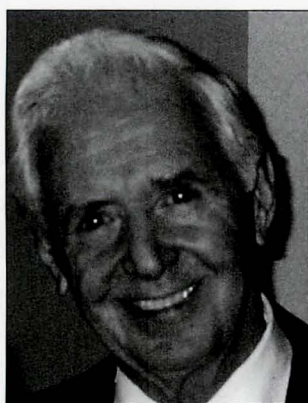


Back to the Future

A Reflection on Then and Now

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Forty years ago I graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law. It was 1958. While I was attending law school I worked as a reporter for *The Baltimore Sun*. I was a day student, in classes from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m., and then covered stories from 3 p.m. until midnight. Hardly the best schedule to keep while studying law. In fact, it is doubtful a full-time student today could hold a full-time job.

I struggled with my schedule, but made it, graduating close to the bottom of my class. When I took the bar examination, my writing and reasoning skills paid off. I was also fortunate that in studying for the bar I hit 60 to 70 percent of the Maryland cases appearing as essay questions on the exam. So from standing

second to the bottom in my graduating class, I finished second from the top in the bar exam.

I left *The Baltimore Sun* thinking I'd give the practice of law a chance. Six months later I was convinced that I preferred journalism and returned to the media, working in press relations, politics, public affairs and a stint at Catholic University School of Law in a public interest legal center. I finally came to rest at the Barton-Gillet Company where I spent more than 20 years preparing publications and providing consulting for such non-profit institutions as colleges, universities, medical centers and hospitals.

Fast forward to 1998, when as president of my own firm, I was selected to prepare a new admissions publication for my alma mater. Given my newspaper background, I began the assignment by interviewing scores of students, faculty members and administrators to determine how the law school was regarded by those who know it best.


Even though I was a faithful alumnus, attending reunions and giving my due in donations, I was unprepared for the startling contrast between then and now. To me, 1998 represented more than the passage of four decades; it manifested a wholly different law school academic program—a radically different law school experience—and profoundly different student expectations.

Consider these differences:

- The 1958 day-division numbered 38 students. Only one woman. No African-Americans. No Asian-Americans. No Hispanics. In contrast, the 1998 day-division had a graduating class of 263 students, comprised of 138 women, 47 African-Americans, 23 Asian-Americans, five Hispanics and one American Indian.

- The law school of my day had 11 Caucasian faculty members, including two women. Today, the law school has 53 faculty members, 18 of whom are women and 11 percent of whom are persons of color. Of course that means that we prevailed in my day with a student-faculty ratio of close to 3 to 1 in contrast with the 1998 ratio of 14 to 1.

- The law school I entered had no LSAT requirement and applicants were routinely admitted—though we ended up with more than our share of high achievers. Now the LSAT is basic, the competition is keen and overall the academic background of current students is uniformly high. As much as I dislike conjecturing, I sincerely doubt that many of us in the 1958 class would have been admitted under 1998 standards.



• From what I can recall the required courses are largely the same, but we had limited numbers of electives compared with more than 150 available to current students. In addition, the law school developed special law-related programs in the environment, health care, business and international affairs that are setting national standards for excellence.

• In my day, class participation was expected, given our small numbers. As for me, usually unprepared, I sat in peril fearful I would be called on. Regardless of my lack of study time, the give and take in class advanced the idea of getting students to think like lawyers. I listened in on several class discussions in the course of my 1998 assignment and I thought the exchanges were livelier and more pointed than ours.

• In my class, the closest we came to experiencing the law was in a moot court presentation. There were no clinical programs, no judicial externships and few summer associate positions. Now, the law school's clinical program is considered one of the most highly regarded and extensive in the country with specialties across the spectrum of civil and criminal law. Moreover, externships are available with federal judges and public interest and governmental agencies.

• Frankly, I can't remember if there was a law review. Today, there are four law journals with the *Maryland Law Review* ranked among the top 40 in the nation and *The Business Lawyer* considered the world's most widely circulated law journal.

• The 1958 graduating class had slim expectations of joining one of Baltimore's major law firms. For a large minority of Jewish students, it was out of the question. The same held true for the few blacks in the evening division. Most of those who pursued careers in the law joined small firms or worked independently. Many prospered as their law practices grew and became well positioned in the legal community.

Today, backed by a strong curriculum, clinical programs and experiences as summer associates, large numbers of the graduating class, regardless of race or ethnicity, can aspire to positions in major law firms in Baltimore and Washington, D.C., in prosecution and public defender offices, top government agencies and as clerks for state and federal judges.

• Forty years ago, the law school was located across the park from the current building in a stately brick structure now occupied by the School of Social Work. Soon, the law school will be rebuilt to meet the needs of a vastly larger and ambitious legal education program.

The theme of the recruitment publication I prepared was "A Transforming Experience in Legal Education." I meant it to apply to the transformation that current students undergo in applying legal principles learned in the classroom to the practice of law experienced in clinical programs, externships and summer positions. It was an equally appropriate theme for me in contrasting the legal education I received, as good as it was, with the legal education of today, as superb as it is.