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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Tawia B. Ansah*

My predecessor as Dean of FIU College of Law, Secretary R. Alexander Acosta,¹ introduced the Decanal Lecture on Legal Education in 2013 at a unique moment in legal education. Law school applications and law firm hiring were both at an ebb in the slow recovery from the Great Recession. Law schools struggled to fill classrooms. Fundamental and seemingly permanent changes within the legal profession created a push for innovation within legal education, with lawyers demanding “practice-ready law graduates” and criticizing an education format that, the argument went, had not changed since the days of Christopher Columbus Langdell.

Secretary Acosta’s idea was to bring a dean from an elite law school to FIU to speak with faculty, students, and the community about legal education, the legal profession, and what law schools expect and demand of students and what students should expect and demand of law schools. The goal was to introduce top legal educators and our students to each other and to enjoy the conversation that ensued. The goal was also to expose our students to a range of academic experiences from the perspective of the leaders at various schools.

This issue of *FIU Law Review* is dedicated to three of our Decanal Lecturers, who visited FIU from 2013–2016 and agreed to publish their remarks.

The inaugural lecture, and first author, is Daniel B. Rodriguez, at the time the Dean of Northwestern Pritzker School of Law and President of the Association of American Law Schools.² Dean Rodriguez began the discussion recognizing the “obvious” point that “we are in a period of great ferment in legal education, with every day bringing more criticism and more news about how our present model is broken and needs to be fixed.”³ The question he asked is, “What counts as innovation and, in particular, what

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¹ Secretary Acosta left his deanship to become Secretary of Labor under President Trump. See *Office of the Secretary*, U.S. DEP’T OF LABOR, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/osec> (last visited Sept. 9, 2018).

² See Daniel B. Rodriguez, *Legal Education and Its Innovations*, 13 FIU L. REV. 199 (2018).

³ See Daniel B. Rodriguez, Dean, Nw. Univ. Pritzker Sch. of Law, Keynote Address at Florida International University College of Law, First Decanal Lecture on Legal Education (Feb. 5, 2014), <https://lawmediasite.fiu.edu/Mediasite/Play/bd5ae36439cd4927b64632f01bb7dd731d?catalog=27fe7e205d4a4adb967ced5c4ddf6e2621>.

counts as innovation in legal education and legal education reform?”⁴ He considered the sweep of recent changes to legal education, looking for those initiatives and ideas that “push the ball forward.”⁵

For the second lecture, we invited Erwin Chemerinsky, at the time the founding Dean of University of California, Irvine School of Law and now Dean at UC Berkeley School of Law.⁶ Like FIU, UCI Law is a new law school, founded to fill gaps within legal education and to affect the composition of the legal profession.⁷ Dean Chemerinsky identified four problems with legal education,⁸ then considered which of them are intractable and which can be solved. He focused on two problems that his law school targeted: increasing diversity within the profession and expanding experiential education.⁹ Dean Chemerinsky predicted that the then lull in applications was temporary and would bounce back, at least to some extent if not to pre-Recession levels.¹⁰ That prediction proved true.¹¹

Our third author is Eduardo Peñalver, Dean of Cornell Law School.¹² Dean Peñalver focused on the evolving role of skills education in law schools, situating it within the “commingling of thinking and doing in law” within legal education.¹³ “Balancing instruction in thinking and doing is a fraught exercise and we will always have to grapple with how to accomplish that balance.”¹⁴ Dean Peñalver emphasized the fact that taking skills education seriously would require a shift in everyone’s thinking, i.e., skills faculty, administrators, and doctrinal faculty.¹⁵

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ See Erwin Chemerinsky, *Reflections on the Future of Legal Education*, 13 FIU L. REV. 215 (2018).

⁷ See Erwin Chemerinsky, Dean, Univ. of Cal., Irvine Sch. of Law, Keynote Address at Florida International University College of Law, Second Decanal Lecture on Legal Education (Mar. 3, 2015), <https://lawmediasite.fiu.edu/Mediasite/Play/b4c703cd9756446d84806d8cbd5c4ad81d?catalog=27fe7e205d4a4adb967ced5c4ddf6e2621>.

⁸ See Chemerinsky, *supra* note 6, at 216.

⁹ See *id.* at 225–27.

¹⁰ See *id.* at 217.

¹¹ Stephanie Francis Ward, *LSAC Reports Increase in Law School Applications*, ABA JOURNAL (Jan. 29, 2018, 3:00 PM), http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/increase_in_law_school_applications_reported_by_lsac.

¹² Eduardo M. Peñalver, Dean, Cornell Law School, Keynote Address at Florida International University College of Law, Fourth Decanal Lecture on Legal Education (Nov. 8, 2018), <https://lawmediasite.fiu.edu/Mediasite/Play/7fdde8e267d24a14a055149798f933df1d?catalog=27fe7e205d4a4adb967ced5c4ddf6e2621>.

¹³ Eduardo M. Peñalver, *The Role of Skills Instruction in Legal Education*, 13 FIU L. REV. 229, 231 (2018).

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ *Id.* at 239.

We are proud of the contributions to this volume of *FIU Law Review*. By addressing the present challenges and future-oriented reforms in legal education, we hope these contributions will impact the discussion.