A great part of the strength of a legal education comes from its connection with the world of the practicing lawyer. The case method is successful in large measure because the cases are not hypothetical and academic handwaving cannot solve the problem.
Modern legal education began over 900 years ago just as Europe was emerging from the Dark Ages. Aspiring lawyers would cross the St. Gotthard pass and immerse themselves in Roman law in Bologna. Roman law had only recently been rediscovered. Students took careful notes because they had no books. Gutenberg's invention of the printing press with moveable type was still several centuries in the future.

At the start, no one ever asked about the relationship between a law school and its university. When the University of Bologna was founded, law was the only course of instruction. Today, the relationship between a law school and its university is controversial, and law schools are not always seen as an integral part of a university. Indeed, people can come to this view from completely different directions.

At one extreme are those who take this view that law schools are trade schools. They think that training lawyers, like training barbers, may be a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but it has little with the mission of a great university. At the other extreme are those who think that a professional school can lose sight of its mission if it is too close to an ivory tower. Law graduates may learn too much high theory and not enough about the basic mechanics of law practice.

The truth happily lies somewhere between these two views. We are a professional school. Our primary mission is to teach those who want a career in the law. On the other hand, mastering the law is very hard. The three years spent in law school can only be a start and one must begin by beginning with the fundamentals.

Many of our most loyal alumni do not spend their careers as lawyers, but rather pursue other ventures. They nevertheless look back at their legal educations as being a defining experience. The intellectual rigor that comes from confronting problems that have no easy solutions proves useful no matter what path one's career takes.

When Dino D'Angelo made his $4.5 million gift to expand the law library that now bears his family's name, he thought of his gift as a repayment of a debt to an institution that had done much more than had given him the basic tools of the practicing lawyer: "We all have debts to pay and each of us pays them in his own way. The University of Chicago helped me break through barriers . . . and showed me new horizons."

A great part of the strength of a legal education comes from its connection with the world of the practicing lawyer. The case method is successful in large measure because the cases are not hypothetical and academic handwaving cannot solve the problem. We know from Marbury v. Madison that a court with jurisdiction must resolve the case before it. Raffles and Wichelhouse both may have believed in the justice of their cause. It was not really the fault of either that there was more than one ship called Peerless, but neither one can get everything that they want.

Solving tough legal problems, however, requires understanding the connections between law and other disciplines. For this reason the Law School has long had its own interdisciplinary tradition. Economist Henry Simons joined the faculty in the 1930s. His work on taxation influenced Walter Blum and many others. Similarly, sociologist Hans Zeisel worked with Harry Kalven in their definitive study of the American jury.

The Law School has also taken advantage of the synergy between it and the rest of the University. Our students take courses from Nobel laureates Gary Becker and Merton Miller, both of whom teach courses that are co-listed in the Law School. Our students also regularly take courses in the political science department, the divinity school, and everything between. Faculty and students from across the Midway attend workshops in legal history and law and government. Students from the School of Social Services Administration work in the clinic and students in political science and Russian studies take advantage of our Center for the Study of Constitutionalism in Eastern Europe.

The relationship between the Law School and the University has been a mutually reinforcing one for many decades. Hugo Sonnenschein will work with my colleagues and I to ensure that it remains strong. Our new president has a special reason to recognize that the connections between the Law School and the University run in both directions. His most important work as a scholar analyzed the behavior of a monopolist who sells a durable good. For this work, his starting point was an article by Ronald Coase. Coase, of course, is a member of the Law School faculty.