

RISA GOLUBOFF: I have three parts to my remarks today to welcome you to your law school journey. The first is my own journey, a little bit about that, then talk about your journey, and then our collective journey. So when I sat where you sit today at my own law school orientation, I did not imagine that my career would take me where it has taken me. I did not imagine that I would be the Dean of this law school, and I didn't imagine that I would be, for my career, a scholar of lawyers.

My original goal when I became a legal scholar was to study how regular people may change in the world. And let me just say, that until this moment, you all were regular people in my category of the world. Now you're on your way to being lawyers, but until right this moment, you were part of the regular people who make the law happen.

So the very first scholarly project I ever embarked on as a graduate student and a law student was about hundreds of African-American teenagers who found themselves virtually enslaved, working on sugar plantations during World War II. Yep, that's World War II, not the 19th century World War II. And the questions that I asked about that subject were, what happened to those teenagers?

How did they and their parents argue for their release? Who did they argue to? And what did all of that say about how they understood their rights and what they thought the law could do about the problem? And these, I think, were and are incredibly important questions. It's important to recapture their stories, their hardships, and the efforts that they took on their own behalf.

As I started delving into their stories, though, I realized that their story did not end with them. Their stories entered into the legal apparatus, entered into our legal system. And they made their complaints to the Department of Justice, and they made their complaints to the NAACP.

And their relationships with lawyers was key to their ability to advocate on their own behalf. The lawyers transformed their stories. They put their stories into legal categories. They figured out how to argue them. And the lawyers essentially facilitated and mediated and sometimes actually thwarted the claims of the people who hoped to be their clients.

So I found myself not only a scholar of regular people and their interactions with the law, but also a scholar of lawyers. Cases exist because real people experience real harms that they

think lawyers can help them with. And lawyers wield enormous power in response.

And by lawyers, I don't just mean famous lawyers or the exceptional lawyer. I am not only talking about Thurgood Marshall. Every lawyer wields this power. So what is that power, the power that you are here to learn and to acquire and to employ?

It's the power to make the law, to effect real people, institutions, companies, and nations. The law unlocks doors, and it enforces contracts. It puts people in prison and gets them out again.

It allows for treaties, and it ends wars. It merges companies or allows them to go bankrupt. And it doesn't do any of those things without lawyers.

So you're going to spend a lot of time in law school, and especially this first semester, reading opinions written by judges, and you are going to think judges are at the center of the law. And judges are important, don't get me wrong. Judges are very important. But behind every case you read, there are lawyers who brought the case and lawyers who chose their clients or had clients come to them and lawyers who shaped the facts and made the arguments and put the cases in categories for the judges to decide.

So all this is to say, if you have an idea that the law is some constant external foreign thing that exists in a vacuum out there, I am here to tell you that is not what the law is. Law is made, not found, and it will eventually routinely and momentarily be made by you. That is why you're here. So that brings me to your journey.

It is my job-- it is our job to ensure that you understand your power, and that you are equipped to deploy it with integrity and responsibility. So how does that happen? How do you go from the lay people that you were until five minutes ago, to lawyers Initiated into a new language, a new set of forms, and new powerful institutions?

Well the answer is obvious, law school does that, right? That's how you make this transformation. And there are three parts to your legal education.

The first one, and the one you're probably thinking the most about, and the one you've heard the most about, is that you will learn to think like a lawyer. You will learn to analyze problems, understand and manipulate categories, reason with clarity, and persuade, not disagree. Maybe some of you think I came to law school because people say I'm argumentative or disagree.

No, you're persuasive. You are persuading. This is the fundamental building block of law school, is learning how to think like a lawyer. But it's not the only aspect of your education.

The second part is experiential learning, experiential learning that teaches you skills and the actual work of lawyers and where you will gather the integrity and judgment you need to be the best kind of lawyer. These are courses like clinics and externships and courses in negotiation. You will also get this through pro bono work, your summer jobs, alternative spring break, your extracurricular activities.

I could not encourage you in more emphatic terms to take a clinic. Clinics will provide you with real-world experience and skills. You will encounter real people, real clients. You will gain empathy and understanding. And clinics will give you real insight into your own interests and how practice areas really work, because there can be a huge difference between the substance of a particular area of the law and how the practice operates, the dynamics of a practice area.

And it's very hard to get a sense of the latter without actually engaging in it or watching others engage in it. So first, the fundamental thinking like a lawyer. Second, experiential learning so you can gain all that and hit the ground running when you start your careers. And the third part of your education will consist of courses in a wide array of scholarly perspectives that foster your big picture thinking that are critical to leadership. These classes will allow you to put the one-on-one, real-world, interpersonal cases that you deal with into a larger perspective.

Why is this deal on the table now? This merger? This bankruptcy?

What's the economic context? What's the political context? What are the larger structural forces that are making this happen now?

Why has this social movement erupted into the public spotlight now? You'll learn history or jurisprudence, economics, philosophy, politics, psychology, religion, sociology, data science. We have faculty who are experts in all of those things, as well as the law, and they will give you the big picture and enable you to take the long view.

For each of you, these three types of classes will be a different mix. You'll take them at different times. You'll take them in different ways. And of course, your first semester you're really focused on the fundamentals.

But I want you to think about a mix of these three kinds of classes as your goal over your three years here. And by engaging in all of that, you will learn to think not only about manipulating and using set legal categories, but also taking ownership over what the law most fundamentally is. You'll learn to think not only about what can be done, but what should be done in order to practice the law and lead the law as you should.

So in order to do this, you have to see your education as a partnership intended to achieve mastery. You are not-- maybe today you are-- but generally you are not, after today, passive recipients of information. There's a lot of information in orientation, and you're going to receive a lot of it, although some of it will still be interactive. But you are not mere consumers of your legal education overall.

You are active participants, and I cannot urge you enough to own your own adventures. So the first thing I'd like you to do is everybody raise your hands. Raise your hands. Raise your hands. Now say UVA Law.

AUDIENCE: UVA Law.

RISA GOLUBOFF: OK, you've now done the two-- you can put them down. You've now done the two hardest things for a 1L to do. You've raised your hand in front of a very large group of people, and you have spoken in front of a very large group of people. And, in fact, none of your classes will be this big, so that was by far the hardest.

So I-- this is what you need to do every day at law school, again and again, starting the first day so you can be in the habit. I tell my own classes that I am always on a relentless quest for total participation, and as Dean, I am on a relentless quest for your total participation.

Participation and ownership of your education is a gift to yourself, and it is also a gift to all of your colleagues, because this educational process is one of dialogue. And I'll talk more about that in a minute.

But participation leads to ownership, leads to mastery, and enables you to become the people who truly make the law. And that is my goal for you, and I hope it is your goal for yourselves. So if law is power, and you are here to learn how to wield that power, there are two things that come with it.

The first is opportunity. You can do literally anything when you graduate from this law school. I mean, maybe not anything. You'd have to go to medical school if you want to be a doctor. But

you can do pretty much anything, and I think you-- I want you to dream big, and we will help you make it happen to the best of our abilities.

Life is long. Careers are long. Careers are not linear. And no two careers are the same.

You will meet Cate Stetson in a minute and learn about her own incredible career from sitting right where you are to where she is today. And law school is your chance to prepare for the whole long, wide-ranging career that each of you will follow. I'm going to tell you right now, your careers will be amazing and wondrous. And I know that, even if you are not yet sure of it.

And that's because I spent a lot of my days talking to our graduates, and I know that those who have come before you have clerked for judges. They've practiced in non-profits or in government or in law firms. They are CEOs of hedge funds. They are executive directors of legal aid offices. They are US attorneys and judges and Congress people and senators and presidents.

You can even be The New York Times Puzzlemaster like Will Shortz, our graduate, who gave our graduation speech three years ago. You wouldn't have thought that would be on the list, right, but it's on the list. He's also a ping-pong champion. So you can do literally anything.

But seriously, being a lawyer comes not only with power but with myriad choices as to how and in what realm and on whose behalf you wield that power. And that is up to you. For some of you, you came here knowing exactly what you're going to do, and you will go off and do exactly that thing. For others of you, and I'd put myself in this category, you came here knowing exactly what you are going to do, and that is not what you are going to do, and that's totally OK. And for others of you, you sit here, and you don't yet know what you want to do, and that too is OK.

There are all good ways to go through law school, and there is no one right way. The only thing that I think is crucial is knowing that you will have this power when you graduate and making it your business to be thinking about how you want to exercise it as you go forward.

The cognate to power and opportunity is-- maybe this is obvious already-- responsibility. Law is not just a job. It is a learned profession.

And when you are entrusted with the knowledge and license to practice law, you are given a public trust to do public good and fulfill public obligations, as well as work for private gain and personal glory. There are myriad ways to fulfill this public trust. There is no single path, but all

paths flow through your understanding of yourselves as holders of this trust, as active participants in law, and thus in the governance and leadership of American society and our larger global community.

So this brings me to my third and final part, our collective journey. There is no better place than here to become a lawyer, and I think you all know that. That's why you're sitting here. That's why you chose UVA.

There is no better place for all of the obvious reasons. We have an incredible world class faculty, the best teachers, and most distinguished scholars who will bring their scholarship into the classroom and teach you how to be the best lawyers. There are you, the students, the best and the brightest in the nation, and our amazing staff who will guide you through the entire educational and professional process.

And finally, our deep and broad curriculum that I was just talking about. Do you sense my excitement? I'm very excited. This is a great place! OK.

But there is more than just our excellence, our ambition, and our rigor. It is also the case that our faculty, our students, and our staff are all engaged in a shared enterprise beyond the formal curriculum and professionalization process. This is an enterprise that never loses sight of the importance of humanity, respect, and relationships to both the educational process and the workings of the law.

We at UVA Law School are unique because we combine incredible diversity on every dimension with a true commitment to this community being a real community. We come from different backgrounds, experiences, views, attitudes, politics, interests, career ideas, passions, hopes, and dreams, but we are all committed to joy, humanity, respect, dialogue, collaboration and community across differences. That's a lot of words, but each one means something slightly different, and I wanted them all.

The fact that we are so diverse and have so much pluralism, and we link it with collegiality, means that we are not siloed, but we are engaged. If you have as much diversity as we do, without our commitment to community, you end up siloed and divided, but we combine diversity and community to be engaged. We reach across our differences to build community and engage in respectful, empathetic dialogue all of the time. It's not always easy, and we don't take it for granted. We are always looking for ways to enhance our community and our

discourse.

A few years ago, a group of students and faculty launched a new organization, called Common Law Grounds, to enhance political discourse across differing viewpoints. We have a Community Fellows program that brings in first year students to build community and enhance dialogue. This year we will be hosting a series of dinners, called For Understanding, that I encourage you to sign up for, that will pair people across their different views and bring them together for four dinners across the year together with a faculty member or administrator as a mediator and a facilitator. And we have our new Karsh Center for law and democracy dedicated to dialogue across democracy and related values.

This unique combination of rigor and community, diversity and dialogue, not only benefits your experience here, which I know is probably part of what drew you to UVA-- and it will do that, it will immensely benefit your experience here. But it is also fundamental to your own professional development and education. The legal profession is committed to testing ideas through dialogue and persuasion, to analyze and solve problems, to consider every argument, and explore every idea. Doing that well means hearing the best arguments against your own, even when it is hard, which it sometimes will be.

And it means making your own arguments with respect so that others can hear them. So talk in class, argue in the halls, go to office hours, attend talks even when you think you might not agree, perhaps especially when you might not agree. And a favorite of our new president and law grad and former member of the faculty, Jim Ryan, ask questions of those with whom you disagree, and most importantly, listen to the answers.

Do this all informed by our robust intellectual and human community of mutual respect, joy, and a love of learning. This is critical to becoming the lawyers that you are here to become. UVA lawyers, lawyers who can talk and try to persuade and also listen and absorb, who can collaborate and problem solve with professionalism, respect, and empathy. This is the essence of our values as an institution, the fundamentals of our profession, and the heart of our educational mission. It is what will make your time here transformative and what will make you all the best hope for our future as a profession, a nation, and a world.

There is no better place to become this kind of lawyer, and there is no better time to become a UVA lawyer than now. This year marks our 200th anniversary as a law school. We were chartered in 1819 as one of the original departments of the University of Virginia to provide a

broad education to lawyers who would help build the new democracy that was the United States. Clearly that is still what we do today, even as so much has changed over the past 200 years.

And in fact, coinciding with 200 years of our existence is 100 years of coeducation at the law school. In 1920, the first woman law student entered this law school, coinciding again with 100 years of women's suffrage. We began commemorating our bicentennial last year with an event commemorating Gregory Swanson, who was the first African-American law student-- the first actual African-American student at UVA and the first African-American student at any institution of higher education in the former Confederacy. He came to the law school 70 years ago this fall.

Over the next two years, we will continue to explore our past and all of the people who made this place what it is, and we will look forward to who we want to be for the next two centuries. To the UVA lawyers, we will continue to teach and grow through what we do, both inside the classroom and out of it. Lawyers with judgment, perspective, imagination, dignity, empathy, integrity, and leadership.

People sometimes laugh at me when I talk this way, because, you know, it sounds so hokey. My husband jokes that I love lawyers, and he would know, because he's one, and I'm married to him, so it's literally true. But it's more than that.

After more than a decade of being a lawyer, writing about lawyers, teaching future lawyers, and now leading an institution where we educate lawyers, I think I know lawyers pretty well. And I do love lawyers. And I have a good feeling about all of you too.

But it's not just love. It's actually faith. It is hokey, but I believe in lawyers. I believe in the role that lawyers play in society, for the rule of law, and for the support of our democracy.

And being a Dean for me is both a privilege and a responsibility. I believe in the power of the law, and I believe in a legal education that prepares you for every opportunity you can imagine and every responsibility you will take on. I believe in you and the UVA lawyers that you will become. So welcome.