

# A Day in the Life of the Dean

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Over the summer, Washburn University School of Law said goodbye to the longest serving faculty member in the law school's storied history. James Concannon's legacy will live on through his work, his mentorship, the endowed deanship in his honor at the law school, and the James Concannon Dean's Suite in the new Robert J. Dole Hall. The suite was made possible by an anonymous donor in honor of Concannon well before his death. While he did not have the opportunity to see the suite completed, he recognized that the space would be utilized by the law school's leaders for generations to come. *A Day in the Life of a Dean* offers a preview of some of the work taking place in the dean's suite.

## 8:45 *Arrival*

Interim Dean **Jeff Jackson**, BBA '89, JD '92, arrives on campus after dropping his son, Jon, off at Stofer Hall. Jon is a junior at Washburn University studying environmental biology. He lives at home and commutes with Jackson. Although the dean is just arriving at Dole Hall, his workday started earlier as he spent time at home with a list of three to four priorities for the day. Spoiler alert: he will only get to work on two of them.

## 8:50 – 9:10 *Settling In*

Jackson checks his emails and returns messages. There are countless projects underway relating to the law school, but the major one is preparation for the 10-year ABA accreditation visit in the spring.

## 9:10 – 9:30 *Report Editing*

As part of this process for the site visit, the school must fill out a 125-page survey detailing its policies, procedures, and practices to meet the ABA regulations, as well as a 25-page self-study that analyzes the effectiveness of these practices. All the administrative offices across the law school have been working to compile the information for their respective areas. **Shelby Grau**, BA '03, JD '07, formerly director of compliance and administration at the law school, and **Emily Grant**, associate dean, have been integrating the collected information into a draft report. The dean gets the easy job in the process: reviewing the information and editing the draft. It's a project best done in bite-sized chunks. This is one of them.

## 9:30-10:00 *Meeting with a Current Student*

Although he isn't teaching this semester, Jackson still meets with students who need advice on their legal careers. Today, he's speaking with a student about applying and interviewing for judicial clerkships. Because Jackson has clerked for judges on the Kansas Court of Appeals, Kansas Supreme Court, and the United States 10th Circuit Court of Appeals, students who aspire to clerk for those courts often ask him for advice about clerking.

## 10:00 – 10:30 *Meeting with a Prospective Student*

Another part of the dean's job is promoting Washburn University School of Law to prospective students. When a student visits campus, they first meet with either **Kaitlin Alegria**, BA '12, JD '15, MA '21, assistant dean of admissions, or **Priscilla Samarripa**, admissions director. Then a student ambassador takes them on a tour of the building. They will also often sit in on a class in session. At Washburn, each of the visitors meet with a professor one-on-one. Often, they will meet with the dean. Over this half hour, Jackson will talk to the prospective student (and sometimes the student's parents) about Washburn and what attending law school is like. This personal touch is something that Washburn is famous for, and it helps with recruitment for the law school.

## 10:30-11:00 *More Emails*

Now Jackson gets some time to breathe after his recruitment activities. He spends this time fielding and replying to emails that come in throughout the day about a variety of law school matters.

## 11:00 – Noon *Meeting with Director of Development*

Once a week, Jackson meets with **Patrick Mikesic**, executive director of development and alumni relations for the School of Law. A large part of the dean's job involves traveling and speaking with alumni, either in one-on-one visits or at larger alumni events. With the opening of the new building, Washburn Law has been fielding several requests from alumni and outside organizations who want to tour and utilize the building. On this particular day, the schedule of events for the week is heavier than usual. On Thursday, the United States District Court judges for the District of Kansas will be holding parts of their annual retreat at the law school, and Jackson will be tasked with greeting the judges when they arrive and conducting a tour of the school for them. The dean will also join in when the judges eat lunch with groups of students in the Kent & Karen Smith Student Commons and introduce the judges for a panel discussion with students. These types of

## Lessons from Jim Concannon by Jeff Jackson

I had the good fortune to be able to learn from Jim Concannon in a variety of settings. He was my law school dean, my faculty mentor, and my go-to source for advice as an interim dean. What I know about being a faculty member and a dean, I learned from Jim.

### **As a Student:** *A Dean Steps Up*

In the fall of 1990, I was a member of the infamous civil procedure class that lost its professor. It was an incredible story that you can read about in Jim's book. With no other choice, then-Dean Concannon stepped up to teach the class by combining it with the civil procedure class he was already teaching. This situation meant that, in addition to all of his duties as dean, he was teaching, and grading, 150 1Ls! Somehow, he managed to give all of us the personal attention for which Washburn is famous. I don't know when he found the time to sleep. But it was a job that had to be done, and so Concannon did it.

### **As a New Professor:** *Give Everyone an Even Shake*

We have blind grading here at the law school. That's a good thing, although it sometimes causes issues. There are occasions when, after you've finalized the grades and they are unchangeable, you find out that you gave a bad grade to a student that you really, really like. Maybe it's the student that you were really rooting for because they seemed so earnest. Maybe it's the student who answered all the questions you asked. At these times, a professor can begin to question whether they somehow made a mistake in grading, or whether blind grading even makes sense. It was Jim Concannon as my faculty mentor who drove home to me that I couldn't know everything about students. Some of those students who don't talk much in class

may be listening intently to every word, but are too worried about being wrong to speak up. Students who don't seem to be putting in the effort may in fact just be a swan – cool on the surface, but paddling like heck underneath. Students need to know that, as a professor, you're going to give them an even shake.

**As a Dean:** *When I accepted the job as interim dean, Jim gave me some words of advice that I've taken to heart. They are:*

**1. The dean has to be the biggest cheerleader** – In anything having to do with the law school, the dean is the person people want to hear from. That means the dean must be the public face. Most of the time that's fun, because it means you get to talk to interesting alumni, prospective students, and guests and you get to show off the school. Other times it's, well, not so fun. Either way, that's what I signed up for.

**2. Don't forget who actually does the work** – Although the dean is the one who often gets the spotlight, it wouldn't be there except for the work of others in the dean's suite. I may feel good about talking to a prospective student who seems eager to attend Washburn, but that student wouldn't be in my office except for the hard work that the admissions team put in to identify and recruit that student. And although I may feel important when an employer calls me for a final reference check for a student, the truth is my part is only the last bit of a process that started with Tammy King, assistant dean for professional development, and Kate Davis, assistant director, getting the student the interview in the first place and coaching the student through it.

**3. You don't know everything** – A big temptation for a law

professor, and for a dean, is to think that because you know a lot about one thing, you know a lot about everything. You don't. You can only succeed if you hire good people and let them do their jobs. I know that I can't navigate the tangle of students, professors, and space requirements in order to produce a class schedule nearly as well as Associate Dean Emily Grant can. And though I can read a balance sheet, I can't devote the attention to figuring out the law school's cash flow as well as the finance team can. I can talk to students, but I can't work through their degree requirements like the registrar team can. And I certainly can't begin to solve student problems like our student affairs team can. It takes all of us to run this place. Sometimes my part is just getting out of the way.



interactions are some of the highlights of the year for students. Later in the week, the Topeka Bar Association will be holding their monthly meeting at the law school. At that meeting, Jackson will be addressing the approximately 45 attorneys who attend and will update them on Washburn Law's programs

and students. That meeting will also finish with a tour of the building conducted by the dean. At the end of the week, the law school will be hosting its annual alumni awards, honoring distinguished alumni and friends of the school. Jackson will present the awards along with JuliAnn Mazachek, president,

Washburn University, and **Lucky DeFries, '78**, alumni association awards committee chair. Finally, the week will conclude with the board of governors meeting on Saturday morning. Jackson and Mikesic go through all the preparations and scheduling for these events to ensure they run as smoothly as possible.

### **12:15 – 1:30** *Faculty Meeting*

The faculty are meeting today to discuss the upcoming hiring season. Washburn Law has seen the recent retirement of several long-time professors and is looking at hiring up to five new professors this season. In preparation, the faculty gather and discuss subject priorities and strategies for attracting the largest number of possible candidates. And there's pizza.

### **1:30 – 2:00** *Still More Emails . . .*

Jackson uses this small break in the day to catch up on correspondence from the morning.

### **2:00 – 2:30** *Marketing Meeting*

Jackson meets with **Karli Davis, BA '06**, director of marketing and communications for Washburn Law, to go over the work on the Washburn School of Law website. Davis is overseeing a complete restructuring and modernization of the website to

make it more attractive and accessible. It's the first step of a university-wide overhaul of websites. Davis brings Jackson up to speed on the work that she and her assistant director, **Ryan Purcell, BA '05**, have been doing.

### **2:30 – 5:15ish** *Time for Dean-ey Things*

Today, this is a rare block of time with few interruptions. Jackson uses this time to edit the ABA site visit documents and look at the scholarship reports for a meeting tomorrow with Brett James, the Law School's budget and operations manager, and Alegria. They'll be figuring out how to allocate the available scholarship money to attract and retain students most effectively.

### **Evening**

The dean heads for home. Sometime between 7 p.m. and 9 p.m. tonight, he'll check email one more time to make sure that no emergencies have cropped up and to think about and prepare a list of three to four priorities for tomorrow.

Interim Dean Jeff Jackson, BBA '89, JD '92, teaches in a new classroom. Photo by Jeremy Wangler

