When the Law School underwent its routine re-accreditation process this year, the American Bar Association’s site evaluation committee filed a report praising Duke as one of the strongest schools in the country, “especially in the areas of professional culture, student and faculty quality, research centers and programs, facilities, clinical programs, and interdisciplinary programs.”

The committee chair called our student culture the strongest of any law school he had ever seen. The ABA report credited our Blueprint ideals — engage intellectually, embody integrity, lead effectively, build relationships, serve the community, practice professionalism, and live with purpose — as having created a culture that emphasizes service, collegiality, and excellence.

During my first year as dean, I have come to call it “The Duke Way”: a unique combination of intellectual engagement at the highest level, a commitment to serving the common good, and extraordinary collaboration and collegiality that sets us apart from other law schools.

For our faculty, “The Duke Way” is a culture that values knowledge in the service of society. Our professors routinely tackle complex, real-world problems in their research and teaching. You will read about some of their initiatives in this issue of Duke Law Magazine: Professor Steven Schwarcz’s proposal for the establishment of a “liquidity provider of last resort” to protect the financial markets from systemic collapse (“The Credit Meltdown,” Page 16); Professor James Cox’s series of empirical studies of securities litigation settlements (Page 40); Professor Neil Vidmar’s examination and evaluation of the American jury system (Page 32); and Professor James Boyle’s commitment to the public dissemination of knowledge (Page 39). On Pages 27–31, faculty offer advice to the next U.S. president’s administration on such key issues as global climate policy, democratization, and military preparedness.

For our students, “The Duke Way” is a commitment to leadership in and out of the classroom. Matt Wolfe ’08, for example, completed an externship in the North Carolina Office of Administrative Hearings as he pursued a joint JD and master’s degree in public policy; after his externship, he conceived and crafted a proposal to establish a State Administrative Law Clinic, through which our students would represent individuals and community groups in administrative procedures and hearings — petitioners that would otherwise appear pro se. Two other 2008 graduates, Jade Totman and Chris Dodrill, both military veterans, established a project through our Office of Public Interest and Pro Bono to help injured veterans complete their initial disability applications. (See story on Page 5.) A team of students from our Appellate Litigation Clinic briefed, argued, and won a case in the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit that represents a significant victory for disabled prisoners; the ruling held that disabled inmates have the right to sue states under the Rehabilitation Act regarding prison accessibility issues.

For our alumni, “The Duke Way” is about risk-taking, innovation, and using their education and experience to make the world a better place. Several alumni who exemplify these ideals are profiled in this magazine (Pages 42–47), including Kendra Montgomery-Blinn ’03, a former prosecutor who now heads up the nation’s first state agency devoted to the cause of innocence, and Alan Bender ’79, who had the vision and determination to take a risk on cell-phone technology when most people thought it would not last.

Of course, I could tell many more stories of the people in our community who exemplify “The Duke Way.” Lanty Smith ’67, who has served as adviser, mentor, and benefactor to this Law School and to many of our students and graduates over the years, was recently appointed chairman and interim CEO of Wachovia Corp., the country’s fourth-largest bank. Gao Xiqing ’86, an architect of China’s securities markets who regularly returns to lecture at the Law School, now oversees the investment of China’s $200 billion sovereign wealth fund. Harrison Dillon ’03 is president and chief technology officer of Solazyme, a synthetic biology company that uses marine organisms to create clean and renewable energy and industrial chemicals.

In every respect, the Duke Law community values curiosity, the common good, and the greatest tradition of the legal profession: leadership. I am privileged to be a part of this extended, international community.

Before I close, I extend a warm welcome to the newest member of the Law School’s leadership team, Jeff Coates, associate dean for alumni and development. He comes to Duke after serving as assistant dean for development and alumni relations at the University of Illinois College of Law, where his record was outstanding. Jeff has a passion for legal education and ambitious ideas for enlisting you and the broader community in making Duke an even better place. I’m sure you’ll hear more from him soon.

Best wishes,

David F. Levi