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Practice Perfect

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Practice Perfect

GGU Law Dean Rachel Van Cleave

By now, GGU Law's Dean Rachel Van Cleave, who began as our permanent dean in January, needs no formal introduction. In the University's spring magazine, Faculty Chair Eric Christiansen described Rachel's Olympian qualities of discipline, focus, and grace under pressure. Like Eric, I have been in awe of Rachel's ability to work collaboratively and strategically, orchestrating positive programmatic changes that reflect and combine professors' expertise, best practices in legal education, and market realities—all to serve our students.

To the many kudos Rachel has earned during her first six months of being GGU Law's new dean, I would add her uncanny ability to operate with both depth and breadth in her work on behalf of the law school. Rachel displays relentless energy and keen intellect in seamlessly and simultaneously understanding the important, deep work

faculty do with students and collaborating to help integrate that richness with a vision and strategy that addresses the current climate of legal education and the legal profession.

While Rachel is very serious about the work we are doing and the challenges we face, she also possesses a warmth and collegiality that is contagious. I enjoy hearing the warm laughter that emanates from her office next door to mine as she meets with alumni, students, university stakeholders, and community partners. We at GGU Law are most fortunate for the rare combination of vision, diligence, intelligence, and friendly grace Rachel brings to all she does on behalf of the law school. GGU Law could not ask for a stronger leader in the midst of so many changes in legal education and in the profession.

Kimberly Stanley, Associate Dean of Academic Affairs

by Dean Rachel Van Cleave

Institutions of higher education and law schools in particular are currently addressing new questions about the value and form of the education they offer, due, in part, to economic reality, practical necessity, and public scrutiny. Changes in the nature of the legal profession and the market, the cost of legal education, and most recently the purpose of the third year of law school, have each been at the center of professional conversations, public debate and media stories about reform.

Like my colleagues at other law schools, I am certainly involved with these critical conversations. I am also working with GGU Law faculty members and program leaders to launch and execute a comprehensive three-year action plan this fall. The plan will provide clear strategy and guidance and more importantly, tackle critical areas that address the needs of students from the time they enter law school through their transition into the profession.



Recently, the *Daily Journal* published my article “The Future of the Legal Profession” (you may read the full article at <http://digitalcommons.law.ggu.edu/pubs/569/>). In this piece, I write about technology-driven changes in the profession. I also write about the values that shape our professional purpose, the importance of not losing sight of what it means to be a “counselor at law.” I believe it is critical that, at a time of rapid changes in the legal profession, we all remain grounded in the core values of serving clients and society by continuing to build a stronger profession and a more just democracy.

The article has sparked informative conversations with colleagues, alumni, and friends. Many were pleased that our law school is aware of and responsive to the changing external landscape. Other readers enjoyed learning about mindful lawyering. And, in the midst of so many external changes, many were pleased to be reminded of and affirmed in the values that drew them to the profession and guide their work during challenging times.

At GGU Law, we are working to both hold to the values that shape the legal profession and the practice-driven hallmarks of the education we offer while strategically and thoughtfully designing a future for the law school that responds to the needs of our students and the profession. Thus, we will enhance the work of our faculty and students so that they, like generations of GGU Law alumni, will contribute to a vibrant future rooted in integrity and service.

Professors and students choose to teach and learn at GGU Law because they seek a small school culture, a dynamic urban setting, and, above all, a focus on experience. The entrepreneurial students GGU Law attracts, the vast majority of whom participate in externships and other field placements, eagerly pursue opportunities to apply and practice law from the time they start at GGU. To help them get started, this fall we

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are launching a Faculty Coaching program for our first-year students. Small teams of students will meet monthly with their coaches to discuss the transition to law school, professional identity, and other areas of professional interest. Our faculty look forward to using this new program to engage and cultivate our future colleagues.

Because of our small size and long tradition of practical training, we have, over the last few years, been able to fine-tune and implement strategic reforms to existing programs, implement curricular reforms that spurred a partnership with the Educating Tomorrow’s Lawyers consortium of schools focused on innovative legal



education, and offer new scholarships and post-graduate support that help lessen our students’ and graduates’ debt. Still, we know there is much work to do to continue perfecting our programs, preparing students for their transitions into careers, and implementing programs that ensure the law school remains a sound economic and professional investment.

In the coming months, I look forward to designing and launching a focused and strategic plan of action for GGU Law—a plan rooted in our more than 110 years of emphasizing both theory and practice, strong collaboration with colleagues, in conversation with our students and alumni, and with our eyes and ears on the market. ///