

Marquette Law School Math

Legal education + public programs = civic leadership

Mike Gousha was the premier television news anchor in Milwaukee when he announced in 2006 that, though not retiring, he was giving up the anchor seat and that line of work. A few months later, Marquette University announced that Gousha was joining Marquette Law School. I was a reporter for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* then and was assigned to write the story. I asked the obvious question to Dean Joseph D. Kearney: “Mike’s not a lawyer. He’s not going to teach. What’s he going to do?”

He’s going to pioneer a public policy initiative at the Law School, Kearney said. He’s going to develop, convene, and host programs such as newsmaker interviews, conferences, and candidate debates. The Law School has been good at teaching people to be lawyers, but it has operated largely within its own walls or those of the profession, Kearney said. The new effort might make the Law School a crossroads for level-headed, serious programs on major matters for the broad community.

Boy, has it ever done so. Nearly two decades later, there has been a long list of impressive and successful programs on law, politics, education, water and the environment, public safety, and much more. As the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* put it in 2011, shortly after the opening of Eckstein Hall, Marquette Law School has become “Milwaukee’s public square.”

But the question I asked in 2006—three years before I left the newspaper and joined the Law School’s public policy initiative—is still worth considering. What kind of match is this, educating people to become lawyers while running programs about things that often don’t intersect directly with the core mission of a law school? To give a specific example, the Marquette Law School Poll has been a huge success since it was launched in 2012. To say (correctly)



Alan J. Borsuk moderates a conference at Marquette Law School on May 8, 2025.

that it is the largest polling project in Wisconsin history and the premier way to understand what Wisconsinites are thinking doesn’t even begin to get at the national reach, even significance, of the poll. But why is a law school running a political polling operation?

The short answer is: Because good civic leadership comes in a variety of flavors and the Law School has become good at serving several of them. The main dish remains educating students to be lawyers. Important side dishes include both the vibrant Office of Public Service, involving law students in volunteer efforts such as pro bono work, and the school’s curricular fieldwork placements. This menu is further enriched by the efforts of the public policy initiative launched in 2006; these have grown to include a cadre of us in what is now named the Lubar Center for Public Policy Research and Civic Education. (By the way, no law student tuition money is used to support the Lubar Center or the poll.)

Yes, we’re distinctive. We’re not aware of any other law school in the country that offers a public policy initiative along these lines. But I suggest that Marquette Law School is a good and worthwhile home for all of these efforts, and I point to this issue of the *Marquette Lawyer* as evidence of that.

Consider the E. Harold Hallows Lecture at the Law School, delivered on March 3, 2025, by Judge Michael Y. Scudder of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. The cover story of this magazine is an edited text of Judge Scudder’s lecture on the role of “standing” in bringing cases before federal courts. But Scudder goes beyond that to consider whether communities, rather than courts, should be the venue for settling more issues. That led us to bring together Scudder and Professor Charles Franklin, director of the Marquette Law School Poll, to discuss the state of civic engagement in America and to ask Franklin for a summary of recent poll questions on civic involvement.

Put it all together (as we do on pages 6 through 23) and you have a strong example of the equation that makes Marquette Law School vibrant: legal education plus public policy work equals civic leadership. And throughout this magazine, there is much evidence of how the formula is succeeding, with insights on legal education, legal scholarship, public service, and public policy. The recipe for Marquette Law School is distinctive—and successful. ■

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