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## Evan Caminker | Dean of the University of Michigan Law School

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Three days after being named dean of the University of Michigan Law School in 2003, Evan Caminker had already accomplished one of his goals. While under consideration for the deanship, Caminker said he would strive to achieve three goals: continue to build a world-class faculty; initiate a building project to enhance the law school's facilities; and see the law school through an affirmative action battle, with a case pending in the US Supreme Court.

"An announcement on my selection as dean was made on Friday, and the Supreme Court issued its ruling on Monday, in favor of the law school," says Caminker. "I told my colleagues: 'I had three goals, and I just completed one over my first weekend. It's a great time to resign!'"

Since then, Caminker has remained focused on his other goals, in the process inspiring his students and bringing his experience in government and private practice to the law school.

Caminker joined Wilmer Cutler Pickering in Washington DC in 1985 as a summer associate. After graduating from Yale Law School in 1986, he clerked on the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit for Judge William Norris from 1986 to 1987. He then worked for the Center for Law and the Public Interest on a fellowship from 1987 to 1988. While at the public interest organization, Caminker was selected for a clerkship under Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr., scheduled for the summer of 1989.

"I had a year off before the clerkship, so I came back to Wilmer in that interim year," he says.

"Because I was there for a defined period of time, my work centered on writing Supreme Court briefs, and I was the envy of my surroundings. The first-year associates would've given their left arm to work on a Supreme Court case, and here I was doing one after the other."

Though his time at the firm was brief, Caminker calls the experience "fantastic."

"It enabled me to be a more productive, effective and mature Supreme Court clerk," he says. "It truly allowed me to understand cases and oral arguments from the perspective of fantastic lawyers, and to see what good lawyering is, what it does and how it can be helpful to the court."

Following his clerkship, Caminker decided to try his hand at legal academia. "Though I did think

seriously about coming back to private practice,” he adds. He began teaching at the University of California, Los Angeles—his undergraduate alma mater—in 1991, and stayed through the fall of 1999, when he was recruited to the University of Michigan Law School. “I wasn’t looking to leave LA; Michigan was out of the blue,” he says.

Though it was unexpected, Caminker thought the move would help broaden his professional horizons, and came to appreciate life in the college town of Ann Arbor. But soon after he came to Michigan, he left. In January 2000, Caminker took leave from the law school to join the Justice Department in Washington as deputy assistant attorney general in the Office of Legal Counsel, where he remained through the end of the Clinton Administration in 2001.

“My boss there was Randy Moss,” says Caminker. “And I often did work with Jonathan Cedarbaum, Seth Waxman, David Ogden and others. It was comforting to be surrounded by people with similar values, and legal talent that was off the charts.”

In the summer of 2001, Caminker returned to the law school and became associate dean. At that time, he approached then-Dean Jeff Lehman about working on two ongoing cases—*Grutter v. Bollinger*, which challenged the law school’s affirmative action admissions policy, and *Gratz v. Bollinger*, which challenged the University of Michigan’s undergraduate affirmative action admissions policy.

“I worked behind the scenes with the outside counsel, which happened to be John Payton, as well as Craig Goldblatt, a dear friend, and others at the firm. It was nice to see friendly faces and work with extremely strong talent.”

Once the cases ended in 2003—the Supreme Court upheld the law school’s policy in *Grutter*—Caminker, who had been teaching classes on the federal courts and civil procedure, was named dean.

“I used to love teaching civil procedure,” says Caminker. “You’re the professor opening the door for first-years to a whole new world of law. It’s not so much about teaching a subject, but introducing them to ways of thinking about the law and the importance of law in our society.”

This year, the law school had an entering class of approximately 360 students, with approximately 1,200 students enrolled in total. Among his many responsibilities, Caminker recently saw another of his original goals take flight. The school has broken ground on a \$102 million building that will “take us leaps ahead,” according to Caminker.

But Caminker admits that the law school, like many institutions, has not been immune to the “unique circumstances of the outside world.” His greatest challenge now, he says, is to predict the skills his graduates will need in order to succeed in the legal world.

“It’s a tumultuous time right now,” he says. “A good dean should always be thinking about what students will need when they graduate, to get them to the right spot.”

Regardless of the economic strain, Caminker remains dedicated to seeking out the potential in all students and providing the support and education necessary for them to succeed.

“A big piece of what is so satisfying about my role as dean is having a transformative impact on bright and passionate people,” he says.

Caminker’s enthusiasm for his students is exceeded only by his appreciation for past experiences and colleagues.

“I learned during my time at WilmerHale that the most important thing a lawyer has is a reputation,” says Caminker. “A reputation for integrity, honest dealing, forthrightness, and for being the type of person you yourself would want to work with and against. We try in various ways to instill that here.”