

Aaron David Frankel

2019 commencement speaker on behalf of JD Day Division graduates at UConn Law

Dean Fisher, Solicitor General Verrilli, faculty, staff, family, friends it's an honor to represent my class here today. As a class, we have a lot to celebrate and a lot to be proud of and one of those things that we have to celebrate is our culture as a class. Our norms and expectations, how we treat each other.

Heading into law school, you learn quickly the culture is important because people tell you it's gonna be tough, the competition is going to be fierce and you're going to face it alone. A lot of horror stories. And those were just the headwinds that I faced as a white, middle-class male.

But I have experienced something far different here at UConn. And I think that my classmates would agree with me. And a story really illustrates this.

One of the scariest things that one else subject themselves to here at UConn is the Davis Mock Trial competition and it starts in the beginning of the first semester. You choose a partner that you hardly know and you compete against your classmates in a public display of who knows the least about the rules of evidence. You get up to deliver your opening statement and you cross-examine witnesses in front of upper-class judges, knees shaking voice quavering, palms sweating. But after one of my first trials something special happened that speaks to our community as a law school.

My partner and I went up against two tough opponents and we all failed. It was a disaster and one of our opponents famously remembers hearing one of us say to the other at the midway break "that did not go well." It was an 8 p.m. trial after a long day of class, and so by the time we wrapped up it was already quite late. Instead of leaving us to lick our wounds and wonder how to improve, the upper class students who had judged us did something different.

They took us out for drinks well we went down the street to the Half Door and they spent an hour or more working with us on how to improve. Hours on top of the hours they had already spent in class that day and trials just like ours, probably multiple times that week. And that was the first time that I realized that here at UConn Law School, people want me to succeed.

My classmates, those who came before me, care not just about their own growth, but about the growth of their peers. This was a revelation to me and it is borne out time and again here at the school. We want each other to succeed and there are too many examples of this ethic to name.

So, I just want to stop and say thank you to my classmates, everyone who's been a mentor, a coach, an advocate for each other's mental health, a welcoming and friendly face on campus. Thank you.

So as Emily rightly asked, what do we do now that we're heading out into practice? How do we keep this going? Because, you know, we do we hear the same horror stories going out into the world. The job markets, long hours, the mean senior partner. How can we walk confidently into life as new lawyers and face those challenges head-on?

Well, all we can do is take what we've learned here and put it into practice. All we can do is start working in a field, that while it's inherently adversarial, take the sense of community that we've built here and bring it with us.

We can support our colleagues struggling with heavy workloads or personal conflicts. We can mentor young lawyers as they come into the field and show them that we care about their learning and development. We can remain committed to working in places where success is measured not just by our personal achievements, but by the success of those around us. We can bring this spirit of community that we've built here into practice with us.

I just want to say thank you to my friends, my family and my wife, Becky, who's here with me -- thanks for everything.

Congratulations, to the members of the Class of 2019. Congratulations on what we've accomplished and what we've accomplished together and as a community. I can't wait to see what you all achieve ahead.