

## TRIBUTE LAWRENCE P. WILKINS

FLORENCE WAGMAN ROISMAN\*

Despite Professor Wilkins' retirement from the law school, he is a continuing presence for me—and, I am sure, many others. I still think of the office he occupied as his office, though someone else is in it now, and I expect to see his door open and Professor Wilkins behind his desk, as he almost always was.

Professor Wilkins did many things well, but I remember him particularly for two aspects of his life and work, aspects that are inter-connected. The first was his dedication to teaching; the second, his commitment to this law school.

People who are not intimately familiar with the legal academy might think that legal education is focused on teaching, but this—alas!—is not true. Most law schools and most law professors are focused primarily on scholarship and are far more interested in the production of law review articles than in the care and nurturing of those who would become lawyers. I am glad to say that our law school is an exception to this general rule, and much of this is due to Professor Wilkins's influence.

With respect to hiring of faculty, Professor Wilkins was famous for five things. When he served on the Faculty Recruitment Committee, he played a crucial role in sketching each faculty candidate, which enabled those of us who have bad memories to sort out one candidate from another. He also authored three "Wilkins Rules": 1) that a person who was first in her or his class at any school is a candidate worthy of our consideration; 2) that a person who began but did not complete any program needed to have a good explanation for not finishing what s/he had begun; and 3) that anyone who offered to teach "any first year course" was someone who did not appropriately appreciate those courses. His fifth and most important contribution was his insistence on teaching ability as a priority. He helped to create the happy situation that this school, as an institution, truly does care about teaching, and has hiring and promotion standards that take teaching into strict account, so that virtually everyone on our faculty is a good teacher.

Professor Wilkins was interested in and knowledgeable about new technologies, and did pathbreaking work in developing lessons for law students for CALI (the Center for Computer-Assisted Legal Instruction). His early leadership in technology—he was founding editor and Webmaster of the law school's Web site, and wrote the first fully electronic text used at the law school—always was subordinate to the human interactions of students with one another and with the professors. He developed innovative and effective ways to teach his classes, and also worked hard to influence how the school as a whole structured its curriculum, set its priorities, and evaluated teaching. Having developed an effective way of teaching the six credit Torts class, he refused to teach Torts after the faculty voted to reduce Torts to a four credit course. I've never been altogether certain that I was right to have agreed to continue to teach Property after it was reduced from six credits to four.

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Professor Wilkins was a central pillar of the law school's institutional existence. He was one of the most reliable and essential contributors to faculty governance—willing to chair and serve on demanding committees and always a dependable participant in meetings and discussions. His characteristic closing for messages regarding faculty disagreements was “Respectfully”—no matter the topic, no matter how much heat might be generated among the disputants, Professor Wilkins's contributions always were useful, thoughtful, pertinent, and civilly and “respectfully” proposed.

Professor Wilkins often quoted Justice Cardozo. I should like to do so as well. Justice Cardozo wrote that “The victory is not for the partisans of an inflexible logic nor yet for the levelers of all rule and all precedent, but the victory is for those who shall know how to fuse these two tendencies together in adaptation to an end as yet imperfectly discerned.”<sup>1</sup> That Professor Lawrence B. Wilkins made profound contributions to enabling new generations of lawyers to secure this victory is what I wish to submit—most grateful and respectfully.

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1. BENJAMIN N. CARDOZO, *THE GROWTH OF THE LAW* 143 (1924).