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# The Spirit of Excellence

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THE SPIRIT OF EXCELLENCE

J. Clay Smith, Jr. \*/  
Dean

I am pleased to welcome each of you to the Howard University School of Law. You are the second group of students who have been accepted into the Early Enrollment Program at the law school. The Early Enrollment Program is important to me because it is a program that I created; it is a program in which the faculty believes; it is a program to which we are committed.

The Early Enrollment Program was created to give students an opportunity to be exposed to the law at Howard Law School in advance of the regular opening of the academic school year. At Howard Law School we know that there are students who are capable of the study of law -- they simply need a chance to demonstrate their ability. I want to assure you, however, that opportunity is not a word which is isolated from another word -- hard work.

In the weeks ahead you will come to know the real definition of hard work. Hard work is a virtue. It is a virtue that others around you may criticize. The law demands the attention of people dedicated to hard work and to the pursuit of knowledge. The law has little sympathy for people who seek the easy road to success or who labor in the vineyard of excuses for nonperformance.

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\*/ Remarks before the second group of students admitted in the Early Enrollment Program at the Howard University School of Law on July 1, 1988. The names of these Early Enrollees are: Gerald B. Coleman, Portland, Oregon; Myla E. Friedman, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Quinne Harris, Temple Hills, Maryland; Lolita A. James, Wheaton, Maryland; Tonya M. Lacewell, Burgaw, North Carolina; Michael Lockworth, Freeport, New York; Solomon P. N'Jie, Hanover, New Hampshire; Maria D. Oliver, Washington, D.C.; Stephen T. Orsino, Fairfax, Virginia; James S. Robinson, Missouri City, Texas and Faith-Ann M. Warner, Potomac, Maryland. The Director of the Early Enrollment Program for the 1988-1989 academic year is Professor W. Sherman Rogers assisted by Professor Paula Rhodes.

Each of you are here to learn about the law; you will also learn about yourselves. Whether you achieve your goal, your dream, to become a lawyer will depend on what you are made of.

The study of law is a challenge; it is not easy, but life itself is not easy. I know no woman or man worth their salt who does not compete each day to meet the challenges of life with self-determination and gusto. You have the power to lift yourself up, to see the world for what it is and to make your life and the world what you want it to be.

The study of law is a science. Understanding this science will arm you with a mind not only to contest injustice, but to correct it. The science of law is also a process of thinking. In the study of law, simple thoughts will become complex; complex thoughts will become simple: the question is -- will you know the difference?

There are a few principles that I want to share with you that will help you through the valley of confusion into which you are entering:

1. Learn how to read. You know how to read, but the study of law will require a more critical study of the words and phrases that you read.

2. Be tolerant. Tolerate those things about which you are ignorant. You must recognize your own ignorance before you are able to recognize that you are lacking in knowledge.

3. Respect your colleagues. No one has a corner on knowledge. We learn from each other. Respect for your fellow person allows for open discussion and for the sharing of ideas. Learn to respect your colleagues -- even when they fall short -- for tomorrow you may be on the short end.

4. Avoid excuses. It is all too easy to give excuses for your own shortcomings. So don't do it. If you know why you are not performing, you don't need to be told why you are not performing. Do not substitute an excuse to cover up your own faults, and do not attempt to shift your shortcomings to others.

5. Learn how to think critically. As human beings we are gifted with the power of thought. However, to think does not guarantee the power to think critically as a scholar. You must learn and the faculty must help you to learn how to think critically. A critical thinker questions what is and asks the "why" of the is. Learn how to question the is.

The Howard University School of Law was founded in 1869. It is the only school in the history of American law that had a 50 percent integrated faculty when its doors opened. John Mercer Langston, the first dean was defined as being black, but he was part white and part Indian. Albert Gallatin Riddle was the first professor of law at Howard Law School. He was a white abolitionist from Ohio. The first law class was graduated in 1871. It consisted of ten males. The first woman to be graduated from Howard Law School, Charlotte E. Ray, finished in 1872 and became the first woman admitted to the bar in the District of Columbia.

You are the legacy of Langston, Riddle and Ray. You will inherit the bounty of each dean, each professor and each student who has passed through these doors. You are privileged and you are different because of the opportunity afforded to you to attend Howard Law School.

Always keep your eyes open and your arms ready to lift as you climb.

I wish you well and again extend my congratulations to each of you for what you have achieved thus far in your lives. Finally, excite yourself with the spirit of excellence as you commence the study of the science of jurisprudence.