

Dean's Remarks:
J.D. Orientation—Class of 2028
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Thank you, President Woloshyn. I look forward to working with you and your fellow student leaders in the coming year.

I also want to express my gratitude to Dean Iwerebon and the Admissions Office for bringing all of you here to Columbia Law School. And to Dean Saavedra and her team in Student Services for their work in planning this week's orientation.

Let's give them a round of applause!

Dean Iwerebon did an excellent job of heralding your many talents and experiences. It could not be clearer that this is a group of exceptional individuals.

Individuals who hail from around the country and the world. Individuals who represent wildly different backgrounds and life experiences. Individuals who have come to Columbia with an overriding desire to gain mastery of the law and make an impact in the world. Up until now, this is exactly how we have known you. As individuals.

But, beginning today, you are no longer just individuals. You are the Columbia Law School J.D. Class of 2028. And it is one of the great perks of my job as Dean to welcome you as you begin your Columbia Law School journey.

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As President Woloshyn mentioned, I came to Columbia last summer. So, that means I just finished my first year in the job. And I can tell you from experience that it can take a bit of time to find your bearings around here.

Some things are a little confusing at first:

Like the fact that Low Library—that imposing, domed building at the center of Columbia’s campus—is actually not a library at all. Or that the Manhattanville campus, where we are right now, is different from the Morningside campus, where the Law School is, even though they are just five blocks apart and both begin with the letter “M”. Or that there is a difference between William and June Warren Hall—which we call “Big Warren”—and William C. Warren Hall—which we call “Little Warren”. Yes, they are, in fact, different buildings.

Nevertheless, Class of 2028. Rest assured that you will come to learn these Columbia quirks in no time. I have not confused these locations for at least a few weeks now.

But, I am glad to see that you have arrived in the right place today. And by that, I mean you have made the right decision in choosing Columbia Law School. This institution has a proud tradition as a training ground for world-renowned, innovative, and field-defining lawyers. The sheer breadth of our offerings is simply astounding. You will take classes with some of the world’s leading legal thinkers, scholars, and practitioners. You will develop and apply your lawyering skills in the community. You will connect with classmates. You will discover new ambitions and intellectual interests. And you will be exposed to a network of alumni practicing law at the highest levels around the world.

You also join us at a pivotal moment, here on campus and in the world. You will be the first class to enjoy our spectacular new Law Library when it opens later this fall. You will shape the future in an age transformed by technology and revolutionized by artificial intelligence. And you will rise to meet the challenges facing the domestic and global order—just as Columbians before you have done time and time again.

This is the legacy you inherit. This is the opportunity before you.

Today, I want to tell you about some of the values and qualities that I believe characterize what it means to be a member of the Columbia Law School community. What I think of as the intellectual architecture that makes this institution distinctive.

Columbia is one of the world's leading institutions of higher learning. Our North Star is to advance knowledge and seek truth—no matter where it lies. We aim to teach you how to think, not what to think. We do this, first and foremost, by fostering conditions that enable free expression and the open exchange of ideas. This requires an environment in which students and faculty can express themselves and engage in open inquiry. We must grant one another the widest possible latitude to test new ideas, some of which will inevitably come into contestation and conflict with one another.

It is through this kind of open discussion, debate, and even passionate disagreement that we are able to understand the views of others, to strengthen our own ideas, and, at times, to even change our minds. If we are doing things right here at Columbia Law School, you will feel some measure of discomfort as you encounter ideas and perspectives that are different from your own. This productive discomfort is by design. When you experience it, I encourage you to begin from a place of good faith.

Why good faith? As we begin to learn, we may be using new language or expressing ideas that are not fully formed as we work to clarify our own thinking. This is even more true as we learn to interact across political, experiential, and cultural differences.

So, I ask you, the future leaders of the Law School and society, to seek to understand and engage others who have views different from your own. Don't rush to judgment, foreclose further discussion, or let disagreements come in the way of friendship. In doing so, you will be better for it. You will have contributed to making Columbia a place that can transcend differences. And you will have helped to model deep intellectual engagement and discourse in an environment of mutual respect and civility.

But it is not sufficient to simply say that we embrace free expression and welcome a wide range of viewpoints. We must create the space for dissent, disagreement, and even protest. Each and every one of us has the freedom to disagree. We can disagree with one another. We can disagree about

politics, locally, nationally, and globally. We can even disagree about positions and policies taken right here at Columbia. Our community is better when we have the ability to disagree. And when we do, we help reinforce that ideas, dialogue, and constructive engagement are non-negotiable parts of life at the Law School.

But, at the same time, this freedom to disagree is not absolute. It goes hand-in-glove with a responsibility to listen, and to engage not only with curiosity, but with civility toward one another. It also exists within a policy framework that respects reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of such actions.

Why? Because Columbia is fundamentally a truth-seeking institution, and no truth-seeking institution can be one in which protest impedes the ability to carry out the critical activities necessary to achieve that research, educational, and experiential mission.

Moreover, it is essential that faculty and students are able to share their perspectives without concern that their views may be in tension with some “institutional” position on a particular issue. This means that the Law School will not tell its community which ideas to explore, which topics to discuss, which opinions to express, or which views to reject, or take institutional positions on political or social issues. But we will defend the values that are fundamental to our core mission, like free expression, open inquiry, and respect for diverse viewpoints in an environment free from discrimination.

As Dean, I see it as my responsibility to create an environment in which views can be expressed freely without impeding the rights of others to be heard, and that the values that underpin our distinctive intellectual architecture continue to flourish.

Another element that makes Columbia Law School an extraordinary place to learn is the fabric of our community. As I mentioned earlier, at the beginning of my remarks, today marks a transition. You are now a class—a collective body. And you take up membership in the Columbia Law School community. You even have the ID cards to prove it!

Access to this exclusive network means you will automatically have a host of supporters. People who have stood in your shoes and know what it feels like to be where you are now. Your fellow JD

students. Exceptional faculty and staff. Thousands of alumni around the world. And lawyers in every sector and area of practice.

Know that each and every one of us is here to support you. Do not be afraid to seek us out. We are not only committed to your success, but to ensuring that you thrive. Not just during your time at Columbia Law School, but as lifelong members of this community and the profession. You will also become acquainted with one another. Your classmates will be a source of great strength and friendship. And, without fail, at least some of you will find partners in law, or even in life.

But this membership within this Columbia Law School also comes with responsibilities. If you see a classmate in need, reach out your hand in support. Do what you can to smooth the path for others. And, in turn, accept help when others reach out their hands to you. While you are here, find ways to support and enrich this community. Join student organizations, help those around you, and lend your voice to causes you care about.

This commitment to service is deeply ingrained in Columbia Law School's ethos. Generations of Columbians have been asked to perform acts of service in their lives and in their legal careers. And they say "yes". The call to serve might not come with election to public office or an appointment to the judiciary. It might be much more simple—representing a client pro bono, mentoring a colleague, or sharing your skills and talents with others in the community.

You will find many opportunities to serve over the next three years. Embrace them. And remember, the legal profession is rooted in helping others, both individually and in service of a well-governed society. And serving is what Columbians do.

One of the reasons I came to Columbia Law School last year is because I believed in the positive—even transformational— impact this institution can have on both individuals and the world at large. Today, as I look around the room, my belief in Columbia Law School has only strengthened. This is a place that is moving forward. And all of you will drive its progress.

Class of 2028: I welcome you and I congratulate you. I know that your time in law school will be challenging, but it will also be filled with learning, discovery, and friendship. Thank you, and I wish you all the best.