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January 14, 2009

Dear Future Marquette Lawyer,

As we begin a new semester, I wish to share with you some thoughts concerning your legal education.

Some of you noted to me that my letter this past August did not touch upon Eckstein Hall; there was much else to relate, and most of you will have graduated before it opens in 2010. But there is a relevance of this project to your studies. Specifically, I encourage you to regard Eckstein Hall as a metaphor for your careers: each is a work in progress that is being built to be excellent. I am confident that Eckstein Hall will reach that goal. I know as well that we have provided you with the building materials out of which you can fashion the beginnings of careers concerning which a similar statement can be made in the future; in particular, we offer you a curriculum and a faculty that, though imperfect (the human condition after all), are first-rate.

The rest is pretty well up to you. That statement reflects not some indifference to your development—far from it—but my recognition, some 20 years out from my own days as a law student, of how much legal education consists of *self*-development. I tell our graduating students each year that the three characteristics that I find most associated with successful lawyers are humility, industry, and curiosity. We cannot make you curious: if you cannot bring yourselves to “google” an unfamiliar legal phrase which you find in your reading (let alone look it up in *Black’s*), your lack of education will fall on you, in both cause and consequence. We cannot really make you industrious: if you are not developing habits of hard work, organizing your days (and nights) to ensure time to read, reflect, reread, and synthesize, no law school assignment will cure the matter. Nor can we even make you humble, a quality that implies not a want of confidence in what one knows but a proper respect for what one does not.

I do not wish to suggest that all of your learning must come from your classes and your reading—although most of it should. I recently had the occasion to spend some time with my closest friend from law school, and it reminded me, some two decades after graduation, how much he and I had learned during school from one another, and from

other students with whom we associated. In moot-court competitions, law journals, study groups large and small, and myriad other ways, together we fashioned ourselves into competent beginning legal professionals. Whether through these devices or others—e.g., by reading and commenting on the faculty blog (<http://law.marquette.edu/facultyblog>)—you must do the same. Of this will you fail—forgive the initial negative phrasing, but I mean to sound a cautionary note—if you do not engage with your courses, your reading, your faculty, your fellow students, and if you do not develop the *habits* that ensure that you will do these things even when your energy is low, the weather is nice, or the television or internet is inviting. But if you *do* do these things, you will succeed in this, the initial phase of your lifelong education in the law.

I say all of the foregoing in full recognition of the uncertain economic times and the associated challenges to finding employment, even as you take out loans to finance your educations. You must be willing, however hard it can seem, to take a long view of these matters, trusting that if you invest as I have described above, returns will follow. Here, too, Eckstein Hall can be a metaphorical example: when I became dean in 2003, the Law School was not expected (even by me) to study or plan for the possibility of an entirely new facility; the University was not expected to embrace any such plan, let alone insist that it be pursued at a level of true excellence, with the goal of its being the best law school building in the country; and no alumnus was expected to be willing to make a gift that would advance us so immediately and so far towards achieving the fundraising goals that this project requires. In short, the project was thoroughly implausible. Yet all of this happened, because we were bold, worked hard, engaged in collaborative processes with one another—willing to be persuaded but only of things shown rigorously to be *true*—and, yes, got a little bit lucky. I am not the first to observe how frequently the last of these follows from the others.

In short, even as we complete our penultimate year in Sensenbrenner Hall, I hope that you will regard Eckstein Hall as a metaphor and inspiration for your lives in the law, which, too, are very much underway.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Joseph D. Kearney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Joseph D. Kearney
Dean and Professor of Law