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RENNARD STRICKLAND: A TRIBUTE TO A MAGNIFICENT LEGAL EDUCATOR

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I am pleased to join in the Oregon Law Review tribute to Dean Rennard Strickland upon his retirement as dean of the University of Oregon School of Law.

Rennard Strickland is truly a renaissance individual. He is a leader in American legal education, a distinguished legal historian, an expert in law school admission matters, a leading writer and commentator on Native American law and history, a forceful advocate for human rights, a respected author, an effective advocate for a global approach to legal education, a skilled teacher, and a wonderful friend. Dean Strickland is a pioneer in introducing American Indian Law into the law school curriculum, an author of more than thirty-five books, a major collector of American Indian art, and a legal educator with a wide range of interests and expertise. Truly the term renaissance individual describes Dean Strickland, who is in the forefront of analyzing and solving our society's contemporary legal issues.

My first real memory of Rennard was in 1974 when I was the newly appointed Consultant on Legal Education to the American Bar Association and he was the newly appointed acting dean at the University of Tulsa School of Law. We both found ourselves on a small commuter plane out of Cincinnati bound for a meeting of the Law School Admission Council. As we bounced over the hills and dales of Kentucky, West Virginia, and Virginia, we discussed the current state of American legal education, where it was, and what changes would occur in the future. Thus began what has been a warm and close friendship for over twenty-seven years.

Dean Strickland is catholic in his interests; art, music, literature, [*1144] film, world affairs, history, and good food, but like me not sports. Perhaps the latter is one reason why we early developed such a warm friendship.

Wherever Dean Strickland has taught and deaned, he has stimulated the faculty and students to have a global approach to the teaching, study, and practice of law. He has been a pioneer in legal education as a springboard for public service. Pro bono, using one's legal talents to serve the public good, has been a firm resolve of Dean Strickland throughout his legal education career. As he stated in his 1994 valedictory address as president of the Association of American Law Schools (AALS):

We, as law faculty members, can and do serve an important social and intellectual function by creating an understanding and appreciation of law in the public arena and especially among those who would be our public servants. Again, I stress the theme of this sermon - law professors have an opportunity, a challenge and an obligation to step beyond the classroom, outside the ivory tower, to address a public educational mission which we are uniquely qualified to fulfill. n1

He further stated:

Reaching beyond the law school classroom is something in which I had a long-term interest... . And like so much of our law school public service, this is rooted in traditional academic endeavor and scholarship... . In fact, law professors are able to work so effectively in the public arena because we have this heritage of hard-edged and cutting-edge research upon which to draw. n2

These thoughts were an extension of his 1993 AALS inaugural presidential address when he stated:

We know, as a matter of fact, that there are immense changes going on about us. We know that the practice of law as it is undertaken now is not what it was in 1950, is not what it was in 1900, that there have been many, many, many changes in the practice of law.

More importantly, however, I would suggest that those changes and the changes that haven't taken place in the practice of law but have taken place in the society are not changes which have been cast upon just those of us who are in the legal arena, that in many ways Holmes was right when he spoke of law as a magic mirror which reflects the society that is about it.

[*1145] During this year I hope as an Association we can focus upon those aspects of our work which are, in fact, uniquely ours, and I want to suggest that at the heart of that is the role of scholarship. n3

When Dean Strickland became chair of the Law School Admission Council, Philip D. Shelton, president, reported to the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar:

Rennard has outlined three areas of focus for LSAC during his two-year term as Chair. First, he hopes that LSAC will take a leading role in making sure that the law school admission process reflects the current and future needs of the profession, looking beyond predictors of classroom performance when admitting an entering class. Second, will be a focus on making admissions a more cooperative venture within law schools, by working more closely with deans and faculty to help them better understand the admission process, and the appropriate role of numerical indicators of success. The third focus will be on technology and how it can help all of us do our jobs better. We will look not only at computerized testing options, but also at ways in which technology can allow us more time to do what humans do best - deliberate and make substantive decisions. n4

This is another example of Dean Strickland's future perspective.

I could recount many examples of his activities on behalf of American legal education. Few people have served as a chair and a member of law school site evaluation teams, as has Dean Strickland. His site evaluation reports have always been a model for clarity, accurateness, and honesty. He possesses an innate sense about what is good legal education.

In the law school admissions area he has stressed that admission to law school should not be by some mathematical formula.

I am concerned about the kind of numbers-driven approach to admissions in which many law schools seem to engage, without the benefit of periodic assessment of how that process shapes institutional character, what alternatives might exist, and what benefits those alternatives might hold.

. . . .

. . . We must master the issues and method of admissions, using experimentation, creativity, and thoughtfulness. There **[*1146]** is a better way, and we must work together to find it. I hope all law schools will rethink their admissions processes. A more thorough, and thoughtful approach to admissions can provide real benefits to students, faculty, and the life of the law school. n5

Again he stated:

Another, sometimes related challenge is a tendency among some law schools to overrely on numerical admission factors such as the LSAT. The test is a good one - perhaps the best of its kind. But it is not a substitute for a thoughtful examination of an applicant's entire record and does not even purport to measure many of the qualities that we know contribute to success in law school, qualities such as intellectual curiosity, self-discipline, listening skills, clear writing ability, and many, many others. In 1999, a workgroup of the Law School Admission Council designed a group of "Alternative Admission Models" to assist individual law schools in making admission decisions more consistent with individual institutional missions. Implementation of these models is an ongoing challenge.

Fueling this overreliance is the pernicious effect of various law school ranking schemes. These commercial rankings often are based largely on a small set of factors that the rankers have determined to be indicators of a law school's quality. Among them, almost always, is the average LSAT score of the school's entering first-year class. Indeed for some, student LSAT scores have become a stand-

alone measure of a school's quality, all but forcing many schools to concentrate on that single factor when admitting a class. We must do more to help US [sic] law schools and the public at large understand the proper, limited role that the test should play in admission decision-making.

Finally, legal education in the United States must devote more resources to the important job of selecting its students. Overreliance on the numbers results from external pressures, but also from the fact that they are convenient and inexpensive. Doing a more thorough, whole-person review of applicant files will require both more time, particularly on the part of law faculty and professional staff, and money. It will be time and money well spent. n6

I will not comment in detail upon his stewardship of the University of Oregon School of Law. I will leave comment to his law school colleagues. Suffice it to say that a magnificent new law [*1147] building and new programs such as the Law and Entrepreneurship Center, a global oceanographic law program, and specialized law school clinics in family law, intellectual property, constitutional and criminal law, civil rights, and American Indian policy are his legacy as dean at Oregon.

In legal education there are never enough leaders who believe in the highest educational standards, yet also believe in, endorse, and implement real innovation in legal education. Rennard Strickland is clearly such an individual. His influence on American legal education is enormous because of his wise counsel to so many law schools over so many years. He does all with style, grace, firmness, and good sense. I know that Rennard will continue to play an important role in the advancement of legal education and the legal profession whatever his next adventure in legal education might be.

The Report of the American Assembly on Law and a Changing Society II observed: "Lawyers are administrators of justice as well as advocates of clients. Lawyers and those training for the practice of law have an affirmative responsibility to nurture justice and truth." n7

Legal education must train its future lawyers ensuring their commitment to serving the law for the public good. The task of legal education is to provide continuous review of developments in the legal profession and in society in order to assure that legal education's values respond to the changing needs and obligations of the profession. This task, this goal, has been Rennard Strickland's throughout his career in legal education, and most especially as part of his deanship of the University of Oregon School of Law. I salute a magnificent legal educator, historian, author, collector, and friend.

FOOTNOTES:

n1. Rennard Strickland, *Beyond the Law School Classroom: Some Thoughts on Professing, Couch Potato Scholarship and Educating the Public About the Legal System*, Ass'n Am. L. Schs. Newsl., Nov. 1994, at 1, 3.

n2. *Id.*

n3. Rennard Strickland, *From Disney World to Mardi Gras: New Directions in Legal Education*, Ass'n Am. L. Schs. Newsl., Feb. 1994, at 1, 2.

n4. Report of the Law School Admission Council to the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association I (July 16, 1999).

n5. Rennard Strickland, *Rethinking Fairness, Diversity, and Appropriate Test Use in Law School Admission Models: Observations of an Itinerant Dean*, 31 U. Tol. L. Rev. 743, 744-47 (2000).

n6. Ass'n of Am. Law Schs., *Conference of International Legal Educators* 268-69 (2000).

n7. Report of the American Assembly on Law and a Changing Society II, at 12 (1975).