

8-2012

## Who Are You, Class of 2015

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### Recommended Citation

Rahman, Michelle, "Who Are You, Class of 2015" (2012). *Who Are You Class of...Orientation Speeches*. 5.  
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## WHO ARE YOU - 2012 (GRADUATING 2015)

I am here today to introduce you, our Richmond Law Class of 2015, to our University President, our Law School Dean, our faculty and most importantly, to each other. I speak to you today, adhering to our long tradition, to issue you a challenge. Each of you – the 154 who make up the Class of 2015 – has a unique story. Each of you is sitting here because of the faith of the faculty that you “measure up” to those who have gone before you. We know that each of you is fully capable of being a star in life, your law school and in the legal profession. The challenge I issue you today will shortly become clear.

Each of you sitting out there has won a seat despite the stiff competition of 2823 applicants this year, 19% more than last year, applying from 30 foreign countries and 49 states. Graduates of 600 colleges and universities – 28 more than last year - applied to the law school this year and again this year, following a trend of the last several years, we admitted a smaller percentage of those who applied – only admitting 21% of our applicants; 3% fewer than last year. Several of you have applied to as many as 21 law schools before electing to come to Richmond. You are alumni of 75 American and 2 Canadian universities; 9 of you have earned graduate degrees. Slightly fewer than 50% of you have been out of school for at least one year and one of you graduated in 1996. Three of you graduated in three years and 1 of you has earned 3 bachelor degrees. You are a singularly smart group: of the 475,660 test takers nationally, your class LSAT median is 162 - in the top 14% of these test takers. Your median GPA is 3.50. The top quarter of your class has a score of 163 (the top 12% of test takers nationwide and UGPA of 3.60; the bottom quartile of your class is in the top 25% of these test takers at 158. Among your classmates are those who speak a total of 15 foreign languages: French, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, Gaelic, German, Hindi, Persian, Portuguese, Korean, Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Mandarin, and Arabic.

Nearly half of you are from out of state representing 26 states and the District of Columbia. We also welcome 6 exchange students from Germany, France, Italy, Chile and Australia. One of you is a citizen of Pakistan, 4 are citizens of Saudi Arabia, 1 of Russia, several are citizens of China, 1 is a dual citizen of the US and China, another of Lithuania and I'm sure I show no bias when I enthusiastically tell you that one of you is a citizen of my own home country – Canada. You've majored in 52 different disciplines – 34 of you being political science majors – the highest number from a single major. English runs a distant second. Forty-five of you achieved Latin Honors – 19 of you graduating Cum, 9 Summa, and 17 Magna Cum Laude. Many of you graduated with distinction and High Honors. 77 graduated with a GPA of 3.5 or above. Two of you were inducted into Phi Beta Kappa and 4 of you into ODK. One of you is not only a member of Mensa but also of Bluegrass Mensa. Eight of you are married and 3 of you have children – one with a set of twins - or did at the time of your application. A couple of you were just married this summer. Six of you have earned a foreign law degree. One of the members of your class counts his father and his grandfather as Double Spiders. Eight of you have members of your family who are Richmond law school alumni and one of you has a brother who will graduate from this law school in 2013. Many, many of you have been inspired to become lawyers by family who are members of the legal profession. Nine of you are Eagle Scouts, and one has won the coveted Girl Scout Gold Award. Twelve of you are John Marshall Scholars.

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 86,849 miles by land and air to find, and recruit you, to join our law school family. You should know I'm grateful to you for adding to my road warrior frequent flier miles since I travelled 8214 more miles this year than last.

Many of you have already faced adversity – fought in wars, grew up in poverty, were homeless – fought personal demons, near fatal illnesses and other curve balls thrown at us by life. While each of you is diverse in your own way, 15% of your classmates are students of color. One of you is a practicing Buddhist. The two youngest members of this class are 20 and the eldest, 43. I'm relieved I don't have to do the quantity of birthday-gift shopping as does the member of your class who is number 28 of 42 children in his family. Yes, I said 42!

We have 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 2015 but unlike you I already know the stories that make up your class of 154 souls. As I went back and reread your files again, my thought was that you, the class of 2015 are accomplished in so many ways other than your academic credentials. You come from a variety of backgrounds – big cities, small towns, farming communities. Several of you are the first in your family to attend college. One wrote that she, “comes from generations of rural families for whom formal education has been an unaffordable luxury” – but she graduated Summa Cum Laude and has published several scholarly papers. You have lived abroad, and almost every one of you has had fascinating internships many of which were in law firms. You come from privileged backgrounds and from poverty. One of you wrote, “I spent 9 years and lived in 15 homes before I found a place to call home. Life was a lottery. At one house my sister and I weren't allowed to eat at the dinner table with the ‘real family’ ”; another spent the last 17 years serving as a single parent to a child whose mother simply walked away, supporting him as a taxicab operator. Another of you learned from her mother: “if you curse at the cookies you're baking in antique Sicilian, they taste better.” Yet another wrote, “My experiences as an infantry officer securing the freedom and liberty of others profoundly influenced my decision to pursue a degree in law”. One of you who comes from a country which does not honor it's citizens freedom as does our own wrote, “ I find my work similar to Sisyphian labor; indeed my knowledge, my experience and effort do not have much value, and what is appreciated here is corrupt connections which I will never accept”. I am looking forward to meeting the engineers in your class – a biomedical engineer, 2 electrical engineers, two ocean engineers (one male and one female) and an oil field engineer. Two of your classmates graduated from the Naval Academy including a woman who, along with being deployed to Iraq was entrusted with the safe navigation of a multimillion dollar warship. You will happily meet your classmate who has been employed as a European Union Delegate to the United Nations as he can fill you in on how he managed 3 rounds of negotiations between the Belarusian delegation and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Still another of your classmates can share how “knowing when to advance upon a cow and when to retreat is the difference between successfully loading a cow onto a trailer and a trip to the hospital”. Such a variety of life experiences! One of you was accepted to an Air Force Reserve cyber intelligence officer position at the National Security Agency and won a Global War on Terrorism medal. I know you will want to meet the Nashville song-writer/musician who co-wrote two songs which have been recorded and perhaps you can

learn something from your classmate who is a member of a holding company which has joint ventures with 3 foreign countries providing engineering and construction services to emerging markets of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf.

Politics drew many of you who have worked on presidential, senatorial, gubernatorial, congressional and other political campaigns. Several of you have been teachers and many of you carry certifications in CPR, wilderness first aid, public health, Bioterrorism, have instructed Mass Media Disaster Preparation, or are EMTs. One of you has had formal gambling addiction training. A woman in your class started a small healthcare corporation with the goal of serving the people in Appalachia, another of you drove a bus for 2 years and yet another made his living as a carpenter. There's a fellow sitting amongst you who was responsible for the 4 hour birthing process of about 200 pregnant horses during the 6 month foaling period and interestingly enough, by the time he graduated HS he could perform the whole surgery process from administering the anesthesia to operation to rehabilitation. Have you wondered how surfers/tourists have had a view of the beach along the Maryland coast without leaving home? One of your classmates founded a dot com which installed webcams along that coast. Want to know your way around Capitol Hill? Many of you have either worked or had internships on the Hill; one of you has worked first in the US Senate and most recently worked for the Executive Branch. Teach for America, Americorps; working as a games intern at Busch Gardens; living in a tent in Montana for 4 months with no internet, cell phone or other distraction, teaching in the inner city; laying massive steel pipes with men who barely spoke English, working as a reporter/producer for Satellite Television Asia Region in Hong Kong, modeling, repairing appliances – none of you have been idle. One of you even worked as a prosthetic knee fabricator at an orthopedics company.

One of you wrote this: “I dreaded the prospect of having to take a life. I was, however, prepared to do so if the situation deteriorated”. Some in your class have served tours in Afghanistan, Iraq, Thailand and the Philippines. Earning several medals and still on active duty one wrote: “Most Americans take for granted the sacrifices others make every day to ensure our way of life. These sacrifices are made not only by the military, but all members of society who fight for the inalienable rights of our citizens: cops walking their beat, professors teaching in institutes of higher learning, political rights activists challenging the status quo and ordinary citizens exercising their right to vote”. To those of you who've served, so that we may be free to enjoy the quality of our own lives, we salute you!

One of your classmates has had a front row seat to history being made. Her father was President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and initiated the movement to restore the Chief Justice of Pakistan to his position when ousted by the country's president; when martial law was declared he was imprisoned. One of your mother's is an avid African huntress who is known as “one shot”. A student entering with your class has published letters and opinion editorials in the NY Times, Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post and TIME magazine. He wrote, “when people think of Islam and human rights, they remember my pen.” Interesting folks in your class – how lucky you are to meet them since they are about to be your new, lifelong best friends.

Along with interesting careers, you are a well travelled group dedicated to seeing the world and improving it. You've lived and studied abroad, exploring and using your talents. Each of you

has performed public service giving from the heart thousands of hours of your time to benefit others. You've done countless mission trips and performed as good will ambassadors all over the world. You believe in service above self and volunteer your time in soup kitchens, work in food banks, man crisis lines, tutor, raise countless dollars to go to dozens of charities and good works; run races and dance in marathons in the name of eradicating diseases. One of you collected 250 coats to keep children warm and another has taught children in wheelchairs to ride a horse. You volunteer in neonatal intensive care wards, domestic violence shelters, coach and work with underprivileged children, help students get their GED, raise money to help eradicate disease, you truly "give back". The depth of your involvement, your commitment to the world around you, is inspirational. 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 contributions.

Your interests and talents are varied and you are accomplished in so many areas. You are artists, singers, active in theater arts, dancers, accomplished in playing a wide variety of musical instruments including one of you who is a member of a Japanese Drumming Ensemble. You are published poets and authors; members of choirs and orchestras. We could certainly have a talent show since one of you has worked in reality TV and so many of you are involved in music – playing a variety of instruments. One woman in your class was voted best all-around varsity cheerleader and another woman in your class has created and produced a number of short films some of which have been submitted to film festivals. One of you is a hip hop director and radio DJ – the SBA will be looking for your talents.

Albeit your altruistic bent you and your classmates know how to have fun. There is hardly a sport not represented in your class. Serious athletes are amongst you – a surprising number of you play ice hockey. You run marathons, hike miles and miles, swim, dive (one of you has dived in 8 countries) – be it clubs, racket, balls of every stripe – you play it all.

Once more this year, I've been gratified to so often see words such as integrity, commitment, honesty, public service, ethics and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. I'm pleased to see that the reasons so many of you have chosen to go to law school remain 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 wrote, "Answering phones at the Legal Aid office, I was struck by how clients' lives and livelihoods hung on the expertise of the professionals I worked with, and how a single sentence from the right person could sometimes calm even the most hysterical".

Life is a contact sport and 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. One of you quoted Calvin Coolidge, "Persistence. Nothing in the world can take the place of persistence. Talent will not; Nothing is more common than unsuccessful men with talent. Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb. Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent. The slogan, "Press On" has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race." Persistence would aptly describe your classmate who lost 80 pounds in less than a year and changed his life.

I began by issuing you a challenge. I suspect by now you've figured out the challenge: The challenge is for you to guess who is who. I challenge you to use the next three years to find out about that future best friend sitting beside you today – or at the end of the row – as there will be a quiz in 3 short years as you graduate and leave us to take your place in the noble legal profession amongst those upon whose shoulders you stand. I wish you good luck and good fun as you embark on the wonderful adventure before you.