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Message from Dean Caminker

University of Michigan Law School

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MESSAGE

from Dean Caminker



Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia's recent visit to the Law School afforded a great opportunity to witness, in action, the combination of intellectual vibrancy and social cohesion that characterizes the University of Michigan Law School. While the spotlight was on the Justice's formal teaching and presentations, his presence illuminated the many informal spaces outside the classroom where this collegiality of our community really thrives.

Our students decided to prepare themselves for the Justice's visit by designing extracurricular opportunities to educate themselves about his jurisprudence. During the week before Justice Scalia arrived, student organizations gathered faculty (both ours and those from other schools) to discuss the Justice's views of criminal law, separation of powers, voting rights, and affirmative action. They titled the series "Scaliapalooza" — clearly a play on "lollapalooza," literally meaning "an event of tremendous importance," but perhaps the pop culture reference to an alternative music concert tour was intended, given the festive flavor of the gatherings. The collaborative energy in these faculty-student interchanges was infectious, and the Law School came alive with passionate debate on all sides of the issues. The students' homework paid off; they were primed and ready to engage with the Justice in the classroom and at his public address at Rackham during the following week.

Our faculty interacted with the Justice in much the same way, with spirited but collegial dialogue in dining halls and hallways. In just one example, Professor Rich Friedman, whose scholarly view of the Sixth Amendment Confrontation Clause was recently adopted by Justice Scalia writing for the Court (in a case argued by Jeff Fisher '97), found the opportunity informally to engage the Justice about the case. Together they probed how best to address an important question left open — concerning the meaning of “testimony” triggering the right of confrontation, with Rich actually doing almost all of the talking (his loquaciousness being justified, he claimed, by his desire to make sure the Justice wouldn't say anything requiring his recusal from the next case). Several other faculty joined in the discussion, and the dialogue was energetic, stimulating, and productive, notwithstanding the variety of views represented.

Of course, none of this is new for us; day after day we collaboratively explore the law in informal and *ad hoc* ways, as well as through classroom teaching. A host of dynamic visitors offer insights on contemporary issues of the day, sparking a hallway conversation among students here and inspiring some volunteer efforts there. Our top-notch faculty share their scholarly work with students and help them marry theory with practice. And

student-organized workshops and other events generate exciting discussions that greatly enhance the learning in the core curriculum. The legal education provided here is a synthesis of formal and informal, practical and theoretical — only some of which can be clearly defined in an admissions catalog or statistical rankings.

To be sure, such outside-the-classroom learning is present at all top-tier schools, and I'm sure many of our peers can boast of a similar intellectual energy. In fact, all top schools acknowledge this informal learning is imperative in today's legal education. But I'll argue that even among the best schools, the cohesive and collegial nature of our community stands out. This is in part because our location — on a world-class university campus in the “small town” of Ann Arbor — allows this type of community to flourish. First, we have a very focused group of faculty and students. Law schools in urban centers often struggle with distractions, as many professors and students are routinely pulled away from the school by the allure of law firm practice or other endeavors. In contrast, our location encourages us to find our intellectual stimulus within our own community. Indeed, I believe Michigan Law attracts students and faculty who appreciate that central focus, further reinforcing this notion of a strong, engaged community.

Finally, the majesty of the Cook Quadrangle, an unsurpassed architectural gem, inspires the dialogue and debate that takes place within.

And it often inspires those who are just passing through. As we said our farewells, Justice Scalia said that our students were noticeably more engaged than those he had met elsewhere during visits to other prominent law schools, and they were far more civil as well. And after remarking on the vibrant but collegial culture we have nurtured at the Law School, he added that perhaps his own Court could profit from aspiring to the same.

Evan Caminker