Dear friends –

Chicago Law has always been a special and unusual place, and in no arena is that clearer than the one that is the focus of this issue: teaching. Legal academics have long had the reputation of being scholars first and teachers second (if at all), but that has never been the case here. Time after time, when I talk with alumni, they tell me wonderful stories about the professors who influence them to this day, about Socratic debates and class comebacks, gales of laughter and flashes of brilliance.

These stories are also often about how the experience of teaching at Chicago is one that goes far beyond what happens inside the classroom. Alumni tell me how so many of their professors took the time to talk at length with them in offices or in the Green Lounge, about how they took an interest in their careers and avocations, and about how years or even decades later these professors were still treasured advisors on legal matters big and small. The intimate size of the Chicago Law community makes all these things possible—our very architecture ensures that the small number of people in our building every day cannot help but interact and become partners in the learning that is at our very core.

Lest you think this is all happenstance, I feel the need to remind you of what you already know—that the quality of our teaching is by design. Prospective faculty must be extraordinary scholars, to be sure. But at every level of hiring, the faculty demands that those joining our ranks be extraordinary teachers as well. We test them at workshops, study them during full quarters teaching our students, and scrutinize their teaching evaluations from other institutions. We nurture new faculty members by having senior faculty observe them, by sending them to the University’s Center for Teaching and Learning, and by taking very seriously what students say on their evaluation forms. And because we have this reputation in the legal academy for valuing teaching, we tend to attract like-minded scholars to our school.

So it was important to me to spend some time celebrating this specialty of ours with an entire issue of the Record devoted to teaching. In these pages you will explore the past by reading alumni remembrances of favorite teachers and a history of the course that unites nearly every living alumnus—Elements of the Law. You will also read some self-examination about how we teach—the pedagogical basis behind our clinical programs, the importance of our Lecturers in Law to the curriculum, the use of new technologies in the classroom, and the process of teaching students to become academics themselves. Martha Nussbaum provides her take on the current debate on the third year of law school, and Geoffrey Stone talks about his highly unusual and brilliantly structured course in Constitutional Decisionmaking. In perhaps my favorite article, you’ll find out how several of our faculty members who are alumni of the Law School feel about seeing the experience here from both sides.

If what you read in these pages makes you nostalgic about your time here and excited by how vibrant legal education is at the Law School (and it should), come and visit us. We would love to have you sit in on a class or two and meet the faculty who joined us after your graduated, or see an old favorite in action. I am in awe of my colleagues’ teaching every day, and hope that you will come see for yourself.

Warm regards,

Michael H. Schill