

SPOTLIGHT ON TENNESSEE LAW SCHOOLS

UT College Of Law commencement: A moment to reflect on life in the law

By Jamie Ballinger Holden

On May 11, the University of Tennessee College of Law celebrated the hooding of 146 graduates in the Class of 2007. Interim Dean **John Sobieski** set the tone for the ceremony by reminding graduates to take time to reflect on their accomplishments and the grand institution to which they now belong.

Dean Sobieski noted that each year the bittersweet departure of a graduating class is followed by the excitement of a new class's arrival. He then expressed special thanks to the faculty for their devotion to students and legal education, followed by an announcement of the departure of two faculty members: **Deseriee Kennedy** and **Fran Ansley**. Professor Kennedy, who taught civil procedure, family law, women and the law, family violence and business torts, and has served as a dedicated mentor to students in the domestic violence clinic, will begin a new teaching position this fall with the Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center of Touro College in Long Island. Kennedy also has been extremely active in Knoxville non-profit agencies and will be sorely missed. Professor Ansley, who graduated first in her class from UT College of Law in 1979, plans to retire. She has been a professor at the College of Law since 1988 and has been active in scholarship on the effects of globalization, social justice and equality. More importantly, she has been an inspiration and mentor to service-minded students. The announcement of her departure was coupled with news of her selection as the 2007 recipient of the prestigious Society of American Law Teachers (SALT) Award.

Each year, commencement speakers are chosen by a student selection committee, while the class speaker is chosen popular vote. This year the selection committee chose Tennessee Supreme Court Justice **Cornelia "Connie" Clark** and Fox News anchor and attorney **Megyn Kelly** to address the graduating class. **Daniel Headrick**, National Moot Court team member and recipient of every advocacy award given by the law school, was elected class speaker. Reflecting on their own lives in the law, each speaker gave rousing speeches derived from their diverse experiences.

Justice Clark congratulated graduates on the attainment of their dream and reminded them that being a steward of the law is a high privilege. She noted that this privilege gives graduates the power to choose a journey with the law that will be fulfilling and she reminded each of them that for centuries countries in strife and those in need have turned to those who understand the law for guidance. She enthusiastically reminded everyone that the law is still one of the most respected professions in the world, and that through the law, the downtrodden can be assisted, art can be preserved and justice secured.

Next, Kelly reflected on her legal journey with equal enthusiasm, but with sage words of caution for the next generation. Kelly began by recounting her journey as a new associate in a large corporate law firm and her subsequent ascension to professional success.

She revealed that while she was dubbed a “killer” and her briefs and motions were expertly written, for nearly eight years she did not attend the weddings of close friends, nor the funerals of others. She recalled finding herself at the top of professional success with her marriage in trouble and her once powerful love of the law dissipated. Kelly powerfully reminded graduates that they must balance the professional with the personal and that they must put as much work into their lives as they do their careers. She concluded by sharing her belief that one can be an excellent attorney and be proud of how life is lived.

Then it was time for Headrick to give the final word. He reflected with his usual humor on how the impressive class of financial advisors, public relations executives and various military captains had come to law school to share three wonderful and challenging years together. He noted that his fellow graduates would practice and serve in Tennessee, New York, Iraq and the courthouses and chambers of a dozen states’ courts. In closing and on behalf of the class, Daniel thanked the family, friends and faculty who mentored and supported them through their law school experience. And, for the first time that afternoon, the tumultuous applause was not for the class, but for those who helped them complete their long journey.

Jamie will graduate from the UT College of Law in 2008 and will chair the Moot Court Board this coming year. This summer she is clerking in the Knoxville law firm of London & Amburn PC. She can be reached at jballing@utk.edu.