

FYI — Summer 2005 Dean's Letter

That old adage “time flies” has taken on a new dimension for me. I can hardly believe a year has passed since I became dean. In that time, I’ve had the chance to meet hundreds of our graduates, get acquainted with the job on a multitude of levels, and even dodge a bullet or two!

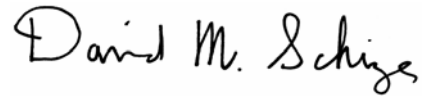
One of my most satisfying moments so far was sending our Class of 2005 on its way, and I’ve included my remarks from the graduation ceremony. Just a few days later, I addressed graduates attending our Reunion Weekend concerning “The State of the School.” Simply put, for those of you who didn’t hear it in person, we are the world’s greatest law school. Here are four reasons:

1. **Our Students.** For the past four years, we have attracted more applications (8,000+ each year) than any other elite law school. The top students want to come here, and their academic statistics (stratospheric LSATs, undergrad GPAs, etc.) bear that out. I’ve heard more than one graduate joke that they’d never be admitted to the current class!
2. **Our Faculty.** We boast 75 energized and engaged full-time faculty (and I should note that a substantial number are being recruited by other schools, but plan to stay). They love to teach, and their cutting-edge research is having impact all over the world.
3. **Our Graduates.** Columbia Law’s alumni are leaders in business, private practice, government, the legal academy, and public interest. You are examples to our students of what it is possible to achieve, and how important it is to give back (and I don’t just mean in financial terms. Our graduates serve as adjunct professors, guest lecturers, and student mentors. Additionally, alumni serve vital roles on our Law School Association and Board of Visitors).

4. Our Facilities. A number of graduates at Reunion Weekend couldn't believe their eyes, saying things like, "I never took a class in a room like this." We've remodeled and teched-up (including wireless access) to meet today's needs.

We have challenges, of course. Being the best implies constant vigilance and the outlay of significant resources. I'm confident we're up to the task.

Have a great summer!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David M. Schizer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'D'.

David M. Schizer
Dean and the Lucy G. Moses
Professor of Law

Remarks to the Columbia Law Class of 2005

By Dean David Schizer

Welcome everyone. On behalf of Columbia Law School, I want to congratulate the Class of 2005. I will always feel a special bond with this class. I had the pleasure of teaching many of you, and you are the first class to graduate since I've become dean.

You are an amazing group of people. Your families and friends have every right to be very proud of you, and to be proud of their *indispensable* role in what you have achieved.

In expressing pride in you, I know I speak not just for those who are here, but also for loved ones who cannot be here. Our law school community has suffered losses this year. We all miss Alan Farnsworth, Jim Milligan, and Richard Uviller. They helped to shape this wonderful institution, and the objectives we all share.

At Columbia Law School, we have an ambitious goal: we train our students to become leaders of a new and better world, a world of prosperity and freedom based on the rule of law. One of my personal heroes is a Columbia-trained lawyer -- Alexander Hamilton. As I see it, we are living Hamilton's dream. A poor immigrant from the West Indies, he hated slavery and valued religious freedom and social mobility. He was a talented lawyer who believed in meritocracy and personal initiative. And as a soldier and statesman, he understood that the fate of the United States would rise, or fall, with the rest of the world. His vision has been realized to a remarkable degree.

The result is amazing opportunity for all of you. You are graduates of the greatest law school in the world. There really is no limit to what you can do. This is not an exaggeration; it's a fact. You can run an investment bank or a public interest organization; you can be a scholar or a Senator; you can be a corporate counselor or a cutting edge litigator. Our graduates have done all these things, and much more.

At one level, this range of choice is an incredible privilege. The vast, vast majority of people do not have any choice in the way they live their lives. They do what they have to do to survive. This has been true throughout history, and it remains true for most people today. You obviously are very fortunate.

But this degree of choice brings its own burdens. After all, you have important choices to make. What should you do? For many of us, law school represents the end of a well-defined path. Do well in high school, and get into a good college. Do well in college, and get into a good law school. What comes next? Now, there are many forks in the road.

The law is a vast universe, and different talents and interests correspond with different jobs. Do you like winning a tough fight? Or sealing a deal? Do you like to write? Or to talk? Do you care about the environment? Or human rights? Do you like

to read prospectuses, or academic articles – or, maybe, neither? Do you find travel in a job appealing? Or burdensome? We all have to find our own answers. Over the next few years, you need to get to know yourselves a little better, so that you figure out what gives you the most satisfaction.

One way to do this is to look at the responsibilities of people a few years ahead of you in a job. Would you enjoy doing what they are doing? If the answer is “yes,” then keep going. If the answer is “no,” then keep looking around. As you consider your options, have the courage to make your own choices. Don’t waste your life living other people’s dreams.

And while I am giving you advice, I want to emphasize one other thing. Do not keep score with money or fame. I just finished a biography of Lord Horatio Nelson, the British naval hero who repeatedly defeated Napoleon’s navy. But the more he achieved, and the more the crowds loved him, the more it fed his ambition, leaving him unsatisfied – and, indeed, miserable – much of the time. “I have had a good race of glory,” Lord Nelson wrote, “but we are never satisfied. One cannot help longing for a little more.” The irony is that, as he lay dying on his ship during the battle of Trafalgar – his greatest victory of all – he spoke mostly of the woman he loved, and of the young daughter he was leaving behind. If you must keep score, keep score with the happiness you find, and with the lives you touch along the way.

This brings me to my final point. Life is fragile. You know this – everyone does, in a world of terrorism and war. Most of the time, I have great confidence in the future. But I have to admit that, in darker moments, I feel doubts and, sometimes, fear. Freedom and prosperity are available to us, now. But they are not available to everyone, and, even for us, who knows what the future will bring? Hamilton’s dream is fragile.

So what do we do? My own answer is to devote myself to training people like you. The future we all want – freedom and prosperity *for everyone*, all over the world – that future depends on a corps of energetic and talented people, across the world, who are deeply committed to progress and the rule of law. The world can become *so much better* than it is now – but, I’m sorry to say, it can also become so much worse. To keep things moving in the right direction, we are relying on all of you. I, for one, am very comfortable with this. You are an amazing group, and I know you will do great things.

Congratulations and enjoy the day. Thank you all and please stay in touch.

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