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Called to Teach: Brief Essays on the Meaning of Teaching



Teaching and Training Baylor Lawyers: A Calling and an Honor

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“The practice of democracy is not passed down through the gene pool. It must be taught and learned anew by each generation of citizens.”¹ –Justice Sandra Day O’Connor

When asked what makes Baylor so special that I would stay for the entirety of my career, my answer is simple. I know our work is critically important not just for the future of our students but also for the future of our communities and our great nation.

Higher Education is Critical to Our Nation’s Prosperity

In the 21st century, institutions of higher education hold one of the most important roles in shaping the future of our society. A strong system of higher education is essential to a country’s ability to compete in the global marketplace. An educated citizenry is critical to our economic strength, social well-being, and position as a world leader.² Our calling to teach, train, and guide our students

¹ Sandra Day O’Connor, “About iCivics,” retrieved on May 8 from <https://www.icivics.org/about>.

² David Skaggs, “Higher education as a matter of national security: can a democracy plan ahead?” *Liberal Education* 100 (2014): 1. Leah Teague, “Higher Education Plays Critical Role in Society: More Women Leaders Can Make a Difference.” *Forum on Public Policy* 2015, No. 2 (2015). Available at <http://forumonpublicpolicy.com/journals-2/online-journals/vol-2015-no-2/>.

through their transformation into proficient employees, committed citizens, and compassionate leaders is a high calling – one which I, and you, gladly accept with honor and pride.

This calling is not without trials and tribulations. The challenges faced by higher education today are complicated and multi-faceted. Perhaps no challenge is greater than the public's perception of our value. The public understands the role of higher education institutions as places where students are educated and prepared for their future occupations. This limited understanding considers only the benefits to individuals and not the advancements to society or the "greater good." Unfortunately, far too many Americans fail to recognize the value of higher education beyond its remunerative benefits to individuals. While some understand universities are base camps for researchers exploring new knowledge that will improve and advance societies, few appreciate the broader impact of educating citizens for engagement in their communities, participation in civic activities and public discourse, and leadership in businesses and organizations.

Considering recent domestic, economic, and financial crises, and amid concerns about the waning global position of the United States, the work of colleges and universities has never been so critically important to the future of the American way of life. While national media focus on our influence on world behavior through economic sanctions and well-funded military power, have they forgotten that our system of high education is responsible for significant "soft power" for the United States? Have *we* forgotten?

While Secretary of State, Colin Powell said: "I can think of no more valuable asset to our country than the friendship of future world leaders who have been educated here."³ International students usually return home with a greater appreciation of American values and institutions. As expressed in a report by an international education group, "the millions of people who have studied in the United States over the years constitute a remarkable reserve of goodwill for our country."⁴ The critical role of higher education cannot be understated.

The new president of the American Council of Education, Ted Mitchell, recognizes the imperatives and the critical challenges facing higher education. He has pledged to make public esteem of higher education a priority for ACE, with the first of three strategic initiatives being to

Affirm and Strengthen Public Trust in Postsecondary Education: Deepen the public's confidence in higher education by communicating its impact as a powerful engine of economic opportunity, social mobility, and a flourishing democracy, and encouraging member action around meaningful change.⁵

³ Nye, J. (2005). *Soft Power and Higher Education*, Harvard University, 14.

⁴ Idem

⁵ Ted Mitchell, "Higher Education for the Nation's Future." *Higher Education Today* (June 20, 2018). Retrieved from <https://www.higheredtoday.org/2018/06/20/higher-education-nations-future/>

We all must be engaged in promoting the wide-ranging benefits of higher education.

Education Expands Opportunities for Individuals

For individual students, post-secondary education creates a path to financial security, economic mobility, personal growth, professional development, leadership opportunities, and the promise of a brighter tomorrow. Research also shows that college graduates live more stable family lives, enjoy better health, and live longer.⁶ As Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out, a benefit of living in a democracy is the advantage that higher education offers its citizens – students are not restricted by class or guilds.⁷ We are privileged in the United States to have a higher education system that is available regardless of the family to which one is born. College students who come from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit significantly from their education.⁸

Opportunities for improving one's position in society are enhanced, often greatly, by a person's degree and alma mater. College graduates find more desirable jobs and positions, earn more money, and suffer less unemployment.⁹ Generally, the higher the educational level and the greater the reputation of the university, the greater the benefits.¹⁰ Baylor's commitment to increased visibility, ranking, and stature is an important initiative that will provide greater value and benefits to our students and alumni.

Communities Benefit from Educated and Engaged Citizens

Higher education enhances civic engagement and political knowledge and participation, which benefit communities.¹¹ American culture has historically expected educated citizens to provide wise counsel and actively participate in community affairs. Indeed, our country's continued prosperity depends upon our educational system to produce an educated community that understands and values our system of government, appreciates the complexity of world cultures, economies, and

⁶ Michael Hout, "Social and economic returns to college education in the United States." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38 (2012): 379-400.

⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 302-309 (Henry Reeve trans., Pa. State U. 2002) (1835), <http://seas3.elte.hu/coursematerial/LojkoMiklos/Alexis-de-Tocqueville-Democracy-in-America.pdf>.

⁸ Hout, *supra* note 6 at 380.

⁹ *Idem*; Michael T. Benson and Hal R. Boyd, "The Public University: Recalling Higher Education's Democratic Purpose." *Thought & Action* (Summer 2015): 69-83.

¹⁰ Hout, *supra* note 6 at 381.

¹¹ Hillygus, D. Sunshine (2005). "The Missing Link: Exploring the relationship between higher education and political engagement." *Political Behavior* 27, No. 1 (March 2005). Retrieved from <http://sites.duke.edu/hillygus/files/2014/06/HillygusPB.pdf>

relationships, and recognizes the importance of being at the forefront of innovation and research. Higher education is one of the last societal institutions responsible for shaping the future of civilization. This is particularly so for law schools, given the important role lawyers play in communities.

Lawyers as Leaders Impact Society

Throughout history, lawyers have played a critical role in shaping stable, peaceful, and prosperous societies. Serving in positions that require legal training, as well as serving in a wide array of other leadership roles, lawyers influence society. In the United States, lawyers make up less than one-half of one percent of the population, yet no other profession, past or present, accounts for more leaders throughout society.¹² Lawyers have led our country at critical junctures and contributed to pivotal events since its inception, including the founding of our nation, the progressive era, the New Deal, and the civil rights revolution. Lawyers advocate for important causes, counsel businesses, and serve non-profits. As heads of nations, universities, foundations, companies, legislative committees, and public offices, lawyers have shaped our society and culture.

American lawyers are educated and trained as the keepers of the rule of law in our democracy. As such, lawyers confront injustice and fight to protect rights, liberties, and property interests. Lawyers also provide reasoned guidance and direction to enable clients to make decisions from a more informed perspective. Often lawyers prevent clients from acting on fleeting impulses or out of emotional fervor without reasoned consideration or appropriate due process. By advising, advocating, and influencing their clients, lawyers can address their needs and ideally accomplish a greater good.

It is this role of lawyers in society that keeps me committed to doing everything in my power to prepare our Baylor Lawyers to be difference makers. Baylor Law is a special place with a distinctive and proven program – a model for effective legal education. It is rigorous and not for the faint of heart. Because we understand the demands our students will face in the practice of law and we know the critical need for lawyers to serve in their communities, we are committed to preparing and equipping our students to deal with the complex challenges that await them. The skills, talents, and resources of lawyers can have a tremendous impact on society. This is especially true of Baylor Lawyers.

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¹² Deborah L. Rhode, *Lawyers as Leaders*, 1 (2013).