



January 9, 2026

Dear Future Marquette Lawyer:

Welcome to the new year—which in the modern law school also means a new semester. How much better this is than to have first-semester exams still awaiting you after the Christmas break, as in days of old. Some changes in this world are real improvements. Yet as we look ahead to this new semester, I find a *constant* (or two) on my mind: the importance of both people and ideas.

My beginning-of-term letters often start with people and provide news about faculty and staff colleagues—those who lead and challenge and serve our community in so many ways. Thus, I relate here that Professor Judith G. McMullen is electing to step down from the active faculty after this semester, having served since 1987 as an invaluable teacher and colleague. I am grateful for her long tenure, including her friendship and counsel, and for her willingness to remain part of our community, hereafter, as a professor emerita. Adding to our ranks, Matt Martell joined our media and tech group in November as audiovisual technician. The need to integrate technology continually and intelligently into our program of legal studies requires local expertise and concentrated attention, and we are glad to welcome Matt.

As for ideas, their *general* importance should be evident: Otherwise, there would scarcely be much point to legal education, with its emphasis on doctrinal courses and the development of our thinking, our questioning, our *knowledge*. As we bring the point down to specifics here, please recall that the ideas one encounters will depend substantially on the people with whom one associates. And I especially encourage you to join us for our Hallows Lecture, annually a flagship event, which will be delivered on March 2 by one of the nation's most widely respected law professors: Thomas W. Merrill, the Charles Evans Hughes Professor of Law at Columbia University. The lecture's title—"Unstated": How Three Implicit Legal Ideas Have Sidelined Congress and Empowered the President and the Courts—suggests my broader point even as it conveys the lecture's timeliness and significance.

This semester also marks the twentieth anniversary of an idea that has grown to a signature program at the Law School: our Jenkins Honors Moot Court Competition, which we launched in 2006 as part of a vision to build on our longstanding upper-level moot court tradition. When we arrive to the Jenkins Finals, annually a highlight of our academic year, the law school community gets to witness skilled jurists and our talented and earnest students grappling with legal problems and ideas. This will be the first year that the finals judges are all Marquette lawyers: the Hon. Janet C. Protasiewicz, L'88, justice of the Wisconsin Supreme Court; Hon. Byron B. Conway, L'02, U.S. District Judge for the Eastern District of Wisconsin; and Hon. Michael F. Iasparro, L'01, U.S. Magistrate Judge for the Northern District of Illinois. I hope that all in our community will plan to gather for the Jenkins Finals in the Lubar Center the evening of March 18.

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Other events this semester will also challenge and engage you, if you allow this. Our Nies Lecture on Intellectual Property will be delivered by Colleen Chien, professor of law and co-director of the center for law and technology at the University of California, Berkeley, on April 16. Our Lubar Center will conduct a “Get to Know” program with Chief Justice Jill J. Karofsky of the Wisconsin Supreme Court on March 4. You may also want to attend the Lubar Center’s “Face of the Case” program on February 5 with Grant House: He served as the lead plaintiff and a class representative in the landmark antitrust case, *House v. NCAA* (N.D. Cal.), whose settlement in 2025 is already transforming the world of college athletics. The antitrust laws—by declaring “illegal” at a level of generality “[e]very contract, combination in the form of trust or otherwise, or conspiracy, in restraint of trade or commerce”—are in substantial part an invitation to judges and parties to develop *ideas* as to what might be swept into their orbit and abjured. Thus, the Supreme Court has overruled longstanding antitrust precedents when economic theories—themselves “just” ideas—have changed. Still other engaging opportunities can be found in programs organized by law school student organizations (*Law News* being a twice-weekly indispensable guide) or offered elsewhere on the campus of this great university (*Marquette Today* being the best source of information).

Many programs of our Office of Public Service create opportunities to expand your network of people and ideas. For example, our ongoing effort to expand, via online access, the reach of our pro bono programs into rural Wisconsin is looking for volunteers. I am confident that the primary motivation for all such service is to “do good” (recalling the phrase of the late Dean Howard B. Eisenberg) or to “Be The Difference” (in the now-venerable Marquette University phrase). Yet it is not impertinent for me to note that this is also a way to begin to build one’s professional network, especially given that a student always performs pro bono work in tandem with a licensed attorney, and often in a one-to-one way. Such is the case, for example, in the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinics, our flagship public service program (an initiative, now benefiting thousands of people in our community, which exists because some alumnae and some students ca. 2001 had an *idea*). In today’s time of unusual change, some of it quite astonishing, the value of personal connections to one’s career remains a constant.

While as dean of a professional school I scarcely apologize for speaking to students about their careers, my interests and hopes for you are broader yet. And in these respects, too, personal relationships are invaluable. Your experiences in life, beyond the practice, will be richer and more satisfying to the extent that you have developed genuine, meaningful connections with others, with ease *or* with effort. “No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main,” as you may recall from your high school English class. Whether that particular poet and clergyman drew on his lesser-known work as a lawyer or on his legal education in so positing, I cannot say. I *do* know that one of my colleagues still raises her eyebrows at my having quoted “Jake from State Farm” in a welcome-back letter several years ago. So John Donne seems a safer bet.

I look forward to a great semester with you.

Sincerely,



Joseph D. Kearney
Dean and Professor of Law