

ADVANCE TO THE RETREAT

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THE beautiful ocean-side location of the Pepperdine University School of Law is always a mixed blessing. Although it looks great on recruiting posters and web pages, the splendor of the setting lends itself too easily to Doonesbury-style cracks about the “surfer dude law school.”¹ While not discounting the advantages of our location, I often claim that we could move the faculty to a warehouse in Pacoima² and still have one of America’s great law schools. At Pepperdine, as at every law school, the strength of the institution is the faculty, not the stunning facility, the highly regarded university parent, or the geographic location. The care and feeding of the faculty—meaning the maintenance of faculty morale—should be every dean’s priority. The annual faculty retreat is one of the keys to good faculty morale.

I. FORMAT OF THE RETREAT

Throughout our brief history,³ the annual faculty retreat has been held just before the beginning of first-year orientation. The location varies, but is usually a resort hotel within a two to three hour drive of the campus.⁴ Depending on the cost of rooms⁵ and the extant law school budget environment,⁶ the stay is one or two nights,

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1. A few years ago, we launched a competition for a bumper-sticker quality slogan. The winning entry, from an alumnus who practices in New Mexico, was: “Great view; better school.”

2. Pacoima, Oxnard, Rancho Cucamonga. Pick the oddly named California city of your choice.

3. The Pepperdine University School of Law is only thirty-one years old. Our annual faculty retreat, like most traditions at the law school, was begun by my predecessor, Ronald F. Phillips, our dean for twenty-seven years. I’m reasonably sure that Pepperdine is the only law school that has an annual faculty retreat, which families also attend. The only way to be sure is to conduct a survey, but one of my goals as dean is never to inflict a survey on a fellow dean. In fact, if any dean ever receives a survey from a Pepperdine faculty member, he or she should send it to me and I’ll fill it out. By the way, the funniest law review articles were all written by Dean Prosser. It is now my privilege to cite one of them, copies of which I frequently send to people who send me surveys: William Prosser, *A Questionnaire for Questioners*, 10 J. LEGAL EDUC. 494 (1958).

4. In L.A., of course, a two to three hour drive is also known as a short commute. Here, you can drive two to three hours just looking for good barbecue. I recognize that, for many of you, a two to three hour drive suggests the need to pack survival gear and file a flight plan.

5. Like most things, hotels are becoming more and more expensive. It’s been several years since we could afford to spend two nights at the retreat. And, the more expensive the hotel is in California, the more likely the bathroom is to contain this notice: “To protect the environment and save water, we will only change the linens or towels upon request or at the end of your stay.” Despite those noble motives, I suspect that the cost savings to the hotel may be a factor. Soon, the notice will be amended to say, “Nor will we make your bed during your stay, in order to avoid further exploitation of underpaid hotel employees who only harass us with frivolous workers comp and unemployment claims. Anyway, didn’t your mother teach you to make your own bed? Were you raised in a barn? And, don’t go whining to the front desk either, if you know what’s good for you.” (I’m finding these footnotes to be a welcome outlet; cleansing, really. I feel better already. Thank you.)

6. Back in the 1980s, a university belt-tightening did force us to hold the retreat at the law school one year. We’re spoiled; it was awful.

with business meetings during one day. The Associate Dean for Academics is responsible for planning the retreat, including the hotel and meal logistics, although the Dean directs the overall substance of the business sessions and may conduct lengthy briefings⁷ himself.⁸

All faculty members, deans, and directors, as well as their families are invited. In fact, the main point of the exercise is that almost all the families do attend. We see each other's children grow up over the course of the annual retreats and, as young faculty are added, there are new waves of young children. Faculty spouses renew their friendships with other faculty spouses whom they see rarely, if at all, between retreats. Families are invited to most meals, with at least one evening dinner that also features entertainment.⁹

The law school pays for all costs of the retreat,¹⁰ including rooms¹¹ and meals, although families may come to the hotel a day or two early at their own expense. The schedule during the retreat allows for plenty of free time for family activities or the recreation furnished at the retreat.

II. ADVANTAGES OF THE RETREAT

Good faculty morale requires that the faculty actually like and respect each other. Mingling in social settings away from alumni or donors and outside of work hours is the best way for faculty members to get to know each other. Assuming that they are basically likeable people, mutual affection¹² and respect should grow. While there are ongoing opportunities to build sound faculty relationships throughout the year,¹³ the annual faculty retreat begins the academic year with a comfortable,

7. As a Power Point abuser, I voluntarily used flip-charts at the 2000 faculty retreat. After papering the meeting room walls with page after page of condensed, barely legible brilliance, it became clear that abstruse confusion can be achieved with either old or new media.

8. I'll skip the "himself or herself" formula so that no one thinks I'm confused about my gender.

9. When I was Associate Dean, the entertainment was provided by country, bluegrass, or mariachi bands. The current Associate Dean, Professor Shelley Saxer, is known to favor show-tune medleys and, most recently, arranged for a DJ to pump out hits and teach new dances. AT THE FACULTY RETREAT! For those of you who think of Pepperdine as religiously conservative, I'm forced to admit that there *was* dancing at the faculty retreat. Also, in the Lynn Administration, we've installed a pool table in the Faw Student Lounge. Some would say that moral decay is rampant. I say, "Three ball, corner pocket."

10. Except for raids on the mini-bar or massages. At one faculty retreat when my children were much younger, they were delighted to find a whole refrigerator full of free food and drink, right there in the hotel room. That's when I learned that a small jar of macadamia nuts costs \$10.00. As a shy person, I have no experiences with massages.

11. Large families may require two rooms. In the past, the Dean was housed in a suite much nicer than the average hotel room. I've noticed that I haven't been getting that lately. Hmm, could that be related to the fact that the Associate Dean for Academics handles the logistics for the retreat? Was it the "show-tune medleys" remark? See *supra* note 9.

12. Within limits, people. Perhaps another dean is contributing an article about sexual harassment to this issue. I'm pushing the envelope already with my gender self-identification comment. See *supra* note 8.

13. In the unlikely event that I'm asked to contribute to another deanly venting issue, my essay, "Lunching in the Faculty Lounge," will break new ground in arguing that the faculty should eat lunch together on a regular basis. Following that will be "Birthday Cards for the Bashful." As you can see, I plan to let other deans deal with the vexing problems of *U.S. News*, minority admissions, and law

reassuring start and gives everyone a chance to forgive their colleagues for all the misguided opinions expressed during the previous year.

The fact that the retreat involves families also softens any rough edges. Even the professor who thinks the *Restatements* are communist plots¹⁴ is more bearable after you watch him play with his kids. The professor with the breathtakingly comprehensive view of law and public policy wears plaid shorts with a boldly striped shirt. The dean spills hot fudge sundae in his lap.¹⁵ All the human insights and interactions that help us see each other as people, rather than as pedantic legal experts, take place more often in the faculty retreat. And, they take place in view of the whole faculty, rather than the smaller groups who might entertain each other the rest of the year.

You may be on a faculty that is divided, corrosive, or, worst of all, doesn't care what colleagues think of each other. Starting an annual faculty retreat with primarily social goals may sound as inappropriate as starting a "Kumbi Ya" sing-along in a crowded elevator.¹⁶ And, the first one or two might be awkward or poorly attended. Maybe, it will take the goodwill associated with a new deanship to break the ice and begin the tradition. Then, the tradition can take care of itself.

Family support for what we do is important. Every perk that faculty families receive rewards them for the time their spouse or parent spends away from home writing, teaching, or attending conferences. Making families the focus of the faculty retreat is not the least we can do for them, but it is minimal. While there are budgetary constraints, the families should be made to feel that no expense was spared.

The least important part of the faculty retreat is the business session. At most law schools, a faculty retreat signifies a monumental problem that must be attacked—a drop in the bar passage rate, a drop in the *U.S. News* ranking, a drop in funding, etc. Those are merely extended, pressured faculty meetings, even if conducted off-site. The more useful faculty retreat retreats from immediate problems and focuses on long-term challenges and opportunities, rather than immediate threats. The less-pressured, more congenial faculty retreat allows faculty to dream out loud about the future of the school or of the law. Part of the time might be taken up with a routine, first faculty meeting of the year, when committee or university assignments are handed out and AALS representatives are selected or when reports are made on summer projects around the school. But the rest of the business session should be aspirational, forward thinking about where the law school and its students should be years from now.

students' soaring debt. Me, I'm claiming the social high ground. And, since I'm not charging for this, it also qualifies as *pro bono*.

14. No, I'm not going there, either. See *supra* note 12.

15. Of course, he does that during the regular work week, too.

16. The singing of "Kumbi Ya" in a public school setting was recently challenged on the ground that the religious content of the song violated the separation of church and state. I would give you more information about that if I could remember how to use Westlaw or Lexis and if I knew the correct spelling of "Kumbi Ya." Lacking in-depth research, I can only assume that George Harrison's "My Sweet Lord" is also off-limits. [Editor's Note: The correct spelling is Kumbaya.]

Reality intrudes.¹⁷ Immediate problem solving may be necessary in some years because it is the first time the faculty has been together for three or four months. Even then, the meeting was not scheduled *ad hoc* to deal with a problem, but is one in an unbroken string of annual faculty retreats when the faculty and their families gather to remember why theirs is the best job in America and to celebrate the high honor conferred by the title "law professor."

Go thou and do likewise.

17. Which is one of the many things I don't like about reality.