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Tribute to Rex Perschbacher

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Over the years, many faculty, students and staff have arrived at King Hall, stayed for a while, and departed. Most have left King Hall pretty much the way they found it, while a few have left a lasting imprint. Rex Perschbacher is among those few.

Rex was recruited in 1981 to direct the school's clinical programs. Those programs, while quite excellent, had developed largely on an ad hoc basis, almost as an afterthought to the traditional law school curriculum. Within just a few years, Rex succeeded in elevating the status of clinical legal education and persuading a sometimes skeptical faculty of its relevance to modern legal education.

Rex was a superb teacher and beloved by generations of students. I will never forget the day when one of his Civil Procedure students summoned me to his classroom to join his class in singing a parody of the Rolling Stones song "Satisfaction" entitled "Jurisdiction." As you can probably imagine, the refrain was "I can't get no jurisdiction." Most of the students were wearing versions of Rex's trademark blue blazer as well as "Groucho Marx" glasses to mimic Rex's dark glasses and mustache. The room was brimming with affection for Rex.

My deepest connection to Rex was during our service in the Dean's Office — he as Associate Dean and I as Dean. Faculty and staff hired over the last two decades may not be aware of the various crises faced by the Law School in the mid-1990s. First came draconian budget cuts, resulting in staff layoffs and a reduction in faculty FTEs. Then, we faced an existential threat when then Governor Wilson sought to privatize or possibly even close the Law School. The Law School

survived that threat, but at the cost of new “professional fees,” which have ratcheted up dramatically over the years. Finally, the voters approved Proposition 209, which banned affirmative action and necessitated a revision of our admissions criteria. I was subsequently summoned to appear before the University of California Board of Regents to explain and defend our policies.

Rex was in the middle of all of this. It is not an exaggeration to say that we were actually co-deans. Although I was the “front” person, major decisions were jointly made. If we initially disagreed, either I managed to persuade him, or he managed to persuade me. Of course, it was usually the latter. He was brilliant, tireless, and filled with personal warmth. He had an infectious sense of humor that helped make the stress bearable. It is hard to imagine navigating those difficult years without him. Later, as Dean, he took the Law School to a whole new level. We (I especially) owe him a lot.