Ovid C. Lewis, 1979-84

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Abstract

Ovid Lewis is a very special and unique person.
awarded. Of course, there were problems, but on the whole it was a period of success. But then the second financial crisis came in 1984. In many ways, it was worse than the first, because there was no hope of a major bequest in the pipeline to bail us out. The financial problem then prevailing has a very contemporary, Washingtonian, ring: a chronic budgetary deficit. For example, in the four year period preceding that crisis, the university had accumulated additional debt of $13 million, against a total annual budget of less than $30 million.

The immediate precipitating need for an acting dean was Ovid's decision to accept a position as Vice President for Academic Affairs at the university. Although the university administration wanted Ovid to continue as Law Center dean, Bruce argued that this would be a conflict of interest, and Ovid shortly thereafter resigned the deanship and accepted the other position. Once again, the vacuum of authority had to be filled. Bruce, who was most senior (and this time had actual on-the-job experience), was the logical choice. He wisely shared the responsibility and increased political consensus by forming a managerial triumvirate consisting of himself, Joe Smith and me. Although his actions had virtually insured that he would have to take on the decanal responsibility, Bruce was deeply ambivalent. His family responsibilities were growing, with two small children and a third soon to come. His activities as a litigator had taken off. He did not want the day to day hassles of running the law school. As it was, he caught pneumonia before his term ended. No doubt it was stress-induced.

The dean search produced no acceptable candidate by the spring of 1985, and Bruce made his intention to vacate the acting deanship clear in many ways. For example, he left for Europe after spring classes ended; Joe and I shared the thankless task of setting faculty salaries for the following year. Before his departure, he had talked to me about coming forward as acting dean, but, with my father dying of lung cancer and a second child on the way, the last thing I needed was a new set of responsibilities. To his credit, Joe Smith stepped up to the plate and held things together during the following academic year while the dean search produced Roger Abrams.

How then should we assess the tenure of acting deans serving during times of trouble? I think it can be said of them all that they did what was necessary to keep the place going and to give us hope for a better future.
While carrying out his decanal functions, Ovid also maintained his roles as teacher and scholar. He taught courses at the Law Center and for the undergraduate program at Nova College. He wrote articles for our fledgling law review and assisted the editors of what was then the Nova Law Journal in securing major articles.

Ovid was and remains a critic of the quality of legal education being offered in the United States and urged the faculty to pursue innovations. For several years he compiled lengthy annual reports on the state of law school curricula and other emerging issues in legal education and distributed them to the other law schools' deans. He foresaw how technology was going to change the practice of law and eventually legal education. He took the initial steps to assure our students were trained in the new technologies, particularly in the area of computer assisted legal research.

These were all great accomplishments, but do not reflect Ovid’s most important contributions—the spirit he brought to the Law Center and his commitment to giving every individual an opportunity to succeed. Ovid believed in doing whatever was needed in order to make the Law Center a better place—whether it was negotiating for additional faculty positions, restructuring the budget to avoid a tuition increase, moving furniture to the new faculty offices, or setting up the chairs at two o’clock in the morning in a just-completed classroom so it would be ready for the first class the next morning. It was his “can do” spirit that often inspired others to seek and achieve goals that initially seemed out of reach. Ovid thought each member of the Law Center community was an important part of its success. Little could be accomplished without the assistance of others. He was always interested in their work. He believed that combining all our work had a synergistic effect on the Law Center, university, and surrounding community.

Ovid never turned away students or a colleague who needed help with a problem or had a question. The caring attitude of his administration and the faculty is part of the history of what has made the Shepard Broad Law Center a special place. This spirit lives on at the Shepard Broad Law Center and is part of what make it and Nova University a very special place for the faculty, staff and students. Thank you for those remarkable years.