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In Memoriam

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TIMOTHY FISHER

Phillip I. Blumberg served as Dean of the University of Connecticut School of Law from 1974 to 1984. These remarks were first delivered at the University of Connecticut School of Law's tribute to Dean Blumberg, "Honoring Phillip I. Blumberg," held on December 10, 2021. They have been lightly edited for publication.



Phillip Blumberg's Legacy: A Dean's Perspective

TIMOTHY FISHER*

The year 1974, when Phillip Blumberg arrived at the University of Connecticut School of Law, was a turning point in the history of the school. His leadership vaulted the school into a new tier of recognition and quality that it has enjoyed ever since. How did he do this? Dean Blumberg was a force of nature. He brought a vision of excellence to a school that previously had modest expectations of itself. He coupled that vision with a level of intellect and energy that knew few bounds.

Dean Blumberg had followed a path through life that equipped him well for the kind of leadership that the school needed. The son of a union leader, and with a Harvard education, he saw service as a Major in World War II. After the war he advanced to success as a Wall Street lawyer and corporate leader before leaving the private sector to bring his talents to the field of legal education. He then joined the faculty at the Boston University School of Law where he learned the culture and institutions of the legal academy, adding to the range of experience that would help make him a great Dean.

The University of Connecticut School of Law, upon Dean Blumberg's arrival, was at a crossroads. His predecessor, Howard Sacks, had brought a new vision to the school, especially with his work in clinical education gaining national prominence. But the alumni and broader community still saw the school as a local institution, and there were few who saw the school's potential to move toward elite status. Fortunately, following a lengthy search with some tension over the school's mission, Phillip Blumberg was chosen to be the next Dean.

He found a school that was struggling with its limitations. There were only eleven full-time faculty members for a student body of 300. The law library collection was small, and the school occupied a building that was obsolete before its time and was soon down to only three classrooms. Dean Blumberg met these challenges, recognizing that a law school needed three things to be great: a first-rate faculty; a fine campus; and financial support. He accomplished dramatic improvements in all three dimensions.

Dean Blumberg signaled the future direction of the school in the faculty hires that he accomplished. The professors he hired have gone on to earn national reputations as legal scholars, raising the standards of the entire intellectual enterprise and positioning the school in a fully different tier among the country's law schools.

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Dean Blumberg also led the effort to move the school to its West End home with the acquisition of the former Hartford Seminary campus. With this move, the school went from occupying a substandard facility to one of the finest in the country.

He also profoundly improved the school's funding. Though the University administration in Storrs had previously paid little attention to the law school, Dean Blumberg garnered the public and political support to build the budget for a significantly expanded faculty, as well as for the cost of purchasing and renovating the new campus. He also helped organize the Law School Foundation and generously led development efforts to seed the endowments that the school has today.

With all these practical accomplishments, what his students and colleagues alike remember most personally is Dean Blumberg's exacting standards for the entire intellectual enterprise of the school. He was relentlessly curious in his discussions with faculty about their work. When he organized weekly lunches with the first-year students to get to know them, the students were honored, but somewhat intimidated at the high level of discourse expected of them. Everybody had to bring their "A" game when Dean Blumberg was concerned.

Those of us who have followed Dean Blumberg have benefitted greatly from the foundations he built. He brought a clarity of vision, high standards, and great optimism to the University of Connecticut School of Law. We are incredibly lucky to have had him as our Dean.