

## THE FORGOTTEN CONSTITUENCY? LAW SCHOOL DEANS AND STUDENTS

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### INTRODUCTION

ALTHOUGH law schools unquestionably vary dramatically, law school administrations tend to follow a somewhat formulaic hierarchical model. The dean is the titular head of the law school. At most law schools, the dean works closely with the associate dean, or the equivalent, and, among many other tasks, helps plan the curriculum, assists with visitors and adjuncts, and participates in assigning courses to faculty. The dean of students has primary responsibility for dealing with student concerns and problems that arise on a daily basis. Besides working with the other deans, the law school dean generally, either directly or indirectly, supervises a number of different offices, including the law school registrar, career services, financial aid, and admissions offices, which provide direct service and assistance to prospective, admitted, and enrolled law students.

In essence, the dean supervises the law school administrators and staff who regularly work directly with law students. While ordinarily not having daily interactions with students, students obviously must have *some* kind of relationship with the leader of the law school. Students are one of the law school dean's many constituencies—including faculty, staff, and alumni—who are being “led” by its leader. And, as any law dean can readily attest, unaddressed student dissatisfaction can make a dean's life miserable and produce unhappy alumni who are less likely than happy alumni to provide much-needed financial support to the school.

Specifically, law school deans at various (often inopportune) times must deal with an array of demands—requests, if you will—from individual students and several different student organizations. The requests can range from seeking action with respect to a professor experiencing alleged problems in the classroom to law student mobilization surrounding a hot-button political issue of the day. For me, it recently was a call for the law school to take a stand against the state of Arizona's 2010 foray into immigration regulation.<sup>1</sup> In dealing with such

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1. See S. 1070, 49th Leg., 2d Sess. (Ariz. 2010); Gabriel J. Chin, Carissa Byrne Hessick, Toni M. Massaro, & Marc L. Miller, *A Legal Labyrinth: Issues Raised by Arizona Senate Bill 1070*, 25

student demands, it helps measurably if deans—it should go without saying—have a positive relationship with students, even if in some instances it almost invariably is more attenuated and distant than the ordinary student relationships with law faculty members and the student services staff.

In thinking about the dean's relationship with students, it seems important that deans, as the leaders of their law schools, to some degree must be visible to law students and interact with them on a number of different levels. Students are students, consumers, and future alumni, all rolled into one. At a bare minimum, students must feel confident that the school has an effective leader looking out for the well-being of the school. They cannot be left to think that their school somehow resembles a rudderless ship.

Most law school deans forged relationships with students early in their careers as classroom teachers. However, students come and go every year. And given the many huge demands on a dean's time—especially in these times of increased pressures for fund-raising, marketing, and public relations—it is difficult for a dean to spare time to maintain his or her teaching at the level of a normal faculty member and to get to know current students as most faculty members do. While some law school deans do spend some time in the classroom, I am not aware of any who teach a full load of courses like the average faculty member.

Consequently, law school deans ordinarily must get acquainted with most law students in ways other than in the classroom. Many deans initially meet students through various forms of outreach to prospective and admitted students. In addition, deans, in different forums at different law schools, ordinarily welcome incoming first year law students to the study of law and the legal profession. These ways of getting to know students, however, do not entail the dean regularly and repeatedly interacting with students. Indeed, these interactions do not create much more than an impression of the dean among students, rather than anything like a student/teacher relationship.

Despite the challenges, it remains important for the law school dean to have as healthy, positive, and constructive a relationship with students as possible. It is important to remember that law schools could not exist—and that law deans would be unnecessary—but for the continuous flow of law students through their hallowed halls. Besides making the dean's life miserable, unhappy students may make it difficult for the law school to recruit new students and, as previously mentioned, can later be rather unforgiving alumni.

To effectively lead, a dean must fully understand and be connected to the institution that he or she leads, of which the student body is a fundamental part.<sup>2</sup> Even though law students are a critically important constituency of the dean,

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GEO. IMMIGR. L.J. 47 (2010)). Although I have expressed my personal views on the infirmities of the Arizona law, there are limits to what statements a public law school can, and should, make on controversial social issues. See Gabriel J. Chin & Kevin R. Johnson, *Profiling's Enabler: High Court Ruling Underpins Arizona Immigration Law*, WASH. POST, July 13, 2010, at A15; Kevin R. Johnson, *Viewpoints, Arizona Law Will Likely Collide with Constitution—And Lose*, SACRAMENTO BEE, May 2, 2010, at 1E.

2. See John A. Miller, *The Modern Law Dean*, 50 J. LEGAL EDUC. 398, 412 (2000).

there has not been much serious discussion of the law school dean's ongoing relationship with law students. Much of what has been written has appeared in this annual symposium issue of *The University of Toledo Law Review*. In this essay, I hope to make a modest contribution to the literature based on my experiences with students.

At the outset, I admit that difficulty arises in generalizing about how law deans might build and maintain relationships with students and what will work best at different law schools, which vary dramatically. As former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Tip O'Neill is often credited as famously saying, "All politics is local."<sup>3</sup> Importantly, local variations exist between law schools; so, variations obviously will exist in the relationships between the law school dean and students at any particular law school. Many factors may significantly affect that relationship, from the size of the student body, to the architecture of the law school building(s), to the personality of the dean. Of course, my experiences as Dean, Associate Dean, and a faculty member at UC Davis influence my analysis. Nonetheless, I hope to offer some more general lessons.

Part I of this essay sketches the nature of the relationship between the law school dean and students at UC Davis School of Law, the law school where I have the privilege to serve as Dean. Part II sketches a process-oriented approach to the administration's response to student interests and concerns.

### I. UC DAVIS SCHOOL OF LAW

I am the Dean of the University of California, Davis School of Law, a relatively small public law school with roughly 600 students.<sup>4</sup> The law school has a flat hierarchical structure, as well as the tradition of having an inclusive, community-oriented culture. Our faculty members are committed to research and scholarly excellence (there really is no choice in the University of California system), but also generally share a commitment to effective teaching, and thus to law students. The UC Davis School of Law is generally known for a strong sense of community among faculty, students, staff, and alumni, which is fostered by the relatively small student body.

The law school at UC Davis is housed in one building, Martin Luther King Jr. Hall, which is graced with a statue of Dr. King in the lobby. Its name affects the character of the faculty and students who we attract. The students, alumni, faculty, and staff often refer to the law school as King Hall. Although most of our graduates go into private practice, the student body generally has a strong social consciousness and public service orientation.<sup>5</sup>

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3. TIP O'NEILL, MAN OF THE HOUSE 26 (1987) (stating that his father passed this famous adage on to him).

4. See ABA-LSAC OFFICIAL GUIDE TO ABA-APPROVED SCHOOLS: 2011 EDITION 158-59 (2010).

5. This public service commitment is exemplified by the law school's clinical programs, including a civil rights clinic, family protection clinic, and immigration clinic. See generally Kevin R. Johnson & Amagda Pérez, *Clinical Legal Education and the U.C. Davis Immigration Law Clinic: Putting Theory into Practice and Practice into Theory*, 51 SMU L. REV. 1423 (1998) (analyzing the pedagogical foundations of law school's immigration law clinic).

All classes ordinarily are held in King Hall. Getting to know students as a faculty member and as dean is relatively easy. Indeed, given that the law school, faculty offices, and the student body are located in one building, it would be difficult (even if one wanted) to avoid interaction with students regularly when the law school is in session.

After a stint in private practice, I joined the law faculty in 1989, became Associate Dean in 1998, and served in that position for ten years. Before becoming Associate Dean, I was a tenured member of the law faculty and regularly carried a full teaching load at the law school.<sup>6</sup> As Associate Dean, I primarily focused on the scholarship, hiring, and promotion of law faculty; however, I worked at various times with students and student groups. I interacted regularly with student organizations, such as the *UC Davis Law Review* and other journals in organizing and providing financial support for symposia. I also worked with various students and student groups on a variety of issues (and at times, responded to student complaints concerning faculty members, staff, curriculum, and other matters). These experiences and many of those relationships generally carried forward in my role as Dean of the law school, which commenced in 2008.

As Dean, I have continued to enjoy working with students. I remain a faculty advisor to La Raza Law Students Association and, when my schedule permits, I attend its meetings. I make every effort to attend an array of student events during the school year, such as the annual public interest auction and a variety of lunchtime panels, presentations, potlucks, and dinners. Like many deans, I regularly interact with the leadership of many student groups, including the Law Students Association, the Moot Court Board, Black Law Students Association, King Hall Legal Foundation (which raises money for summer public interest internships for students), Korean American Law Students Association, Lambda Law Students Association, Asian Pacific American Law Students Association, Intellectual Property Law Students Association, Real Estate Law Society, Jewish Law Students Association, Filipino Law Students Association, Middle Eastern and South Asian Law Students Association, and many other organizations.

Since this generation is in the electronic age, students often send me e-mails—often registering complaints, offering suggestions and comments, and almost invariably providing information. I employ a Facebook account and a UC Davis School of Law fan page in an effort to keep students and alums up-to-date on law school news and activities. I also have sent text messages and e-mails to students, as well as called by telephone, to convince them to attend UC Davis School of Law. Using the Internet and other electronic means to communicate has been a subject of an entire article in and of itself.<sup>7</sup> To avoid any

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6. For my biographical sketch, see *Faculty & Administration—Kevin R. Johnson*, U.C. DAVIS SCH. OF LAW, <http://www.law.ucdavis.edu/faculty/Johnson/index.aspx> (last visited Mar. 23, 2011).

7. See generally Frederic White, *The Trouble with Email: Suspect Every Negative Declaration*, 37 U. TOL. L. REV. 191 (2005). For an article on the importance generally of communication by the law dean with the law school community, see generally Melissa A. Essary,

miscommunications attached to failing to respond to an e-mail (such as having silence being interpreted as a sign of disrespect, if not malevolence), I have always striven to respond in some form to virtually almost all e-mails from faculty and students in a timely manner.

Besides current students, as Dean I am regularly in contact with prospective students and speak at events held by various undergraduate pre-law organizations. I also engage in other efforts to encourage applicants to apply to UC Davis School of Law.<sup>8</sup>

From talking to people at other law schools, I understand that other law deans, especially those at the most elite law schools, have fewer interactions with law students than I do and are much less engaged with the student body. Deans at other schools often have considerably more distance from students than I do, which can be viewed in certain respects as a benefit. It unquestionably saves time for these deans, as there are too few hours in the day for which there is an incredible amount of fierce competition.

For example, my own law school experience did not include many, if any, personal interactions with the Dean. And I never thought that I could complain to the Dean about anything, much less visit his office. E-mail was not available at the time, and the possibility of leaving a note or telephone message for, much less visiting the Dean of Harvard Law School, simply never crossed my mind. I doubt that it crossed the minds of many of my classmates. I never visited the Dean's office, and I am still not sure where it was even located in the rather massive law school complex. Indeed, my memory is altogether fuzzy about who the Dean even was during my law school years.

I must admit that my interactions with students as Dean at UC Davis have changed in number and kind from when I was a faculty member and Associate Dean. The most salient differences are that in my role as Dean, I am much more likely to receive complaints, including complaints about other deans, faculty, and staff, well-intentioned advice about just about everything—large and small alike—at the law school, and requests for funds than in my previous law school roles.

To some degree, students may have changed over time. Over the years, rapid increases in student fees resulting from reductions in state funding have been accompanied by students making increasing demands of public law schools like ours. Some have observed that high-fees paying students apparently view themselves more as consumers than as students.<sup>9</sup> Viewing the law school as a commercial enterprise, they often see the dean as the “boss” of the law school and often expect their complaints, including those about the faculty and the

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*Confessions of a Dean: Barriers and Breakthroughs to Communications*, 40 U. TOL. L. REV. 333 (2009).

8. For example, I prepared a lengthy on-line interview that was designed to provide general information about the law school application process and the selection of a law school to attend, as well as to attract applicants to UC Davis School of Law. See *Interview with Kevin Johnson, Dean of the U.C. Davis School of Law*, TOP-LAW-SCHOOLS.COM, <http://www.top-law-schools.com/kevin-johnson-interview.html> (last visited Mar. 23, 2011).

9. See White, *supra* note 7, at 191 (referring to “the new breed of law students characterized by some academics as the ‘consumer generation’”).

curriculum, to be addressed immediately, if not instantaneously, just like those of consumers. Along those lines, students often expect substantial—if not definitive—input into certain law school policies and practices, as well as the operation of certain offices, such as career services.<sup>10</sup>

Students are one of the groups to which deans are accountable. Deans, as only deans can know, must seek to advance the hopes and dreams of many different constituencies, including faculty, alumni, staff, campus administrators, community leaders, and students.<sup>11</sup> Although student interests are important, the interests of various constituencies at times conflict. A skillful dean must carefully balance those interests. Importantly, as with other complex institutions, some constituencies are not much concerned with the needs or interests of other constituencies.

Finally, as I previously mentioned, it goes without saying that student interactions can be time-consuming, and, at times, emotionally-draining and nothing less than exhausting. Even if devoting time to students is unusual among law school deans, I believe that the allocation of time that I have to students has proven to be beneficial in the aggregate and saved me time in the long run. My interactions with students have offered me several important lessons about law school leadership, which I briefly summarize in Part II.

## II. A PROCESS-BASED APPROACH TO THE LAW DEAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH STUDENTS

Upon a bit of reflection, one realizes that the dean's decisions with respect to students are vitally important to the law school's overall health. Many of the dean's duties directly involve and impact law students.

Importantly, deans must work collaboratively with students to build a positive student culture.<sup>12</sup> Hopefully, such a culture will allow a law school to keep up with the competition, ensure student satisfaction, and create community-spirited and supportive alumni.

In this vein, deans must work to create and maintain a cohesive and supportive law school community for students, faculty, and staff.<sup>13</sup> With the assistance of the Associate Dean, Dean of Students, and faculty, deans also must

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10. See Frank T. Read, *The Unique Role of the Law School Dean in American Legal Education*, 51 J. LEGAL EDUC. 389, 392 (2001).

11. See Kevin R. Johnson, Commentary, *Session 1: Deciding to Become a Dean*, 31 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 813, 814-15 (2008) (mentioning the many different fears that different constituencies have based on their different interests about a prospective law school dean).

12. See David E. Van Zandt, *Building the Student Culture*, 37 U. TOL. L. REV. 171 (2005). See also Barry R. Vickrey, *Session 2: Understanding the Dean's Job*, 31 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 833, 834 (2008) (explaining how the dean's community-oriented functions include that of serving as a "pastor" to the law school community).

13. See generally Patrick K. Hetrick, *The Quest to Achieve True "Top Quartile" Status: Creating and Sustaining an Affirming Law School Community*, 39 U. TOL. L. REV. 305 (2008).

maintain a curriculum that prepares students to assume leadership roles in U.S. society, as well as to “think like a lawyer.”<sup>14</sup>

Despite the law school dean’s important role vis-à-vis students, scant attention has been paid to the dean’s relationship with students. In some ways, this lack of attention is understandable because almost all deans were at one time law professors. Faculty members have experience with students and frequently believe that they know everything necessary about how to deal with them. In contrast, many new deans understand that they have an incredible amount to learn with respect to alumni relations and development. Consequently, new deans at least initially tend to be more open to learning about these parts of the dean’s job than hearing more about student relations. Although new deans have experience with students and believe that they have the skill set for dealing with them, new deans may not be ready for the challenges of their *new* relationship with students as dean, rather than as a member of the teaching faculty.

My experience as a law school dean suggests that the dean’s interactions with law students differ in important ways from faculty interactions with students. A few deans have written about how deans might effectively interact with students. The dean of deans, Iowa’s Bill Hines, thoughtfully discussed the importance of placing student interests first as an institutional priority.<sup>15</sup> In this vein, Washington University School of Law Dean Kent Syverud sent out a humorous reminder in the summer of 2010 to fellow deans about the importance of considering student interests in law school decisions; it replicated a traffic sign reading “and this would be good for students because ...?” The sign now sits prominently on the desk in my office. Lawrence Dessem also compiled a thoughtful “top ten list” of ways that deans can build positive relationships with students.<sup>16</sup>

Student interests vary significantly from other constituencies’ interests, such as faculty, staff, alumni, and campus administrators. This difference is not surprising in the least, but probably holds true for many constituencies of most complex institutions of any size. Although their interests may differ from those of other groups, students do value the same fundamental types of process and treatment that these other constituencies demand and appreciate.<sup>17</sup> In reality,

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14. See Donald J. Polden, *Educating Law Students for Leadership Roles and Responsibilities*, 39 U. TOL. L. REV. 353 (2008); Rex R. Perschbacher, *The Public Responsibilities of a Public Law School*, 31 U. TOL. L. REV. 693, 695-96 (2000). Although a young law school, UC Davis has had alumni who have assumed high positions in the government of the State of California. Most recently, this includes Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, see Bob Egelko, *Filipina Nominated as Chief Justice*, S.F. CHRON., July 22, 2010, at A1; President Pro Tem of the California Senate, see Patrick McGreevy & Nancy Vogel, *Veteran to Fill Perata’s Post; Democrat Darrell Steinberg Will Take Over as State Senate Leader Later This Year*, L.A. TIMES, Feb. 8, 2008; and Majority Leader of the California Assembly, *It’s Politics: Assemblyman Charles Calderon Named Majority Leader*, WHITTIER DAILY NEWS (Cal.), Mar. 26, 2010.

15. See generally N. William Hines, *Are Students A Dean’s Primary Constituency?*, 31 U. TOL. L. REV. 629 (2000).

16. See generally R. Lawrence Dessem, *Ten Things Deans Can Do with Students*, 35 U. TOL. L. REV. 45 (2003).

17. See generally John L. Carroll, *Value-Based Deaning*, 40 U. TOL. L. REV. 327 (2009).

students are not different in this all-important way from the law school dean's other constituencies. This simple, but at times elusive, realization can inform the dean's interactions with students.

Here are some of the key ingredients to a process-based approach to students that I have found to work fairly well.

A. *Respect*

Students want to be respected, and they want the law school leadership to respect their requests, complaints, suggestions, and comments. The dean can demonstrate this respect on a regular basis by attending student events, listening to student complaints, concerns, and suggestions, and providing effective and efficient student services. It goes without saying that, in all interactions, I also demand respect by students toward me and faculty, staff, fellow students, and others.

Importantly, building a reservoir of respect with students in times of tranquility can greatly assist the dean in working effectively with students in times of crisis. Faculty, staff, alumni, and campus administrators are no different in their demand for and expectation of respect. For me, seeking to build a relationship founded on respect has proven to be valuable and much-appreciated. It has also contributed to my job satisfaction.

B. *The Opportunity to Be Heard*

Like faculty, staff, and alumni, students want to have their voices heard, not ignored.<sup>18</sup> They do not want to feel that it is futile to raise issues with the law school administration. Rather, students want to believe that the dean listens to them, takes their concerns seriously, has a general understanding of their feelings and issues, and, when appropriate, "feels their pain."

A dean definitely does not want or need students to invoke some kind of "futility exception" and avoid the dean's office when a problem arises. It is no fun, for example, for the dean when students maneuver around the dean to the university president with a complaint.

C. *Accessibility*

Like faculty, alumni, students, and staff, students want to feel as if they have access to the dean. For a dean to simply meet and listen to students means a lot to them, just as it does to faculty, staff, and alumni.

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18. See *Mullane v. Central Hanover Bank & Trust Co.*, 339 U.S. 306, 314 (1950) (holding that "[t]he fundamental requisite of due process of law is the opportunity to be heard."); Lucie E. White, *Subordination, Rhetorical Survival Skills, and Sunday Shoes: Notes on the Hearing of Mrs. G.*, 38 BUFF. L. REV. 1 (1990) (analyzing importance and value of a welfare recipient client being able to present her case at a hearing).



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Of course, time demands on the dean must be carefully balanced and efficiently rationed. Nonetheless, student access to the dean must be factored into the mix.

*D. Transparency*

Like just about everyone else, students appreciate consultative, transparent decision-making in which they feel that they have a say. Students are precisely like faculty, staff, and alumni in this regard. They want to have input, and desire to know how and why a decision is made. It often proves valuable to share information, even if the recipients ignore it, which in my experience happens with the many constituencies that the law school administration regularly attempts to keep in the informational loop.

*E. The Value of a Process-Based Approach to Students*

As with all law school constituencies, process has value in the interactions with students and decisions affecting students. No dean can give students—or faculty, staff, and alumni, for that matter—everything they might want. All deans, however, can ensure that a process exists in which students can be made to feel respected, heard, have access to the relevant decision-makers, and know how and why the decisions that affect them are made. At a minimum, law school deans can provide this process for students.

Most importantly, I have found that decisions that students may not want are more readily (even if grudgingly) accepted if students feel that they were treated with respect, able to communicate their concerns, and informed of the reasoning behind the decision. This process is important because no constituency can reasonably expect all decisions to go their way.

I recall two different law school incidents revealing the power of these insights. A few years ago, an African American student group at an elite law school shared with me a list of demands to the administration. There had been an unfortunate racist incident by a student that upset many students at the law school.<sup>19</sup> The student group's first demand requested a meeting with the dean and associate dean, who, the students alleged, had flatly refused to discuss the matter with them. One wonders why the deans had refused to meet. Refusing to even talk with the students strikes me as a self-inflicted wound. Access is translated as respect; denial of access is viewed as a sign of great disrespect. Moreover, the dean can always gain information from hearing student concerns and giving students an opportunity to be heard.

When students demand a meeting, they think that the matter is important enough to meet. For that reason alone, it is probably important for the law school administration—and in many circumstances, the dean—to meet with student

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19. See Alex P. Kellogg, *Racially Charged Incidents Create Uproar at Harvard Law School*, CHRON. HIGHER EDUC., May 3, 2002, at 38, available at <http://chronicle.com/article/Racially-Charged-Incidents/9294> (last visited Mar. 23, 2011).

groups when they request a meeting. Often, a meeting is a critical step in remedying a problem situation or relationship.

The other event occurred at UC Davis. During the terrifying time that letters with poisonous anthrax were being sent by mail shortly after the events of September 11, 2001, our La Raza Law Students Association—along with a number of other Latina/o organizations in northern California—received a hate letter with white powder enclosed.<sup>20</sup> The letter's message was gross and hurtful, as well as undeniably racist; the good news is that the FBI ultimately determined that the white powder was innocuous nondairy coffee creamer. I was the Associate Dean at the time. While law enforcement investigated the incident, the students demanded immediate action. They felt hurt, disrespected, and vulnerable. The law school administration—led by a thoughtful and sensitive dean—responded in a simple way, and more or less said to the students: “[W]e do not have experience with this kind of matter. We want to do what is right. What do you think we should do?” Students in my Latina/os and the law class suggested that the law school respond with a public forum to discuss the matter.<sup>21</sup>

The administration took the students' suggestion to heart and organized a public forum, moderated by civil rights icon Cruz Reynoso, a faculty member and former Associate Justice on the California Supreme Court.<sup>22</sup> The forum drew a crowd of faculty, students, and staff, and gave the greater community a chance to voice how they felt violated. Everyone was given the opportunity to allow their outrage to be heard. This public event began a community healing process that ultimately proved to be successful.

The law school administration's contrasting responses to these troubling and difficult incidents suggest to me that students desire the same respect, opportunity to be heard, accessibility to the administration, and transparency in decision-making that other law school interest groups demand. As Tom Sullivan emphasized, the law dean's job is much about “managing” relationships among various constituencies.<sup>23</sup> While people do not like to think of themselves as being “managed,” the efforts of managers who respect these people offer them

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20. See Heath Druzin, *FBI Investigating Hate Mail Sent to UC-Davis Latino Organization*, CAL. AGGIE, Mar. 14, 2002.

21. I admit that deans of color may have slightly different relationships with minority students and student groups than other deans. See generally LeRoy Pernell, *Deans of Color Speak Out: Unique Voice in a Unique Role*, 20 B.C. THIRD WORLD L.J. 43 (2000). I identify as a Latino and have served as a faculty advisor to the UC Davis La Raza Law Students Association for many years. See generally KEVIN R. JOHNSON, *HOW DID YOU GET TO BE MEXICAN? A WHITE/BROWN MAN'S SEARCH FOR IDENTITY* (1999) (offering autobiographical account of person of mixed Anglo/Mexican-American heritage). As is the case with faculty and students, efforts have been made in recent years to diversify the corps of law school deans. See, e.g., Symposium, *Encouraging Diversity in Law School Deanships*, 31 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 737 (2008).

22. For a biographical sketch of Reynoso, see *Faculty & Administration—Cruz Reynoso*, U.C. DAVIS SCH. OF LAW, <http://www.law.ucdavis.edu/faculty/Reynoso/index.aspx> (last visited Mar. 23, 2011). A documentary about his life, “Sowing the Seeds of Justice,” was completed in 2009. See *Cruz Reynoso: Sowing the Seeds of Justice*, <http://www.reynosofilm.org/HOME.html> (last visited Mar. 23, 2011).

23. See generally E. Thomas Sullivan, *Decanal Leadership: Managing Relationships*, 31 U. TOL. L. REV. 749 (2000).

the opportunity to be heard, ensure accessibility to the decision-makers, and act transparently in decision-making.

Understanding the fundamental values of a general process for addressing the concerns and demands of various law school interest groups have made my task as Dean easier. It also helps to justify my accessibility to—some might say excessive interactions with—students.

Of course, there is a cost to this kind of approach allowing the dean to be relatively accessible to students. As any dean knows, a dean's time is incredibly scarce. Offering students time for discussion and, at times, debate, depletes a scarce resource. Still, I have found it to be a good investment of my time because "building a strong relationship with students provides helpful reserves of political capital upon which to draw during times of student tension and unrest."<sup>24</sup> More generally, "[a] healthy relationship with students is beneficial to one's deanship, law school, and to the dean herself [or himself]."<sup>25</sup> In my estimation, it is deficient for the dean to only deal with any of his or her constituencies in a time of crisis, when tempers may be short and intransigent positions more likely to be taken.

#### CONCLUSION

In this essay, I have drawn some basic lessons from my experience with law students about how a law school dean might build and maintain positive relationships with students. Deans ignore students at their peril, and they cannot satisfy their entire constituency's or any constituency's demands, or follow all of their suggestions. As with other leadership roles, deans must work hard to listen to students, faculty, staff, alumni, and other interest groups, and offer the respect, opportunity to be heard, accessibility, and transparency in decision-making that students demand, value, and in my experience and appreciate. Through collaboration with students, just as with other constituencies, deans and law schools can create an environment that ensures students receive a high quality legal education and the support that they need to thrive in law school.

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24. Dessem, *supra* note 16, at 45.

25. *Id.* Dean Dessem offers a "top ten list" of ways that deans can interact constructively and positively with students. *See id.* at 45-54.