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SOME REFLECTIONS ON AN ACTING DEANSHIP

ROBERT KOGOD GOLDMAN*

During academic year 1979-80, I had the pleasure of serving as Acting Dean of the Washington College of Law (WCL). Albeit a brief tenure, it was, nonetheless, quite an eventful and at least for me, a memorable one. My service as Assistant Dean for Academic Affairs from 1971-74, under Dean Gordon Christenson, provided me with invaluable insights into, and largely shaped my own views about the kind of leadership skills and management style that a dean must possess to be successful at this law school. What was absolutely clear to me was that while the dean must lead, propose, and, at times, cajole, he is, at best, only first among equals, and his ultimate responsibility is to execute faithfully faculty sanctioned policy. But, since the formulation of that policy can be a fractious process, the dean, who is responsible for maintaining the good order of the institution, must always strive to avoid acrimony and polarization within the faculty by building consensus around principled compromise. This requires regular consultation and, above all, straight dealing, with the faculty, both collectively and individually. Consistent with these views, I relied heavily on faculty-student committees for advice and counsel and called more special faculty meetings to discuss particular policy options than my colleagues care to remember.

My principal goals were to smoothly shepherd the school through an on-site visit by the American Bar Association/Association of American Law Schools (ABA/AALS)¹ and the transition to the new dean. I should note that, because I ruled myself out as a candidate for the deanship, a search committee was formed at the time of my

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1. Every seven years, joint ABA/AALS teams carry out on-site visits to fully approved ABA law schools. The team prepares a report, based on its visit, which is used to determine whether the particular law school is in compliance with ABA standards and procedures on legal education.

appointment. My immediate concern, however, was to ensure that the construction of new classrooms and the renovation of existing classrooms in Myers Hall, and the opening of the new law library were completed by the beginning of the 1979 fall term. The new library facility, housed in the renovated Battelle-Tompkins building adjacent to the main law school building, was largely made possible by the generosity of—and appropriately was named for—the late Alvina Reckman Myers. The new library increased the actual seating capacity from that provided in the old facility by eighty-nine percent and made possible the expansion of the library collection from 125,000 volumes to over 150,000 volumes. Both construction projects, which were finished on time, were major components of WCL's Development Plan which was agreed to by the law faculty and the University's Central Administration during Nicholas Kittrie's deanship.

To assist me with the running of WCL's academic program, I appointed Professor Andrew Popper as Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Andy's presence and counsel vastly simplified my life. Since then, he has continued, as have I, to hold decanal and other administrative positions under subsequent deans. By agreement with the faculty, new programmatic initiatives, such as curricular reform, while studied, were frozen until the new dean took office. Instead, particular attention was devoted to increasing the number and geographic distribution of qualified applicants and expanding job placement opportunities for graduating students. In this regard, applications for the class entering in the fall of 1980 totaled 3490, an eighteen percent increase over the previous year. For the same period, there was a fifteen percent decrease in law school applications nationwide. Job placement of our graduates, which institutionally languished until Gordon Christenson's arrival, continued to show steady improvement. Approximately ninety-five percent of the class of 1979 accepted employment where they preferred, and my recollection is that 1980 graduates did about as well.

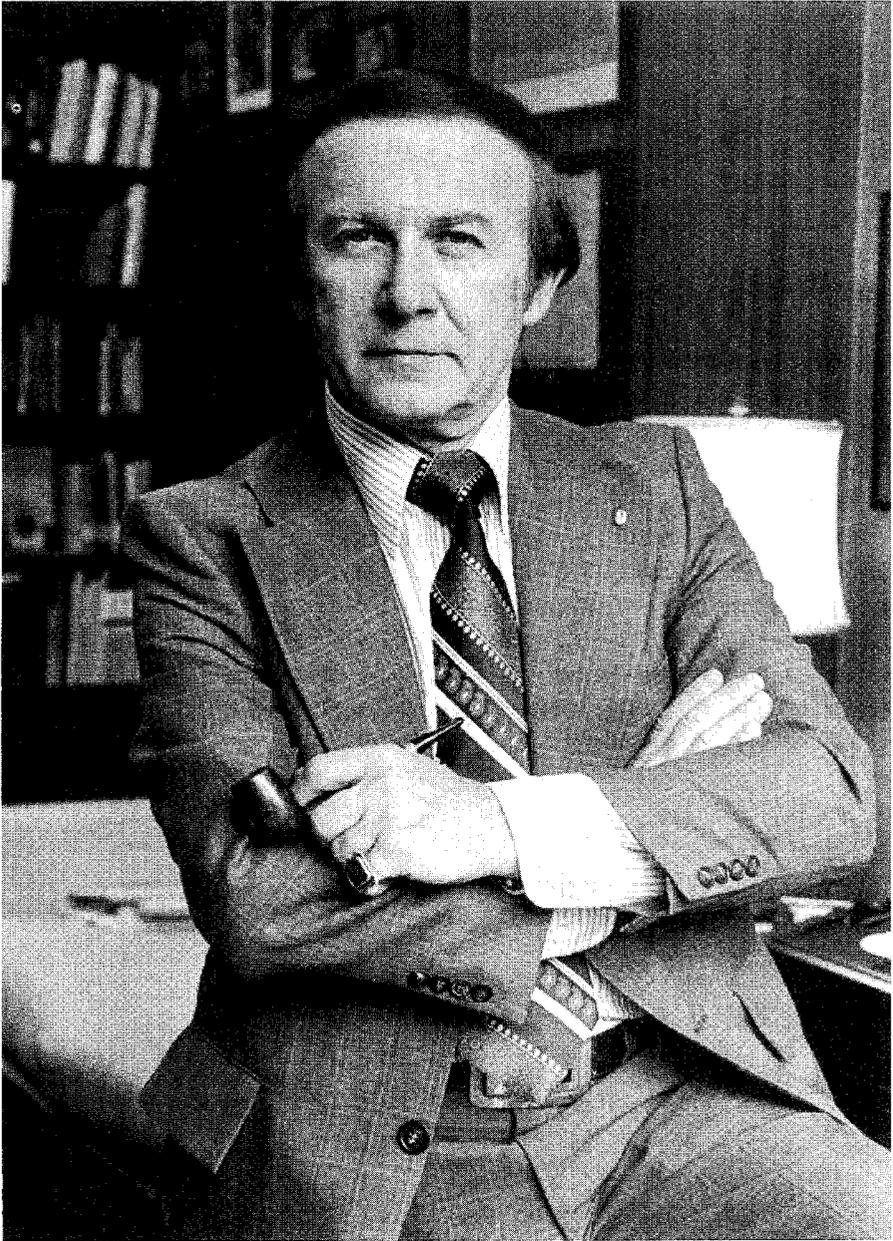
During the 1979 fall term, the decanal staff and chairs of the school's various committees collaborated on the preparation of a self-study which had to be presented to the members of the ABA/AALS reinspection team before their spring visit. All of us realized that a document that depicted a shared perception of the law school's strengths and weaknesses and the merits of the existing budgetary arrangement with the University would not only orient the reinspection team to our concerns, but also could help strengthen the hand of the new dean in his initial negotiations with the Central Adminis-

tration. Accordingly, the self-study was particularly candid in tone and revealing in its discussion of these key and related issues.

During this same period, the decanal search committee was receiving resumes and interviewing the best candidates. The committee, so ably chaired by Professor Barlow Burke, also included, *inter alia*, Professors Evelyn Abravanel, Andrew Popper, Seymour Rubin and Michael Cardozo, former Executive Director of the AALS and Professor at Cornell Law School. The search process culminated in the faculty's unanimous recommendation to the University's then President, Joseph Sisko, that he name Thomas Buergenthal the new dean. Buergenthal, a renowned international law and human rights scholar from the University of Texas Law School and judge on the recently created Inter-American Court of Human Rights, accepted the offer and took office in July 1980.

When the time came to go, I departed with, however, no regrets. It had been a challenging, fatiguing and, at times, exhilarating experience. I was anxious to return to full-time teaching and to resume my human rights work in Latin America. Like the rest of the law school community, I looked forward to the promise and excitement of the Buergenthal years.

I have always believed that anyone entrusted with the administration of an institution has a duty to leave it in better condition than he found it. I would like to think that my colleagues believe perhaps that I did so.



Nicholas N. Kittrie