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A Lawyer's Calling

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A Lawyer's Calling

The paths that led the current first-year class, the Class of 2005, to the School of Law are as varied as the paths they — like you — will follow after graduation. Students come to law from other professions, from the study of many other disciplines, from communities across the country and around the world — both communities based on proximity and those based on affinity. While the study of law presents new vocabularies, skills, and ideas, that study does not require leaving scholarly, professional, and personal histories at the door. Quite the contrary — what makes law a particularly powerful and humane force is its ability to absorb wisdom from multiple experiences, perspectives, and disciplines. The following is from Dean Robel's 2002 address to the entering class.

In the halls of the Law School hang pictures of some of our graduates, members of our Academy of Law Alumni Fellows. These alumni are honored for their dedication to the highest standards of personal excellence and to the profession. They have followed many and varied paths.

This fall, at the Buskirk-Chumley Theater downtown (formerly the Indiana), the Bloomington community celebrated the music and life of Hoagy Carmichael, whose beautiful song "Stardust" many of you know. A 1926 graduate of the Law School, Carmichael went on to a career in music and films, to concerts at the London Palladium and movies in Hollywood.

Near him is Harriet Bouslog, a 1936 graduate of the school. As the only Hawaii lawyer willing to represent the longshoreman's union,

Bouslog fought ferociously in courts throughout the islands for the union's poorest members, who were jailed during a paradigm-altering strike right after World War II. Bouslog imagined and advocated for a vision of the constitutional rights of those workers that would not become common for two decades more, demonstrating the kind of creativity and courage that distinguishes many of the alumni you see represented there.

Near Bouslog you will find Wendell Wilkie, a 1916 graduate of our school, whose visionary view of international relations helped the United States overcome an instinct toward isolationism after the Second World War.

While these three alumni — Hoagy Carmichael, Wendell Wilkie, and Harriet Bouslog — could not have gone from the Law School into more different careers and worlds, all three shared vision, imagination, and the courage to create a life that none of them probably imagined in their Indiana childhoods.

On that wall as well are a number of graduates whose careers are pathbreaking not only for themselves but for others: Shirley Abrahamson, JD'56, the first woman on the Wisconsin Supreme Court and now its first female chief justice; Florida Romero, LL.M.'55, one of the first women on the Supreme Court of the Philippines; Juanita Kidd Stout, JD'48, the first African American woman in America to be elected to the judiciary; Sue Shields, LL.B.'61, the first woman in Indiana to hold an appellate judgeship; Franklin Cleckley, JD'65, the first African American on the West



Annalese Poorman

Lauren Robel

Virginia Supreme Court.

There are entrepreneurs, like Michael Maurer, JD'67, whose success in business — in the early 1970s, he pioneered the initial development and operation of the cable television system — has been followed closely by a life dedicated to community service. And there are a great number of lawyers who served their communities with passion, excellence, and professionalism during long and distinguished legal careers, from the largest cities to the smallest towns.

As an alumna of the Law School myself, I am proud of my fellow graduates — proud of their reputations for integrity and deep competence. And as I talk to our alumni, I find they uniformly cherish the friendships they made with the faculty and administrators here, and with their colleagues. I believe that what binds us together is our shared sense of calling, as advocates.

The root of the word "advocate" is the Latin word "*vocare*," which means "to call." The word "advocate" comes

into being through the addition of “ad” to “*vocare*,” changing its meaning from “to call” to “to summon to one’s aid.” Advocacy has the same root as vocation — meaning a calling away from ordinary life, a summons from God to undertake service to others. And advocacy shares its root term — “*vocare*” — with the word “voice.” The roots of the word “advocate” break open its true meaning: Advocates give voice to the people they are called to serve, a calling that has at its center a deep and awesome responsibility, as well as, at its best, a touch of the divine.

Law study stimulates many emotions — pride, fear, competitive

spirit, excitement, anger — but the locus of these emotions is the student. The addition of a client changes this locus to the human being whose cause is now yours. In the best of advocates, this change of locus stimulates both a deep fear and a kind of fearlessness. Both the fear and the fearlessness come from a full understanding of the responsibility lawyers take on. Lawyers who forget this lesson or never learn it — those whose arguments are infected by their own need to win approval from a teacher or a judge, or who let their sense of competition get the best of the primacy of their client — are never the advocates that they could

be, or that their clients deserve.

Advocacy is an awesome responsibility. Law school can hardly prepare you for the feeling of having clients entrust their liberty, or their business, or their children, to your skills. In some sense, we should all feel inadequate to this task. But that sense of inadequacy needs to be the goad to a thoroughgoing honesty about our responsibility to prepare well and to think hard. That responsibility is what it means to be part of our particular professional community; underlying all of our divergent paths, it is our common ground.

— *Lauren Robel, JD’83*
Acting Dean, Val Nolan Professor of Law