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Who Are You, Class of 2018

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Who Are You Entering Students 2015

Over many years my task, at Orientation, has been to issue to each of you a challenge. That challenge will shortly be apparent.

Each of you 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. We know each of you has the ability to be a star in this law school and in your chosen profession.

As you searched web sites and a certain rankings magazine, got suggestions from your prelaw advisors, lawyers, friends, family, and visited law schools to determine where to go to law school, we also searched for *you*– traveling nearly 66,000 miles by land and air to find you, and invite you, to join our law school family

Let me share with you some of the interesting “factoids” that are represented by those of you here today. As you may have heard, this was a year in which this law school attracted an unusually high

number of students who determined us to be their first choice – 175 of you 1L students who make up the class of 2018. Nineteen of you are entering with advanced standing, some from the far corners of the world. Six of you are part of our inaugural LLM class which, in itself, is historic. Five of you are international exchange students from Germany, Italy, and Australia. Each of you is standing on the shoulders of those who have paved the way so that you could be here today.

Competing against 1,775 applicants who were graduates of 517 universities, applying from 48 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and 61 foreign countries, each of you won a seat because of your unique characteristics and the predictability of your continued success.

You are a smart group! Your median GPA is the highest in our history – 3.52. The median LSAT – 160 – is the same as last year. Sitting alongside you are graduates of 101 U.S. colleges and universities, and 16 international universities. Four of you are Double Spiders. Fifty-five percent of you graduated prior to 2015;

one in 1984. Seven of you have graduate degrees, and twenty-four of you are married – or were at the time you applied. Nine of you have children – that we know of. You majored in 46 different disciplines, with the greatest number of you – 59 – majoring in political science. One of you is a Fulbright Scholar. Sixty-five of you achieved Latin Honors, graduating Cum, Magna, and Summa Cum Laude. Three of you were elected to Phi Beta Kappa. Several of you have been elected to ODK. Eight of you have advanced degrees including one of you who has earned a doctoral degree. Twenty-eight of you are citizens of nineteen different countries. More than half of you (52%) are from out of state, representing 31 different states, spanning the country from Massachusetts to Washington State. Five of you with us today are exchange students – two from Italy, two from Germany, and one from Australia. The eldest of you is 54, and the youngest of you is 19, with your class’s average age being 24. The ratio of males to females is virtually even – but there is one more female than male in the 1L class.

You are a curious and well-travelled group having been on every continent on mission trips, studying abroad or satisfying your curiosity by getting out and seeing the world. One of you wrote, “Home is never more than a packed suitcase away in the life of an adventurer. The adventure is worth the risk.” You don’t let grass grow under your feet - you have studied in England, France, Saudi Arabia, China, and virtually every corner of the globe. As a group, you speak an astounding 25 different languages: Turkish, Farsi, Japanese, Shanghainese, Taiwanese, Chinese, Arabic, Dutch, Portuguese, Hungarian, Spanish, French, Tagalog, Urdu, Italian, Mandarin, Uzbek, Pushto, German, Greek, Dari, Persian, Hindi, Gujarati and Polish. One of you tells us she possesses what she calls a “very distinct Jersey-Bostonian-Texas accent.”

As I went back and read your files once again, I was struck by what a diverse and well-rounded group you are. One of your classmates saved money to pay for law school by selling pest control services in Chicago – now that is dedication! So many of you have

worked in law firms – and more than a few of you have been inspired to follow this path by the lawyers in your family. Thirty-one of you have a parent who is an attorney. Five of you actually have survived living with both parents who are lawyers. I suspect your negotiating skills have been finely honed. Eight of you have a family connection to UR – fathers, grandfathers, mothers; even a brother who just graduated this May. Talk about legacies - one of you is the 4th in his family to attend this law school. I was interested to learn that 18 of you are the first in your families to earn a degree.

More impressive than even the factoids I found, while re-reading your applications, are the lives you’ve thus far led. Many of you are “self-made” and have had fierce battles to make it to this momentous day. You come from privilege and from poverty.

Consider the tenacity of one of you whose family was left homeless as a result of Hurricane Sandy. This student wrote what I imagine many of you would echo, “I’m not the only person to ever be humbled in the face of tragedy but I have been resilient in my efforts

to rise above adversity and thrive in the end.” Talk about grit - consider your classmate who is a Phi Beta Kappa, graduated Summa Cum Laude. and has earned a Masters Degree in Theological Studies despite being unable to read or write until his junior year of high school! One woman, out of economic necessity, worked three jobs while going to school full-time. One of you has a father who was a Cuban refugee, while another of your classmates saw her parents arrested and her father tortured in Iran for speaking out against the government. Another of you, gravely ill, was granted a wish by A Special Wish Foundation. Even in the face of serious illness, her wish was not to go to Disney World, but rather to meet Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg – and she did. Working 11-hour shifts for a road paving company, one of you had your foot run over by a car while on the job. Many of you had most interesting careers prior to law school. You’ve been congressional and legislative interns and aides, you’ve worked in the White House, and been politicos; one of you was a policy advisor for the House of Representatives for 5 years. You’re going to want to meet this

fellow – he worked on negotiating a bipartisan multi-billion dollar student loan bill to prevent interest rates from doubling. Two of you have been butchers, and, no – both are NOT male. One of you is a published author of work comparing different views of justice pertaining to US Western law and Islamic Saudi law; several of you have been teachers - one, a chemistry teacher, was selected as Teacher of the Year and taught for 23 years. Another was selected as one of only a few males to teach in an inner city kindergarten. I love the grit I see in your personalities – a great predictor of success. One of you worked as a belly dancer. Another delivered pizza for an establishment called, “sexy Pizza” – hmm. One of you developed an online consignment store and one of you developed and implemented a plan to successfully remove all equipment and soldiers from Kunar Province, receiving a bronze star in the process. Several of you worked construction, grew up and worked on farms and several of you were employed as ranch hands.

Richmond has long been known as a welcoming home for our valued veterans, and this year is no exception – your class has representatives from the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marines and we are grateful for their service. Imagine the terror one of your classmates felt as, in performing his own duties, was forced to stand by and watch as 4 Americans were ruthlessly executed by Somali pirates. He says, “My duty was to save lives and the worst thing that could possibly happen, just happened”. One of you was a cryptologist/linguist and was part of the US Intelligence Community. Another soldier served in the Army for 15 years, where she was a Jumpmaster lead instructor. One of you – a woman served the Navy for 7 years and survived 2 tours in Afghanistan throughout Operation Enduring Freedom. She came under enemy fire and a mortar hit the structure in which she took cover. Considering her expertise is in repairing and maintaining artillery, missiles and multiple launch rocket systems, I’d be very nice to her.

There are several entrepreneurs in your class – one founded the “World’s Best Greek Seasoning & Dressing” – online orders only, please. I’m very anxious to get to know your classmate who has been working directly with ultra-high net worth clients to advise their investment, estate planning and liquidity needs, however if he’s going to advise me the adjective regarding net worth may need to be modified. You will also want to meet the Spy Guide who worked for the International Spy Museum. I admire your classmate who founded a company whose purpose is to take sports to low-income communities to get children away from drugs, gangs and violence. I could go on and on – your career paths have been fascinating.

While you have a serious altruistic bent, you and your classmates know how to have fun. You have more than enough musical ability to form a very impressive band, with classically trained singers, trumpeters, pianists, and a cellist, not to mention a former music engineer to mix it all together. You also have

impressive media experience – you’ve interned for ABC News and the Laura Ingraham Show, and have worked as a Play-by-Play announcer for student athletics, a video journalist, and a grip for *Power Rangers: Jungle Fury*. One of you was recently elected Homecoming King and is a member of an all- male dance team called the “Low Techs”.

There is hardly a sport not represented in your class. You are serious athletes. You’ve played Division I sports of all kinds. You are tennis stars (even a pro), swimmers, divers, competitive horseback rides; black belts, soccer players; football, lacrosse, baseball players. You scuba and you row; you dance, you train dogs, and a couple of you even play ice hockey. One of you was a Canadian Nationals Top Ten Rider for the last 6 years and competed in the US Nationals. Another of you engaged over 2,000 people on a 50,000 mile, 48 state, “Discover America” journey. One of you even played lacrosse in Rome and led your team to the Italian National Championship. Another of you ran with the bulls in

Pamplona – not strictly a sport, but he must have been pretty athletic to be sitting here today. One of you spent 4 months hiking the entire 2,100 mile Appalachian Trail – all of it. Several of you also spend a lot of time underwater – 3 of you are SCUBA certified, and one of you has a special certification in Wreck Diving. Five of you are Eagle Scouts, while one is a Girl Scouts Gold Award recipient. One of you has memorized the entire Quran – that should make briefing cases a breeze!

You join the law school in having a serious commitment to public service. Each of you has given from the heart thousands of hours of your time to benefit others. You extend a helping hand wherever you see a need and do not restrict your efforts only to benefit your own country and its citizens. You have volunteered with the Salvation Army, AmeriCorps, Children’s Miracle Network, Child Advocacy Center, the Cancer Institute, the American Suicide Prevention Foundation, and with Hurricane Katrina recovery, as well as just about every organized charity you can think of. A great

number of you have worked with the Special Olympics as coaches, judges, organizers, and volunteers. Contributing to making the world a better place, you have also volunteered abroad, doing community development in Nicaragua, teaching English in China, participating in a medical mission in Africa, and building stoves in rural Guatemala to mention only a few.

Each year I'm gratified to continue to see words such as integrity, commitment, honesty, public service, ethics and loyalty permeate your narrative statements. One of you wrote: "We are all going to be part of the human history. I want to help ensure my generation is not the final chapter!" I've been thrilled to see that the reasons 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. It is said that 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; each of you is a winner – I know that for sure – I'm betting on each of you.

I could go on and on telling you about yourselves for there are truly 202 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 amongst you. I challenge you to find out about that future best friend sitting beside you today – or at the end of the row. There will be a quiz at the end of your short time here – whether you'll be here for three full years, your last two years, or just one year as part of the LLM program, your time here is but a blink away. You will graduate and take your place in the noble legal profession amongst those who are not just good lawyers but are doing good in the world. Hopefully, you will have met today's challenge and gotten to know your classmates in this entering class for they are the keys to your own success. Hang on – the ride is just beginning!

I will close now by wishing you good luck and good fun as you embark on the wonderful journey before you.