Nancy I. Kenderdine: Teacher, Scholar, Administrator, and Colleague

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NANCY I. KENDERDINE: TEACHER, SCHOLAR, ADMINISTRATOR AND COLLEAGUE

VON RUSSELL CREEL*

As Nancy Kenderdine nears well-deserved retirement, it is right and meet to reflect upon the ways in which Oklahoma City University School of Law is better for her more than two decades of service. I write of Nancy as teacher, scholar, administrator, and colleague.

As a teacher, Nancy is one of a vanishing breed in legal education. She actually thinks that teaching is important. Indeed, for Nancy, teaching is the most important thing that the Law School does. Given her intellectual commitment to teaching, it is not surprising that she ranks in the very top tier of teachers in the Law School. "Great," "very demanding, but very fair," "clone Kenderdine," "why can't all our professors be like Kenderdine," are typical comments about Nancy's teaching.

This virtuosity in the classroom is a product not only of Nancy's dedication to great teaching, but of her enthusiasm for teaching. Nancy doesn't teach because she "has to," teaching is not secondary to writing long and boring articles that no one wants to read. Rather, for Nancy, it is an art form that she has perfected by thought and hard work over the years. When Nancy teaches a course, she masters the material, and then studies some more. She never ceases learning about the subject matter. Every class is designed to engage and challenge the students intellectually, a constant striving to improve their analytical and communications abilities. Her goal is that every student "think like a lawyer."

As a scholar, Nancy is marvelously eclectic. She has put pen to paper, or now fingers to computer keyboard, on such varied topics as income taxation, sentencing, family law, wills and estates, and health care and elder law.1 Whatever the topic, however, her writings evince a

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consistent animating principle. The writings address discrete legal issues, analyze them with intellectual rigor, address legitimate concerns in the area, and conclude. There is no tilting at windmills, no intellectual condescension for the efforts of lawyers, judges, and legislators to make the law work, from day to day, year to year. There is no taking issue with a rule, or case, or statute simply to cause another tree to be felled. Nancy writes not to put words on paper, but to make the law somewhat better in a particular context. And it does not bother Nancy that judges and attorneys may find value in her writings as they go about trying cases and practicing law. For Nancy, unlike many in legal education, it adds to, rather than detracts from, the quality of an article that it is of use in “the real world.”

Nancy’s service as Associate Dean and Interim Dean are probably the two aspects of her law school service that she would just as soon forget. This is not because she did not do an excellent job in those positions, but because they took her away from doing what is really important, being a teacher and scholar.

Even as an administrator, however, Nancy had a clear vision of her responsibilities. Her task was to provide the most conducive atmosphere possible for teachers to teach and students to learn. She prefaced her decisions with the query what will be the impact of my decision on faculty and students. Nancy’s administration was not centered on conferences, seminars, “galas,” “events,” “happenings,” and meetings ad infinitum, ad nauseam. Indeed, during Nancy’s tenure as Interim Dean we had only two faculty meetings, and the school flourished. Nancy’s administration was centered on the academic life of the Law School, and for that we can all be thankful.

For more than twenty-five years, Nancy Kenderdine has been a valuable and valued member of the Oklahoma City University School of Law community. While we understand and respect her decision to retire, we shall miss her nevertheless. We shall miss her brilliance as a teacher and scholar, her service in the dean’s office, her thoughtful consideration of and carefully studied opinions on issues facing the school, her collegiality, her respect for her colleagues, and the many ways in which she has contributed to the betterment of our school.