

HOLDING FAST TO FAIRNESS: REMEMBERING JAMES PATRICK WHITE

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First, I want to express my deep gratitude to Dean Karen Bravo and Assistant Dean Elizabeth Allington for this invitation to share a few words about my former boss, mentor, and good friend, James Patrick White, on this occasion reviving the James White Lecture. I only regret that he is no longer with us to share in this event today.

I am not going to recap his many achievements in life. There is a wonderful obituary in the Indianapolis Star and an article on the law school's website that enumerates these as well as his contributions to Indianapolis and his family. I am going to tell you how I knew him.

I am Kathy Grove, and I was the Assistant Consultant on Legal Education for about half of Jim's tenure as Consultant on Legal Education. In a 1993 publication by Susan Boyd, titled *The ABA's First Section: Assuring a Qualified Bar*, I am described this way: "Kathleen S. Grove, a young Indianapolis lawyer, became the first assistant consultant on legal education to the ABA in 1981. Between that time and 1992, when she left that post to return to graduate school, Grove's duties expanded in a number of areas."¹

Yes—some of these areas included supervising the data gathering from the Annual Questionnaire, training site evaluation teams, staffing Council and Accreditation Committee meetings, supervising the foreign summer program evaluation process, and representing the office at meetings of national organizations such as the National Association for Law Placement and the Law School Admissions Council.

When I started the position, I think I was the fourth person hired, and our offices were a line of faculty offices on the second floor of the previous law school building, now the Herron School of Art and Design. We were tabulating the data from the questionnaire by hand with the assistance of law students and there was no such thing as cell phones or iPhones to communicate with our volunteers—most correspondence was by snail mail. There was no such thing as a digital or electronic copy of our documents—everything was xeroxed and we mailed each Accreditation Committee member forty-four pounds of paper in preparation for every meeting!

By the time I left a decade later, we had a staff of ten, were in a lovely suite of offices in the headquarters building of Sigma Theta Nu, the National Honorary Nursing Society over on North Street, and were doing sophisticated data analysis on computers and communicating with rudimentary email.

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1. SUSAN K. BOYD, A.B.A., *THE ABA'S FIRST SECTION: ASSURING A QUALIFIED BAR* 92 (1993).

When hired, little did I know what awaited me. But I was excited to learn about the accreditation process and the intersection of legal and higher education. I did not foresee that I would spend a night on the floor of the Atlanta airport during an ice storm en route to a Council meeting, or that one month after the 1985 TWA hijacking in the Middle East, I would fly to Israel for a summer program evaluation, or that I would be deposed in an anti-trust law suit. These were just small bumps on the road of a job that was truly life-altering, life-expanding, and wonderful. And that is because of the vision, commitment, support, kindness, and wisdom of Jim White.

Jim was probably the best supervisor I ever had. He gave me great opportunities to learn and expand my skill set without micromanaging, and he expressed trust in my abilities and opinions. He was open to new ideas and advocated for the enhancement and modernization of the office. He went to bat for his staff to make their lives easier, advocating for the latest equipment, adequate offices, and more support as the work expanded. It is easy to understand why his staff remained so loyal and stayed with him for decades. And he was a great role model and teacher because of his integrity, his informed knowledge of the world, his equanimity, and his humanity.

Working for Jim, I met some of the finest people I have ever known. As you know, much of the responsibility for decisions rested with volunteers: law professors, deans, lawyers, bar examiners, judges, and public members who Jim recruited to fill the committees and site evaluation teams. These folks were dedicated, smart, well-intentioned, and serious about the responsibility of improving the legal profession. But they also believed in and trusted Jim to hold fast to fairness, understanding, competence, and integrity in the work we accomplished. And so, they volunteered thousands of hours of their lives, usually giving up countless weekends for meetings and carrying around forty-four pounds of paper!

And it is true—Jim knew everyone. If he mentioned someone in a conversation, it was because he had a sincere relationship with that person and that person was most likely a friend—from Supreme Court Justices to state court judges, bar examiners, deans, professors, and students. Jim understood the value of face-to-face dialogue with a person, especially when trying to reach agreement or understanding. His travel schedule was grueling. I marveled at his stamina. But before we had Zoom or Teams for online meetings, Jim understood that presence and dialogue were key to solving conflict or creating community. So, when asked, he said “yes” to in-person meetings whether in a neighboring state, across the country, or in a foreign country. I am sure he was a million-mile frequent flyer several times over.

Jim’s efforts and vision for this work professionalized the process and elevated the quality of its outcome. Robert A. Stein, former executive director of the ABA commented, “Jim White is more responsible and deserves more credit than any other person for the high quality of legal education in the United

States.”² I could not agree more. Jim’s vision, effort, and network of dedicated staff and volunteers transformed the accreditation process into a reliable, validated, responsive, and standardized mechanism for evaluating legal education and improving it.

Here we are, years later. The Section and Accreditation process well-established and effective, but with the same tensions, and new detractors, and a political environment threatening our academic freedoms and the foundations of our rule of law. This is the perfect time to ask, “What would Jim White do?”

2. *IU McKinney Law Mourns Professor Emeritus James P. White*, Ind. Univ. Robert H. McKinney Sch. of L. (May 2, 2025), <https://mckinneylaw.iu.edu/news/releases/2025/05/iu-mckinney-law-mourns-professor-emeritus-james-p-white.html> [<https://perma.cc/3MRH-2B2S>].