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Who Are You, Class of 2014

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WHO ARE YOU 2011

(GRADUATING 2014)

I speak to you today, according to our school tradition, to issue to each of you, a challenge. Each of you – the 154 who make up our Class of 2014 – has come to us with a unique “story”. Each of you has found your way to the decision to enter the legal profession through the prism of your own life experience. Each of you is sitting here because of the faith of the faculty that you “measure up” to those who have gone before you. Each of you is standing on the shoulders of those that have paved the way so that you could be here today. We know that each of you is capable of being a star in life, in this law school and in the legal profession. Your challenge will shortly become apparent.

This year, the competition for admission was even stiffer than the previous year. In a year when there has been a national decline in applicants to law schools, this law school is one of only 12 that

experienced a double digit increase. Richmond is one of only 30 schools of the 200 ABA accredited law schools in the country which experienced any increase in applications at all. With an increased volume of applications coming from every state but Montana we actually *reduced* the number of admission offers made, accepting only 24% of those applying. Thus, you won a seat despite that stiff competition from 2371 applicants this year applying from 41 foreign countries as well as those 49 states. Graduates of 572 colleges and universities applied to the law school this year – 73 more than last year. Eleven of you have earned graduate degrees. Amongst the 86 universities with alumni in your class (19 more than last year) 17 Virginia universities are represented, 11 Pennsylvania universities, 7 in North Carolina, 5 in New York, Texas and Ohio, 4 in South Carolina, Georgia and Maryland, 2 each in Indiana, Louisiana, New Jersey, Florida, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Vermont. You are also alumni of universities in Arizona, Illinois, New Hampshire, the District of Columbia, Michigan, Kentucky,

Vermont, California and Connecticut. Nearly half of you – 49% - have been out of school for at least one year and one of you graduated in 1992. If we are to believe that the LSAT predicts how well you will do in your first year of law school you, as a group, should do remarkably well. Of the 475,660 test takers nationally, your class LSAT median of 162 places you in the top 14% of all these test takers. The top quarter of your class has a score of 164 – the top 10% of these same test takers. Your median GPA is 3.50 – the strongest in our history; with the top quartile having a GPA of 3.66. Among your classmates are those who speak a total of 12 foreign languages – French, Spanish, Russian, Mandarin, Hebrew, Urdu, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, German, Chinese and Arabic. Twenty of you are citizens of Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom, the Russian Federation, China, France, Italy, Singapore, Sweden and my home country, Canada.

You've majored in 39 different disciplines – 40 of you being Political Science majors – the highest number from a single major.

English runs a distant second. Many of you graduated with Latin Honors and 77 of you graduated with a GPA of 3.51 or higher. One of you had a Fulbright Fellowship; 47 of you received scholarships from your undergrad schools. Fifteen of you are married and 6 of you have children – or did at the time of your application. A couple of you were married just this summer. Several of you have earned a foreign law degree. One of you is a member of the New York and Chinese Bars. Many, many of you have been inspired to become lawyers by family members who are themselves lawyers. Seven of you have mothers, fathers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and grandfathers who graduated from this University; 4 of you have parents who graduated from this law school – 3 of them your fathers. Four of you are Eagle Scouts, one a Scoutmaster and one a Life Scout. Eleven of you are John Marshall Scholars. Entering the law school with you today are 20 students who've transferred here from other law schools in the US and abroad, six who've earned an LLM, and 6 exchange students from Italy, France, Singapore, and

Sweden. One of you is the first generation of his family to be born in the US.

As *you* searched web sites, got suggestions from your pre law advisors, lawyers, friends, family, and visited law schools to determine *where* to go to law school, we also searched for *you* – travelling 78,635 miles by land and air to find, and recruit you, to join our law school family. You should know you were harder to find this year, increasing my travel by 22,992 miles more than last year.

Each year I am struck by how many of you have faced adversity in your young lives – fought in wars, grew up in poverty, were homeless - fought personal demons, near fatal illnesses and other curve balls thrown at you by life. There is diversity in the truest sense in your class – geographic, ethnic, racial, age, life experience, political, and philosophical. One of you is 21 and one of you is 40. One of you is the eldest of 8 children and was home schooled until college.

We've had a long journey together, you and I. Like you, I've spent the last year thinking about who would be in the class of 2014, but *unlike* you I already know the stories that make up your class of 154 individuals. As I reread your files in the last weeks I was once again excited and energized by your accomplishments that, for me, are much more impressive than your LSAT or GPAs. You come from such a variety of backgrounds – big cities, rural areas, farming communities. Several of you are the first to enter or graduate from college. You have lived abroad, you have had fascinating internships. You come from privileged backgrounds and from poverty.

Politics drew many of you who have worked on campaigns for mayors, senators, congressmen and governors. Some of you have been teachers - one taught French to missionaries bound for Senegal, several are EMTs and one of you is a nationally registered Paramedic. I myself am anxious to get to know the woman in your class who has been baking bread and desserts for a restaurant. One

of you lived in Munich for three years and worked as an Intellectual Property Consultant working for such companies as Motorola, Shell, Nestle and Kraft in the complexities of securing trademark registration in Germany, Austria and Switzerland . Another of you owns a production company that produces and sells music to TV shows and movie companies, one of you drove a bus for two years and another designed a rain garden. I can barely pronounce the research in Phonemic Analysis of Errors made by Mandarin Speakers of English but one of you conducted such research. One of you spent a summer as a milker on a farm and another wrote: “I discovered that the highest level of satisfaction is achieved when struggle meets accomplishment” – this from one amongst you that came to America with \$200, started as a housekeeper at a hotel and lacked the ability to communicate in English just a few years ago. Another of your classmates is an accomplished photographer having studied his art at Harvard. One of you was an assembly line worker for an automotive company assembling catalytic converters and

mufflers for cars. Be warned – one of you worked as a bouncer. One of you, a Security and Risk Analysis major, gave a briefing at the Pentagon. A classmate wrote: “ I leave my home each morning knowing that ineptitude or complacency in my role carries the potential for disaster” – this man audited critical gas company records and was responsible for safety in the use of natural gas. One of you, a woman, managed a network of oil distributors for one of Chevron’s most profitable territories and completed a certificate in Sustainability and Energy at Berkeley. I anticipate making contact, and begging for assistance from you out there who worked as a Genius Administrator for Apple. One of you is the founder and owner of a wedding planning company and another has launched a blog on international financial news and information. You may want to avoid playing poker with one of your classmates – he was self-employed for 4 years as a poker player in Atlantic City, the last man standing after battling 400 poker plays in a \$500 buy-in-no limit Texas Hold ‘em poker tournament winning \$55,000. Speaking

about winning – one of you won \$107,000 on Jeopardy, winning 4 games and spending a week on Jeopardy! Tournament of Champions losing only in the semi-finals on a sudden death tie-breaker question . Suspect he'll ever forget *that* answer? One of you worked as a dock hand and I'm fascinated that one of you has worked as a zoo keeper aide for over 10 years and most recently has been a train engineer with the zoo. Now, that sounds like a fun job!

One of you wrote this: "To fulfill my duties as a marine I must kill the man in front of me and violate a moral tenet. To neglect this duty, I would forfeit my own life or sacrifice the life of those entrusted to me. One path opposed my faith, the other my responsibilities". This man survived two tours in Iraq. Among your classmates are veterans of the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force Reserve and National Guard. One of them received a Purple Heart. One was invited to join the Marine Special Operations Command, was deployed to Malaysia and Indonesia, and endured two deployments to Iraq; he led a platoon in support of Operation Iraqi

Freedom. Another was a combat engineer for the Marine Corps and yet another was the assault team leader for a combined force of the US Army Green Berets and Iraqi Commandos who removed more than ten hardened terrorists from an embattled area of Iraq. If you thought moving to Richmond was a challenge, do meet your classmate who was responsible for arranging the transport of equipment worth 15 million dollars to Afghanistan and then back to the US. For your service, so that we may be free to enjoy the quality of our own lives, we salute you!

You are an artistically talented group. Musicians are many – one of you plays the trumpet, bass, piano and teaches jazz. Can you imagine existing completely by playing an accordion in the street? Your classmate's mission was to give Carytown a Gypsy soul soundtrack playing not only the accordion but also the piano, violin, banjo, guitar, harmonica and ukulele. He wrote, "I was able to make enough money to pay my bills even if luxuries such as eating meals that did not consist of rice and beans were not an option. This was

the price I paid for the freedom of earning a living from a talent I am passionate about”. Not being able to carry a tune, I am hugely envious, as I suspect you will be too, of the talent of your classmate, an opera singer who has a long list of opera and operetta performances to his credit. One of you not only climbed the Great Wall of China, spent 8 years as an urban planner, but also distracted a ten year old child in the throes of an asthma attack by singing the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles theme song – she’s a Soprano, by the way.

Along with interesting careers and hobbies you are a well-travelled group having visited every continent in your commitment to making the world a better place in which to work. Each of you has volunteered your time and your hearts in mission trips, working for America Reads, giving therapeutic riding lessons to disabled children, building houses for poverty stricken families, working with and tutoring children so they may read and learn, raising countless dollars for countless charities and giving of yourselves in a myriad

of ways. Your fund raising efforts are amazing. You extend a helping hand wherever you see a need and do not restrict your efforts only to your own country and its citizens. You clearly believe in the American Dream and seek to take that dream to the world at large. Our world is now, and will continue to be in the future, a better place because of your unselfish contributions.

Having fun and being heavily involved in sports hasn't been missing from your accomplished lives. One of you runs 80 miles a week and another hikes portions of the Appalachian Trail 30-40 miles at a time. Another of you, a football player, made history at his University with a perfect 12-0 season and competed for a National Championship. He says his goal was to inspire youth to see beyond their preconceived limitations and to teach them how to take initiative in creating their own future. Name the sport – someone in your class has not only played it but excelled.

I've told you that each of you brings diversity in some way but what is *not* diverse in this class is your commitment to excellence

and to the world around you. I've been gratified to so often see words such as integrity; commitment, honesty, public service; ethics and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. You bring character with you among your accomplishments – and that counts big. I'm happy to see that the reason so many of you have chosen to go to law school remains the selfless desire to contribute to making our world a better place to be...to make a difference...to contribute to mankind. One of you summed it up by saying, "My mission is to defend the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed, and to rescue the needy through legal advocacy. "

I have heard it said that life is a contact sport and so many of you have learned that life doesn't always treat everyone gently. You have, however survived some of life's more difficult challenges and yet you endure and strive to be better. You don't give up; you are winners!

I began by issuing you a challenge. I suspect by now you've figured out the challenge: The challenge is to find out who is who.

You are SO lucky – the person sitting next to you, or one row over – that person is likely to become your best friend forever. I challenge you to use the next three years to discover the stories of those future best friends sitting beside you today – or at the end of your row – as there will be a quiz in 3 short years as you graduate and leave us to take your place alongside of those who've gone before you, in the noble legal profession.

I wish you good luck and good fun as you embark on the wonderful adventure before you.