“Leadership Trajectory: From Farmer’s Daughter to Penn State Law School Dean”
RULE Alumni Spotlight
by Jill Callahan Engle, J.D., RULE VI
JD Dunbar, Editor
Tara Homan, Layout

Call me a study in contrasts. I am a farmer’s daughter who yearned to live in a big city from a young age. As a young girl, I loved feeding the chickens and lambs, but also thrived on our annual trips to Washington, DC to sell our Christmas trees in a grocery store parking lot. Fast forward to 1997, when I ducked out of the RULE VI Study Institute in Washington, DC one afternoon to visit American University’s Washington College of Law as a prospective student. Washington, DC soon became my home for the next five years. I worked my way through that law school, taking classes at night and working at the National League of Cities during the day. Many weekends, I drove home to Bedford, PA to enjoy my close-knit family and the great outdoors. But DC has a great outdoor culture as well. I studied for my law classes in sprawling, forested Rock Creek Park and jogged on the National Mall.

RULE found me when I needed it, as a twenty-something social worker living in my hometown after an extremely bad breakup. I was yearning to broaden my horizons while striving to give back to my community.

“As part of “The Class That Flies,” I definitely found courage to try my wings through RULE. The first few flights resulted in some crash landings. But RULE also gave me the opportunity to recognize my roots. At graduation, I was a few months from leaving Pennsylvania to start law school in D.C. 25 years later, I have come full circle, and teach law school back in rural Pennsylvania at RULE’s home university. My students represent rural Pennsylvanians who cannot afford a private attorney. I try to cultivate mutual respect and a sense of justice among those students and clients here in our special corner of the world.”
Since I wrote that, my work at Penn State Law shifted to mostly administrative duties as I have served as the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs since 2019. In January 2023, I will shift again, teaching Constitutional Law and Legal Ethics on a one-semester visiting professorship at Rutgers Law, back in an urban space after all these years. After a few months, though, I will be back to my roots here in Central Pennsylvania. The leadership skills and opportunities that RULE gave me are immeasurable. I try to use those RULE VI wings to fan flames of justice. We need it now more than ever. A few summers ago, I engaged in a social justice retreat in rural Northern California (which was then, as now, on fire). It reminded me very much of RULE with its depth of transferable skills and cultivation of self-awareness. On the last day, we made vision statements. Here is mine:

“Infiltrate power with love, and sow sparks of empathy.”

Jill was selected as a Class Speaker at RULE VI Commencement. The gentleman seated behind her was former State Representative David R Wright, the Commencement Keynote.

The entire RULE VI Class enjoyed a warm ag welcome at the “Way-Har Farms,” always hosted by legacy Lesher family members. Wayne Lesher, who often hosted this event, was a PALP alum, RULE’s predecessor program.

Back Row: Dr. Dave Popp, Nancy Veres Clarke, Dean Fernsler, Elliott Lengel, Elaine Hickey Herstek, Gerald Reichard, late Kurt Sahlmann, Larry Breech, Cameron Auxer, Jan Kiefer, Dr. Richard Schamp
Middle Section: Jill Callahan Engle, Todd Detwiler, Wendy Brunner, Rick Crouse, Rosemary Pavlocak, John McConnell, Cecy Cowger Glenn, late Maxine Herb, Mary Walker, Karen Davis, Ann Ward, Beth Bergman
Front Row: Susan Mitchell, Cheryl Napsha, late Dr. Rhoda Fasano, Dennis Fapore, late Laura Long, Helen Alters, Heidrun Malone