

University of Denver

Digital Commons @ DU

---

Sturm College of Law: Faculty Scholarship

University of Denver Sturm College of Law

---

1-2017

## Fred Cheever - The Denver Law Ideal

Martin J. Katz

*University of Denver*, [mkatz@law.du.edu](mailto:mkatz@law.du.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.du.edu/law\\_facpub](https://digitalcommons.du.edu/law_facpub)



Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Martin J. Katz, Fred Cheever – The Denver Law Ideal, 95 *Denv. L. Rev.* 15 (2017).



All Rights Reserved.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the University of Denver Sturm College of Law at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sturm College of Law: Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu), [dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:dig-commons@du.edu).

---

## Fred Cheever - The Denver Law Ideal

### Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

### Publication Statement

Copyright is held by the author. User is responsible for all copyright compliance.

## FRED CHEEVER—THE DENVER LAW IDEAL

MARTIN J. KATZ<sup>†</sup>

Fred was a mythical figure at Denver Law. Truly. I arrived at the school in the fall of 2000, while Fred and his family were overseas on sabbatical. From the first day I arrived, people would say, “You have to meet Fred. He is the greatest.” He was billed as the greatest mentor, the greatest teacher, the greatest scholar, and the most thoughtful addition to any endeavor we might be contemplating. As the accolades for Fred-in-absentia piled up, I became convinced that Fred did not actually exist; that he was a mythic hero created by my colleagues to describe their ideal of the law professor. And I bought into the myth. We should all aspire to those qualities.

Sure enough, Fred did exist. He returned to the law school one day, and poked his smiling face into my office to introduce himself. And I quickly understood why his colleagues loved and respected him so much. He was all they said he was, and more.

There is so much to say about Fred’s contributions to our school. But I will focus on three.

First, he was an amazing mentor and friend. From the perspective of an individual faculty member, this was an incredible blessing. But from the perspective of our community, it is important to understand that Fred served these roles for so many of us. And by doing so, he set an example for all of us—a mythic ideal. At times when a colleague was in need, even if I felt overwhelmed with other obligations, Fred’s example would often cause me to step up and help. It was infectious in the best of ways.

Second, Fred was often the glue that held our faculty together. Faculty politics can be intense (an understatement). Our law faculty is wonderful. They are smart and highly dedicated. But they can also occasionally be divided over issues that are extremely important to them and often to our school. On those occasions, it is sometimes easy to focus on the division and the rightness of one’s cause. To make these debates healthy and constructive, rather than destructive, it is important to have a leader who subtly but steadfastly reminds us of our ideals and provides perspective on what is most important—including our common values and the bonds of our community. So often, Fred was that leader. I know that others will step up to play this role in his absence. But they will have big shoes to fill.

---

<sup>†</sup> University of Denver Chief Innovation Officer and Senior Advisor for Academic Innovation and Design, Former Dean of the Sturm College of Law, and Professor of Law.

Third, Fred was one of the best associate deans that I can imagine. As dean at the time, I feel amazingly lucky to have had the opportunity to work with Fred in this role. But Fred's impact went far beyond our small office. His work in this role had a positive and lasting impact on our school and on legal education across the nation.

His work as associate dean always began with humility, curiosity, and love. He continually sought to learn about every person, every job, and every system at the law school. He had long applied this curiosity in his scholarly work and in his voracious approach to reading. Yet, when he turned it to the law school, two great things happened. First, he understood the law school and its workings—its soul—in a way that few others have ever done. Second, he made the people who work and study here feel truly understood and appreciated. We always knew that we had a champion in Fred. He brought out the best in so many of us.

Fred's deep understanding of our school, combined with his unwavering commitment to fairness and excellence, resulted in some of the most thoughtful and innovative policies in the nation. For example, he constructed a workload policy that aligned our most important resource—our faculty's time and energy—with our values and our strategic plan. Instead of allocating teaching relief haphazardly, Fred's policy made sure that teaching relief went to those who had carried the highest teaching loads in prior semesters, those who were our most productive scholars and innovative teachers, and those who contributed most to our school through their service. The policy provided "Credit Hour Equivalents" or "CHEs" to these hard-working faculty members, which could be accumulated and later used for teaching relief. (We still joke that CHE stands for "Cheever Credits.")

This workload policy produced great benefits at our school. I believe that policy (in addition to Fred's enthusiastic support for our faculty and students) played a significant role in the progress our school made while he was associate dean. During that time, our faculty's scholarly productivity doubled, innovative course offerings proliferated, and we were able to offer a full year of experiential learning to every one of our students. These things could not have happened without Fred.

Upon seeing the accomplishments at our school, many deans across the country wanted to know our secrets. So often, the answer was an initiative that Fred had created. Because Fred believed in the power of open-source administration, he willingly shared his thoughtful ideas and policies with deans and associate deans across the country, and many U.S. law schools have now adopted similar policies. In this way, Fred not only helped our school; his legacy lives on in legal education in our country.

In all of these ways, Fred—though very real—lived the life of a mythical figure. He exemplified compassion, curious humility, excel-

lence, fairness, and a strong dedication to our community and the people who work and study in that community. At the personal level and at an institutional level, he made our lives so much better. I miss him.

Copyright of Denver Law Review is the property of University of Denver Sturm College of Law and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.