

# Message from the Dean

BY DEAN KENNETH B. DAVIS, JR.

Every seven years, the Law School undergoes a site inspection by an accreditation team chosen by the American Bar Association and the Association of American Law Schools. I am pleased to report that our recent accreditation visit went very well. The initial comments from the site visit team were generally positive. They will prepare a more detailed report and get back to us this summer.

Much of the credit for the success of the visit goes to Professor Steven Barkan, who is also Director of the Law Library. Drawing on his experience as Acting Dean at Marquette Law School, Steve made sure we were well prepared. He worked diligently with a committee of faculty to assemble a comprehensive "Self-Study", required to be submitted to the inspection committee before its visit to the School. I found the work done by our faculty committee to be a very useful way of taking stock of ourselves, evaluating where we are and where we need to go. I thought you might be interested to know some of the things that grew out of the visit and our preparations for the accreditation review.

The most revealing aspect to me was looking at our resource picture in relation to our peers in the Big Ten. I found that we have remained true to our tradition of providing cost-effective access to a legal education. Of the five neighboring law schools (Minnesota, Illinois, Michigan, Northwestern, Iowa), none has lower tuition. But I also noted that this is something of a double-edged sword. As I compared the amount spent per student, I noted that we spend less than any of the aforementioned schools. And this is not a narrow gap: while we spend about \$16,000 per



student, the next closest peer is able to spend about \$6,000 per year more. The disparity widens when we are compared to the other institutions.

This information didn't catch me totally by surprise. We have suspected for some time that our resource problem was more acute than that of some of our peers. What was illuminating was the size of the gulf. This, of course, gives these neighboring law schools a significant competitive advantage when it comes to recruiting the best students and retaining top faculty. For example, when we offer admission to a student who is also accepted by one of these neighboring peers, our peer schools have dollars available to offer financial incentives in the form of merit scholarships to lure prospective students. Traditionally, we have not had the resources to offer merit scholarships, but it is a situation we plan to address in the coming years.

Likewise, the significant resource advantage held by our peers allows them to retain their best faculty. I am not simply referring to paying higher salaries (although that is certainly possible when there are more resources available), but providing faculty with ancillary benefits that add to their satisfaction and often are just as important as salary. For instance, when faculty want to hold a

special conference, invite nationally prominent guest lecturers or buy a new piece of software from the bookstore, my counterparts at our neighboring peer institutions are better positioned to respond favorably to these requests. As dean, I want the University of Wisconsin Law School to be known as a dynamic place of possibilities, not a school where limited resources discourage action and bold ideas.

While the site team was here we also received word that the Law School had moved up eight places in the *US News and World Report* rankings. We hope to improve on our overall ranking of 29, but we are proud that, despite our relative paucity of funds, we continue to be among the elite in the category of "reputation", as assessed by judges, lawyers and academics, who ranked us 19th in the most recent survey.

Considering this strength in the face of limited dollars, I can't help but wonder how we would be ranked had we been able to retain even half of the 11 faculty we have lost to law schools ranked in the *US News* top five. (In fact, only one school, the University of Pennsylvania, has lost more of its law faculty to the "top five" than we have.) While this is a classic "good news/bad news" situation, it is a testimony to one of the traditional strengths of the Law School: our ability to spot excellent young faculty who have the potential to develop into leading figures in legal education. This is another example of what I believe the inspection team saw during the visit: even with our financial limitations and periodic departure of key faculty (either by retirement or via moves elsewhere), the UW Law School remains at the forefront of legal education and is committed to refining itself in response to a changing legal landscape.