Welcome to Stanford Law School!

I’m Rachel Bowanko and I’m KC Shah and we are this year’s co-presidents of the Stanford Law Association, your student government.

**KC:** For our incoming students, already a few weeks in, we’d like to again welcome you to the Stanford Law community. We’re grateful you’re here and we’re so excited to see you flourish here at SLS. For our returning students, welcome back, we’re pleased to continue this journey alongside you.

**Rachel:** This year marks only SLS’s second convocation, but we are honored to be a part of what we hope is a tradition for the Law School. Convocation is a time for us to come together and reflect on our shared goals for this coming year, and our individual roles for shaping those goals.

**KC:** And the year ahead will be especially challenging, for all of us. But we believe that our community will not only survive, but thrive this year. The law school’s excellent staff have worked endlessly to translate our resources digitally, and our world-class faculty have adapted their pedagogy for an online environment.

**Rachel:** Building community with a diverse group like our student body is difficult even in normal times. And these aren’t normal times. A remote environment threatens to keep us siloed in our own physical, mental, and emotional spaces, and dilute the special community we’ve built here at SLS. So it’s worth reflecting on what got us to this point, to see how we can sustain it in a radically different environment.

**KC:** First, our community has been sustained by courage. And courage is just as important, if not more so in an online environment. Behind a screen, it becomes easier to fade into the crowd, to disappear in the endless collage that is a Zoom screen, and hide your individual voices. But the medium of our interaction need not dampen the spirit of our relationships, nor the energy we bring to our common pursuit of knowledge. We believe, no we know, that our students will bring the full force of their convictions, the full breadth of their experiences, and engage with our community with courage.
**Rachel:** That courage can take many forms, whether it’s raising a different idea in the classroom, or reaching out to a faculty member you don’t know to pursue research. Whether it’s calling out injustice and inequity in your environment, or pursuing an unconventional job opportunity. This courage does not know the boundaries of a screen, it comes from within us. And if our experience here at SLS has shown anything, it is that we are unyielding when it comes to speaking up and speaking out.

**KC:** But courage without compassion can lead our community astray. Compassion is the invisible string that connects our community, a source of constant renewal for our intellectual and occupational pursuits. An unrelenting focus on the mental and physical aspects of your education to the detriment of the emotional well-being of you and your peers, is unsustainable and counterproductive. Many of the obstacles you will face this year are borne from an absence of compassion.

**Rachel:** In a quarantined environment, it can be difficult to celebrate your victories and lament your losses. But the solution to this crisis is more compassion, not more seclusion. Take time for yourself, take that walk, visit that park, buy that gift, cook that meal. And commit more time to those around you, reach out to them, learn from them, and show them the compassion you’d like to receive in return. Whether you’re six feet apart from one another, or one screen away, we hope you lean on each other to get through the year ahead.

**KC:** Finally, our community is sustained by our curiosity. We are truly an astounding group, hailing from all over the world, speaking several different languages, and having worked in various professions. Our curiosity stems from this diversity, our distinct experiences inevitably colliding in common purpose. It allows us to see new solutions to old problems, to pull ideas from sources of strife, to recognize inefficiencies and inequities in existing systems. Our individual curiosities are the foundation for our collective one.

**Rachel:** Now, reading the same passages, briefing the same cases, staying in your own room, can make it seem like that curiosity is not valued. But this is the farthest thing from the truth. At SLS, we implore you to be curious. Being your unabashed self, passionately believing in your principles, and pursuing your ideas
with rigor and curiosity, that’s what got you here, and that’s what will help you succeed.

**KC:** In closing we’d like to express our gratitude for all of you, from the Dean, to the staff, to the Faculty, to all of our fellow students. Our community is stronger because of you.

**Rachel:** We’re so excited to start this new year with you all, and we can’t wait to see you again in-person. Welcome to Stanford!