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## A Form Letter From the Dean

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# A Form Letter from the Dean

R. Lawrence Dessem

A few years ago, in "A Form Letter to the Dean," I offered the *Journal's* readers a template form letter which law school faculty could use to communicate with their deans.<sup>1</sup> In the aftermath of that article's publication, I received letters, phone calls, and small explosive devices indicating that, *mirabile dictu*, a few people had actually read the article. Because I had never before had such a response to any of what I rather loosely refer to as my scholarship, I was encouraged to write a sequel. Hence the present piece.

My current form letter is inspired by the annual Dean's Letter that increasing numbers of deans send to law school alumni, friends, and miscellaneous hangers-on. These letters serve important purposes, such as convincing university provosts and presidents that there is some useful activity occurring at the law school and that the dean is aware of at least part of it. I offer the following form letter as a starting point for any dean who would like to send a letter but may not have the time to devote to such a communication, essential though it be.

R. Lawrence Dessem is a professor and dean of the Mercer University School of Law.

1. 47 *J. Legal Educ.* 118 (1997).

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Dear [Insert No. 1]:

It is with great [Insert No. 2] that I write to you at this time. We here at [Insert the name of your law school] have had a truly [Insert No. 3] year. In this letter, I would like to share with you some of our many accomplishments.

As you know, there was a short period last winter when our law school was named the Frederick R. Snodgrass School of Law. Our chief financial officer, Charles Townsend, arranged for the school's naming rights to be auctioned on eBay. Unfortunately, only Frederick R. Snodgrass bid in this electronic auction, and his bid of \$12.97 thus carried the day. Later negotiations with Mr. Snodgrass and his parents resulted in the restoration of our school's original name, and I am proud to announce that a full-tuition law school scholarship has been granted to Mr. Snodgrass upon his graduation from elementary school and successful completion of the online Ph.D program in which he now is enrolled. We have crossed out "The Frederick R. Snodgrass School of Law" on this letter, and we ask you to ignore this heading on our other stationery (on which Mr. Townsend received a terrific discount by having a twenty-year supply printed shortly before we reinstated the law school's original name).

Speaking of Mr. Townsend, I am sorry to inform you that he has left the law school to pursue other professional and unprofessional opportunities. If he is pursuing any of you, please notify the university's general counsel immediately.

We have made great strides here at the law school with respect to technology. Our most recent technological advances include [Insert No. 4]. We also are investigating new yellow-legal-pad technologies that will permit our faculty and staff to write on both sides of their legal pads without the ink leaking through to the paper's other side.

While I and all other deans decry the impact of law school rankings upon legal education, it is imperative that I bring to your attention our own showing in such a recent ranking. You will be thrilled to know that our law school ranked in the top [Insert figure of your choice] percent in a recent poll of [Insert No. 5]. I therefore can say with some confidence, and pride, that ours is and will remain the top-ranked law school at our mailing address.

Our students continue to take the [Insert No. 6] examination in record numbers. So as not to compromise the confidentiality of any of these students (or embarrass our law school), we have continued our policy of not reporting the success rates of our students on this exam. Please ignore those chronically unreliable percentages released by the State Board of Examiners.

Our virtual speaker series is now being copied by law schools across the nation. As you will recall, we pay noted speakers not to speak at our law school--provided that we can list their names in publications such as this. Thus we avoid

Inserts for Form Letter

*Insert No. 1*

- a. Alumni, Friends, and Those Who Vote in the U.S. News Rankings or Have the Potential to Give More than \$100 to Our Law School
- b. Friends, Romans, and Countrymen
- c. Folks on the NPR Mailing List
- d. Folks on the NRA Mailing List

*Insert No. 2*

- a. pleasure
- b. sadness
- c. disgust
- d. trepidation

*Insert No. 3*

- a. outstanding
- b. disappointing
- c. bizarre
- d. forgettable

*Insert No. 4*

- a. the installation of pay telephones in all faculty offices
- b. the conversion of our former stables to a small parking lot for those driving self-propelled motor vehicles to work
- c. the replacement of several of our law school scribes with a photocopy machine
- d. the appointment of a committee to investigate this "Y2K problem" that we heard so much about recently

*Insert No. 5*

- a. our own graduates
- b. our own graduates who have jobs
- c. myself and my immediate family
- d. the many millions of Americans who were not counted in the 2000 census

*Insert No. 6*

- a. bar
- b. cosmetology
- c. high school proficiency
- d. driving

the many hassles (both for the speaker and for the law school) of actually arranging such talks, but we still can list these speakers to impress alumni, prospective students, and others. Among those who did not speak at the law school this past year were [Insert No. 7].

Our moot court teams remain undefeated this year, and I am sure that this record will only improve once they enter an actual competition. Our own new [Insert No. 8] Moot Court Competition is off to a great start. Frankly, it was difficult to come up with a subject matter for a competition that had not already been adopted by one law school or another. But by adopting the specialty that we have, limiting the competition to law schools within a half-mile radius of our school, and failing to publicize the competition, we have assured the success of our own teams in this new competition for many years to come.

At this year's commencement, we were proud to confer an honorary degree upon Bill Gates (who received a certified mail invitation to speak at the commencement but nevertheless chose not to attend). Indeed, all those listed by *Fortune* magazine as "the 100 wealthiest Americans" received honorary degrees, in absentia, this past spring. It is our hope that they, and all of our other alumni, will remember their alma mater during our ongoing capital campaign. If you contribute at least \$100 to this campaign, in recognition of your gift we will [Insert No. 9].

All of us here at the law school thank you for [Insert No. 10]. Please [Insert No. 11].

Very truly yours,  
Your Dean

*Insert No. 7*

- a. Earl Warren
- b. Warren Burger
- c. Burger King
- d. King George

*Insert No. 8*

- a. Third Amendment
- b. Eighteenth Amendment
- c. Statute of Limitations
- d. Rule Against Perpetuities

*Insert No. 9*

- a. name a classroom after you
- b. send you a very nice toaster
- c. write a letter of good character to your probation officer
- d. never send you one of these mindless letters again

*Insert No. 10*

- a. your support
- b. your patience
- c. your hearty appetite
- d. leaving us alone

*Insert No. 11*

- a. keep us in your prayers
- b. send money
- c. stay out of trouble
- d. use sunscreen