Dear Graduating Students,

In addition to the notes I sent to the rest of the student body, I thought I would send a note and an update just for you. And—big cheers for you—you’re almost there!

As I told my small class just yesterday, it tears me up inside more than a little to think how you all are physically apart from one another at this time, unable to share even that last moment of commiseration with one another in the library this next week, then the cheers of joy on the steps of the Law Center the week after. The inability to host commencement next month for those of you nearing the end of your time with us is still a bitter pill to swallow. I said this at the 2L/3L Town Hall today, but I will repeat it here: We at the Law Center want all of you to have your long-awaited and hard-earned opportunity for a collective celebration, and we are committed to making it happen. As you are aware, we cannot yet set a date for that celebration—it’s impossible. But celebrate we will, and we will be in touch with you once it’s time to begin to plan. Please stay tuned.

Another graduation matter relates to graduation honors for JD students, which the faculty recently addressed for the May 2020 graduating class. The usual manner of awarding JD graduation honors is as follows: summa cum laude for the top 2% of the graduating class; magna cum laude for the graduates from 3% to 12%, and cum laude for the graduates from 13% to 25% of the class. These percentages are applied to the final cumulative grade point averages of everyone graduating in an academic year. For Spring 2020 only, as you know, the faculty voted to make an accommodation in the face of the mandatory pass-no credit grading policy adopted for the current semester, which removed the last semester of “movement” for those of you in the May 2020 graduating class. The current 1L and 2L classes also have pass-no credit grading this semester, of course, but they have additional semesters of effort ahead of them, and the balance of concerns did not favor a long-range adjustment.

For Spring 2020 only, all levels of graduation honors will include the JD students eligible under the normal faculty policy outlined above as well as the graduating third-year JD students whose cumulative GPAs as of January 2020 are within 0.03 grade points of the lowest cumulative GPA in each honors group calculated under the normal faculty policy. Just by way of one example, if the lowest cumulative GPA within the magna cum laude group, at 12%, happens to be 3.500 this year (12% being the lower end of the normal policy), then students whose GPAs are 3.470 and above would also be included in the magna cum laude group rather than in the cum laude group. If in this magna cum laude example there did not happen to be any students with cumulative GPAs falling between 3.500 and 3.470, then no students would be added to the magna cum laude honors group under the Spring 2020 policy.

Historically, cumulative GPA movements in this last semester are small—which makes logical sense in light of the proportion of credits this semester represents for third-year students in the overall academic program of 94 credit hours. After some deliberation, the faculty crafted a policy to account for the small amount of movement in GPAs we have seen in the past while honoring the hard work and achievement of those in these groups. The policy is actually more generous at some levels of the honors scale than the movements observable in our historical record, but we decided that opening the possibility of expansion of all categories was more equitable and understandable than only opening the cum laude honors category where almost all movement has occurred in the past.

Important Note: Graduating students need to understand that August 2019 and December 2019 students are included within the group eligible for honors at graduation this month, and a few students who appear in the 3L class headcount as of the end of the Fall 2020 semester may not be slated for May 2020 graduation for a wide variety of reasons, including because they are pursuing a dual degree that extends their time here. This changes the list of GPAs as well as the denominator on which the percentages are based. The honors cohorts are not simply pulled from basic rank sheets for a given semester. In other words, please do not try this at home. I am not sending you this information to add stress to
anyone’s life. I am sending it in the interest of transparent and open communication, which is something I have aimed for all along our collective crazy path during COVID-19.

Keep up the good work—you are definitely in the home stretch now.

All my best—as always!

Dean Lockridge

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