UH Law School Orientation Week Welcomes 116 Incoming Students to JD and Advanced Programs

The UH Law School welcomed an incoming class of 116 to the fall semester with a four-day Zoom Orientation program that included encouragement and advice about the wonder and challenges ahead, as well as a virtual moment during which Hawai‘i Chief Justice Mark Recktenwald administered the Student Pledge from his Supreme Court chambers.

The Chief Justice also took the opportunity to inspire the law students to commit themselves to caring for their community, especially in ways that increase access to justice.

He praised the Richardson School of Law for what it does “to make our community a more safe and just place,” citing the clinics that bring students into a wide range of service projects, and the 60 hours of pro bono work each student completes before graduation, which was originally a student led initiative.

Recktenwald also warmly welcomed Dean Camille Nelson, calling her “a remarkable person .... And absolutely the right person to lead the Law School at this challenging time,” while also acknowledging former Dean Aviam Soifer’s long and successful tenure.

“He has laid a great foundation for Dean Nelson to build upon,” said Recktenwald of Soifer.

For her part, Dean Nelson reiterated for the students the importance of working in service of justice, and in service to others.

“Clearly, how you move through this world matters, and Richardson Lawyers are known for their excellence and professionalism,” she said.

The incoming students include: 86 full-time JD day students; 19 Evening, Part-Time program JD students; 7 students in the Masters degree (LLM) program; 3 in the Advanced JD (AJD) program; and 1 in the doctoral (SJD) program. Of the entering students, 85 are Hawai‘i residents, including from Kaua‘i, Maui and the Big Island, and 51.4% are women.

The orientation covered a wide variety of information and topics, winding up on the final day with Associate Dean of Student Services Ronette Kawakami ’85 and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Daniel Barnett speaking about the importance of professionalism, and Hawai‘i Army Judge Advocate Levi Hookano ’06 advising students to guard their reputations carefully, and to be thoughtful about their use of social media.

“Think about who can view these things,” said Hookano, “and will you regret this later?”

The day also included Retired Judge Barbara ‘Bebe’ Richardson Phillips sharing information about her father, Law School namesake CJ William S. Richardson, and offering encouraging words to the incoming class.

“I know you’re up for the challenges,” she told them, noting that they are the first class to have a virtual orientation, the first to join the Law School after the departure of Dean Soifer and the arrival of Dean Nelson, and the first to bond with classmates without the hugs and closeness that have always been part of the sense of ‘ohana at Richardson.
The incoming students also heard Katherine ‘Kaki’ Vessels ‘16, president of the Alumni Association, encourage them to become involved in club activities, and especially the Ete Bowl, a flag football game played in the fall between women students and women graduates - the Etes vs. the Bruzers.

Vessels, who in 2016 was named by National Jurist magazine as one of 25 “Students of the Year” nationally from more than 200 ABA-accredited law schools, said Ete Bowl was the most important networking experience of her Richardson years, enabling her to meet an amazing group of graduates. She also advised the students to find ways to create happy hour zoom sessions with their classmates.

“Your classmates are vital to your life-long learning,” she said. “They will help shape you as an attorney.”

Also part of the orientation was an emotional meeting with Supreme Court Associate Justice Sabrina McKenna ‘82 who encouraged the students never to give up on their dreams. She candidly shared stories of both her successes and challenges, and encouraged the students to persevere even if they are not initially successful at achieving a particular goal.

“Life isn’t always smooth,” she told them, “but it’s so important to stay positive and keep trying, and enjoy the journey.”

The Law School has had a long and powerful connection with the Supreme Court through many community collaborations, and during his remarks CJ Recktenwald noted that Dean Nelson “knows and appreciates” how deeply those bonds run. And he reflected on the many ways the two institutions work together, including:

- Supreme Court oral arguments that are held at the Law School for students to see in person.
- Training the Law School has provided and still provides for the Environmental Court.
- The deep ties between students who become clerks in the court system and may go on to become judges during their careers. More than 30% of Hawai’i’s judges and justices are Richardson graduates.
- The Courts-in-the-Community outreach program in which law students coach high school students to prepare them for a visit by the Supreme Court to their high school to hear oral arguments in an actual case.

In parting words, Recktenwald spoke passionately to the students of the importance of committing themselves to eliminating bias and prejudice.

“I urge you to be someone who builds people up,” he said. “I urge you to look for ways you might contribute to make justice more accessible …. To speak up when you see injustice …. To use your voice to speak up at unequal justice…. And to make the world a more just place overall.”