Remarks by Bill Hoye, Associate Dean of Admissions and Student Affairs

Thank you, Dean Levi.

As Dean Levi mentioned, I am responsible for admissions, financial aid, and student affairs at the Law School. And with all due respect to the Dean and the important role he has in our community, I think I have the best job at the Law School. I’d like to tell you why.

Every fall semester, I travel widely to undergraduate schools across the country to speak with top students who are considering law school. We talk about Duke Law School: the extraordinary faculty; an academic community that is ambitious, forward-thinking, and innovative; faculty and students together pushing new boundaries and anticipating the emerging issues in society, and who understand that tomorrow’s knowledge is often best found at the intersection of disciplines such as law and economics, business, religion, politics, and science. At Duke, an engaged community is not an abstract claim, but a tangible reality where action matters and people, working together, make things happen. The Law School believes in the development of the whole person, which transforms law students into lawyers who possess an ethical compass, with strong leadership skills, the ability to adapt to unanticipated circumstances, who know how to bring out the best in others – lawyers and leaders who create a positive vision.

Next, we work with visitors who travel to Durham – these prospective students understand that there is no substitute for visiting Duke’s extraordinary campus, seeing the Law School’s impressive physical space, and feeling for themselves the community’s intellectual firepower. We work to construct a visit that clearly demonstrates to each prospective student the benefits that flow from a Duke Law education – to them personally, but also to the legal profession and to the greater society.

Then the challenging work begins -- reading and assessing the application materials of those who compete for an opportunity to study at Duke. The good news is that so many of the nation’s best college graduates want to come to Duke Law School. Consistently, every year for the past few years, national applications have been trending down, while applications to Duke Law School have surged. We are seeing a similar phenomenon this year. While the national pool of applicants has declined over last year, we have experienced an increase – to more than 6,300 applications – the most in our history – competing for approximately 200 seats in our class.

Given this volume, the assessment process is necessarily complex. We strive to make sound judgments about which candidates are especially prepared to take full advantage of the opportunities that exist here – who possess the qualities of mind
and character that will sustain the tradition of excellence that Duke Law has built for all these many years.

So that is the job. The law school dean of admissions is sometimes called one of the gatekeepers of the profession. But while it is true that I may be able to open the gate for some extraordinary individuals, it is also true that this act may be, in fact, illusory for many – especially for those admitted students who still face significant obstacles in their path to Duke Law School due to the high cost of a legal education.

Indeed, it is not long after an offer of admission is extended before our discussions with prospective students turn to financial aid and their ability to manage the high cost of education. The students whom we admit are always very smart and often quite cautious. Many have already acquired significant debt from their undergraduate education. They understand that the world is unpredictable and they are careful to consider the risks and benefits of once again investing heavily in their education.

As many of you probably know all too well, the cost of a top-quality legal education is very high. For many, this education would simply be out of reach without scholarship assistance.

Duke Law’s tuition and living expenses for the 2008-2009 academic year exceed $60,000. Approximately 75% of our students receive some scholarship assistance and 85% of our JD students must borrow to help finance their legal education. A student who does not have access to scholarship assistance and who must borrow the entire cost of the education would leave with a debt of $185,000, which increases with interest over ten years to a quarter million dollars that must be repaid. Even with scholarship assistance, members of the Class of 2008 graduated with an average of $112,000 in law school education loans— higher than ever before in our school’s history.

This debt exercises a strong influence on students who are selecting a law school. It also tremendously influences their career and life choices after graduation. I cannot adequately describe the relief and joy that many admitted students express when learning, after demonstrating to us through their financial aid applications, that they cannot afford a Duke education, that we are able to help – able to make a Duke Law education just within their grasp by offsetting some of the costs with a scholarship.

Our goal, and the goal of so many of you, is that our doors will be open and that the best students in the nation and world will be able to afford to walk through them. To keep the path truly open, we must develop further sources of scholarship funds.

Dean Levi has already mentioned the strides we have made in increasing student aid. We are very grateful for this support, as it has significantly enhanced my ability to bring the best and brightest law students to Duke.
But if we can, we must do more. The current economic crisis is putting tremendous pressure on students and parents. At the same time, Duke’s endowment has suffered and the funds we have counted on for student aid have declined. Our need for new support has never been greater.

But as difficult as this economy may be, I cannot look at the students in this room today and feel anything but optimism about our future. Today you are meeting some of Duke Law’s most talented and accomplished students. The students who are here today were able to come to Duke because of your support. In many cases, the scholarships you have created were the deciding factor for these students when they were selecting a law school.

Your support has enabled us to build a student body that is extraordinarily talented and also quite diverse. This year, for example, the entering class included graduates of 109 undergraduate colleges and universities from around the country and the world. Their most recent homes were in 7 foreign countries and 37 states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. By the way, we also have a number of students who attended college just down the road at the University of North Carolina. (They receive an especially warm welcome to their new home at Duke.)

Financial aid makes it possible for students from all parts of the country and the world to be here for three years. Many of the students who are supported through scholarships have had remarkable and varied experiences before starting law school that help to enrich our academic community. For instance, one of our students, prior to enrolling at Duke, worked for the CIA, in the Directorate of Intelligence. Another served for two years as a Rule of Law Officer with the United Nations Development Program, stationed in West Darfur. One was an Honor Guardsman in the United States Air Force, who before coming to law school participated in and commanded over 60 military funerals. Another was a presidential appointee to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Many built impressive records of service in government and in their communities.

A number of students pursued graduate education before coming to law school. For instance, one has a Ph.D. in Philosophy from Vanderbilt. Another earned a Ph.D. from M.I.T. One of our students holds 26 U.S. Patents – 16 of which he was the sole inventor.

I trust that the conversations today at your tables have revealed the amazing talents and experiences of our students. A high-quality student body really matters to Duke. It helps us to attract top faculty, elevates the quality of our academic discourse, challenges all of our students to excel, and builds an unsurpassed reputation in the practicing bar.

What does it mean to those who create and support scholarships? The graduates and friends who support scholarships demonstrably strengthen the school,
enhancing the value of their own degrees and their connections to Duke Law. They also make a real difference in a student’s life.

The students who receive your scholarships will always know your names, will always list you on their resumes, will always feel a connection and deep gratitude for your role in launching their careers. Given all that these students are likely to accomplish and what they have accomplished already, that connection is powerful indeed.

I am proud of our students and their families. And I am deeply grateful to you for your commitment, for your generosity, and for your faith in these remarkable students and in Duke Law School.

Thank you.