

# Chicago Daily Law Bulletin

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## Corkery offers his opinions

The John Marshall Law School dean answers seven questions in new series

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This is the first of an occasional Q&A series in Law School Notes with the deans of Illinois law schools.

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John E. Corkery is dean of The John Marshall Law School.

**Law Bulletin: What's the toughest part about being a law school dean?**

Corkery: Resolving conflicts between people of goodwill and occasionally between people whose goodwill may not be immediately apparent. Managing people and managing scarce resources are big challenges. Also, this managing has to be done within a context of a tenured faculty and a dedicated, longtime staff.

So maintaining good relationships with the law school constituencies is vitally important even, and especially, where I have to make a decision that a colleague or colleagues might not like.

I like the saying that "whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad." I know that "mad" in the quote probably doesn't mean "angry," but in my world I interpret it as such.

I work at the ability to talk with people about difficult issues even when we disagree. I strive mightily to avoid getting in personal "fights" with people with whom I have a disagreement.

The goal is to make decisions in the best interest of the law

school.

**LB: You recently expanded the space occupied by The John Marshall Law School during a deep recession and at a time when law school enrollment nationwide is declining, and many graduates are having a tough time getting jobs as lawyers. Why did you choose to expand?**

Corkery: We had been planning to improve our facilities for a while. Walgreens had occupied our first floor at Jackson and State for close to 30 years. So they had to be given at least a year's notice that we needed the space. All this began before the length and depth of the downturn was apparent. But we decided to persevere anyway.

We had some funds that the board of trustees decided to reinvest in the school to improve things for our current students and improve our ability to attract new ones. I think it was a good use of school funds.

As the plans were being finalized, the school was presented with an opportunity to purchase the three-story, 19 West Jackson building, located right in between our State building and our Plymouth Court building.

The board and I agreed that this opportunity to control all the space on the south side of Jackson between State and Plymouth Court might not come around again and that acquiring this space could provide us needed space now and for expansion for years to come. And so the decision was made to buy



John E. Corkery

it and to build out only the first floor of 19 West Jackson at this time to house our Veterans Clinic.

We believe those moves are a good bet on the future of our school.

**LB: What do you think of U.S. News & World Report rankings of law schools?**

Corkery: We do well in the legal writing and the intellectual property specialty rankings and we have moved up significantly in the J.D. rankings in the last few years. But because 40 percent of the rankings are based on recognition and reputation, and are really difficult to move upwards, and with ranking components based on LSAT scores and GPAs, it might not be possible to move the needle significantly further. So we're focusing now on finding jobs for our students and being the best law school we can be.

**LB: The dean of the law school at Indiana University in Indianapolis recently said perhaps we need a law school where only a minority of faculty do research and the rest are full-time teachers. He said this might lower the cost of legal education. What do you think?**

Corkery: I'm not sure how that will lower costs for the 210 or so ABA-approved law schools. Many faculty are tenured or on tenure track and many staff are critically important to the success of the school. For a

school starting out now, maybe that dual track would help. But for an existing school, I don't see major cost reductions without reducing personnel and programs. And any such reductions are difficult because they will affect a school's programs.

I believe law school costs went up when most law schools became involved in an "arms race" to become better. Better law schools meant more programs and more faculty and staff. During about eight of the last 10 years, there was the demand to support that expansion and the related increase in tuition. The challenge will be to keep the quality and reduce costs. No one I've talked to has a good idea how to do this at this point.

**LB: When and why did you go to law school?**

Corkery: When I got out of undergraduate school from Saint Louis University in 1964, I felt unprepared to do much in the world. I thought law school would give me an opportunity to do more things and to develop whatever talents I had to a greater extent. It would give me more time to think about what I wanted to do and increase my opportunities. I got accepted at Northwestern University School of Law, and I graduated from there in 1967. I did not know at that time that I wanted to practice law, but I believed that somehow law practice and being a lawyer would play an important role in whatever I did. In hindsight, that turned out to be true.

Today, law school is very expensive, so you should not go unless it's something you really want to do, and in the overall scheme of things, is something you can "afford," after exploring all your scholarship and financial aid options, and your career plans. The biggest luxury for me in going to law school was time, time to earn an important, professional credential, and time to think about how I might use that credential after graduation. This luxury may not be affordable today.

**LB: Did you foresee that you would be a law professor?**

Corkery: I didn't think about being a law teacher during my first five or so years in practice, all of which I spent with Lord, Bissell & Brook, because I was too busy learning what I needed to do a good job for the firm and its clients. But then I began to think more about the long term. I had always admired the great teachers I had in law school and I began to consider whether I would like joining the ranks of the law teaching profession. Stepping off the "good ship big law" was a risk. But it turned out that working first for a firm and then going to law teaching were good decisions for me.

**LB: What is the biggest change you think U.S. law schools need to make in the next five to 10 years?**

Corkery: In the future, law schools will have to take account of the use of technology that is changing the nature of law practice and life. This new technology involves communication devices and techniques that help solve clients' problems in faster, and hopefully more efficient and satisfying ways.

In addition to teaching the use of new technology, schools will also likely go to a form of online, distance education for some of their classes, but not for the first year and probably not for the entire second year of school.

The third year of school is already being redesigned by many schools and will soon likely include more internships, externships, clinical experiences and opportunities to concentrate studies in particular areas. Trial practice in federal and state courts, with electronic filing already here, will continue to involve the use of new technology while the form of trials may also change.

I believe the number of actual trials is now decreasing in civil and criminal areas, and this will require greater emphasis on more efficient ways of resolving disputes. So law schools will have to learn more about some mix of law and alternate dispute

resolution and teach what they learn.

I believe some things in legal education will remain the same. These include teaching students how to think and write clearly; organize masses of data so that they can be used and analyzed productively; understand the strength and weaknesses of process in making group decisions; develop good judgment when authorities conflict and in other situations; think strategically to solve problems within a matrix of limits; and act professionally and responsibly as a member of the bar. Law schools do a good job with these issues, and they will have to continue to do so.