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Message from the Dean

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Thank You, From the Cornerstone of This New Building



On September 7, we were honored by the presence of Supreme Court Associate Justice Elena Kagan at the dedication of the beautiful new South Hall academic building. We were pleased that close to 1,000 alumni and friends could join us at the celebratory dedication weekend, which also featured a Q&A with Justice Kagan, class reunions, and a solid gridiron win over Air Force.

For those of you who could not be in attendance, I wanted to share my thoughts and gratitude regarding the completion of South Hall, as expressed in the speech I gave that day. This state-of-the-art facility was possible only because of the dedication and support of the Michigan Law community. To all of you, thank you, and Go Blue.

Justice Kagan, President Coleman, Regent Deitch, other Regents and executive officers of the University, our very special law alumni family, students, and everyone else here today—welcome to a day of enormous celebration, and thank you for joining us for this special occasion.

The University of Michigan Law School was a very distinguished place long before the Law Quadrangle was even a gleam in William Cook's eye.

Indeed, from the moment we first opened our doors in 1859, Michigan Law was a leader in establishing some important pedagogic trends, and took on a mission consistent with its home in a public university.

From the beginning, Michigan Law promoted a public mission and ethos. Professor Thomas Cooley maintained that the primary obligation of Michigan-trained lawyers was not merely commercial, but also moral and political—to make good laws, and to take part in public life on the behalf of ordinary people.

And our teaching already combined legal theory and practice. As our founding Professor Charles Walker explained in 1859, the Law "Department was intended to make, not theoretical merely, but practical lawyers: not to teach principles merely, but also how to apply them." For example, the Law School was an early adopter of moot court and oratory skills courses. Indeed, in 1889, the law students challenged the Literary Department to a "Pronouncing Contest"—and to the consternation of English professors throughout the land, the lawyers won.

So from the very beginning, Michigan Law had a distinctive voice, and a distinctive role to play in American legal education.

But we also recognize it was William Cook's creation and funding of the Law Quad that truly put us on the national stage.

The Quad's magnificent architecture supported our educational mission. Grand spaces create a sense of purpose; Gothic towers and spires inspire us to reach beyond our present vision; and whimsical gargoyles and common-law cartoons keep us from taking ourselves all too seriously.

William Cook believed that architecture matters, and he was right. His majestic buildings have inspired generations of Michigan Law students.



Our wonderful new additions will be equally inspirational. But they will also do so much more, as pedagogy has changed significantly over the past eight decades.

To be sure, today's Distinguished Alumni Award-winner Professor J.J. White still teaches the same way he did back in 1934. He uses only his brain, a chalkboard to write on, a piece of chalk to write with, and a chalk eraser to throw at students who pass.

But others of us teach in a wide variety of different ways, completely unimagined in Cook's day.

Some of us teach classes in which students work through spreadsheets and other digital information, rather than appellate opinions.

Some of us teach classes for which half the students are sitting here in a South Hall classroom and the other half are sitting somewhere on the other side of the globe.

Some of us teach skills-based courses requiring students and faculty to interact in very flexible classroom environments.

Some of us train young lawyers in live-client clinics to negotiate, and argue in court, and structure real transactions, all of which requires space mimicking a modern law firm.

We teach in all of these different ways, maintaining our longstanding position at the forefront of curricular reform, so as to continue training students to be the leaders and best for modern legal and professional practice, in all of its varied forms.

The Quad, magnificent as it is, needed the supplementation of South Hall, with many wonderful spaces specially outfitted for the curriculum and pedagogy of the 21st century.

And I hope, as you gaze behind me, that you'll agree that South Hall appropriately supplements the Quad's architectural traditions as well, including the fact that the elegant granite comes from the very same quarry.

At the same time, South Hall reflects many appropriate modern-day sensibilities, such as the sustainability measures that helped us achieve LEED Gold Certification.

I believe that, in many ways, we have succeeded in bringing the Law Quad's beautiful buildings into the 21st century.

We don't build very often around here, only every Great Depression or so. But when we do, we do it well.

I'd like briefly to thank the many people who have helped make South Hall a reality:

- Members of the school's Building Committee, especially Chair Becky Eisenberg, and various students over the years, who have helped define the kinds of fresh new spaces we needed;
- Our wonderful architects, from Hartman-Cox in Washington, D.C., and Integrated Design Solutions in Troy, Michigan, and our amazing construction managers from Walbridge;
- The stellar members of the University's Architecture, Engineering, and Construction team;
- The University leaders who supported the project from day one, including the Board of Regents, President Mary Sue Coleman, Provost Phil Hanlon, CFO Tim Slottow, Facilities Guru Hank Baier, and the rest of the University's leadership team;
- Our alumni Campaign Steering Committee, under the inspiring—and I'll say relentless—leadership of Bruce Bickner;
- And of course, our many generous donors, whose support keeps this Law School outstanding.

To all of you here today, thank you from the bottom of my heart, and from the cornerstone of this new building.

Sincerely,

Evan Caminker

Evan Caminker
Dean and Branch Rickey Collegiate Professor of Law