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Who Are You, Class of 2009

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Who Are you – 2006

I thought it would be appropriate, this morning, to tell you, and the faculty, who you, the Class of 2009 are. The trick is to guess who is who. Well, you've got the next three years to find out!

From across this great country, from California to Massachusetts, big cities and rural areas, you've come to us from 21 states, the District of Columbia, Canada, France and Korea. One of you is a citizen of Great Britain and four of you grew up in the Appalachians. One of you was born in Egypt, lived in Zimbabwe, Ghana, Nigeria, Great Britain and finally, Canada, from where you've come to us here in Virginia.

Fifty-three percent (53%) of this entering class is female 10% more than last year and the second highest percentage of women in a 1L class in our history. This class's average age is 24 - about the same as last year. Twenty of you are married (at least at the time of your application) and quite a few of you have children – one of you is the father of twins. A couple of you have literally just returned from your honeymoons. You come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. In fact, this entering class has the greatest number of African Americans enrolled in our one hundred and thirty-six year history – 22 or 14% of the class. The great grandfather of one of you graduated from this law school in 1916, another's grandfather graduated in 1993 at age 60. We are pleased that many of you are following in the footsteps of your brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, great uncles, sister in law and other family members who attended this wonderful law school.

Applications were received this year from applicants in 14 countries. While over 1870 graduates of 434 US colleges applied to this law school, 75 universities (3 more than last year) are represented in this particular class. One of you graduated from a Canadian University and 1 from a university abroad. Ten of you have advanced degrees. Entering the law school with your class, although not technically 1L students, are students from Australia, France, Germany and Ireland.

Eighty six or 54% of you have been out of college for at least one year – and one of you graduated in 1987. Your median LSAT score of 161 (the same as last year) places you in the top 15% of the 424,715 test takers during the last three years.

The top quarter of your class achieved an LSAT of 162 which places them in the top 13% of all test takers in the same period. Your median GPA is tied for being the highest in our 136 year history – tied with 2003. The top quartile of your class has a GPA of 3.58 – the absolute highest in our history. Your median GPA is 3.36 and the bottom quartile of this class, in terms of GPA is 3.07.

Two of you achieved a perfect 4.0; fifty-three of you have a GPA of 3.5 or above. Forty different majors are represented, with the greatest number – 33 graduating in – no surprise – Political Science. English runs a distant second as a major in this class. Three of you are engineers (two of you, women) – one of you is an electrical engineer. Six of

you graduated with Latin Honors and 3 were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa. Many, many of you had undergrad scholarships - some several. You represent membership in a variety of prestigious honor societies. Seven have attained the rank of Eagle Scout. Twelve of you are John Marshall Scholars.

Many of you have traveled extensively, lived, worked, done mission trips, studied and performed as good will ambassadors all over the world. You speak many different languages – French, Spanish, Portuguese, German, and Korean. Several of you are dedicated EMTs and give many, many hours in emergency service. Some of you have served our country in the armed forces and one of you was a dedicated police officer.

You've had some pretty amazing careers pre law school. Fourteen of you have been paralegals or legal assistants. Many of you have been teachers – not just in the classroom but as tutors to inner city children, teaching children to ride horses for therapy and for fun, teaching English as a second language both in foreign countries and at home. One of you contributed to the Terrorism Research Center and helped put together a list of possible key players in the London train bombings connecting them to key players in the 911 attacks and Madrid train bombings; another, a physics teacher, taught at John's Hopkins as a Flight Science Instructor teaching the history of flight and physics associated with flight to extremely gifted elementary children; another has been a professional photographer. I am particularly curious about your colleague who has made his living as a stand up comedian/writer appearing on The Late, Late Show with Craig Kilborn and performing in such locales as the Comedy Store in LA – this fellow was in the horror send up film 'Santa's Slay' (spelled SLAY) – all this after starting his career as an investment banker. Huh, maybe that isn't such a segue after all. Another of you taught school in Harlem.. A woman in your class had a career as a metallurgical engineer where she oversaw the intellectual property function for her company and was involved in steel research. I know you'll be interested in meeting the former sales manager of Fredericks of Hollywood and the district representative for a congressman and certainly the fellow who's been employed to give VIP tours to guests of the State Department and the White House. Another in your class has had a high profile as the deputy press secretary for Senator John Edwards and another started an internet business. One of you who grew up in the coal fields of Appalachia signed with a small independent record label and pursued a career in music traveling around the country hoping that your guitar would lead you out of the mountains. Imagine the satisfaction one of you felt to have been able to cut the red tape and be instrumental in restoring the social security benefits of an elderly woman trying to care for her terminally ill husband after she was declared dead but clearly was alive and desperate.

Politics seem to entice a great many of you with you demonstrating your interest by working on political campaigns and being members of the staffs of Congressmen and Senators. Legislative aides, judicial interns, senate interns – lots of you have made your political mark.

Your interests and talents are varied and you are accomplished in so many areas. One of your classmates won an award for fiction and had his art selected for a juried art exhibit;

several of you played in rock groups and sang in gospel choirs. One of you saved a child's life and one of you has worked as a disaster relief responder; another is an ocean rescue professional. One of you wrote of his work as a police officer and making a decision to go to law school after being dragged 50 yards hanging on a moving vehicle in an attempt to apprehend a suspect wanted for a narcotics violation – the suspect was found: not guilty. Several of you are published and one of you owns a patent. You are poets, artists, singers, dancers, skaters, sky divers and one of you admits to owning a “mean dog and a crazy rooster”.

You have a serious commitment to public service. One of you quoted George Bernard Shaw who said “My life belongs to the community, and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can.” Your class has exemplified this by volunteering countless hours working with the abused, infirm and elderly, in soup kitchens, shelters and with crisis hotlines. You've worked long hours in hospices, teaching the disadvantaged; distributing food to the needy; raising funds for charities and extending a helping hand wherever you see need. You adopt orphans for Christmas, coach children in sports you love, and volunteer in hospitals. You commit yourselves not only to those disadvantaged at home but seek to help those less fortunate in foreign countries as well. You believe in the American Dream and seek to take that dream to the world at large. You give so much of yourselves – you are our hope for the future!

This may be the most athletic class we've ever had. Excitement sure isn't missing from your lives. I was told by the 2L and 3L classes that they were in need of new blood for the serious sport of flag football but I think I may have gotten carried away in attempting to help in the constant search for t-shirt power (otherwise known as beating up on the poor undergrads). There is hardly a sport not represented in your class. Even cricket! Several varsity soccer players and one professional soccer player are in your midst. Serious volleyball, tennis, swimming, diving, rugby, lacrosse, basketball, ice skating competitors – you play hard. One of you thought jumping from airplanes in New Zealand was great fun. Find out which of your classmates was one of 200 figure skaters in the country achieving the honor of being chosen to be on Team USA and competed internationally representing our country. Y'all know how to have fun.

Again this year I've been struck to so often see words such as, integrity, commitment, honesty, public interest, ethics, and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. Well...one did write about the world's largest prairie dog. I've been thrilled to see that the reasons so many of you have chosen to go to law school remain the altruistic desire to contribute to making our world a better place to be.....to make a difference.....to contribute to mankind. So many of you are survivors of life's more difficult times yet you endure and strive to be better. You don't give up; you are winners.

I could go on telling you tidbits...or factoids as they're sometimes called...about your class. There are 158 stories amongst you and all of them shed light on your personalities, hopes and dreams. But, half the fun of being in this law school is getting to know those who are going to become your life-long friends so I'll stop now and wish you good luck and good fun on the adventure upon which you are now embarking.