

# Judging the Iowa Law School

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The *Iowa Law Review* reveals the Iowa Law School.

The quality of a law school is best judged by the quality of its student-written and -edited law review. Law school accreditors, however, contend that you should judge a law school by the number of volumes in its library, the salary levels and teaching loads of its faculty, the LSAT scores and full-time commitment of its students, its core curriculum plus professional responsibility and clinic courses, the presence of a placement office, and the degree of autonomy of the law library and the law school from the rest of the university.

What then gives rise to my wayward assertion that the student law review is the single best way of evaluating a law school? The proof is in the pudding. In the case of the law school, the proof is in the quality of our publications, both for students and for faculty. Lucid thought followed by lucid articulation of thought is the *raison d'être* of legal education. Lawyers are to reason soundly and express clearly. Sound reasoning is more accurately expressed through the written word than through the spoken word. The written word must be more precise than the spoken word because the writer cannot rely on body language and audience questions as communication aids. The student-written and -edited law review contains the students' best thinking and expression. And since the local law review is likely at some time to carry an article written by every faculty member who publishes serious work, we can evaluate the faculty as well as the students.

After forty years, I remain convinced that my experience as a law review student writer and editor was the most demanding educational experience of my life. Rigorous student editing, coupled with concerned faculty counseling, made me reason closely and express myself accurately.

Dean Mason Ladd recruited me to the Iowa Law School to spend half of my time as faculty advisor to the *Iowa Law Review*. On my arrival in 1954, I found a law review of high quality in its fortieth year. From 1891 to 1901 the Law School had published a legal bulletin. It had ceased publication when Dean Emlin McClain left the University to take his place on the Iowa Supreme Court. When Judge McClain returned as dean of the Law School in 1915, the legendary Professor Percy Bordwell suggested that the earlier bulletin be renewed. According to Dean Ladd, Professor Bordwell

visited with Herbert Goodrich, a new member of the faculty just graduated from the Harvard Law School, and Professor Goodrich agreed to serve as editor-in-chief if the project was approved. They presented the matter to an enthusiastic Dean McClain, who obtained funds for the publication from University of Iowa President Thomas Macbride. Faculty and students supported the

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project—thus the beginning of the *Iowa Law Bulletin* [the original name of the *Iowa Law Review*] . . .

Many years later, around 1962, Professor Bordwell came to me and said, "It is time for you to give up being advisor to the Law Review. Being advisor is the work of junior people. If you continue to be advisor, you will not amount to anything." I chose not to heed Bordwell's advice, and after twelve years as faculty advisor, I descended into the oblivion of academic administration where I have been ever since. Yet I believe firmly that my years as a student on the *Minnesota Law Review* and as faculty advisor with the *Iowa Law Review* were the best preparation for my administrative career. Through my law review experience, I learned to identify the issues entangled in problems, seek possible solutions for the problems, and then carefully describe the issues and solutions.

The University of Iowa has a strong tradition in both expository and creative writing. Through all the years of national curricular change, the College of Liberal Arts has always required theme writing by entering students. In the case of the Law School, legal writing has been central to its curriculum. Writing in 1964 on the fiftieth anniversary of the *Iowa Law Review*, Dean Ladd said ". . . every student in the first-year class, as a part of the program in Legal Research, is required to write a case comment. These are not for publication in the *Review*, but they provide preliminary experience in the careful analysis and study that goes into law review writing."

Shortly thereafter, first-year students were assigned to a small section course. This small section was taught by a faculty member, and its central requirement was a piece of writing which was reviewed carefully by the faculty member with the student author. Once when I asserted the centrality of legal writing in law school in a meeting in Chief Justice Warren Burger's chambers, a distinguished legal scholar responded to me by saying, "How can we possibly waste the resources of senior faculty on the teaching of legal writing?" My response was, of course, "How can we possibly afford *not* to utilize faculty talent where it is most importantly needed?" The Iowa Law School has taken the position that writing is a fundamental skill in lawyering.

Perhaps the best evidence of the value of the *Iowa Law Review* is the establishment of two additional student-edited and -written law reviews at Iowa, the *Journal of Corporation Law* and the journal of *Transnational Law & Contemporary Problems*.

At seventy-five, the *Iowa Law Review* is vigorous. It reveals an outstanding law school with a commitment to quality through the rigors of legal writing.