recently with ergo editor **Ken Turchi**, JD'83, to share his thoughts on the Law School's future.

**Ken Turchi:** Welcome to the Maurer School of Law! I know that our alumni are eager to hear about you, and your vision and goals for the school. So let's start with a basic question: What attracted you to this position?



**Austen Parrish:** Although I've lived in Los Angeles for many years, I knew the school by its reputation and the leadership of Lauren Robel and Hannah Buxbaum. They have done a terrific job of setting the school apart from other law schools by preparing students as professionals in every sense of the word. I already knew Hannah because we do research in similar fields, and of course I knew Lauren by her reputation — she is one of the most well-known and highly regarded figures in legal education. When the position first opened, I didn't apply because I assumed that Hannah would be named dean. After talking with her and becoming convinced that she wasn't seeking the position, I threw my hat into the ring. The school has an amazing track record of success, and the chance to be part of building on that success was attractive to me.

**KT:** What are your initial goals for the school?

**AP:** I plan to spend the first few months getting to know alumni, students, and leaders from the Indiana bench and bar, as well as faculty and staff, and building consensus around the future of the school. Getting to the next level of success is a collaborative process, and I'm eager to hear what our various constituencies have to say. After that, I will work with the faculty on specific goals and objectives for achieving our collective vision.

In the meantime, I'd like to start building stronger partnerships with undergraduate institutions both in Indiana and across the country, so that we can ensure a steady, highly qualified and diverse pipeline of incoming students. At the other end, I intend to spend considerable time focused on creating career opportunities for our students and developing pathways for their success. I'd like to expand and strengthen our relationships with alumni, and create robust and active alumni networks, particularly in the larger markets where most of our students want to go: Indianapolis, Chicago, New York, Washington, D.C., and Los Angeles.

**KT:** What do you see as the school's strengths? Opportunities for improvement?

**AP:** Although I've been on board for only a few days, I've been impressed by the Maurer community and the wide support from the university. Over the holidays, I attended a reception for our New York alumni, who were warmly welcoming and enthusiastic about helping our students. We have tremendous resources in our alumni throughout the country, who are extremely talented, and leaders in law, business and public service. I'm excited about meeting them, continuing to build the strength of our alumni network, and working with them to help mentor our students and introduce them to job opportunities whenever possible.

Our school's faculty is another one of our great strengths. They have a record of distinguished scholarship in a wide array of disciplines, as anyone in the legal academy knows well. That scholarship exposes our students to important perspectives on some of the most pressing legal issues in the world, and helps provide an unparalleled quality of education. Our five research centers are nationally known for their innovative work and the opportunities they offer to our students. And as much as they are dedicated scholars, the faculty are equally dedicated to superb instruction in the classroom, and guiding our students through the complexities of legal education. They are role models and mentors, and represent the very best legal education has to offer. That balance between a focus on teaching, significant research and student support is so key.

And what's great is the Maurer faculty "gets it." The faculty's collegial and cooperative spirit also came through so clearly during my interview, and that's a wonderful characteristic, one that's very much welcomed by a new dean. Although I haven't had

many opportunities yet to meet with students, the ones I've come to know so far are bright, energetic and focused on the future. I'm looking forward to meeting more of them.

As far as opportunities for improvement are concerned, I think we've been too modest. Our alumni's achievements, our students' strengths, the accomplishment of our faculty, the tireless dedication of our loyal staff — all of these contribute to a great story about the Law School. There's a lot about us that's different from other schools and a lot is happening. The momentum is palpable. We need to create a real buzz about it.



**KT:** Jobs are obviously on the forefront of students' minds these days. What plans do you have for helping them land the right positions?

**AP:** There's a lot of negative press out there about both the declining number of law school applicants and the tough job market for lawyers. But while there have been changes in large law firms, much of what's happened is the result of cyclical factors. Ambitious, smart, intelligent people still want to go to law school, and they're still going. And even though the traditional big-firm, associate-to-partner journey is not as frequent as it once was, there are still many opportunities for smart lawyers — in business, in government, in public

interest, and in the smaller and mid-size firms that form the legal backbone of Indiana, that day after day make a real difference in the lives of everyday people. These other jobs are not talked about in the national press as much, and may not seem as flashy as those on Wall Street, but they are much more important for so many of us. I'm proud of the impact that Maurer graduates have in Indiana and beyond.

But to answer your question more directly, we have some specific initiatives in the works and the Maurer community can expect to hear more in the coming months. We hope to expand the number of large firms interviewing our students, and also create greater opportunities in business and other areas. We have a terrific office of career and professional development with an experienced, newly hired assistant dean who has a lot of energy and creative ideas. He and I will also work closely with our alumni relations office and our alumni throughout the country to help students hone their interviewing and networking skills – and, we hope, to help mentor them. I know of very few people who are truly self-made. It's time for us to look after the IU-Bloomington family first, and ensure that the school and our more than 11,000 alumni, working together, provide this generation of new graduates the resources, support and guidance they need to succeed.

The reality is it's tough out there. Our students aren't naive; they understand that – they know they need to hustle and that plum positions won't just be handed to them on a silver platter. Of course, that's always been true. Even in good times, our students have never walked around with a false sense of entitlement. Our students also don't blame us for the economic downturn and the challenges in the law firm market that are out of our control. But they want us to fight for them, to do all we can to aggressively open doors, and to have their backs when they need us most. That's a fight I'm

happy to jump in on, and lend my hand as dean to helping our students begin their professional careers in the best way possible. My background and experience should be helpful with this, and my goal is to make an impact quickly.



**KT:** What's it like moving to Bloomington from sunny Southern California in the middle of winter?

**AP:** I'm a hearty Canadian, so this is nothing (although I must admit, the minus-30 degree temperatures with wind chill last week were a little much!). And Bloomington is a great town with a beautiful campus. My family won't be joining me here until after school's out in the summer, so I will have plenty of time to get to know the campus and the Maurer community, while visiting with alumni and friends of the school throughout the country.

