

Town Hall with Dean Kerry Abrams 10192020

BRANDON NEAL: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is Brandon Neal. And as president of the Law Alumni Association Board, I actually have the distinct pleasure of welcoming you to this first ever virtual reunion of 2020 and our first program of this virtual reunion. So thank you all for joining in. And hopefully, you will find this rewarding.

And then, although we're unable to be in Durham on campus and enjoying the good weather during this time of year, we're hopeful that this will still be an opportunity for us to connect and really just continue to engage with the alumni community and with Duke Law. And so we really thank you for being here today. And we're so excited that we have so many folks, so many alumni, joining from around the world and taking this opportunity to connect with each other.

Before we get started and I actually introduce what I came here to introduce, I would like to just highlight a little bit about the Law Alumni Association if you aren't familiar with it. So the good news is that you're all members of the Law Alumni Association. All Duke Law graduates are members. So we have over 12,000 members worldwide. And I would like to give a special kudos to our Law Alumni Association Board that works very actively.

And so our mission as a board is to serve our alumni community by sharing the law school activities, priorities, and intellectual resources, and also represent the interests of the alumni to the dean and the Duke Law school and staff. And so I would like to give special thanks to the board, as well as to all of our alumni volunteers who are here, and especially the reunion committee volunteers who have extended their service into the fall for this first ever virtual reunion. So thank you very much.

The other thing I'll just note at the very top is that, during this time in particular, the law school could really use our additional support, and really encourage you to stay involved the Law Alumni Association-- being able to take advantage of the virtual, of not having to travel, and really being easily to just hop on Zoom, engage with the student, engage with faculty, and just all the programming that will come out of this time-- just really using this opportunity to further engage with the law community. And it really benefits the school, both intellectually, professionally, as well as socially. So thank you [AUDIO OUT].

So I will actually do what I came here to do today, which is the distinct honor of introducing Dean Kerry Abrams. I know many of you know Dean Abrams. She became the James B. Duke and Benjamin N. Duke dean of the law school and professor of law on July 1, 2018. I don't think she could have anticipated, within two years of her tenure, that she would be dealing with COVID-19 and everything that has come out of it. But she has handled it with grace and really just been a shining light for the law school community.

She, as many of you know, is a scholar of immigration, citizenship, family, and constitutional law. Dean Abrams is also well-known for her scholarly writing on family-based migration, the legal regulation of immigrant families, and the history of immigration law. From a personal perspective, I can tell you that one of the best parts of serving on the LAA board and also being engaged as an alumni has been the opportunity to get to know Dean Abrams even more than I

would just from hearing these town halls. And she is an amazing asset to the law school, and just look forward to what she's going to do throughout these troubling times, and also going into the future when we emerge from the other side.

So with that, Dean Abrams, I'll hand it off to you and be back later on for some Q&A.

KERRY ABRAMS: Great. Thank you so much, Brandon. And I so appreciate that really, really gracious introduction. It was not the job I signed up for. And I'm sure that, when you decided to be the Law Alumni Association president, you weren't anticipating a pandemic, either.

But we have all been working hard to adapt to really unusual circumstances. And the law school is doing so well. And a lot of it is a result of your leadership. So I thank you and all the members of the Alumni Association Board.

And welcome to all of you who are here for your virtual reunion. I've gotten to some of you through my travels before our traveling was cut off. But for many of you, this is my first time greeting you as your dean.

I became dean just a couple of years ago. And I want to share with you today some of the trip down memory lane that I hope that you would get to have during a reunion, and also what the law school is doing right now-- so what's new since you left, whether it was 50 years ago, or just or just five years ago.

Before I get started, I want to thank all of you for your patience and generosity during this difficult time. I know it's disappointing not to be able to have a reunion in person. I feel like the whole COVID pandemic has dealt disappointment after disappointment to all of us. And I so appreciate your willingness to show up in a very different format and engage with us in a different way in an unusual time.

So to start off, I'm going to try sharing my screen, because we have gone through our archives and found all sorts of interesting pictures to share with you that I think will make this experience fun today. So let me try sharing my screen. There, I think that looks good.

And I want to start out with some then and now. So what was law school like when you were a student at Duke Law? And what is it like now? And we have tried to images from our reunion years. So a lot of these images are from 1980, or 2015, or 1970, the zeros and the fives. And for the most part, we've been able to find images that we think you will recognize.

So starting out, even our own appearance has changed a lot over time. And we found here a picture of a group of Duke Law students-- maybe it's some of you-- in 1980, a group of you in 2000. And then you'll see today, in 2020, we're social distancing. So here, we have a group of just one student leaving the law school in his mask a couple of weeks ago.

In 1980, we had a building. From what many of you have told me, the building reminded you of a high school, or maybe a junior high school. And there are lots of affectionate complaints about the state of the building before it was remodeled.

Today, the Duke Law building looks like this. It's much bigger and fancier than it was before. The biggest addition is the glass addition that you see in the front, which is the Star Commons, which has really been the heart of the school in many ways.

In normal times, when we are eating together without masks and sitting much more closely together, it is the cafeteria for the law school. During lunchtime, it fills up with students, and faculty, and staff who are eating lunch together from our cafe. It's also the room in which I greet the first-year class on their very first day of class. This year, I did that over Zoom. But we've changed a lot in our physical plan over the last 40 years.

Our student body has also changed. So here's a picture of the class of 1975. If you're a 1975-er, you can try to find yourself and your friends in this picture. In 1975, we graduated 143 students. 15% of those students were women, and only 3% were students of color. So we were a coeducational and integrated institution, but we were not very diverse. And that has changed remarkably since then.

So here's our current class. And here's a picture of some of our current students hanging out outside the law school in their masks. Currently, we have a JD class of 239 students, 57% of whom are women, and 33% are students of color.

And I want to say something quickly about both of those numbers. One of the things I was told during the dean search was that we really wanted to get over 50%, or at least up to 50%, for women students. We've been lingering around 43%, 44% year to year.

And I'm very, very proud and excited that, over the last three years, we have at least 50% women every year, which is consistent with the applicant pool across the country. And so whatever was in the water where women thought that Duke Law was not a friendly place to come-- that has changed. And they are saying yes to our offers now.

We have also gone up on our students of color significantly. And this year, we had the largest group of Latinx students that we have ever had in the history of the school. So we're very excited about the payoff that we're seeing in our recruiting for more diversity in our class in all sorts of ways.

You'll see here we're also very diverse in terms of the number of states, undergraduates, institutions, and even countries that our JD students come from. Their average age is 24. Many of them have had some time off between college and law school. And they come to us from all around the country and all around the world.

We also have an LLM class each year. The LLM is a one-year program for international lawyers. The average age of our LLM students is 28. Most of them have practiced law for several years. And remember, in most countries, the law degree is a undergraduate degree. And so at age 28, they really have been practicing for quite a while.

Normally, we have about 90 or 95 LLM students join us each year. This year, we saw a big decrease in the number who were able to get here this fall. Because of COVID, many countries

had immigration restrictions that meant that students couldn't leave to come here. We also had our own immigration restrictions on visas. They couldn't get visas to come to the United States. And there was also just a general fear of coming here during a pandemic.

So we had only 23 students start this fall. But we have about 67 who think they might start in January. We will see whether that actually happens. The travel restrictions have loosened up, but there is still some question about whether people will want to come to a law school and be physically present for what will still be a largely online experience. But we are hoping to have more of our LLM students join us this spring.

So let's go back to 1970 and talk about our faculty. In 1970, we had 23 tenured and tenure track professors and only six other instructors. And that included visiting professors, adjuncts, staff attorneys, and clinics.

And you can see from this picture just how dressed up you all were in 1970. Students don't dress this way for class anymore. They already didn't. And now, I think, the most common outfit has been what we call the Zoom mullet, which is a nice shirt on top and sweat pants or stretch pants on the bottom. At least, that's often my outfit.

In 2020, we have gone up in our number of faculty. So we have many more tenured and tenure track faculty than we used to have. We now have 50. But the biggest change in our faculty has actually been in professors who teach classes about legal skills. So we have professors of the practice, clinical professors, legal research, and writing professors.

Here, you see Professor Rebecca Rich who is a legal research and writing professor teaching a class on Zoom where she's in a classroom, but many of the students are participating from home on their computers. And I want to briefly just give a shout out to Professor Rich for the incredible work that she's done this year. She won the Teaching Award last year. Students voted her as the winner of the Distinguished Teaching Award. And many of them mentioned in their nominations of her how much they appreciated her ability to pivot so quickly and well when we went online last spring due to COVID.

And so this year, she has been chairing our Teaching and Learning committee. And she has been coordinating our efforts faculty wide to make sure that we give a really good experience, whether it's online or hybrid, to our students during this time. And she's just done a fantastic job of helping our faculty to get really good at teaching in a way that they never expected that they were going to have to teach.

So here are some of the professors that you may have had at Duke Law School. And these pictures, I believe, were all taken sometime between 1979 and 1989. So if you're in the class of 1980 or more recently, you probably recognize some of these people.

Now, obviously, not all of your professors are still with us. Some of them have passed away. Some of them have retired. Some of them have moved on to other things. But this group of faculty are still all teaching at Duke Law School, and I wanted to celebrate the longevity of their service.

So here's what they look like today. And I'm curious about whether you guessed who they were, or if you remembered them. All of these professors are still actively teaching.

Sara Beale is teaching first-year criminal law. Don Beskind is teaching evidence and trial practice. Jim Cox is still a incredibly popular business associations and securities regulations professor. Deborah DeMott is teaching torts, and agency law, and actually teaches a very popular course on art law right now, and is writing a book about art law. Tom Metzloff has been instrumental in our ability to keep our International LLM program going this year, teaching distinctive aspects of United States law to our LLM students.

Jeff Powell teaches constitutional law and helped us to launch a First Amendment clinic over the last few years. And Rich Schmalbeck is still teaching tax law. So now I'll just go back for one second so you could see again. The difference in hairstyles alone is really astonishing.

And of course, we don't just keep our wonderful faculty. We're delighted to retain our top faculty. But we also hire new ones. And as you saw, there's a much, much larger number of faculty here than there was when this group started.

I don't have time to show you all of them right now, but I did want to share the three faculty who joined or are joining our tenured faculty this year. And they are Gina-Gail Fletcher, Tim Lovelace, and Shitong Qiao. And I just wanted to say a brief word about each of them.

Gina-Gaail Fletcher is a corporate law professor. She visited here and taught a class for us, taught a business associations class last year. And I have never seen such a strong and enthusiastic reaction from students for a visiting professor. A lot of them told me that they didn't understand what corporate law was or why they would want to do it until they took her class. And now, they're completely sold. And she made it accessible to them and really helped them understand why it could be a rewarding career.

Tim Lovelace started here this fall. He was actually my student in my first year of teaching at the University of Virginia in 2005. He went on to get a PhD in addition to his JD and is a civil rights historian. And he's teaching a really great seminar this fall on the legal history of the civil rights movement. And I've heard from students in that class. They've told me how exciting it is to get to study the civil rights movement in this moment right now where we're experiencing a different but equally important civil rights movement in this country.

And then, finally, Shitong Qiao is joining us at some point soon. Travel issues continue to be a problem in coming from far away. But he is currently a professor at the University of Hong Kong, and will be joining us as soon as he can to teach property and comparative property law. And we can't wait to have him join us.

So the curriculum has also changed since some of you were students. In 1985, we had 90 courses for 576 JD students. I can't look at a picture like this without thinking and pining for the days in which we were allowed to sit this close together. This looks like exam day. Everybody seems to be working very, very hard. Maybe it's bringing back some traumatic memory for one or two of you.

No longer do we have only 90 courses. Now, with just a small increase in the number of JD students, we offer almost 300 courses every year. And many of those are courses that we would not have been able to offer in previous decades.

We offer multiple clinics now. We have externships where students are working for an entity for academic credit. We have winter session courses. Some of you taught those courses for us. And we have a Duke in DC program where students who are doing an externship with a government agency have a seminar that they go to in addition for academic credit.

We've also added a lot of courses-- summer specialty courses, like our private equity and hedge funds course. And a lot of them are experiential learning courses where they're simulations of the kind of work that lawyers actually do. So we now have courses, for example, in contract drafting or securities litigation.

And you see here an example of one of our hybrid courses this fall. Many of our courses are completely online. But for some of them, we're offering an in-person component for students who want it. And here, you see a group of students taking-- I believe this is a scholarly writing course where they're all writing notes for publication.

And there's a group of students that are participating in person with Professor Baker. And then there's a group of students who are participating over Zoom. And you can see their pictures on the screen above.

I wanted to say a slightly longer word about clinics, because those of you who graduated a long time ago may not have experienced the clinic. And it's become such an important part of the learning process for students at Duke Law School. When someone asks me who doesn't know, what is a legal clinic, the analogy I found the most helpful is this.

If you go to medical school, you actually learn to be a doctor by working with real patients. And if you go to law school, it really helps to learn to be a lawyer by working with real clients. And clinics let people do that.

Sometimes, with a clinic, you're representing an individual who's in need of help. So if you see right at the top in the middle here, Professor Crystal Grant, who is the interim director of the Children's Law Clinic, teaches a clinic where students are working directly with parents and kids who have special needs who need their schools to provide accommodations for those special needs. Sometimes, a clinic will allow students to represent an entity. So if you look down at the bottom in the center at the Start-Up Ventures Clinic, those students are giving corporate law, and tax law, and intellectual property law advice to start-up companies who need a lawyer.

And sometimes, the clinic-- you might be representing an NGO or a policy organization. So the International Human Rights Clinic does a lot of work with policy and advising work for projects that non-governmental organizations are working on. But in all of these cases, our students are getting to actually work with real clients and figure out how to put the legal training that they've gotten into practice under the supervision of a really highly skilled faculty who are both wonderful practicing lawyers, but also know how to teach other people how to be lawyers.

We have some new clinics over the last couple of years that I wanted to share with you. So I think everybody who graduated five years ago or more would not have known about these clinics, necessarily. One is the First Amendment Clinic that I mentioned earlier that Jeff Powell helped us to launch. We got a very generous grant from the Stanton Foundation to launch a clinic that focuses on First Amendment litigation. This year, we hired our graduate, Professor Sarah Ludington, to lead that clinic. And she joined us this fall.

Last year, we also launched an Immigrant Rights Clinic with support from the Chao Family Foundation. This clinic gives direct legal services to immigrants. It can be people who are seeking asylum. Or it could be people who are in removal proceedings who need assistance. You see here a picture of Professor Kate Evans there in the middle who directs the clinic with a group of students, and their client, whose face has been blotted out for privacy reasons.

And then, finally, we continue to want to expand our clinical program. And one direction we are hoping to expand it in is into an Ethical Technology Clinic. We had planned to launch this clinic this year, and then put it on hold when COVID hit. It seemed like a difficult time to be launching something new. But that's something that we're hoping to do in the next year or two.

So student life-- what has changed between then and now? Here, we've got a great photo that I am told that this is some of you from the class of 2010 at the NCAA Final Four in Indianapolis where Duke beat Butler 61 to 59 to win its fourth national championship. So I hope this is bringing back a fond memory for somebody.

Of course, this year, we're about to start a basketball season where none of us can actually go, which is going to put a cramp in all of our style. But we're finding new ways to come together and to enjoy ourselves as a community. And our students are no exception.

Here's a picture of the ceremony last summer that BLSA students did that was their virtual gavel ceremony of passing the torch, quite literally, from one group to another-- a student who's studying in the library in a reserved study space. And then, also, a student's furry friend-- this is Angus, the cat, who belongs to one of our 1Ls. We have been seeing a lot of each other's pets over Zoom this year, as we do everything from classes, to student events, and to social events in a remote way.

So career and professional development-- here's Professor Wiener, I believe, with a group of environmental lawyers way back in 2000. Career and professional development has been a real hallmark, I think, of one of the strengths of Duke Law school for a long time. We give a lot of personal attention to our students, a lot of help in helping to place them in the kinds of legal jobs that they're looking for.

And normally, I tend to avoid the publication Above the Law, because they don't always say the nicest things about law schools. But I made a big exception a few weeks ago when we were ranked number one in the country by Above the Law for best law schools. And the criteria they used was almost all job based-- our students actually getting good jobs after law school, and is the debt that they take on to go to law school worth it, given the first year salary at the jobs that

they get? And we ranked number one. So we were very, very proud of our students and of our career counselors and professional staff in that ranking.

Here's an example of the kind of one-on-one attention that our students get. This is Alex Obiol in the pink shirt, who is one of our 1Ls. She's meeting with her career counselor, Bethan Eynon, who specializes in public interest careers. And this is right outside the law school. And her counselors have been doing this kind of work with students to get to know them, and to get to figure out what their passions are, and help them to go where they want to be going.

Of course, our alumni have also changed quite a bit. And the way that we interact has changed. Normally, this time of year, I would be traveling around and meeting with alumni groups. You might be meeting with each other regionally in person. There's something really, really wonderful about that.

And so we have been doing our best to adapt this year to not being able to do that and to try to find the silver linings of the COVID pandemic to interact in new ways. And so one of the things that has gone really well-- and Brandon alluded to this in his introduction-- is that it's a lot easier with online events to include alumni who are spread out all over the country. It's great when I can come to you, or when a Professor can come to you. But it's also great when you can come to us. And doing things online has made that easier.

So we've done a bunch of things to try to capitalize on that this year. One has been we've opened up a lot of our events to alumni. So the Policing in America event was a great example. This was an event we did last summer in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.

We realized that we had a lot of experts on policing at the law school. And there was a real need for education about what's wrong with the police, what kind of reform needs to happen for policing to get better. And so we put together an event. And to my surprise, I think 200 or 300 alumni showed up at the event during their lunch hour. So this was clearly an area of education that people really wanted to participate in.

We've also relied on you to help our students. So the middle picture is one of four of our alumni, including Brandon, who met with students to talk about, how do you adapt during a time of crisis? How do you have resilience for yourself and your career?

And you'll notice-- the 2010 class members may feel this especially acutely. You'll notice the years of the students who participated on this, or the graduates who participated. These were all people who graduated coming out of the financial crisis, and can remember just how difficult that was, and can share strategies for students today who are having a similar kind of dislocation and unpredictability in what their careers are going to look like because of COVID.

We've also adapted by having the kind of talks we normally have. Professor Joseph Blocher would normally be doing his Duke Law live events with regional groups. We've been doing some of that online. And we've been opening up a speaker series as well. Trina Jones and the Center for Race Law Politics has been doing a speaker series on COVID and inequalities. And a lot of you have attended those events.

I want to take a moment to recognize the alumni who won special awards this year. You may have seen, on Twitter and LinkedIn, we did a celebration of the awards winners earlier. But we had some really, really terrific award winners this year.

Satana Deberry, class of '94, is our district attorney in Durham. Many of you will remember Charles, especially from the class of 2010 and 2015, because he joined us in 2009. He's a fantastic professor.

Jennifer Baltimore-- who works in the music industry. John Yates-- who works in the tech industry. The Honorable Mandisa Muriel Maya-- whose a court of appeal judge in South Africa. And Lauren Fine was our Young Alumni Award winner who does work with youth in prison in Pennsylvania. So congratulations again to all of our award winners.

I want to end by giving you a sense of what the long-term strategic priorities for the law school are. It's a strange time to talk about that, because it feels to me right now that so much of running the law school for me is a day-to-day battle. I wake up every morning, and there's some new crisis that I'm reacting to in the moment.

But it's important to also have a long-term vision at the same time. And this was the vision that I'd come up with before COVID hit. And actually, most of these priorities have become even more urgent during this time. So as an example, fostering diversity and inclusion was already a really important priority. But the racial reckoning that our country has been going through since the murder of George Floyd and all of the other police violence that we've experienced in the last few months has made this even more urgent.

And so we really-- as a school, I think-- decided to double down in this moment on not just teaching what we know through things like that policing panel that I showed you, but also really interrogating ourselves and saying, how could we be a better community? How can we be a more inclusive community? Where have we fallen short over the course of our existence? And how can we come out of this time better and stronger?

Similarly, I already knew that financial aid was a huge priority in terms of fundraising. But so many of our students have families who have lost their jobs, lost their small businesses. We are seeing a big increase in the need for financial aid for students. And so that's become even more of an important priority for me. And I'm happy to answer questions about some of the other strategic priorities, if you're interested.

So finally, I just want to end by saying this has been a time when the real hallmark of Duke Law as a place that's a close and tight-knit community has been even more important than it usually is. Getting together, getting through a difficult time like this, requires coming together and taking care of each other. And I've been really, really impressed by our community's ability to do that. The students, the faculty, the staff, and especially the alumni-- so many of you have reached out and wanted to help our students during this time. And I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for your contributions and just your sense of generosity and community.

So thank you. That's Duke Law, then and now. And I'll stop sharing this now. And I think Brandon is going to field some questions for me.

BRANDON NEAL: Thank you, Dean Abrams. It's always great to hear one of my favorite things of coming back for a reunion, and certainly for the leadership meetings, is they hear what's going on at the law school. So I really appreciate you sharing that with us.

I think the first question-- and so I'll just highlight it at the beginning. For folks, thank you, if you've already sent in questions. We appreciate that. We gathered some questions in advance of this and tried to group them into the categories we think most people would want to hear about. We're continuing to collect questions in the Q&A. And we'll try to answer those to the extent we are able to. But continue to ask your questions.

And so Dean Abrams, the first question I will pose to you is related to the pandemic. So in the news, of course, we've been hearing a lot about the challenges universities are facing during the pandemic, including financial concerns. And in some cases, we've even heard arguments that universities should begin to dip into their endowments or save money by cutting expenses while also still charging the same tuition rates.

There are also recent articles or threats of litigation from students, too. So just what is the situation at Duke? And just how is the law school managing the economic impact of the pandemic and navigating through this?

KERRY ABRAMS: Yeah, I really appreciate that question, because finances have probably been about the most stressful and difficult aspect of the pandemic for me to navigate as dean. I guess the simplest way to talk about it is that, as a school, we have two major sources of funding. We have tuition, and we have gifts. Tuition covers about 70% of our expenses, gifts about the other 30%.

As you saw in the slides earlier, we only had 23 LLM students come this fall instead of the usual 95. That's a lot of tuition to forego. And in addition, we usually rely on gifts for the other 30% of our budget.

And last year, COVID hit right during the time of our fiscal year when we would normally be ramping up our fundraising efforts. So normally, you get a bunch of mailings from us in the spring asking to donate to the annual fund. The annual fund is a fund that we use to support student financial aid. We use it to support faculty salaries, salaries for our career counselors and staff.

And this last year, the university said, it would be pretty unseemly for us to be asking for money right now during this huge crisis. And so we didn't send any direct solicitations. And as you know, we didn't have an in-person reunion, because we couldn't. And I think that was the right thing to do.

But it did mean that we didn't have the banner fundraising year that we thought we were going to have. So we started this fall several million dollars in the hole in terms of what we needed to do

to continue to make good on the financial aid obligations that we had to our students, and to pay our faculty and staff. Those are, by far, our two biggest expenses as a school.

And one thing that was disappointing to me was I thought maybe we could save money because of the pandemic. I thought, oh, maybe it will cost a lot less to run the school. Actually, it really doesn't. It turns out it costs just as much to have a building open, even if you only have 20% of the people in it, as it does if you have 100%. And with a situation like this, you even have to spend more to clean it more. So it wasn't like we were seeing any huge savings because of COVID.

So we did a few things. One thing was that the university administration made some moves that were helpful in terms of saving money. They instituted a hiring freeze on staff. They froze salaries for faculty and staff. They eliminated contributions to retirement that they were making for faculty and staff.

And then, for higher compensated faculty and staff, they cut salaries by 10%. So all of us took a haircut, I guess you could say, to try to make ends meet. And really, the purpose of that was we want to avoid layoffs to the extent we can. We want to try to each give a little bit for the good of the whole, because we felt that it was important to protect our faculty and staff. And we didn't want to have to cut people. And we also didn't want to have to not do the things that those people do anymore.

We made a few law school decisions, too. So we've limited the hours the school is open so we can save on air conditioning. The faculty each took a 50% cut on their research accounts. And that's allowed us to avoid doing anything drastic, like layoffs.

The other thing we did-- and this was difficult, because we were already so on the edge. But I froze tuition for all of the students this year. I thought that, given how difficult this situation is for all of them, and given that so many of them were dealing with difficult family situations, with a lot of stress dealing with the pandemic, that freezing tuition was the right thing to do. But it also made it very, very hard for us, because we really are right on the edge in terms of being able to make ends meet.

One question I get a lot, actually, is one you brought up, Brandon. And that's, why can't you just dip into the endowment? And I think that question comes from a fundamental misunderstanding of what an endowment is. And I'm sympathetic to it, because I think it's what I thought when I was a faculty member.

So I used to think, well, they have some slush funds somewhere. Can't they just go get money from that? And it turns out, no. An endowment is an investment account. So it's like your retirement account or something. It's money that you've put away, because you're going to need that later on.

So when I said, 30% of our money comes from gifts, some of that is return on endowment. So some of it is interest that we've earned on these investments that we already have budgeted into our plans. And so even if you have a school has a really big endowment, we're only seeing a few

percent per year of that amount actually being spendable. And we've already budgeted for that, so there actually wasn't any place to dip into in terms of endowment. That was just not on the table for me, and it's not for most universities.

So I guess the upshot of all of this is that we have needed support even more this year than usual. We always need support of alumni. But if you're able to do something for us this year, it's not an easy year for us. It's been probably the most difficult one in a long, long time. And especially in order to do things like having a tuition freeze for our students, we've had to really make some huge sacrifices. And we really appreciate all the support that you give us.

BRANDON NEAL: Thanks for that answer. It's very helpful. And I appreciate fully the sacrifices that you all are making. I think it's very similar to the sacrifices many of us are making in firms and with our companies during these challenging times.

But I really applaud just the effort and the continued emphasis on the students and continuing to make sure that they feel supported. And the tuition freeze-- I know that couldn't have been an easy decision. So it's the part of the alumni to do our part to continue to support the law school.

So I'll pivot a little bit in the sense that one of the main two things that you highlighted in your presentation that really characterize this unusual year of 2020-- of course, being in the pandemic, the other being just this discussion on equity and everything that's come out of it. So it sounds like the law school-- and I know President Price recently sent out an update on what the broader university is doing in this regard. So how can alumni to the extent there want to support the law school-- and maybe in broader, but certainly law school's diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts-- how can they do that?

KERRY ABRAMS: Yeah, that's a great question. So President Price, many of you may have seen his Juneteenth message-- is how we all refer to it now-- in which, last summer, he set out a really ambitious plan for the whole university on all of the things that we were going to do to make ourselves a more diverse, and inclusive, and equitable place. And he recently sent out a follow-up with the things we've done, and now what we're going to do, in addition to that.

In between that, he asked each school and unit to come up with our own plan for how we were going to handle our own selves within the broad parameters of what he'd given us. And so one thing that I worked on at the end of this summer and through the fall with our Diversity and Inclusion Committee was coming up with the law school's plan. And of course, because we're the law school, it's 18 pages long, and there's a grid, and there's action items. So there's how we're going to be held accountable. It's a very detailed plan.

And we actually got a lot of help from the alumni who were on that committee. So Michelle Chu, and Linton Mann, and Sylvia James are all alums who serve on that committee who have expertise in this area. So we have this very ambitious plan now. And if you want to see it, it's on our website on our Diversity and Inclusion page.

But one thing I thought that you might want to know about is that we divided it into stakeholders. So the plan includes a part about staff, and a part about students, and the part about

faculty. But it also includes a part about alumni. And I think the alumni have-- I think of alumni as having two different roles to play. And one is as a stakeholder. And one is as help for our students.

So the stakeholder role is you all have an interest in this profession being more diverse and inclusive. And we really lag behind other professions, especially in racial equity, but in all sorts of [AUDIO OUT]. And one thing that-- thinking back to the pictures I showed you all a few minutes ago, we have become so much more diverse as a law school over just the last 50 years.

But so many people who are alumni who were-- I guess you might think of yourselves as insiders to the profession. You weren't trying to break in from the outside. You weren't the first Black member of your firm. Or you weren't the first woman member of your organization.

You can be such advocates for our students who are graduating now, and for each other, to help us all with this goal of making this a more diverse and inclusive profession. And so I encourage you all to think of yourselves as having a stake in this, no matter who you are, of helping us to grow as a profession, and of using your power as Duke Law alumni to help each other. So that's one way-- is I think of alumni as stakeholders.

And then the other thing I'd say is that the students are really asking for help from alumni. And so one thing that's changed, I think, since a lot of you were students is the proliferation of really identifying with particular affinities. So the Black Law Students Association has been around for a long time. But the Middle Eastern and North African Law Student Association is pretty new. The First Generation Professionals Association is new. We have a disability focused group now.

And a lot of those students have been coming to me or coming to the alumni development office and saying, how can I find alumni who share this affinity with me who would be willing to come talk to our group or be mentors to us? And we realized that we actually don't-- we don't have good data on all of you. We didn't ask the question, what is your sexual orientation or gender identity, beyond being male or female, until this year of incoming students. We asked that question for the first time this year. So for alumni, we have no idea.

And so you may have noticed emails coming from us asking if you would like to self identify as being a member of any of these groups. But that's really been a student-driven request of wanting more information on who's out there who would be willing to work with us for whom this identity is salient. And so that's another big piece of this that I think you all can really help with.

BRANDON NEAL: Well, that's great. Thank you for that, Dean Abrams. On the next question, I will take you up on your offer to talk more about one of the strategic priorities.

So Duke Law has had a strong history of public interest. And even for those of us who didn't end up going into public interest, I think we have fond memories of the PILF Auction, public interest clinics. They are very beneficial and very much favored by law students. So can you share with us an update in this area? And again, going back to the ways of engagement, are there ways that alumni can help support this priority as well?

KERRY ABRAMS: Yeah, so I'm really excited about this priority. One of the things I noticed when I was considering joining Duke Law School was that it didn't feel to me like the law school had a huge external reputation for being the place to go for public interest law. But then, when I talked to the students, and faculty, and staff who were actually here, it was clear there was a really strong public interest subculture. And we actually had more going on than people would think.

So we did a whole exercise last year where we canvassed all of the public interest activities we had and compared them to our peers. And we figured out that, OK, we're not number one. But we're not at the bottom, either. We actually have made big strides over the last 10 or 15 years. And we need to continue to do that.

And so I guess I tend to think of this in two different ways. One is I want every student who graduates from the law school to think of themselves as a public servant. And I don't want them to think they're off the hook having to do good in the world just because the job they do every day-- that's not the focus of it.

Maybe the job is focusing on profit. But that doesn't mean that they don't have an obligation both to do that job really ethically, but also to be giving back to their community in other ways. And so we've been pushing very hard on pro bono for everyone at the law school.

But then the other way I think of it is, what if they do want to go into a career that's more focused on government or public interest work, either down the road or right away? That requires a lot of planning. And it requires a lot of support. Those jobs are more competitive.

It's not just that they're not as lucrative. It's also that they're really competitive and difficult to find. And so it requires a lot of just intense support for the students that want to do that. And so we've been realigning resources, focusing on making sure the students get the kind of community support they need.

And one thing that's been really helpful, actually, is the new certificate program that we launched a few years ago called the Public Interest and Public Service certificate, the PIPS certificate. But the students who take that certificate work on their curriculum in a way to focus on a public interest subject area, and then also approaches. So you might do, my subject area is criminal justice reform, and my approach is litigation.

But they focus on a particular area. And they take a clinic. And they also work with each other and with faculty mentors. And so a lot of it is needing the support of having a community that are also trying to do something really hard and to really support each other through that.

And the first year we did it, I think we had 15 students or something, and then 19. And then, the third year, we had 37. It just exploded as we began to get a reputation for being a place that had this special program.

BRANDON NEAL: That's great. I'm just going take myself off mute. And I apologize for any feedback outside my window here. So great. Well, thank you for that.

The other question that I'll have-- and we'll see if we have more time after this question. But I know a lot of folks involved here would like to know about the students. And you mentioned this is, no doubt, a challenging time. We really need the support of our alumni. You mentioned events that we've done previously in terms of resiliency and graduating law school in very challenging moments in our history.

So how has the law school been mobilizing alumni to support current students and recent graduates' job searches and professional development in response to these concerns that you raised about the pandemic's impact on the legal job market? And just how is the law school helping with that? And especially in light of the pressure now from Above the Law and us being ranked number one, just how are we going to keep that ranking? That's what I really want to know, Kerry.

KERRY ABRAMS: Yeah, sometimes it's better to be two or three, because you don't have as far to fall. I'm not going to argue with one. Yeah, I've been really concerned about the effect of the pandemic on the job market and trying to out ahead of it. And so I've been thinking of it as a short term, medium term, long term.

So an example of short term was last summer, in about May-- maybe April, May-- we realized that a lot of our students, especially 1Ls but some of the 2Ls, didn't have summer jobs suddenly. Either they had a job that got pulled out from underneath them. A lot of the 1L jobs are public interest summer jobs, and a lot of those employers just couldn't make it happen. Or they had still planned to apply for one, and then suddenly there was nothing to apply for.

And we enlisted the faculty, actually, in that case, primarily. And a lot of them had had conferences they were supposed to go to that got canceled, and so they hadn't spent money on plane fare. We basically got the faculty to voluntarily commit all this money that they hadn't spent. We created a pool. And then we also asked faculty if they had positions that they could develop for research assistants.

And then I also just got on the phone with people. I called the General Counsel's office. Do you want an intern? We'll pay for it out of this fund. I called DUMAC, which manages our endowment. Do you want a law intern this summer? And then we also had a few alumni who found positions that we were able to fund. So that was a short term-- all hands on deck, let's get our students employed as fast as we can.

The medium term, I think, is watching as we're-- things aren't as bad as they could be. A lot of big law firms seem to actually be doing quite well right now. But trying to make sure that, if we do get to the point where it looks a little bit more like the last recession, that we have a really good network of alumni who are ready to step in.

And a lot of this might be-- I think of it as hand-to-hand combat almost. I guess it's not combat. It's hand-to-hand helping. But it's being able to really jump in, and pick up the phone, and make calls, and try to help someone find something if what they were planning to do falls through the cracks.

And we put together a couple-- actually, three different, I think-- bodies that you can think of as supporting this. One is a task force that Jeff Coates from our Alumni & Development office is leading. It's a task force on employment. So it has faculty, and staff, and alumni on it doing that general planning on, how would we make this happen?

And then we also have the committee from the LAA board, and then a special task force on the board of visitors focused much more directly on the alumni piece. So I'm hoping that won't happen. But I am hoping that, if we get into a difficult spot, that we'll be able to really mobile as our alumni network.

And then I guess the final thing I'd say is the long, long term-- it feels to me like this pandemic may have accelerated changes that would have already happened. And so one way that alumni can be really helpful to us is helping us predict what those changes are going to be because, if the needs for legal employment change, we need to be thinking about our curriculum. And we need to be thinking about our career counseling in advance of that.

It's too late by the time someone's out on the job market and they're not getting the job they need to say, oops, you should have taken these three classes instead, or you should have set yourself up in this way. So another thing I'm hoping that those task forces can do is be a feedback loop to us on, what are you seeing the changes being, and then how can we adapt to that so our students are ready when they do go out into the world to be competitive?

BRANDON NEAL: Sounds good. You actually stole my last-- I know we have time for the last question. So you actually stole a part of it, but I'll ask I'll ask it anyway.

It's just, coming out of this year-- 2020, the pandemic, and everything that's come out this year. Just where do you see-- maybe the legal profession's too broad. But just the law school and the role of the law school in preparing the future legal leaders of our country-- just where do you see that going or changing coming out of 2020 and this pandemic? And sorry to ask you to speculate, and I appreciate that we have a task force and everything else working on it. But just would be curious of your thoughts.

KERRY ABRAMS: I have a couple thoughts. And they're on two different tracks. One is I feel like the pandemic has exacerbated preexisting inequalities in a really stark way. And a lot of our students came to law school wanting to make a difference in the world. And this has maybe helped them to continue that sense of momentum and passion in a way that sometimes falls away when you're in the middle of studying civil procedure.

And so I'm seeing a lot of our students really, really wanting to continue to use their law degree in a way that will help to push back against those inequalities. And so I think that's one really important role for law schools to play. And I think we're well positioned to contribute there.

The other is I feel like this has given us a sense both of what's valuable about in-person interaction and what's not. So I think all of us are yearning for a time when we can actually see and touch each other again. And I think we've learned that we actually can't go without that.

We don't want to be a completely virtual law school. And I don't think most employers want to be completely virtual employers. I'm noticing just the huge difference it makes in terms of people's trust of each other if they're not able to just be together some of the time.

At the same time, I think we've also learned what some of the benefits from the virtual world are-- so being able to invite alumni to events where they can pop in for a half hour. We've had a lot of-- the Career Center is doing this great What's on Your Desk series that are a half hour long. And you get three people from one employer to come in and just say, this is the project we're working on right now. This is what the junior associate is doing. And this is what the senior associate is doing. This is what the partners-- we can't do that, normally.

So I bet we will come out of this with a whole menu of things we want to keep doing virtually that we never would have experimented with if we'd been-- nobody wants to go have to figure out how to teach and do all this stuff online if you don't have to. But now let me know how, I bet we'll continue to do some of the things this way. But I also think we're going to see a real push back towards wanting that in-person community that we're so good at and so known for.

BRANDON NEAL: Thank you for that. And I completely agree and look forward to the positive aspects and the silver lining that comes out of these challenging times. Dean Abrams, I just want to thank you again. I know we're running short on time. There are some really good questions in the chat that I'm sure we can follow up on as well.

I would also just plea-- I know the questions we asked for, how can alumni continue to engage? And again, I'll mention what I said at the top-- that this virtual environment does provide an opportunity to engage. And so if you're interested in any of the things we've talked about in supporting students, please let us know, whether through the law school faculty and staff, or even the Law Alumni Association Board.

We're happy to plug it in. We're thinking about ways of doing things differently than we have before to engage a broader group. So just want to put that plea out there.

But more importantly, Dean Abrams, I really want to thank you for all the hard work you're doing and being flexible during these times to allow this type of virtual programming to occur. And thank you, everyone, for joining today. So hope you enjoy your virtual reunion from here on.

KERRY ABRAMS: Yeah. Happy reunion, everyone. It's a great--

BRANDON NEAL: Have a great reunion.

KERRY ABRAMS: --honor and privilege to be your dean. And I love getting to meet you.