



January 12, 2024

Dear Future Marquette Lawyer:

Greetings as we saddle up for another ride. The route calls for you to arrive at the end of the semester, with greater knowledge and skills, and perhaps a growing vision of your more distant destinations. Certainly, over time, the legal profession and civic life will provide an abundance of roads for you to travel, some direct and others less so, and even some seeming wilderness that you may choose to explore. All of us at Marquette Law School are glad to be part of your journey. This is true of faculty and staff, full-time and part-time.

With respect to staff: Two colleagues are new since I wrote you in August. Sofia Ascorbe, a former Legal Action of Wisconsin lawyer and most recently assistant director of the Marquette University Honors Program, has joined us as director of career planning. Eric Semrow, our new welcome desk and visitor coordinator, has arrived from Concordia University. Earlier this month, we expressed sincere thanks to Erik Atwell and Jourdain LaFrombois, respectively our audiovisual technician and events coordinator, each of whom contributed much to us since 2019 and is now pursuing an exciting new opportunity.

Of course, your own time here is spent, in a sense, primarily with faculty, where we experience little turnover midyear. So while I look forward to introducing some new full-time colleagues next August, let me note here, in particular, the important role of our part-time faculty. These colleagues usually teach one semester a year, taking time from their busy practices. This semester we will have fifty such faculty, much along the lines of recent decades. The very origins of this law school—in the 1890s, before its incorporation into Marquette University in 1908—involved several outstanding lawyers in Milwaukee who pulled together to teach evening classes. We are immensely grateful to our part-time faculty, who so enrich our upper-level curriculum and our active engagement with the profession in this region. Finally on the faculty front, please join me in welcoming Paul Finkelman, with us this semester as Boden Visiting Professor of Law. Professor Finkelman is a distinguished legal historian, as you may know from the announcement last semester (in *Law News*, where one can learn much); we are grateful for his being part of our community.

To be sure, all of this is just the framework for the greatest activity at the Law School: your own individual work and learning. To make an explicit reference to my earlier metaphor, we all may reach the semester's end, but what you will have collected along the way for future travels depends pretty well entirely on you. To focus "only" on courses for a moment: If you engage with the material both before and after class—for example, if you read with a critical yet open eye and delve into substantive discussions outside of class with fellow students (a study group, say)—you will be well provisioned for the long haul.

So my suggestions to you are rather more practical than metaphorical. Permit me to recall a blog post late last semester ("What's Luck Got to Do with It?") by Anna Fodor, assistant dean of students and adjunct professor of law. "We tell [students]," she wrote, "hard work is rewarded with knowledge. Accomplishments flow therefrom. Luck or chance or cosmic design is a part of this (and every) equation, but hard work, strategy, practice—these are the key ingredients." We tell you this because it is true and important.

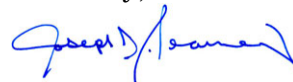
You are accumulating more than knowledge and skills. You are also forming an *ethic* that will support and guide your future travels in the profession and the world. The point is as old as Aristotle, who maintained that “virtues” such as excellence “are formed in man by his doing actions.” My own conception of the point, for present purposes, includes the process of habit-making—something to consider even beyond the beginning of a new year. Throughout this semester, you will be developing or refining habits, good or bad, that may last well beyond your formal legal education. In that regard, I admire the many of you who are actively participating in the Marquette Law Mentoring program, pairing together upper-level and first-year students; I encourage you to maintain the contact, as there will be benefit all around, now and down the road. Other opportunities abound in Eckstein Hall to engage with fellow students, variously co-curricular (e.g., journals and extramural moot court competitions), extracurricular (in particular, student organizations), or merely informal conversations and quotidian interactions (such as those in the Tory Hill Café or the Huiras Lounge). Since our move to Eckstein Hall in 2010, I have been able even to *see* more clearly the way Marquette law students so often are supportive and kind to one another. Whether your actions reflect instinct, habit, or a considered judgment, by them you make this place special. Keep it up.

Permit me a plug for Milwaukee more generally, which will become a still broader point. While I appreciate that your resources and time are limited and most of you already range beyond Eckstein Hall for pro bono work or supervised field placements, our region has much to offer in both entertainment and culture. I was much moved last weekend when I found myself, somewhat to my surprise, at the Milwaukee Art Museum, viewing its special exhibition, “Art, Life, Legacy: Northern European Paintings in the Collection of Isabel and Alfred Bader.” At very high levels of generality, I was familiar with the late Baders, longtime Milwaukeeans, and with the work of the Old Masters, such as Rembrandt and other Dutch artists, which formed part of their collection. Yet as always, there was much that I did not know, including the basic biography of Alfred Bader’s birth in Vienna in 1924, his escape from Europe as part of the *Kindertransport* in 1938 (the aunt who had raised him would die a few years later in a Nazi concentration camp), and many of his subsequent accomplishments. Nor had I ever walked around quite such paintings, which the exhibition’s curators well summarize thus:

Paintings reflecting themes of generosity, sacrifice, struggle, faith, family, and journey open the exhibition and impart the collectors’ life story. These are primarily scenes from the Hebrew Bible. Subsequent sections in the exhibition examine the role of mythology, the construction of identity, and the global trade and colonial expansion that not only built the wealth and prestige of the Dutch Republic but also fundamentally shifted how it viewed the world.

Perhaps you would not find this particular exhibition affecting in the same way I did (although I will gladly pay the admission fee of any Marquette law student who goes to it during its two remaining weeks, as noted in *Law News*). Yet today, 100 years after Alfred Bader’s birth, I would like to hope that those who suffer and survive through modern-day privations and persecutions somehow will emerge with the same appreciation of humanity. My purpose is not to close with some great peroration, but I will take the opportunity to encourage all of us always to recall that law is a human endeavor—such that people, places, habits, events, small kindnesses, and many other sorts of things will affect our understanding of the practice and our affinity for the law as a profession.

Sincerely,



Joseph D. Kearney
Dean and Professor of Law