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IU Dean Advises Law Graduates How to Use Degree

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IU dean advises law graduates how to use degree

IU News Bureau

"The Law Degree and How to Use It" could have been the title of Dean Bryant Garth's brief address to graduating students at the Indiana University Bloomington Law School. During student honors ceremonies May 9, Garth warned that good lawyering is more than making clever legal arguments.

"Both sides can always make what lawyers call 'arguments.' Given time, energy and compensation, you have learned that the devil's position can be made quite respectable through such arguments. Maybe you learned that the more brilliant the student or professor, the more respectable the devil's argument.

"I want to emphasize that however malleable legal texts may be, we have to act as if they mean something. The American public still cares very much about 'legality' and 'illegality.' The present investigation of the Iran-Contra affair is fascinating because the focus has shifted to whether the President and/or his staff broke the law. "If many persons in the administration looked at the law as something to be stretched and manipulated in the name of a larger foreign policy interest, as it appears they did, then it is perhaps refreshing to see the public take a very different approach. The question of whether or not the law was broken is very important. A government of laws is not just an out-worn cliche."

Garth urged the students to avoid getting caught "in the world of more or less plausible arguments." He told them to build up resistance by thinking critically about what they are doing. He reminded them, "You must see the connections between your profession and the world it helps create."

Garth noted that "We often speak to lawyers about the unduly bad reputation of the bar and the need to educate the public better about how good we are."

His message, he said, is different: "Keep your eye on yourself and you won't have to worry so much about your public image. This advice is so good, I might add, that I recommend it for presidential candidates as well."