REMARKS

OPENING REMARKS

Connie Mayer*

MS. MAYER: Good evening. My name is Connie Mayer, I'm the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, and this semester I am also the Acting Dean and President, filling in for Dean Guernsey while he's on sabbatical.

I'd like to welcome you to Albany Law School for this roast or tribute, depending on how it turns out. Sorry, David. (Laughing).

We're here to celebrate the career of Distinguished Professor Emeritus David D. Siegel.

For those of you who haven't visited with us in a while, we welcome you back. I see we have a wide range of family, friends, and colleagues. Thank you all very much for coming tonight.

The one thing we all have in common is that we've been touched by Professor Siegel in some way, either personally, professionally and academically, or in my case, David, literally, right?

(Laughter)

Rose, we've got to talk.

(Laughter)

As many of you know, Professor Siegel joined the faculty in 1972 after teaching at St. John's Law School for ten years, where he met his lovely wife Rosemarie, who is also with us tonight. We appreciate her being here as well.

As a faculty member and as the Associate Dean here at the law school, I've had the pleasure of working with Professor Siegel since 1986.

Professor Siegel exemplifies what we mean when we talk about excellence in teaching and scholarship. Professor Siegel is the embodiment of what it means to be an excellent teacher, mentor,
and an excellent scholar.

As I look out on this audience I realize that many of you are former students of Professor Siegel. You know that Professor Siegel’s name, as I think his biography says, is synonymous with New York Practice. His treatise on New York Practice is frequently called “the Bible,” probably by people in this room, certainly by our students. And if you practice law in New York, you’d better have a copy of it, because he has been known to walk into an office unannounced to make sure the lawyer there has a copy on the bookshelves.

Over the course of his thirty-six years of teaching here at Albany Law School he has taught New York Practice, federal jurisdiction, conflicts, and civil procedure to thousands of Albany Law School graduates.

As a faculty member, those of you who have had Professor Siegel know that he’s very tough, he’s very demanding, he sets very high standards in the classroom, he has very high expectations, but along with his toughness he also has a terrific sense of humor that the students here and his colleagues on the faculty have come to love and appreciate. Sometimes more than other times, it depends.

In preparing to talk about Professor Siegel tonight, before I turn the program over to the others who will be presenting, I had the opportunity to review some of Professor Siegel’s old student evaluations and they consistently describe him as one of the most enthusiastic and knowledgeable professors they’ve ever had here at the law school or at any other institution. His class lectures and presentations are described as clear and precise, and those of you who have had Professor Siegel I’m sure would agree.

Hundreds of students said in their evaluations that Professor Siegel is their favorite professor at the law school. I see nods of agreement in the audience. And some said that their favorite subject was civil procedure, because of Professor Siegel. And, of course, there were a few complaints.

(Laughter)

One had to do with the temperature in the East Wing. Anybody remember?

(Laughter)

For many years Professor Siegel taught his civil procedure or New York Practice class in the West Wing or the East Wing because it was the only room big enough to hold as many students as wanted to take his class. At the beginning of class he would go over and
turn down the thermostat, which we actually had in the East Wing and West Wing, to fifty-five or sixty degrees, depending on his mood. Within ten minutes the room would be so frigid that students swore the air conditioning would come on in the middle of class even during the winter. So they took to wearing extra scarves, mittens, hats, and other kinds of winter paraphernalia to gear up for these frost-like conditions in his class. Folklore has it that if students came dressed in extra sweaters and hats he would go over and turn it down even lower.

(Laughter)

He just needed to make them reasonably uncomfortable. Not so uncomfortable that it would be actionable, but reasonably uncomfortable.

But his reason for doing this was educationally sound. It woke them up. It kept them alert. They were ready for those piercing questions. Their minds were focused. And as he said, they can think better when their brain is cold.

(Laughter)

Well, we finally changed the heating system because we couldn't let him torture our students any longer. We took the thermostat out; we now control it on our own, to the great relief of his students. But I think he's still disappointed that he doesn't have that same control over the temperature—he actually went back into Administrative Services many years in a row and tried to get them to turn the heat down in that room before he went in, and I think they did it at least for a while.

Professor Siegel also took great delight in phoning certain students after he had graded their exams. I don't know if any of you had this experience with Professor Siegel, but as you know, he doesn't allow students to take his courses pass/fail very frequently; but occasionally he'll let students take one of his courses pass/fail. Again, not a lot of students did that, but there were some nervous types—Nervous Nellies—who didn't think that they would do well enough in his class, so they would opt to take his class pass/fail.

No student in their right mind, even if they were taking his class pass/fail, would ever walk into his final exam unprepared. They still studied like crazy. They studied like they were going to get a grade for it, but they were taking it pass/fail.

So, invariably, some of these students ended up actually getting a good grade in his class. So—at least this is the folklore—Professor Siegel loved to call them after he had graded the exams to tell them
what a good grade they would have gotten had they not been so foolish as to take his class pass/fail.

(Laughter)

And finally, before I turn the program over to Professor Connors, I wanted to share with you just a couple of comments from his evaluations that I think really sum it up well.

One student at the end of his evaluation just wrote in huge block letters, this big (making hand gestures), across the bottom of the student evaluation: “The bottom line is he’s a fun guy.”

(Laughter)

The second one that I thought was—that I think some of you will really appreciate, I particularly appreciated it—was in response to a question on the evaluation that asked whether the student had any other comments on the evaluation. The student wrote the following, which I think exactly reflects what Professor Siegel was probably thinking about that semester and has thought this many times after. The student wrote this: “The administration should listen to Professor Siegel’s suggestions more carefully regarding the running of the law school.”

(Laughter)

I think David planted that one—

(Laughter)

—because he also gave himself all fours. That’s the highest score you can give. I think that one came from him.

Anyway, Professor Siegel is a brilliant teacher and scholar, a wonderful colleague, and a wonderful friend. We will miss him greatly. We know that he is going to continue his scholarship and his presentations, and we do thank him for continuing to contribute to the education of future lawyers and students.

And we wish him well.

David, I’m sorry that you are retiring. We’re suitmates now, which I very much like. Although your office—I’m not sure about the desire to have everything carpeted in your office.

Has anybody been in Professor Siegel’s office? His desk is carpeted. I don’t understand that, but it’s very interesting.

(Laughter)

I’m sorry you’re going. I don’t have to try to remember how to spell your name anymore, which I’ve never mastered during all of these years.

Before I turn the program over to Professor Connors, I’d like to mention that the Albany Law Review is dedicating a special issue of
the *Albany Law Review* to Professor Siegel and will be publishing articles relating to Professor Siegel's impact and contributions to the practice of law and most especially to New York Practice.

Additionally, a few weeks ago, we asked people to write to us about their experiences, their stories, their thoughts about Professor Siegel. We received dozens of very entertaining and thoughtful stories from students, from friends, and from even his cousins. Not all fit for publication, but those comments will be showcased in the foyer during the reception.

For those of you who would like to share some kind of a special message with Professor Siegel tonight, there will also be poster boards at the reception for you to sign and put a note on, if you want.

And finally, in the glass case outside the library we have on display some of Professor Siegel's publications and books, if you want to take a look at that.

So at this time I'd like to turn the program over to another one of our very popular professors, Professor Pat Connors, who is helping us continue our commitment to teaching New York Practice here at Albany Law School.

(Applause)