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From the Dean

As I sat down to write this end-of-year column, it was hard to accept that 2021 is already coming to a close. COVID continues to warp our sense of time, but not our collegial spirit or our commitment to providing an excellent education for FSU Law students. In the spring of 2021, we figured out how to offer virtual interviews with employers more effectively. We created a virtual tour of the law school and virtually recruited our fall entering 1L class from start to finish. We didn't just adapt; we excelled. The graduating class of 2021 had a higher percentage of students employed at graduation than we have seen in recent times, and our incredibly talented, hard-working, and enthusiastic 1L class set records for median incoming credentials and the diversity of their backgrounds. Our advocacy teams set national standards with virtual competitions, and our Moot Court Team won more national championships than any law school in the country! We offered virtual lectures and discussion panels on a wide variety of topics with speakers from across the nation. Faculty teaching remotely continued to innovate their courses with new equipment, updated Zoom features, and revised techniques. Faculty workshops, where we meet with top-flight law faculty from across the country to learn about cutting-edge research developments, all occurred in Zoom boxes. And slowly, with the introduction of a university vaccine clinic across the street, we began to dramatically increase the protection of faculty, students, and staff against COVID.



FSU Law Class of 2024



(L-R) Hannah DuShane and Gabriela De Almeida, winners of the 2021 Seigenthaler-Sutherland Cup National First Amendment Moot Court Competition



The 2021 Energy Law Panel, "Rooftop Solar Energy in Florida: Opportunities and Obstacles," was conducted via Zoom



A graduating student and her furry friend celebrate at the "Dogtorate" ceremony hosted by SALDF

By fall, our students were very eager to return to all in-person classes as well as in-person student organization and co-curricular events. The energy on the law campus has been incredibly vibrant this semester, with students not taking for granted any event or opportunity to engage and socialize. The Student Bar Association worked with law school offices and other student organizations to offer a fundraising carnival and several smaller social events designed to welcome and welcome back the law students, and to help strengthen our community. Professors were so happy to see the students re-engage that several volunteered to sit in the carnival dunk tank, including Justin Sevier, Steve Johnson, me, and Justice Alan Lawson! Our Final Four Competition returned to the Florida Supreme Court, where all seven justices participated and joined our celebratory reception afterward.



Student attempts to dunk Justice Alan Lawson at the SBA carnival



(L-R) Justice Jamie R. Grosshans, Chief Justice Charles T. Canady, Justice Alan Lawson, Salomé Garcia, Zachary Loyed, Keiana Wilkerson, Justice Ricky Polston, Ella Biggins, Justice Jorge Labarga, and Justice John D. Couriel at the Final Four Competition's reception

The positive energy also appears in our classrooms, where our students truly appreciate the opportunity to learn and to engage in small group discussions, advocacy exercises, and more with their professors and with one another. Externships, clinics, and other professional skills courses provide added richness and more effective mentoring in person. What was once (in pre-pandemic times) normal, sometimes tedious, or occasionally frustrating is now satisfying, even exciting. In

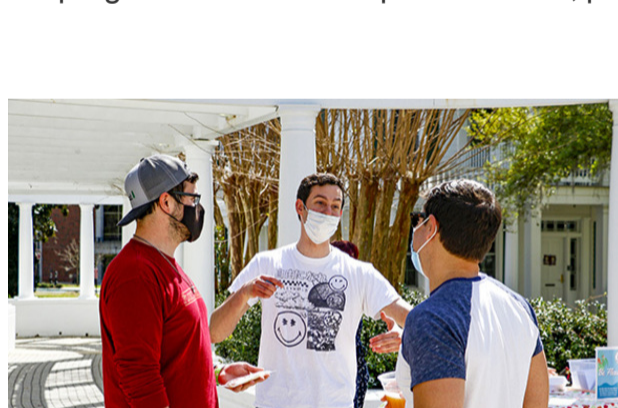
part, the energy on campus is due to the fact that we truly appreciate the normal, having had to settle for something fundamentally abnormal for the past two years. Normal now feels special in so many ways.

However, it is important to acknowledge that "normal" has changed here at FSU Law, permanently, and for the better. We have learned to use virtual programs, video recording, and other mechanisms to avoid forcing students to stay late on campus or to attend law school briefings at the convenience of administrators rather than them. Even many in-person events now have a Zoom option for those who are not on campus but wish to join the conversation. And this semester, our 2Ls and 3Ls continued to have remote exams where they could choose between staying with family after Thanksgiving or coming to the law school to take exams in their familiar study environments. These enhanced options provide flexibility and choice to students, who in return are more likely to embrace opportunities and can navigate stressful times more effectively.

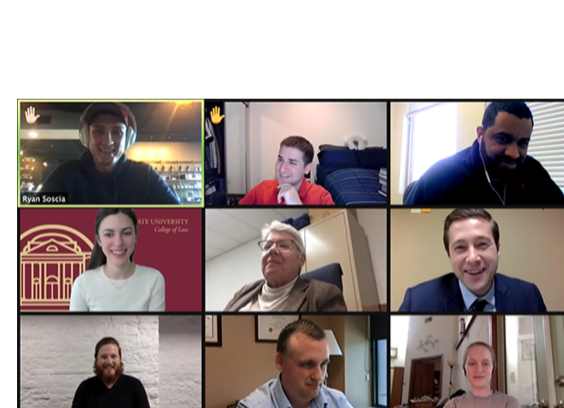
Hybrid options—including virtual and in-person educational opportunities—create an opportunity for us to reach more people, including alumni, employers, prospective students, adjunct faculty, and broader community constituents, than ever before. Consider, for example, the creation of our new Center for Law and Business, made possible by the generosity of alum Jeffrey Stoops and The Stoops Family Foundation. The new Center will offer virtual and hybrid professional and executive education programs, conferences, symposia, competitions, and more. These new educational opportunities will build on the strength of our online master's degree in compliance, which now enrolls more students than our J.D. program. All of these new opportunities make it possible for business professionals outside Tallahassee, and even outside Florida, to take advantage of the exceptional training we provide, and to join a conversation here at FSU Law about the future of business law and regulation in its many forms. Should you or your law firm wish to partner with us to provide non-degree educational programs for business professionals, please let me know.



Pamela Burch Fort ('77) accepts the Alumni Association Service Award virtually, joined by fellow alumni and friends from around the country



Students socialize at the Flamingole on the Green event hosted by the Office of Student Advancement during Wellness Spring Break



Student members of the Education Law and Policy Society hear virtually from Joy Frank ('80)



Students select books at SBA's spring book exchange event



Judge Adalberto Jordan answers student questions during a luncheon

As we navigate our new normal here at FSU Law, we find we are more effective, more collaborative, more flexible, and stronger in many ways due to the forced and extended, albeit temporary, transition to virtual spaces starting in spring 2020. We hope that you too are now navigating an improved normal and envisioning exciting paths forward for your workplaces and professional careers. We also hope to find an opportunity to engage with each and every one of you, virtually and in-person, soon. Happy Holidays!

Erin O'Connor

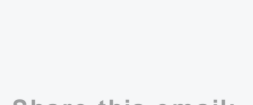
Dean Erin O'Connor

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