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Letter to Graduates and Friends

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Dear Graduates and Friends:

New Students. School begins on South Henry Street in the teeth of the dog days of August. This is bracing for someone of my vintage, who thinks school is supposed to begin after summer ends. Our new first-year students arrived on Sunday afternoon, August 15, for a get-acquainted party in the front hall of the Law School. The next day opening rites for the ILs took place in the University Center on main campus (there is no place at the Law School large enough to seat a class in mass). During these ceremonies, former Justice John Charles Thomas (the youngest person and first African-American ever appointed to the Virginia Supreme Court) gave a rousing talk about the significance of law to American society and the challenge of being citizen lawyers. Dave Douglas from the faculty talked about the rich history of Marshall-Wythe, Jim Moliterno introduced our unparalleled Legal Skills Program, and I made a few dean-like noises. It was a good beginning for 1999/00.

The Class of 2002 is impressive. It’s big (201 students), with a median LSAT of 163 (90th percentile) and a median undergraduate GPA of 3.3. The class was chosen from 2,267 J.D. applicants from all over this country and abroad. The students who joined us came from 37 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, China, France, Kazakhstan and Korea. They did their undergraduate work at 116 colleges and universities. Over 30 have advanced degrees. Their average age is 24. More than half worked full time before law school (including three physicians and a veterinarian). Their record of public service is already notable. They have helped Cuban refugees, battered women and abused children, built homes with Habitat for Humanity, fed the homeless, rescued golden retrievers and given therapy using horses. They have coached soccer, umpired softball and played almost every sport, often with real athletic prowess. They’ve traveled the world and have talents in an amazing range of areas from ancient Greek and music (bluegrass, jazz, symphonic) to poetry, philately and spelunking.

Men make up 58 percent of the class and women 42 percent. Twelve percent identify themselves as students of color (some people decline these days to state
their “racial/ethnic” status). Forty-four percent of the class came to the Law School as Virginia residents, with 56 percent from other places.

The Building. You may remember the really green walls running down the long classroom hall on the first floor of the Law School. You may also remember the television sets hanging like large birds of prey from the classroom ceilings. Over the summer, the halls were repainted (not green) and the televisions came down, replaced by modern audiovisual equipment. In combination, it’s quite a change and worth a look the next time you’re at Marshall-Wythe.

Next summer we will make real progress in wiring the classrooms so that students can use their laptop computers to take notes, as they want to do in ever increasing numbers. We are behind other law schools when it comes to “wired” classrooms.

Ground should be broken this fall for the long-awaited north wing of the Law School. The last pre-bid hurdle imposed by state bureaucracy is about to be leapt. Then we hope the bid process itself will move quickly. The new wing will add about 21,000 square feet to our existing 68,260 square feet. This will take the sharp edge off the overcrowding now filling every nook and cranny of the building.

Architects skilled in law school design are at work on “pre-planning” for the renovation of the library and an addition to it. Once this “pre-planning” is completed in December, we will have a much better idea of what is feasible and desirable and how much it is likely to cost.

Summer Abroad. Over the years, Marshall-Wythe has offered summer programs in England, Australia and Spain, and serious thought has been given to beginning a summer program in Malaysia. In the summer of ’99, however, we taught only in Madrid, Spain. Our program there was a great success, both academically and financially. Ninety-four students from 40 law schools (28 of the students from W&M) took courses (three or four per student) for the prescribed six weeks and otherwise enjoyed Mediterranean delights.

Why did we drop our programs in England and Australia, and why no startup effort in Malaysia? Our British and Australian efforts were not attracting enough students because they were not located in major cities. They were losing money. Our summer programs need to sustain themselves financially. Economic and political instability in the Far East militated against beginning anything there at
present. Equally important, the Law School is in an international holding pattern until we can recruit a new professor with significant international expertise, who can take the lead in retooling our overall international effort.

Alumni Developments. I don’t know if you’ve tried to give birth to a web site. Not easy! After months of effort (admittedly, without the help of a “web master”), the Law School now has a web site up and running for Marshall-Wythe alumni. This alumni site is starting without many bells and whistles. With your advice, we hope to improve it quickly. The goal is something that you will find worth visiting. Go to www.wm.edu/law/alumni. You will find news about the Law School, class notes, reunion information (including who has signed up so far), and more. You’ll also be able to e-mail us your news, address changes, and words of wisdom.

Starting this fiscal year (July 1, 1999), all Marshall-Wythe graduates became members of the Law School Alumni Association. Thus, you’re a member even if you haven’t paid dues. This does not mean that the Association has stopped needing money to fuel its operations. There is an easy way to continue helping to fund the Association. Designate the Association when making your contribution to the Annual Fund for Excellence.

A new member of the Development and Alumni Office, Kim Ludwig, arrived after Labor Day. Kim will focus on alumni matters and keep track of where our graduates are (people move a lot, particularly when young) and what sorts of work they’re now doing. She will try to link people who are doing like things with one another (for instance, those who are in business, or practicing patent law, or working in New York City). She will help produce alumni events (Reunions especially), keep the web site for alumni alive and well, staff chapter development and the Co-Counsel and Mock Interview programs, and otherwise do whatever justice dictates to try to keep Marshall-Wythe relevant to its graduates.

The Law School’s Annual Report for 1998/99 should reach you by year end. It will show a healthy increase in the amount of private support for Marshall Wythe. It will not show an increase in the percentage of graduates who back the Law School financially - whether by gifts to the Annual Fund, or to capital and endowment projects, or (in years past) by dues to the Alumni Association. The relatively small percentage of Marshall-Wythe people who include the school in their charitable giving is surprising. Almost all the graduates I’ve met believe their time at the Law School was substantively strong, collegial, and (within reason) fun. They also understand that, while the Law School is state-owned, it is decreasingly state-supported and, thus, its capacity to excel hinges on tuition and private giving.
Kudos. Three examples:

I just graduated today and didn’t want to leave the school without dropping you a note about what a wonderful library staff you have. For me, the library was an oasis in the law school. I realize what a challenge it must be to keep five hundred stressed law students happy, but your staff was unfailingly efficient, helpful and kind.

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I should pass along a nice compliment received from [someone for whom I worked this summer]. As we were discussing a case, he paused in mid-sentence and asked who had taught me about land use because whoever it was had done an excellent job. I told him Professors Rosenberg and Butler could be given the lion’s share of the credit for what I have learned thus far. He said they should both be complimented. I pass that along and say thanks for everything the past couple of years. Without their guidance there is no way I could be doing what I’m doing this summer.

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I had the occasion to call the Law School’s admission office last Tuesday. The person who answered the phone was very helpful and obviously knew her business. It was a pleasure speaking with her and she left me with a very good impression of the school. I just wanted to let you know that you have someone in the admissions office who is doing a superb job.

This school delivers the goods!

Cordially,

W. Taylor Reveley, III
Dean