

UCI Law 2013 Student Commencement Speech

David Pierucci

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Ladies and gentlemen; administration, faculty, and staff; fellow classmates; family and friends; Chief Justice, Chancellor Drake, and Dean Chemerinsky.

Allow me to begin by addressing the question on everyone's mind here today: Why was I, David Pierucci, chosen to be student commencement speaker for the second class ever of this law school? Well, no matter what I've been telling my parents, it's not because I'm class valedictorian. My grade in torts class took care of that. Maybe, since my younger sister, Katie Pierucci, is also a student at this law school, my classmates wanted the first of the UCI Law's legacy family to speak. But probably not, since this is a state school.

I believe my classmates chose me because they knew I would prepare for this speech with the level of research and investigation it deserves.

As you may know, from the beginning the founders of UC Irvine wanted law school be part of this university. Chancellor Drake told us that he found an early map of the school that had drawn a spot for a future law school, pretty much right where the law school is today. Well, I dug through our school archives and found a handwritten document dated February 15, 1964 entitled, "Notes from Meeting RE Future Law School."

I thought I might read a few of their notes, at the top here:

- Admit first class of students. If absolutely necessary, admit a second class of students.
- Admit one Pierucci. If that doesn't work out, admit another Pierucci.
- If the library doesn't have a lot of books from the start, fine oil paintings and Amish rocking chairs are a good distraction.
- No milestone is too small to celebrate with cake. Consider cake for the end of the student's first day of class, end of the first week, end of the first semester, the halfway point between the first and last day of school, the first day of the last year, and, if there's any cake left, graduation.
- For advertising and public relations, consider hiring Sterling Cooper Draper Price. If they're unavailable, or, more likely, fictional, then two words: Rex Bossert.

When our class started here, this law school was relatively new. But even if it weren't, law school would still be new for all of us.

None of us had ever been law students before. You don't learn law as high school students or undergraduates, so we had to count on and trust our law professors to teach us law's broadest concepts, its nuanced intricacies, and everything in between. Their doors

were always open to us. The same was true for our administration and staff. Also, the lawyers we worked for in pro bono projects, summer jobs, and clinic assignments gave us their time, not just as supervisors, but also as mentors. We thank them all for their devotion to our success.

Further, many of us have never made a financial investment like this before. A lot of us are paying more for law school than we've ever earned in income. But our class was fortunate enough to receive sizable scholarships and summer stipends for those of us doing public interest work. So we thank our law school donors, partners, and the students who chipped in. Your generosity is truly helpful.

Finally, many of us have never made a commitment to time like this before. Beyond reading for class and preparing for exams, we sacrificed evenings and weekends to extra curricular activities and volunteer projects. So we thank our family and friends for their much-needed understanding and support, and for putting up with our law school stories that are usually so inside they're indecipherable.

As newspaper headlines will tell you, going to law school isn't the most popular career move right now. The World Wide Web is fraught with stories and opinions detailing problems in legal education today. But it's not just the Internet.

Two weeks ago at a coffee shop, this older gentleman asked my girlfriend, Jessica, and me what we were studying for. When we told him law school, he said, "That's another problem in this country. Too many of our best minds are becoming lawyers. They should be doing something productive, they should be entrepreneurs." Turns out, I had heard US Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia say the same thing on C-SPAN in 2009. Except he didn't say they should be entrepreneurs, he said they should be "out inventing the automobile."

Now, there are problems in legal education today, and I hope our school continues to be part of the solution. And maybe the guy from the coffee shop and Justice Scalia are right, that too many people are going to law school who should be doing something else. But that's not the whole story. So what do you say to the guy at the coffee shop?

You want to say that we know the positive impact lawyers can have in people's lives because we've already made an impact as law students. Students in our class helped Iraqi refugees in Jordan, hurricane and oil spill victims in Mississippi, and, here in Orange County, the homeless, senior citizens, children, victims of domestic violence...I can't even begin to tell you the impact our class has already had in people's lives.

You also want to say we get to step into the arena and do exciting and challenging work. Students in our class have worked with attorneys preparing arguments for the US Supreme Court, and even argued themselves before the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. That's a big deal.

But you may want to say, look, I'm just trying my best to make it in life. I'm just trying to build a career I can be proud of that can also support my family and myself.

In our quest to make it, we will all continue to have a positive impact on people's lives. Some of us will end up in positions regarded as politically influential or posts of community leadership. Now, since Dean Chemerinsky rarely does it himself, I'm not going to hand out free advice. But I will ask all of you for three favors.

First, if you have an opportunity to make anything, big or small, better, or at least more reasonable, please take it.

Second, if you make a mistake or even if things you promised change beyond your control, please apologize. Just say you're sorry. I think people are more forgiving than they are willing to apologize. The worst is when you mess up and then try to act like it's all part of the plan. People can see through that. You can probably pick up points by just admitting what happened.

And third, please try to be as kind, generous, caring, and display as much humility to the people around you as Dean Chemerinsky has to us. We may not all have it in us to become America's Number 1 constitutional scholar, but we certainly have it in us to display the Dean's kindness.

As Dean Chemerinsky said at his commencement address at UC Berkley's law school in 2009:

“Third and finally, [I think he had two points before this...] make a difference. Over and over again, we hear people say that there is a problem and someone should do something about it. As lawyers, you are the ones who can do something.”

I am so honored and also touched that my classmates selected me to speak on their behalf. I can't believe you wanted me to do this. And I still can't believe I got into this school.

Thank you.