A MESSAGE FROM DEAN CAMINKER

Trajectory-Changing

A few weeks ago an alumnus in his mid-60s walked into Hutchins Hall to meet with a faculty member. As they walked down the hall together, the alumnus pointed to the classroom on his left. “I took Tax from Professor Wright in there,” he noted, recalling the scene vividly.

This profound sense of place is built on the architecture, the feel of the arched doorway, the warm wood of the classroom chairs, the green space as you step outside. Even decades after your Contracts class, those surroundings are etched into your memory, a snapshot of time, space, and place.

Since the 1930s the Law Quadrangle has been that sort of indelible environment, a space unlike any other in the United States. A place that, when constructed, changed the trajectory of Michigan Law. It turned what had started as a department of law into one of the nation's leaders in legal education. Those stone hallways became a magnet for some of the world's finest legal scholars, people whose intellectual contributions shaped American law even as their outsized personalities were ingrained in the hearts and minds of their students. The Quad emerged as home to generations of students from across the globe, who together with their faculty created a memorable sense of community, of camaraderie, that continues today.

The story of the Law Quadrangle, historical and contemporary, hinges on the power of a philanthropic gift. It was William Cook’s series of visionary donations in the 1920s that brought the Law Quadrangle to life. Cook imagined “a great center of legal education and of jurisprudence for the common good of the people.”
Over the course of the last few years, as we celebrated the Law School’s sesquicentennial and broke ground on both the new academic building and the stunning Commons, I’ve thought again about the trajectory-changing nature of philanthropy for Michigan Law. William Cook envisioned a future of leadership in legal education, and his gift made the critical difference in the University of Michigan’s ability to realize that future.

Now, almost 80 years later, the gifts of more than 420 alumni and friends dedicated to that same leadership have made our new learning and gathering spaces possible; envisioning a future where legal education includes professional clinical suites for students and clients to meet, where skills-based education blends with extraordinary legal scholarship.

At the same time, Bob and Ann Aikens’ gift of $10 million is bringing to life the Robert B. Aikens Commons, an arched glass gathering area that is soon to be the heart of our historic Quad.

And this March, we celebrated yet another transformational moment that will change the future of living space in the Law Quadrangle. Charles Munger, a long-time friend of the University (and the man responsible for the lighting and Reading Room renovation project), has given the Law School $20 million to renovate the residence portions of the Lawyers Club. We had long recognized the need to bring the residences up to contemporary standards, and this gift will enable us to do just that. And yet, taken together with the construction of the new academic building and the Aikens Commons, the total is far greater than the sum of its parts. This visionary philanthropy will enable the Law School to match its modern-day facilities with the quality of its academic mission.

As we look at Michigan Law’s proud history, it is that sort of powerful vision and commitment that fueled the Law School’s leadership and carved such a memorable sense of place from quarried stone. And it is that sort of vision and commitment that will mark the Law School’s future strength as well.

As I look across the hallway of Hutchins Hall, I see Professor Monica Hakimi’s class on the law of foreign affairs is about to start. And yet, I can almost hear students in L. Hart Wright’s 1971 Tax class gathering down the hall.

Sincerely,

Evan Caminker

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