From one generation to the next

Not long ago, I had occasion to review the law school course catalog for 1968. Yes, this was the same law school. The names and pictures of some of our best current faculty—Ester, Powers and Tomlinson—were in the 1968 catalog. But in so many other ways the school seemed barely recognizable.

Today we offer more than 145 courses, three times as many as we did in 1968. Then, courses were not offered in either Health Care Law or Environmental Law; now there are 24 courses in the two areas combined. The Law Library housed approximately 56,000 volumes compared to a collection seven times that size today. A student in 1968 could receive credit for interning with the Legal Aid Society—the precursor of our extensive experiential learning programs in which sixteen of our current day faculty directly supervise students. Today, student lawyers practice business law and family law, and represent both the homeless and University of Maryland scientists.

There were other differences as well. The day division in 1968 was about half as large as today’s. Fifty percent of this year’s class is comprised of women; there were but a handful in 1968. The few minority students in 1968 would be pleased to know that now more than 25 percent of the student body are students of color. In 1968, students edited the Maryland Law Review, but no one had yet envisioned that our students would, a generation later, edit three additional scholarly journals, including The Business Lawyer, the world’s most widely circulated law review publication.

Students in 1968 spent $260/year on tuition. Tuition and fees now exceed $9,000 for Maryland residents and $15,500 for non-residents. Tax dollars from the state of Maryland, the largest source of revenues for the school in 1968, are now less than 15 percent of the school’s operating budget. There was neither an alumni and development office nor an office of career development in 1968.

In the midst of vast differences, some things seemingly never change. Take, for example, the building. The then-new building of 1968 now houses greatly expanded and more diverse educational programs focusing on clinics and other experiential learning opportunities, including scores of classes in more specialized areas of the law. The problem, today, is you can’t fit three times as many courses and twice as many day division students into the same building.

That is why planning is under way for the construction of a major new addition and renovation to the Law School building. The Maryland General Assembly has passed the first of four separate appropriations that will be necessary to plan and construct the new building. The General Assembly, however, has required the School of Law to raise $8 million in private contributions to go along with the $28.4 million in tax dollars.

What ought a graduate give back to the school that provided “the union card” for a meaningful and lucrative professional practice? When one has benefited from the contributions to the practice of generations of Maryland Law School graduates—going back as far as Professor David Hoffman’s founding of the School in 1817—what is our obligation to future generations of Maryland Law School graduates? How much more will the educational program of the Law School need to evolve over the next generation in order to assure that Maryland grads are ready to meet the new challenges?

These are the questions we raise as part of our efforts over the next two years to receive the necessary pledges of $8 million for the Capital Campaign. These questions must be asked not by me as dean or my faculty members, but by the School of Law alumni.

That is why I am so pleased to tell you that the Law School Building Campaign will be chaired by Frank Burch ’74, the chairman of Piper and Marbury, and co-chaired by Paul Bekman ’71 of Israelson, Salsbury, Clements & Bekman. Frank and Paul are key leaders of the legal community: Paul currently serves as president of the Maryland State Bar Association, and Frank recently stepped down as chair of the school’s Board of Visitors. Each has made a personal commitment of $100,000 to the building campaign. I thank them, among others, for their personal commitments as well as their leadership.

Stepping forward to prepare for the future is what leadership is all about. Maryland law grads are leaders throughout the legal, judicial, business and philanthropic communities. We are Maryland’s leadership school. Now it is time for you, our graduates and friends, along with Frank and Paul, to lead by helping the school that launched your careers.

Donald G. Gifford, dean