



MARQUETTE  
UNIVERSITY

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LAW SCHOOL

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Dear Future Marquette Lawyer,

I wish to share a few thoughts with you as we begin the second semester. They concern politics—or at least they derive from Aristotle’s famous statement, as frequently rendered in English, that “man is by nature a political animal.” This dictum has been much on my mind over the past several months, as we have begun to inhabit Eckstein Hall. There is a lesson here for you, if (always the same *if*) it interests you to find and take it.

Let me begin by noting that Aristotle’s reference is not to “politic[s]” in the sense that we would use the term. His observation rather is that a human being is by nature someone who tends to live in a πόλις, or “polis”—the Greek word for city-state or society. Perhaps an inevitable byproduct of this reality is that there will be disagreement concerning the reach of the state, the role of government, and other things that we associate with the modern term “politics.” My interest here is different: it is to focus on our “polis,” if you will. That necessarily includes Eckstein Hall.

Our central animating principle in designing Eckstein Hall was to arrive at a building in which you and other students would wish to find yourselves even when you did not have to be here. For, as is traditional, the curriculum each semester requires only some 15 credit hours (typically, hours in a classroom) even for a full-time student. Yet there is so much to learn at the Law School *outside* the classroom, from both faculty and fellow students. Law school—perhaps like graduate professional education in general—is a substantially immersive activity, if its full benefit is to be obtained. The conversations that you have with your fellow students, to take only one example, in discussing a moot-court problem are valuable parts of your education.

This principle has driven much of the design and operation of Eckstein Hall—from the inclusion of a café and oversized lockers to the policies placing students on an equal parking footing with faculty (and the dean) and tailoring undergraduate access to the third and fourth floors. I note this because Eckstein Hall has been part of us for only one semester, and I hope that you have continued to learn new ways in which it serves your needs and interests. For example, the fitness center was not open until late this past semester, and the chapel remains under construction (we had focused for the opening last semester on the timely operation of the spaces central to our core operation, such as the library, classrooms, and offices).

In the process simply of being in the building and spending time, as I hope, with fellow students and faculty, you are learning, and not just about the building. You are soaking up some of the legal culture—one of the things, along with learning legal doctrine and becoming skilled in the legal discourse, that I note at graduation our students have done in their time with us. You are thereby becoming professionals. That this is important is an understatement.

One of my colleagues recently suggested that I remind you of the coat of professionalism that you assume as a member of the Marquette law community. As this person put it, “In electronic and written communications, interpersonal interactions, online presence, actions, even attire, our students represent themselves, the Law School, and the greater community of Marquette lawyers. Given this responsibility—and it should be viewed as one—it is good to remind students of the value

of professional behavior and good judgment. This can be as seemingly insignificant as including a salutation and closing in an email request for assistance to a professor or administrator.” I agree with this, even as I recognize that at certain times one may reasonably be less formal in his or her communications than at other times. I have tended nonetheless *not* to issue such reminders, as my own preference usually is to presume that you will *infer* such lessons from observing faculty and other longtime members of the legal profession whom you encounter during your time in law school. I go against that preference here because, the longer that I am in education, the more I have come to see the value of explicitness with respect to the lessons that we are seeking to impart.

There is much enjoyment to be derived, and much to be learned, from our relations with fellow members of our community. To be sure, this is scarcely to denigrate the importance of other matters: I continue to teach each semester (usually a doctrinal class) partly because I believe that reading and otherwise learning legal doctrine constitute the most important thing that students do in law school. At the same time, valuable friendships and incidental enjoyment—indeed, to an extent, even substantive knowledge—require more than time alone reading or in a classroom. Indeed, with no disrespect to Facebook or Twitter, there is no substitute for personal interaction. Thus, I am delighted, for example, that the Student Bar Association is planning a Super Bowl party in Eckstein Hall’s Zilber Forum, using the large-screen monitors to broadcast the game (even if the result of next week’s Bears-Packers game will necessarily leave little for the few of us here who are Vikings fans).

Perhaps the matter of relations among members of a community is much on my mind for another reason as well: I have spent a considerable amount of time during the past semester as the person tapped by Rev. Robert A. Wild, S.J., to lead the University’s transition to his successor as president, Rev. Scott R. Pilarz, S.J. (I have no strong interest here for the Law School, for Father Wild’s support of the Law School during the past 15 years has been extraordinary and I have no reason to expect that Father Pilarz will not act similarly upon becoming president this summer.) Much of my emphasis during this transition year has been to introduce Father Pilarz, a quick study and a worthy successor to Father Wild, to many of the *people* who, at all levels, from students to staff to senior administrators, form the community of Marquette University. The transition process thus has been an intensely political one, and rightly and productively so.

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My family for Christmas gave me a book entitled *I Saw Esau: The Schoolchild’s Pocket Book*, which is a collection of rhymes that have passed from one generation to another. The first one, under the category of “Beginning of Term,” reads in its entirety: “Here we are, back again! / Lots of work and lots of pain.” I do not doubt that this captures an eternal truth concerning school and that it will be true of your semester. Yet I am confident also that much time spent in our polis and with one another will be both educational and enjoyable, and I hope that, albeit less poetically and less succinctly, I have in this note touched upon another eternal truth: viz., that we derive much of our learning, and otherwise gain much of even lasting value, from our informal personal association and contact with one another and that this, too, deserves our attention. I look forward to the semester with you.

Sincerely,



Joseph D. Kearney  
*Dean and Professor of Law*