



NEWS & EVENTS

Posted May 18, 2015

Core Values Matter, DeMaurice Smith '89 Tells Class of 2015



"'Self-made' is a myth, and therefore we have a duty to reach back, pull up and provide a foundation so that hard work can actually make dreams a reality," commencement speaker DeMaurice Smith '89 told graduates.

The Class of 2015 should uphold core values, including having courage and helping others, NFL Players Association Executive Director [DeMaurice Smith '89](#) told graduates on Sunday.

"Know that the personal and core values that you want to believe matter, actually do matter," Smith said at John Paul Jones Arena, where the Law School ceremony was held due to inclement weather.

Those values include treating colleagues well, no matter how they treat you, he added. "Your greatest victories will always be those that include the successes of others."


Smith leads the union responsible for protecting the interests of NFL players, a position to which he was twice unanimously elected by a board of active player representatives. He is a former assistant U.S. attorney in Washington, D.C., and was counsel to then-Deputy Attorney General Eric H. Holder Jr. After his government service ended and before his current role, Smith worked as a partner in the law firms Latham & Watkins and Patton Boggs.

In a speech peppered with humor and heart, Smith said that he started to speculate at his selection as the commencement speaker, as surely other alumni were better qualified. To realize that might be the case "was even a little ... deflating," he said slyly, referring to recent Deflategate woes in the NFL.



Though he didn't take courses in antitrust, labor law or sports law — all areas he focuses on in his current role — Smith said he gained a strong sense of camaraderie with classmates and gained

"authentic friendships."

"I owe a tremendous debt to this law school because it gave me the start that today it gives each of you," he said. "I look for opportunities to give back, because the law school — as we are fond of saying — took a chance on me."

 **University of Virginia School of Law** added 52 new photos to the album: **Class of 2015 Commencement** — at **JOHN PAUL JONES ARENA**.
Organization · 6,530 Likes · May 18 at 1:46pm · [Profile](#)

UVa Law School Graduation, May 17, 2015

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He encouraged the class to help others the way he was helped.

"'Self-made' is a myth, and therefore we have a duty to reach back, pull up and provide a foundation so that hard work can actually make dreams a reality," he said. "It does obligate each and every one of us to make the same investment for someone else."

He also encouraged students to be courageous in applying their newfound skills. He pointed to his successful negotiation of a historic 10-year collective bargaining agreement in 2011 with the league and NFL commissioner Roger Goodell, following a 132-day lockout.

The players' goals weren't about money, he said, but about "a desire to realize a vision that our players are more than fungible commodities."

The resulting agreement resulted in less rough contact for players in practice, broader access to better pensions and better access to health care, he said.

"History proves that the only thing that makes a vision for a better tomorrow a reality is courage," he said. "Courage still, and will always, matter."

He challenged graduates to find "good fights" to tackle.

"Ours is a profession that is designed to arm advocates with the ability to bring fairness to every contest, and it is grounded in a belief that justice is a right that can be achieved by any person," he said.

The students in the Class of 2015 who were once strangers are now classmates and friends, Smith said.

"The years that will come after today will bring you both joy and pain, but the real benefit of living through both of them is that it will sear into you that which is truly important and truly worth living for, every day."



In total, the Law School conferred 406 degrees: 366 J.D.s, 39 LL.M.s and one S.J.D.

"You are trained to be leaders, and you will be, in your careers, in your communities, and in some cases, in elected or appointed government service," Dean [Paul Mahoney](#) said. "Your law school is proud of you and confident of your future."

[Alex Matthews](#), the outgoing president of the Student Bar Association and the president of the graduating class, announced the class gift: 297 graduates — 82 percent — pledged to support the Law School with financial donations over the next four years.

Matthews also thanked the family members, friends and others who supported the students through law school.

"Without your support, guidance and tolerance, the many accomplishments of this year's class would not have been possible."

Fast Facts About the Class of 2015

- The class volunteered 17,563 pro bono hours to assist those who cannot afford legal representation
- 103 graduates met the [Pro Bono Challenge](#) by each contributing 75 hours or more of pro bono service
- Graduates led effort to [raise more than \\$23,000](#) through the softball invitational for a local nonprofit and students working in public service positions over the summer
- Through [Public Interest Law Association](#)

[fundraising](#), the class made it possible for other students to work in public service

- During their three years, 10 student-run [academic journals](#) published a total of 37 issues
- Two graduates were featured on Peabody-award-winning podcast "[Serial](#)"
- Several graduates worked on Supreme Court cases ([Elonis](#) and [Henderson](#)) and [argued before federal and state courts](#) across the country.

Awards Presented at Graduation

Margaret G. Hyde Award

To the graduate whose scholarship, character, personality, activities in the affairs of the school, and promise of efficiency have entitled him or her to special recognition.

Joel S. Johnson

James C. Slaughter Honor Award

To an outstanding member of the graduating class.

Sejal Parimal Jhaveri

Thomas Marshall Miller Prize

To an outstanding and deserving member of the graduating class.

Jessica Leigh Wagner

Z Society Shannon Award

To the graduate with the highest academic record after five semesters.

Samuel Matthew Strongin

Law School Alumni Association Best Note Award

To the member of the graduating class who wrote the best note in a current issue of a Law School publication.

John Franklin Sacha Jr.

Robert E. Goldsten Award for Distinction in the Classroom

To the graduate who has contributed the most to classroom education by his or her outstanding recitation and discussion.

Colin McGovern Downes

Roger and Madeleine Traynor Prize

To two graduates who have produced outstanding written work.

Lide Evans Paterno

Evan Thomas

Herbert Kramer/Herbert Bangel Community Service Award

To the graduate who has contributed the most to the community.

Megan Margaret Durkee

Mortimer Caplin Public Service Award

To a graduate entering a career in the public service sector who demonstrates the qualities of leadership, integrity and service to others.

Sejal Parimal Jhaveri

Edwin S. Cohen Tax Prize

To the graduate who has demonstrated superior scholarship in the tax area.

Jasmine Nancy Hay

Stephen N. Shashy

Earle K. Shawe Labor Relations Award

To the graduate who shows the greatest promise in the field of labor relations.

Emily Elizabeth Batt

John M. Olin Prize in Law and Economics

To a graduate or graduates who have produced outstanding written work in the field of law and economics.

Megan Elizabeth Colville

Eppa Hunton IV Memorial Book Award

To a graduate who demonstrates unusual aptitude in courses in the field of litigation, and who shows a keen awareness and understanding of the lawyer's ethical and professional responsibility.

Brett W. Rector

Virginia Trial Lawyers Trial Advocacy Award

To a graduate who shows particular promise in the field of trial advocacy.

Sarah Alexandra Smith

Virginia State Bar Family Law Book Award

To the graduate who has demonstrated the most promise and potential for the practice of family law.

Katie R. Packer



University of Virginia School of Law added 18 new photos from May 17 to the album: [The Class of 2015 on What's Next](#) — at [JOHN PAUL JONES ARENA](#).

[Profile](#)

Organization · 6,530 Likes · May 17 ·

Graduates waiting for the #UVALawGrad ceremony to start told us what they were up to next, including starting careers, moving and taking imaginary trips to Disney World.



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More News From UVA Law

 **University of Virginia School of Law** Profile

added 37 new photos from May to the album: [Class of 2015 Graduation Reception — at University of Virginia School of Law.](#)

Organization · 6,530 Likes · May · ·

Graduates and guests gathered for a reception on Saturday during the weekend's festivities. Tag your friends! #UVALawGrad

Hi-res photos can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1Puttyf>



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