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Who Are You, Class of 2017

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Who Are You Class of 2017

Today, in accordance with our long tradition, we issue to each of you a challenge. Each of you – the 134 who make up the class of 2017 – has come to us with a unique “story”. Each of you has made your 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 are 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.

As you searched web sites, a certain rankings magazine, gotten suggestions from your prelaw advisors, lawyers, friends, family, and visited law schools to determine where to go law school, we also searched for *you* – travelling more than 60,000 miles by land and air to find, and invite you, to join our law school family.

Rather like your first day in kindergarten, high school and then college you tried to imagine who would be in your classes. You packed your dreams and aspirations and, yes, even your own insecurities, to arrive at this monumental decision that will greatly impact your life and change your professional future.

Competition for a seat at this law school remained stiff despite the national decline in law school applicants. Competing against 1867 applicants who were graduates of 519 universities, applying from all 50 states and 41 foreign countries, each of you won a seat because of your unique characteristics and the predictability of your continued success in the future. Sitting alongside you are graduates of 76 US colleges and universities and 8 international universities. Fifty-six percent of you graduated prior to 2014. Nine of you have graduate degrees and eight of you are married – or were at the time you applied. One of you is engaged to a current law student. Several of you have children –two of

you have 4. You majored in 41 different disciplines with the greatest number of you - 34 - majoring in Political Science; one of you in Art History. Two of you have earned a PhD. Forty five of you achieved Latin Honors graduating Magna, Cum and Summa Cum Laude. One of you was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. One of you graduated from college in 1993. Six of you are citizens of other countries. More than half of you (53%) are from out of state, hailing from 29 different states spanning the country from California to Massachusetts. Two of you with us today are exchange students from Italy and 3 incoming transfer students are from Saudi Arabia, 1 from China, 1 from Germany and 1 from Puerto Rico. The eldest of you is 43 and the youngest is 19. Three of you are under 21 and your class's average age is 24. Slightly more of you – 51% are male. One of you is a twin.

You are a well-traveled group dedicated to seeing the world and improving it. So many of you have travelled extensively, lived, worked, done mission trips, studied and performed as good-will ambassadors all over the world. You speak many different languages: Spanish, French, Italian, Urdu, Hindi, Arabic, Greek, Russian, Farsi, Bulgarian, Macedonian, and Mandarin Chinese. One of you is fluent in American Sign Language. Several of you have security clearances – two of you, “Top Secret”.

As I went back and read your files again, my thought was that you, the class of 2017, are one of the more interesting groups of students we've had in recent years. You come from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. A great many of you are the first in your family to graduate from college. You come from privileged backgrounds and from poverty. Reflect on the tenacity of your classmate whose home was destroyed by Hurricane Sandy. Another was bed ridden for six months. Consider your classmate, able to join us today, who suffered a traumatic brain injury, as well as your classmate who is a true survivor – having experienced both homelessness and growing up in the foster care system. She not only had the drive to put herself through college but also became a stand-up comedian. I marvel at your tenacity and ability to overcome. Life is a contact sport and so many of you have gotten here

by enduring and striving to be better. You don't give up; you are winners.

We are always happy to see that a great number of you have been inspired to become lawyers by family who are members of the legal profession. Twenty one of you have parents who are lawyers – several of you growing up in a home with mothers and fathers who are both attorneys. Four of you are children of law school alumni – one of them, a judge.

Quite a few of you are trained and certified EMTs who give many, many hours of service. Six of you are Eagle Scouts and several of you have a long history with Boy and Girl Scouts.

We are especially proud of, and grateful for, the service of those of you who have served in our country's armed forces. In your class are those who have served in the Coast Guard, the Army, Marines, Marine Reserves, Navy and Army Reserves. One is trained in Survival Evasion Resistance Escape, was deployed to Afghanistan and has specialized training as a sniper. I am reassured, and feel safer knowing that we have in this class someone trained on explosives, interrogation, how to follow people, and how to target terrorists. At least I *think* I feel safer. One former service person wrote, "Duty, Honor, Country applies just as much to the courtroom as it does to the front lines."

You've had some pretty amazing careers pre law school. Some of you have been teachers – several in other countries including China and France. One of your classmates taught in an inner-city school as a Special Ed teacher in a classroom exclusively for autistic, non-verbal students. Nearly every one of you have had significant internships and many of those in law firms. Several of you are paralegals – some from very large law firms. One member of your class has been an assistant professor of law in Saudi Arabia and holds a PhD in International Law along with two LLM degrees.

Your experiences in the workplace have been wide and varied – a bed maker, sous chef, bar tender, DUI Standardized Field Sobriety Test

Practitioner and Breath Alcohol Test Administrator (you'd better be *real* careful after DownUnders), film makeup artist, caterer for a film studio, missionary in Italy, cabinet maker, tutors; nannies, Au Pair, business analyst, construction laborer, protection officer for an art museum, ranch hands, web specialist, milking cows - so many different jobs. One of you has been a CPR provider in a hospital. He says about his job, "Whenever a patient anywhere in the hospital crashes into full arrest, it is my job to provide chest compressions for the duration of the code". He adds that, "If I am to be part of the solution, I may as well do it right." Good thing- doncha think? Another of your classmates has served both as a Deputy Sheriff and a city Police Officer. He has joined us leaving his job as a special agent for the Virginia ABC Board Bureau of Law Enforcement says, "I have a passion for ensuring justice and fairness. I have determined that as a police officer, I merely serve as a bandage for the wounds of justice. I intervene in the act, but my passion begins to ignite only when I piece together the events and evidence into a logical sequence for prosecution and examination". One of you has been recognized for the importance of your research which helped "to elucidate a regulatory mechanism for a protein of interest" and yet another of you assisted in excavating a biblical site in Jerusalem. I could go on and on as each of you has had significant experiences in developing your diversity.

Your interests and talents are varied and you are accomplished in so many areas. You are dancers, poets, artists, actors, accomplished in playing a wide variety of musical instruments – several of you in bands and an orchestra. I have never seen a class with so many who have been involved in marching bands – a section leader for UVa's marching band, a drum major for the famous Maroon MSU Marching Band, and even a member of the color guard for yet another marching band. One of you took a semester off to walk the Appalachian Trail. This classmate walked 1076 miles from Georgia to Pennsylvania. The collective artistic talents of this class will be highly sought after for the riotous Law ReVue in the spring!

Politics have not escaped your notice. I'm struck by how many of you have participated in and directed political campaigns at all levels. One of you was a Deputy Political Director for the Majority Leader of the House; you've been aides to senators and congressmen. One of you works hard as a political operative working for LGBT rights and another worked for the Secretary of Agriculture. Several of you are members of the ACLU.

You join the law school in having a serious commitment to public service. Each of you has performed some type of public service giving from the heart thousands of hours of your time to benefit others. You are not strangers to sacrifice. You are tutors, you teach children to ride horses as therapy, you rehab homes for the poor, you raise money for every charity in existence and, if it doesn't exist, you will establish one. You volunteer for organizations which help victims of violence; you obtain books for the underprivileged, work in shelters and thrift stores. You extend a helping hand wherever you see a need and you do not restrict your efforts only to benefit your own country and its citizens. You clearly believe in the American Dream and seek to take that dream out to the world at large. You give so much of yourselves – the world and its future is in good hands!

While you have a serious altruistic bent, you and your classmates know how to have fun. There is hardly a sport not represented in your class. Serious athletes are among you. You've played Division 1 sports of all kinds. You are tennis stars, varsity rowers, star hockey and soccer players, and you take lacrosse to a new level. Thought of a career as a competitive figure skater? One of you did. Someone in your class was a member of the clay target team and several of you were on equestrian teams and were equestrian trainers. You might notice some mighty big guys in your class. I believe this is the only class in my memory with so many former D1 football players. Look around – you'll spot them. Typically there's a serious passion for flag football amongst our law students as they delight in beating up on the lowly UR undergrads – all for the glory of winning a t-shirt! One year we even fielded a team called the Rahman noodles – and, unfortunately they lived up to their

name in competition. We needn't worry this year – lots of new blood which will surely bring us a championship.

Again 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 suspect each of you has encountered a naysayer who has questioned your joining the legal profession. One of you countered by saying, "I have become well aware of the altruists' caveat – that you simply cannot help everyone. I do not want to be a lawyer because I believe that I can save the world. This is a nation of many iniquities, most of which likely remain beyond my reach. But there is something to be said for those who are willing, in their own limited way, to try and rectify everyday injustices on behalf of others. This is what I long to do, and this is the promise that law school holds for me". Another said, "If having a true altruistic nature is now considered unrealistic, how will we better society? The world needs a call to action, not the dismissal of a young man's dreams". I've been thrilled 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.

I could go on and on telling you about yourselves for there are truly 134 amazing stories amongst you and all of them shed light on your personalities, hopes and dreams. I began by issuing you a challenge. I suspect by now you've figured out what that challenge is. 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 three short years as you graduate and 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 journey before you.