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Dedication to Paul L. Oberst

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DEDICATION

The rumor of Professor Paul Oberst's retirement, upon which this dedicatory issue was premised, was much exaggerated. At its last meeting the University's Board of Trustees officially restored Paul's regular faculty status, implementing an earlier decision to extend to those scheduled for retirement last year the option of accepting retirement or continuing to work until the age of seventy. I am happy to report that Professor Oberst has elected to continue with us as an active law teacher.

These developments do not make an effort to honor Paul any less fitting. Chronologically he has given as much of himself to legal education as others before him, here and in most of the country's other law schools where retirement generally was forced at an earlier age. And in other terms he has given as much as or more than may reasonably be expected of anyone.

Paul Oberst is probably best known across our campus as a faculty leader-participant in University governance and as a champion of academic freedom and other faculty rights and interests. He was boldly active in the arena of academic freedom at a time when championing that cause required substantially more courage than it appears to require today. His reputation as an early academic freedom-fighter is well established nationally.

I have been aware of his campus-wide involvement and status as a faculty leader through many years, and I have been his colleague in this college for periods that equal twelve years. But if I know Paul better than most people do, and I believe I do, it is because of our relationship when I was a student of his in the setting of a small law school. In addition to taking several courses under him, I served as his student research assistant and co-authored three articles with him. Those who know him well are aware of two characteristics prominent in his makeup. One is his decent and generous nature and the other—more remarkable—is the constancy in him of all those qualities which prove his decency and generosity. More than almost anyone else I know, Paul Oberst has
an optimistically ideal perception of humankind. I think he may be incapable of feeling—certainly of acting out—sustained animosity towards anyone. Moreover, he has approached the law, its study, and the teaching of it with a generous understanding, enthusiasm, and idealism.

The manifestation of Paul’s nature that students find most appealing and that has made the deepest impression on me is his unselfish and genuine interest in his students, while they are students and later as they develop their careers. I have come to learn that this interest is more intense respecting Kentuckians, and I believe in fact that it is associated with his deeply-felt loyalty toward and love for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. Because it may seem trite to remark on a teacher’s interest in the development of his students, I want to illustrate the depth and reality of this quality in Paul by a personal reference. When I had been out of law school for about nine years I participated in a three-day conference at the Chicago Law School. Paul Oberst attended the conference at his own expense, and while the subject-matter of the conference and the standing of the other conferees were sufficient justification for his decision to attend, I have never doubted that the participation of one of his former students was the actual cause of his attendance.

My experiences with Paul may have been unusual, but they have not been unique. I know that a multitude of alumni in and out of Kentucky will understand and appreciate the point I have sought to make concerning Paul. His dedication to the College of Law and to its students has been complete. The student editors of the Kentucky Law Journal initiated and developed this issue as a means of expressing their appreciation of his contributions as a law teacher. His projected retirement had the good effect of prompting this expression of appreciation. The action of the Board of Trustees has the better effect of permitting Professor Oberst to continue to enrich our law school’s environment by his active participation.

Thomas P. Lewis
Dean