

Thanks, Dean Richardson. Dean Paris and members of the Class of 2009. On behalf of the faculty of the UO Law School, I want to welcome you, congratulate you, and challenge you.

First, welcome! This is a friendly place. If “The Paper Chase” or “One L” have made you dread law school, I think you’ll be pleasantly surprised when you meet your professors and your fellow students. Legal education is stressful, as I will discuss in a moment; but here at UO we do our best to avoid unnecessary stress, competition and terror.

Second, congratulations! Believe it or not, coming to law school was a good idea. Studying law can provide you with skills and credentials that will enrich the rest of your life. Law school has a bad image. Most of you have encountered at least one person – a relative perhaps, or a practicing lawyer or just a stranger at a party – who has taken you aside and asked confidentially whether you are **sure** you want to put yourself through this experience. Often it is someone who had a bad experience in law school; equally often it is someone who knows little about law school but who is responding to the general anti-lawyer tone of much of society. Try to put aside the expectations and apprehensions those encounters roused in you. Come to your studies with confidence and a desire to enjoy yourself, and you will be successful. Expect to give your best and receive our best, and your expectations will not be too harshly dashed. Law school truly is what you make it.

Finally, and most importantly, I have a challenge for you. Law school, as I said above, is stressful. It combines genuine education with professional training. The two are not the same. Education – which comes from a Latin root meaning “to lead out of” – involves developing and realizing the capacities and values that are already in you. Education at its best is designed to help you be more fully and successfully the person you were born to be.

Training, by contrast, is designed to school you in skills and norms that do not depend on what is inside you. Training fits you to the legal profession, not

the other way around. That's a necessary process, and if we did not provide it, you would be justified in asking whether your tuition dollars had been well spent.

But training is a two-edged sword. In learning how to think like a lawyer, you run the risk of forgetting how to think like yourself. And so I want to take a few minutes now to perform a brief exercise that may help you keep your focus over the next three years.

Staff members are handing out sheets of paper and envelopes. Please take one of each. Does everybody have one?

Now, this exercise is only for you. No one else will ever see it unless you choose to share it. I want you to take a minute to think through this question, and write down the answer that comes to mind in one or two sentences. Here's the question: *Why did I come to law school?* For most of us, there is some dream, some image of what we will get from legal education that brings us here. Sometimes it is highly developed – some of you know exactly what kind of lawyer you want to be, where and in what professional setting you want to practice, what values you want to embody in your legal career. For others it is less formed – you may have images from books like *To Kill a Mockingbird*, you may have met a lawyer you admire (I admired the lawyer who got me out of jail in 1971), you may have a vague sense of what you are good at or what you enjoy, or some unformed vision of what a good life and a good career can be.

Whether your reasons for being here are highly specific or less formed, I want you to take a minute and quietly call them up. Why are you here? What do you want out of law school?

*What is your dream?*

When you have thought about it for a minute – it's like the LSAT, don't overthink it! – write down your answer.

(One minute of silence)

When you are finished, seal your answer in the envelope and sign your name across the flap. Then write your name LEGIBLY on the front as well and pass your envelope toward the aisle. We will return it to you at the beginning of next semester, when you have completed your first set of courses and exams.

The beginning of the second term is a time when first-year students often wonder why they are here. Sometimes the pace of law school is so rapid and intense that students lose sight of their dream. But the dream that brought you here is important. I hope getting your answer back will help you to refocus after the intensity of exams.

What I want to say to you in conclusion is that you should look around the law school—look at me and my faculty colleagues, look at Dean Paris and the law school administration, look at Dean Richardson and the student services staff, look at Dean Loya and the career services office, look at the student activities that the law school offers—and say to yourselves, “These people, these structures are not here to remake me, or give me a new self, or reorder my value system. They are here to help me realize my dream. It may be that my dream as it now stands is unrealistic and need to be adjusted. It may be that I need to find unexpected ways to realize it or that I will need to overcome unexpected obstacles to it. But I am not in law school to become someone new. I am here to become the person I was born to be.”

When things get tangled and stressful over the next few years—and they will—it may be helpful to remember this moment, or even to glance at what you have written. Dreams matter, and all of us here at the law school stand ready to help you make yours come true. It’s only up to you to ask.

Thanks, and welcome again.