The Law School—First Impressions

Before reporting my first impressions of The Law School, I should make a full disclosure in order to avoid charges of prejudice: My impressions may be influenced unduly by the twenty minutes instead of two hours and twenty minutes from my home to work and back again each day and by the fact that I can walk my children to school and see them at night before they are in bed. First impressions about a school consist largely in confirming and readjusting earlier ideas gained from hearsay and observations from a distance. I have come from a university also having the advantages and disadvantages of being in a metropolitan area. Accordingly, some things were not unexpected by me. On the other hand, some things have surprised me.

In spite of the cold Gothic shell of The Law School (I came from a school with a Sanford White shell) and of the hiding of the faculty offices from easy student access, I find the tone of the faculty-student relationship to be much warmer than I would have thought possible in a metropolitan school. Perhaps this results from Dean Levi’s recent repeal of the common law of classroom and office colors (dirty beige, buff, and pale green) and the substitution of warm, bright, and clean colors. In any event the afternoon coffee hour for faculty and students, the frequent faculty-student luncheons, and the occasional more formal dinner all evidence a warm relationship between students and faculty.

While I knew, as all law professors do, that Chicago pioneered the currently expanding law-school program of using teaching fellows to supplement and intensify instruction, I had not realized the extent to which the Chicago program emphasized the practice of law. Class reaction to problems in drafting agreements which I give my class indicates that the teaching-fellow program has succeeded in teaching the students drafting know-how.

All major law schools “talk” about integrating the study of law and economics, and their alumni continually pressure the schools to integrate because of the importance of such integration in actual practice. While I knew from reading on the subject that Chicago was a leader in this matter, I was not familiar with the approach used here. I expected something in the way of the technique of presenting statistical data to the court as part of the advocacy of the client’s case and perhaps the occasional use of economic data to show the importance of having a legal rule on a particular matter. I find the Chicago approach to include much more—training of the students in bringing economic analysis to bear on such questions as whether the means selected by legal rules to reach a desired end do or are likely to attain that end and whether, if they do attain a desired end, the means selected dis-serve other social values. This type of training seems extremely important in developing the lawyer’s sense of prudence and justice in decision-making.

No professor in a private university is surprised these days at the preoccupation of his school with money-raising matters. The University of Chicago Law School development program does amaze me in two respects: the modesty of the sums sought and the concreteness and vision of the program for the use of the money.

All in all, my first impressions are favorable, but the fact is that even these matters I have mentioned are likely to be improved and developed before my impressions become fixed. The Dean and faculty whose excellence produced and pioneered the present program have such energy and vision for law-school development that improvements are certain to occur. It is this characteristic of the Chicago law faculty which makes The Law School an exciting place with which to be associated.

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