

LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS — INTERVIEW WITH PROF. RAUSHENBUSH

Professor Walter Raushenbush of the Law School Faculty is currently completing the first year of a two-year term as President of the Law School Admissions Council, a non-profit educational association made up of the 171 ABA-approved law schools in the country. As its name indicates, the Council provides services and conducts activities to serve and inform those involved in the law school admissions process — applicants, law schools, and undergraduate institutions.

Not surprisingly, one of the Council's central functions is the administration of the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). Although the test is actually owned by the member law schools, through the Council, the test is currently administered by the Educational Testing Service. Starting this year, the Council has assumed for the first time full responsibility for operating the Law School Data Assembly Service, which previously was also contracted out to ETS.

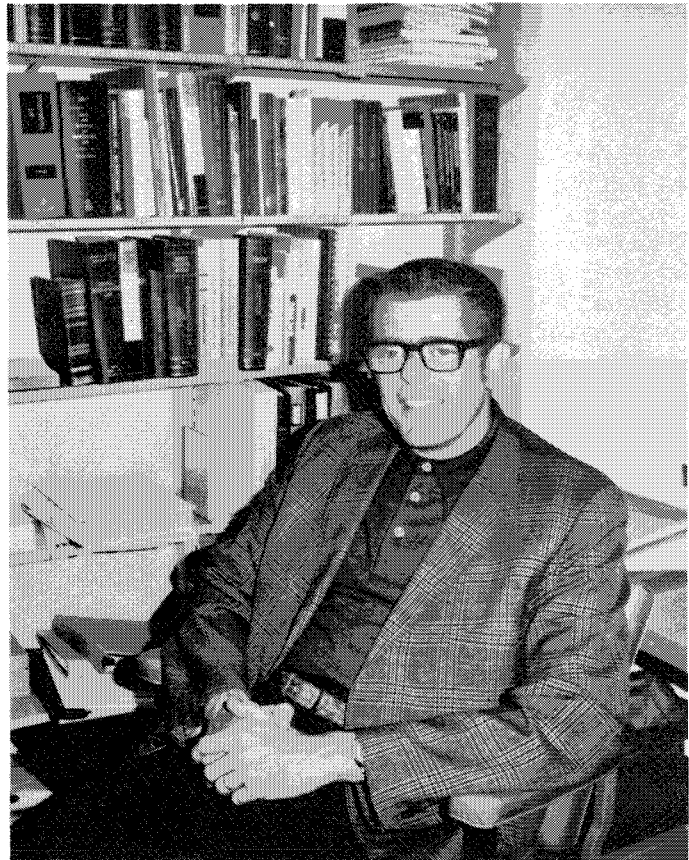
In his role as Council President, Professor Raushenbush has gained a special perspective on future trends in law school admissions. He states that the Council is particularly concerned with estimating future demand for law school places, since this has important implications for the member schools and the planning they must do for the coming years. As anyone who has been connected with legal education knows, the past fifteen years or so have seen a boom in law school applications, with the numbers more than doubling from 1964 to 1971. During the last several years, however, this trend appears to have changed, resulting in a levelling and even some decline, in numbers of applicants.

If this downward trend continues, as the Council believes it

will, more law schools will once again be faced with the nearly forgotten dilemma of deciding which among the field of applicants are qualified for a particular school and which are not. This is in sharp contrast to the present situation in which most schools are inundated with many more qualified applicants than they can accept. Decreased numbers of qualified applicants will have an impact on law schools in budgetary terms, resulting in schools' being faced with a need to fill all slots in order to produce needed revenues, a pressure which can work against the desire for a strongly qualified student body. One way to meet this challenge is the development of innovative recruiting practices, which most law schools have not had to engage in for many years. One of the Council's roles in the years

ahead will be that of a resource to law school admissions committees in assisting them to resolve these difficult problems.

The Reagan administration's proposed student financial aid cutbacks may also soon affect law school admissions, according to Professor Raushenbush. A decrease in the amount of "cheap money" for graduate and professional education could have a serious impact on the numbers of students who will be able to attend law school. The proposed "needs test" may be very restrictive and it is unclear if the independent status of most law students will be adequately recognized. The Council will attempt to influence the funding picture by resisting decreases in financial aid and by urging that decreases that do occur should not have a disproportionate impact on graduate and legal education.



Prof. Walter Raushenbush

In addition to financial aid concerns, the Council has also been involved in extensively revising the LSAT. The need for revision is primarily the result of a "Truth in Testing" Act passed in June, 1979 by the New York Legislature. This law mandates disclosure to the public of the contents of tests such as the LSAT and requires the test, with its answers, to be filed as a public document and to be provided on request to anyone who has taken the test. Subsequent to the enactment of the New York statute, the Council decided that fairness and consistency dictated the disclosure of the test and its answers in all areas of the country. Although the tests had previously been re-used three or four times, the new policy precludes using a test more than once. One result is that a new test format became necessary if scores are to be comparable from one adminis-

tration of the test to another.

Although the new test will be quite similar in content to the old one, a new scoring scale will be used. Possible scores will range from ten to fifty, rather than the present range of 200 to 800, for LSAT's administered starting in June 1982. New test forms are now being developed and pre-tested by ETS, with all questions being reviewed by a Council committee of experienced law teachers.

"'Truth in testing' legislation is a 'glamour' project right now," says Professor Raushenbush, adding that Congress and many state legislatures are interested in passing laws similar to the New York statute. "Since the Council would have a difficult time complying with thirty different state laws, and the costs of such compliance would necessitate dramatic fee increases," he states,

"we are actively engaged in efforts to either defeat these proposed pieces of legislation or to assure that, while reasonably meeting the objectives of proponents, they will not be too costly to comply with, or too damaging to the testing process." He points out that fees had to be increased as a result of the Council's nationwide compliance with the New York law.

"However," he adds, "recent news of flawed questions in some ETS tests underlines the value that substantial test disclosure can have from the standpoint of accountability and quality control. Whether voluntary (as we would prefer) or required by legislation, such disclosure looks like an idea whose time has come."

Suzanne Williams



Hon. Thomas E. Fairchild (left) and Gordon Sinykin (right) were the recipients of this year's WLAA Distinguished Service Awards. The presentation was made during the Annual Meeting on May 1, 1981.