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## Dean's Message

University of Michigan Law School

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# A MESSAGE FROM DEAN CAMINKER

■ read a student blog entry recently that was compelling in its description of Michigan Law's unusually collegial culture.

"Returning classes feel it—that's why we sign up for things like tour guiding and orientation leading. Alumni know it too—when a law firm associate tried to explain how friendly the people in his firm are, he compared it to his experiences as a Michigan Law student," wrote 2L Joseph Wang, who earned his A.B. in classics from Princeton and his master's in philosophy from Oxford before joining us in Ann Arbor.

This sense of collegiality has been a Michigan hallmark for many years. Not only does it create a pleasant learning environment, but it translates into a significant advantage for our students. Because our students, faculty, administrators, and alumni are supportive of one another—and committed to one another's success—students have the greatest possible opportunity to excel in law school and in their careers.

Our dean of admissions recalled a story that illustrates this point, one of dozens I hear every year. A student's laptop failed during exams. Not only did many other people offer her their outlines, one fellow student with a computer engineering background spent several hours repairing the laptop for her.

Here at Michigan, we demand intellectual rigor and cultivate a spirit of collegiality in equal measure. I consider this one of the School's most distinguishing characteristics. It is a far cry from a three-year legal education defined by cutthroat competition at all costs. More importantly, it is a terrific environment for learning the skill of collaboration that will be so important on an increasingly interconnected world stage.

This issue of the magazine marks the Law School's 150th anniversary. The sesquicentennial celebration provides the opportunity not only to reflect on Michigan's proud history, but also to look ahead to the future of the Law School, and of legal education.

Consider this: in the next few decades, lawyers and those trained in the law are likely to be more important players on that world stage than ever before. Lawyers have an intellectual skill set, and a penchant for critical thinking, that are essential in a wide range of circumstances. Clients will continue to rely on the lawyer's wise counsel and zealous advocacy to navigate the evermore complex web of regulations. And, I can imagine tomorrow's global lawyer increasingly in the role of broker as well, bringing together disparate parties compelled to coordinate in some way, whether they are individuals, multinational corporations, or countries concerned with cooperative policy development.

The combination of smart, analytical thinking and effective brokering will be just as essential in a global environment for



legally trained professionals who have chosen not to practice law in the traditional sense. These are nuanced skills. On the one hand, there is the ability to mediate, negotiate, find common ground, lead a cross cultural team; on the other, there is the critical thinking which enables one to tease out fact and knowledge from the tsunami of information now available instantaneously. Many alumni of the Law School who took a career path outside of the law tell me they credit their career success in large measure to learning to think and work in the "Michigan way."

Our 1L class is the face of our future, and the legal profession's future. The qualifications of the class are astonishing—the highest median GPA and LSAT we have ever admitted. But just as impressive is the multifaceted nature of the class composition: a 2008 Olympic silver medal winner in fencing, the manager of China policy for the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, a former Army lieutenant who earned the Bronze Star, an ordained rabbi, a member of the Guatemalan national rugby team. Most of our candidates for the S.J.D and LL.M. have worked overseas in private practice, government, NGOs, and academia.

This year's entering cohort comes from 43 states and 35 countries, and when they graduate they will be placed in all the world's largest legal markets. This national and international reach is another of Michigan's competitive advantages. When compared with the rest of the top law schools, Michigan Law is among the most national of these institutions; that is, Michigan and only a handful of other schools have a significant concentration of alumni placed in all regions of the country.

A few weeks ago, one of our staff members asked 1L Michael Shaffer, who came to Ann Arbor from San Francisco, why he chose Michigan. Michael had created an extensive set of metrics to compare the top-tier schools, and in addition to overall reputation he was impressed with two significant factors: the sheer number of Michigan alumni in practice across the country, and what he calls the "nationality" of where those graduates live and work. It is a powerful alumni network that stretches all the way around the world.

In fact, we have the best of all worlds. Our alumni constitute a critical mass in most major markets, but our students do not find themselves competing with hosts of fellow students in the same one or two narrow geographic regions. And we know that firms in New York, in Washington, D.C., in California, and well beyond this country's borders want to recruit at Michigan precisely because of the "Michigan way," that combination of analytical thinking and collaborative outlook so important in our complex, interconnected society. Just this year, Michigan Law was ranked #1 for "best career prospects" in the *Princeton Review* list of top law schools, and Vault.com, a legal career website, placed Michigan second on its list of best law schools from the perspective of employers.

With this issue of the magazine, we celebrate Michigan Law's 150th birthday. We have taken this occasion to update the graphic look and feel of the publication to better reflect the Law School's vibrancy and contemporary strengths, even as we pay homage to our proud tradition.

I hope you will take time to read this special issue, which includes historical highlights from the Law School's earliest days. In addition, you will find one of our most exciting pieces of news in these pages: gorgeous schematic designs for a new building on the corner of State and Monroe streets which will add much needed and well designed space to our signature Law Quad complex. We hope to break ground on the new building in the fall of 2009, when we gather as a Law School community to mark 150 years of remarkable legal education.

Sincerely,

*Evan Caminker*

Evan Caminker  
Dean and Branch Rickey Collegiate Professor of Law