

The Student Education & Admission to the Bar Committee (SEABC)
Presents

SO YOU WANT TO BECOME A
LAWYER?

LAW SCHOOL HANDBOOK



2021-2022



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INTRODUCTION

Today, more than ever before, the legal profession offers a unique opportunity for the dedicated individual to make a significant contribution to society. Opportunities exist in the legal profession for service that helps individuals and society. This handbook is intended to help those of you who are considering law as a career. It should give you a better idea of what to expect on your educational path in pursuit of a law degree, as well as the career opportunities that may be open to you once you obtain your law degree.

WHAT IS THE PRACTICE OF LAW?

Generally, the practice of law involves counseling clients on legal matters and preparing legal instruments affecting important rights of a person under the law, advocating on a client's behalf in transactions and disputes, and preparing pleadings and other papers incident to any action in any court or other judicial body. A lawyer may practice law as a general practitioner who is available to assist and counsel clients on a variety of matters, such as estate planning, family law, personal injury, and criminal defense. However, a lawyer may also choose to specialize in a select area of law, such as practicing solely in the areas of intellectual property, tax, or immigration. Individuals interested in the practice of law in the state of Florida must fulfill several requirements, including, among other requirements, passing the Florida Bar Exam and becoming licensed by the Supreme Court of Florida.

THE LAWYER'S ROLE

A lawyer, as a member of the legal profession, is a representative of clients, an officer of the legal system, and a public citizen having special responsibility for the quality of justice.

As a representative of clients, a lawyer performs various functions. For example, a lawyer provides clients with advice and informed knowledge of the client's legal rights and obligations. A lawyer also zealously advocates for the client's position under the rules of the adversary system. Moreover, a lawyer, as a representative of clients, seeks a result advantageous to the client but consistent with requirements of fair and honest dealings.

As an officer of the legal system, a lawyer is responsible to the judiciary for his or her professional activities. The legal profession, generally, has been granted powers of self-regulation, and it is self-regulation that maintains the legal profession's independence and responsibility.

As a public citizen, a lawyer seeks improvement of the law, access to the legal system, the administration of justice, and the quality of services rendered by the legal profession. A lawyer promotes knowledge of the law beyond its use for clients, utilizes that knowledge in transformation of the law, and works to improve legal education. In addition, a lawyer increases the public's understanding of and confidence in the rule of law and the justice system.

However, no matter the professional function or role, a lawyer must always be competent, prompt, and diligent. A lawyer's conduct should conform to the requirements of the law, both in professional service to clients as well as in the lawyer's business and personal affairs.

CHOOSING A LEGAL CAREER

Before choosing a career in law, you should evaluate your personal goals, strengths and abilities, and your areas of interest in the legal arena. A career in law requires intelligence, diligence, and perseverance. It is no small task to earn a law degree, to pass the Bar exam, and to be admitted to a state Bar, which allows one to practice law and represent clients.

To successfully complete law school requires dedication and stamina. You must be driven to work as many hours a week as are needed to complete your law school studies, which typically consists of a three-year, full-time degree program beyond your undergraduate studies. Later, as a practicing lawyer, working nights and weekends on cases may be required as well as functioning under stringent deadlines with the professional grace and courtesy required of members of the Bar.

As for personal goals, while it is true that a legal career may provide opportunities to earn a substantial income, the legal profession is often geared toward providing a professional service. Whether it be to the general public or in the private sector, a lawyer's duty is to serve. While your individual career path may lead to a position of authority and influence, it is important to recognize and embrace a focus on practicing with competency as well as uplifting the reputation of the legal profession. Lawyers are in a unique position to help see that laws are upheld, that personal rights are protected, and that our system of justice continues to equally serve and protect the citizens of this country. It is important to approach your legal career with reasonable expectations and identifiable goals.

A LAWYER'S JOB DESCRIPTION

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, there are 813,900 lawyers in the U.S. as of 2019. Activities and responsibilities of those in the legal profession vary according to the individual lawyer's personality and area of practice. Lawyers are known to be problem solvers. They serve as advocates for their clients whether the client is a plaintiff, defendant, or a non-party to a legal matter. The day-to-day responsibilities could include legal research, drafting memorandum of law, contracts, wills, trusts, demand letters, and other legal documents. It could also include meetings with clients, co-counsel, opposing counsel, witnesses, investigators, government officials, law enforcement officers, and judges. Lawyers also spend a reasonable amount of time negotiating a client's case, whether civil or criminal. A lot of time for many lawyers is also spent mediating a civil case or plea bargaining a criminal matter.

More than half of all lawyers go into private practice, setting up a solo office or joining a law firm of two or more partners. Private practitioners usually handle a variety of cases, although they often earn a reputation for concentrating in a particular area. This reputation leads to client referrals. For example, a lawyer might gain a reputation as a divorce lawyer, handling enough cases in this area that they make up most or all of their practice. As an alternative to private practice, many lawyers are employed by departments and agencies of federal, state, and municipal governments. Additionally, lawyers may choose to work for private businesses, large corporations, or industrial firms. Some lawyers become judges, politicians, mediators, or teachers. Others apply their legal education in areas such as banking, insurance, and real estate, where legal knowledge may be a part of the job's activities.

Lawyers may also focus their practice in a specialized practice area of the law. For example, some may seek certification in certain practice areas such as immigration, tax, health, elder, aviation, family, or estate planning, just to name a few. The certification requires a lawyer to have advanced knowledge and skills in the area of certification. Accordingly, lawyers can then market to clients any certification and specialization in the law they may have.

Because the profession of law is so diverse and complicated, law school provides a general legal background, after which there are many options as to the specific area of law or career to be pursued. As the practice of law is becoming increasingly competitive, students should attempt to improve their chances of attaining the legal career they desire, which can vary widely. In law school, students can adequately prepare for their future careers by identifying the general area of law they may want to practice in, take classes in the subject area, focus their extracurricular activities, and seek opportunities that will enhance real world experience. Internships and summer employment in these specific areas will be a valuable contribution to marketability. This will help ensure that after you become a lawyer, you will provide an almost immediate contribution to the law firm, without much training. Law firms are increasingly moving to hiring lawyers who can immediately add value without extensive (and costly) training.

A LAWYER'S INCOME

According to The Florida Bar's 2018 Economics and Law Office Management Survey, the median salary for a starting lawyer with no internship or clerking experience is \$50,000. Salaries for starting lawyers with no prior clerking experience vary among the three regions of Florida. In the North Region, which includes Jacksonville, Tallahassee, and Pensacola, the median salary for a beginning lawyer is \$45,000. In the Central-Southwest Region, which includes the Orlando and Tampa areas, the median salary is \$50,000 for a beginning lawyer. In the Southeast Region, which includes Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale and Miami, the median salary for a beginning lawyer is \$60,000.

As with all compensation, there is a strong correlation between years of experience and salary. The median salary in Florida is \$75,000 for a lawyer with three to five years of experience, \$90,000 for six to eight years of experience, and \$150,000 as a partner in a firm. Larger firms generally offer greater initial salaries and more employee benefits than smaller firms. Salary amounts vary according to years of experience, area of expertise, type of practice, and firm size.

Additionally, there are various payment structures lawyers may utilize to receive compensation, which include, but are not limited to, the use of consultation fees, flat rates, hourly rates, retainers, and contingency arrangements. For example, consultation fees may be charged by lawyers to compensate for the time the lawyer takes to get initial information from the client to help the lawyer decide whether to take the case. However, some lawyers may offer free consultations. Alternatively, a flat rate may be utilized as a fee-for-service the lawyer performs or for a certain type of case, such as an uncontested legal matter that requires a defined amount of the lawyer's time (i.e., an uncontested divorce). Lawyers may also charge their clients hourly rates, which, for example, not only includes the hours the lawyer expends litigating a case, but it also includes the hours of preparation for the litigation. For clients who may have a continual need for legal services, a retainer fee may be utilized, which ensures that the lawyer will be accessible to provide the client legal services, when necessary. Lastly, a lawyer may choose to utilize a contingency arrangement with his or her client where the

lawyer will be paid a certain percentage of the monetary damages the client is awarded (i.e., personal injury or wrongful death cases).

OTHER LAW-RELATED CAREERS

For those who have an interest in law but are not necessarily looking for a career as a lawyer, there are countless other professions that value the skills of a law school graduate, and alternatively, there are other educational paths that lend themselves toward a law-oriented career.

The skills and knowledge developed from law school are applicable in many different industries, professions, and careers. For example, there are many available professions in the legal industry for law school graduates, such as client service managers, legal recruiters, legal sales representatives, and e-discovery professionals. Likewise, there are many areas outside of the legal profession that are compatible with the skills and qualities of law school graduates, such as compliance officers, policy advisors, content writers, entrepreneurs, and teachers or professors.

Although a law degree from an accredited law school is required to practice law in the state of Florida, there are other available law-oriented career paths and professions that do not require a law degree. Career paths in the legal field that do not necessarily require a law degree include positions such as law office manager, personnel director of a law firm, lobbyist, bookkeeper, librarian, law school recruiting specialist, legal assistant coordinator, and mediator. Educational paths, such as earning a master's degree in law or getting certified as a paralegal, are alternative career paths for those who may wish to pursue a position in a law firm or in another law-oriented profession.

For example, a Florida Registered Paralegal is a person who has met the requirements as set forth in Chapter 20 of the Rules Regulating The Florida Bar. While Florida Registered Paralegals are not members of The Florida Bar and may not provide legal advice or practice law, they are an integral part of legal practice. Paralegals often are in a unique position of being in communication with clients, lawyers, judicial assistants, court reporters, mediators, and many other individuals in the legal arena. People skills are a must, and a strong educational background and interest in and affinity for the law can put a paralegal in a position to earn a very comfortable salary without attending law school.

Another interesting and important law-related profession that does not require a law degree is court reporting. Court reporters create word-for-word transcripts of trials, hearings, depositions, and other legal proceedings. Without a transcript of proceedings, judicial decisions cannot be legally challenged or reviewed on appeal. An interest in the law and attention to detail are highly sought for this profession.

PRE-LAW EDUCATION

If interested in pursuing a legal education or law-oriented career, it is of utmost importance that you take the high school and undergraduate courses required for admission to the law school you wish to attend. See your high school counselor or undergraduate pre-law advisor to make sure you are maximizing your education potential. Courses that develop your ability to read and write more precisely are important, especially if one ultimately seeks to pursue a law degree after successfully completing undergraduate studies.

No law school requires a formal pre-law course of study for admission. While no specific courses are required, a strong liberal arts background is beneficial. Specific useful subjects include English, political science, economics, philosophy, logic, business management, a foreign language and other courses that enhance your reading, reasoning, writing, and communication abilities. It is helpful to set goals in your pre-law education coursework that will allow you to develop your strengths and knowledge in the areas of 1) analytical skills, 2) written and verbal communication skills, and 3) opening your mind and attention to a broad awareness of our society and the world at large. Language is the tool of the lawyer, whether it is in oral arguments in court or in letters, legal briefs, and drafting pleadings. Therefore, any course that develops this skill is valuable.

In addition to the pre-law academic portion of preparing to enter law school, it is beneficial for pre-law students to become involved in pre-law organizations. For example, Phi Alpha Delta (PAD) is a legal fraternity that offers membership to pre-law students to learn more about the legal profession while building a diverse community. In addition, some colleges and universities offer student-run mock trial teams and debate clubs which offer undergraduate students the opportunity of immersing themselves into the legal system.

LAW SCHOOLS AND COSTS

At the time of publication of this handbook, there are 199 American Bar Association-accredited law schools in the United States. Florida has 12 law schools: Ave Maria School of Law, Naples; Barry University, Orlando; Florida A&M University College of Law, Orlando; Florida Coastal School of Law, Jacksonville; Florida International University College of Law, Miami; Florida State University College of Law, Tallahassee; Nova Southeastern University Shepard Broad Law Center, Fort Lauderdale; Stetson University College of Law, St. Petersburg; St. Thomas University School of Law, Miami; Thomas M. Cooley Law School, Riverview; University of Florida Levin College of Law, Gainesville; and University of Miami School of Law, Coral Gables.

Applying to law school is a strategic endeavor that requires time, attention, and careful planning. Being proactive and motivated throughout the law school application process will be most advantageous to aspiring law students, as many law schools employ a rolling admissions process that benefits applicants who submit their law school applications early. Therefore, you should begin your application process approximately one year before submission of your law school applications. Ideally, it would be prudent to submit your law school applications by November or December, if not earlier, regardless of the official deadlines given by the desired law school. Thus, you should begin your application process in the previous December to fully address and complete all of the requirements for law school admission, including researching law schools, gathering your letters of recommendations, writing your personal statement, updating your resume, scheduling to take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), and studying for the LSAT.

Most law schools require applicants to include a score from a prescribed standardized test that the law school believes will effectively predict one's aptitude to successfully complete law school and become a lawyer. All American Bar Association accredited law schools accept scores from the LSAT. However, many schools are also accepting scores from the Graduate Record Examining (GRE) General Test and/or Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT). Nonetheless, because the LSAT is the only test that is accepted by all accredited law schools, it remains the most popular standardized

test among law school applicants. Fortunately, the LSAT is offered several times year, which gives law school applicants many available dates to choose from. No single LSAT offered is more challenging than the others offered on alternative dates, so it is recommended to select a date that works best within your study schedule. Because the LSAT is the kind of test that takes preparation, it is also recommended that applicants explore instructor-led LSAT preparation courses, on-demand preparation courses, self-study, or tutoring to find the study plan that makes most sense for you.

In addition to preparing for the LSAT, law school applicants should register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), provided by the Law School Admission Council, which is required by most American Bar Association-accredited law schools. For a small fee, CAS will assemble a report containing your transcript, LSAT scores, and letters of recommendation. Upon applying to your desired law schools, the schools will contact the CAS directly and request a copy of your report.

Moreover, all aspiring law students will need to know which law schools they would like to apply to before submitting applications, because finding the law schools that are right for you is crucial. Therefore, it is imperative that all high school and undergraduate students who wish to attend law school conduct plentiful research on each desired law school. For example, find out where your GPA and LSAT scores fit within the application pool of each school. Additionally, it is important to keep in mind the tuition for each school and preferred locations that are conducive to helping law school graduates pass the bar and obtain employment. If possible, meet with law school recruiters face-to-face to discuss how the schools develop lawyers for the legal profession, the benefits of a law degree from the school, LSAT prep, employment post-graduation, bar passage rates, the school's specific application process, and more.

A law school education is an investment. The costs to attend law school, including tuition, vary greatly among law schools, from the modest tuition of state-supported schools to the much higher tuition of the private law schools. According to a study conducted by U.S. News and World Report, the average annual tuition and fees in the 2019-2020 academic year for private schools was \$49,548, the average annual tuition and fees at public in-state law schools was \$28,264, and the average annual tuition and fees at public out-of-state law schools was \$41,726. The total difference between average annual tuition and fees at private schools and average annual in-state tuition and fees at public schools was approximately \$21,300.

The American Bar Association Young Lawyer's Division 2020 Law School Student Loan Debt Survey Report found that among the new and young lawyers surveyed, more than 75% of respondents had at least \$100,000 in student loans at graduation, over half of the respondents surveyed had more than \$150,000 in student loan debt, more than one of every four respondents had \$200,000 or more in student loan debt, and over 85% of the respondents had more than \$80,000 in student loan debt at graduation. However, many students finance their law school education through scholarships and government-backed student loans. Several law schools and other legal organizations provide merit or need-based scholarships and grants as well as tuition discounts and student loan programs.

When exploring options to finance a law school education, one should thoroughly research the type of financial aid available, as the type of financial aid available for graduate students may differ from the financial aid available to undergraduate students. For example, graduate students cannot borrow federal subsidized loans and are generally not eligible for Pell Grants. Knowing the various options for financial aid can assist aspiring law students in deciding how they will pay for law school.

Similarly, aspiring law students should understand the range of available repayment options for any student loans. For example, a six-month grace period before repaying student loans, while commonly available to those when paying back undergraduate loans, may not always be available for law school graduates. However, law school graduates with higher loan debt or those who are employed full-time by a public-service employer may be eligible for varying repayment programs, such as an income-based repayment program or the Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program. Lastly, although law schools commonly prohibit full-time students from being employed during their first year, many students help finance their legal education by part-time employment. Alternatively, some law students enroll law school on a part-time basis, allowing them to work while obtaining their law degree. Lastly, due to the cost considerations in deciding to attend law school, all aspiring law students should obtain tuition, scholarship, financial aid, and other financing information from the law school you wish to attend.

THE FLORIDA BAR

The Florida Bar is the organization of all lawyers who are licensed by the Supreme Court of Florida to practice law in the state. Any lawyer desiring to practice law in Florida must be a member of The Florida Bar and be considered in good standing with The Florida Bar. To seek admission to The Florida Bar, a person must meet specific eligibility qualifications, such as earning a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from an American Bar Association-accredited law school, passing the Florida Bar Examination, passing the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination, producing satisfactory evidence of good moral character and fitness, and filing the appropriate applications and fees.

Members of The Florida Bar in good standing have paid annual membership dues and are not retired, resigned, delinquent, inactive, or suspended. Additionally, to remain an active member in good standing with The Florida Bar, all members of The Florida Bar are required to complete 33 hours of continuing legal education credits over a three-year period - five of which must be in the area of ethics, professionalism, substance abuse, mental illness awareness, or bias elimination; three hours must be in the area of technology; and one hour must include professionalism. As of November 1, 2020, there were 89,739 members of The Florida Bar who were eligible to practice law and are in good standing.

The Florida Bar helps protect the public from harm that could result in unqualified people practicing law. As such, The Florida Bar's core functions are to prosecute unethical lawyers through the **Attorney Discipline System**; administer a client protection fund to cover certain financial losses a client might suffer due to misappropriation by a lawyer; **administer a substance abuse program**; and provide **continuing education** services for lawyers. In addition, The Florida Bar provides many other services to members and the public, including publishing legal periodicals, administering a public information program, providing **ethics** and law office management advice, and sponsoring **conferences and meetings**.

As a member of The Florida Bar, each lawyer is expected to devote some time to the improvement of the profession. Lawyers participate in the work of The Florida Bar and uphold the established ethical standards and discipline procedures. The Florida Bar members are encouraged to support the public interest by providing free or low-cost services ("pro bono") to individuals or charitable organizations in need and by working with and financially supporting organizations that provide legal

services to those in need. The Florida Bar's aspirational goal is for each lawyer to provide 20 hours annually in pro bono service or \$350 in contributions to legal aid organizations.

BAR ADMISSION THROUGH THE FLORIDA BOARD OF BAR EXAMINERS

Law school graduates receive a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree. Because law school fosters an environment of creative thinking and problem solving, some law school graduates are offered employment in positions that do not require additional credentials. However, to represent clients in the state of Florida, a law school graduate must also pass the Florida Bar Examination and the Florida Board of Bar Examiners' (Board) character and fitness investigation.

The Board is an administrative agency of the Supreme Court of Florida. The Board consists of 12 members of The Florida Bar and three non-lawyer members of the general public. The Board is responsible for making recommendations to the Supreme Court of Florida regarding whether each applicant seeking admission to The Florida Bar should be admitted. The Board must ensure that each applicant meets the requirements regarding educational qualification, technical competence, and character and fitness before recommending an applicant for admission.

To seek admission to The Florida Bar, a person must meet the eligibility educational qualifications, that is – all applicants seeking admission to The Florida Bar must be enrolled in an American Bar Association (ABA)-accredited law school that will ultimately result in the awarding of a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree, or must have already been awarded the Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from an ABA-accredited law school at a time when the law school was accredited or within 12 months of accreditation or be found educationally qualified by the Board under an alternative method of educational qualification set forth in the rules of the Florida Supreme Court relating to admissions to The Florida Bar.

In addition to educational qualifications, all applicants to The Florida Bar must also satisfy the requirements for technical competence through successful completion of The Florida Bar Examination. Admission to practice law in Florida is by examination only, and applicants must complete the requirements for law school graduation prior to submitting to the General Bar Examination (Parts A and B). The Florida Bar Examination consists of the General Bar Examination, which includes a Florida-prepared Examination (Part A), the Multistate Bar Examination (Part B), and the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (Part C). Applicants may sit for the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination prior to graduation from law school.

The Board administers The Florida Bar Examination only twice a year. Specifically, the examination is administered each February and July. All law school graduates must pass this examination to obtain a license to practice law in Florida and be a member of The Florida Bar. The Florida Bar exam is typically a two-day event that includes a full day devoted to Florida-specific law on multiple areas (i.e., family law, torts, criminal law, constitutional law, property, etc.). The Florida part of the test includes the writing of essays and answering multiple-choice questions. The next exam day covers many of the same subjects but relates to the multi-state or national laws and is mostly tested by multiple-choice questions. Unlike other professions such as management, accounting, or engineering, one cannot practice law without having met all of the requirements of The Florida Bar. Accordingly, law students need to begin preparations for the Bar exam while in law school. This can involve taking

Florida-specific law subjects or taking special research courses focusing on areas of Florida law. In addition, most graduating law school students take a Bar exam preparation course immediately after they complete their law school education and right before the exam. This course could take up to eight weeks to complete and covers all areas of Florida and multi-state laws. With Bar exam pass rates averaging about 70 percent, pre-exam preparation for The Florida Bar exam is imperative to ensure passing the exam. Finally, developing data shows a correlation between how well a student does in law school (GPA) and the chances of passing The Florida Bar Exam.

Lastly, all applicants to The Florida Bar must produce satisfactory evidence of good moral character, an adequate knowledge of the standards and ideals of the profession, and proof that the applicant is otherwise fit to take the oath and perform the obligations and responsibilities of a lawyer. In making a determination as to your character and fitness to be a lawyer, the Board conducts a thorough background investigation regarding your honesty, fairness, and respect for the rights of others and for the laws of this country. This investigation includes an analysis of each applicant's ability to comply with deadlines and court rules; to communicate candidly and civilly with clients, lawyers, courts, and others; to conduct financial dealings in a responsible, honest, and trustworthy manner; and to avoid acts that are illegal, dishonest, fraudulent, or deceitful. The primary purposes of the character and fitness investigation are to protect the public and safeguard the judicial system. Since this review process is very thorough, students are encouraged to begin this process while in law school. In addition, The Florida Bar also requires law students to pass the Professional Responsibility Exam, which is administered several times a year. This exam can be taken by a student while still in law school. Understanding the ethical and professional responsibility rules of The Florida Bar is also important in helping to know what limits and barriers may be placed on a lawyer's practice in a specific area of law.

Once you pass all parts of the General Bar examination and meet the character and fitness requirements established by the Supreme Court of Florida, you will be recommended to the Supreme Court of Florida for admission to the practice of law. Induction ceremonies for new lawyers are held twice annually, usually in May and October.

The Board recommends that you file a student registration application in the first year of law school. By registering with the Board as a law student, you will pay a lower fee, and you will obtain a preliminary decision from the Board as to your character and fitness. Certified legal internships (CLIs) are available to law school students. To participate in these internships, you must obtain a preliminary decision regarding your character and fitness from the Board. This is an important reason to file a student registration in the first year of law school.

It is also important to note that there is no reciprocity between Florida and any other state or jurisdiction at this time. In other words, submission to The Florida Bar Examination and completion of a character and fitness investigation is required for all lawyers who wish to represent clients and practice law in the state of Florida. Other states may open the practice of law to out-of-state applicants who have already been admitted to the bar of another state, including those who have been admitted to The Florida Bar. However, each state/jurisdiction establishes its own criteria for admission and reciprocity. Therefore, one should inquire with the specific out-of-state jurisdiction to determine if the jurisdiction offers reciprocity and the rules that govern admission to the jurisdiction's bar.

For information on admission or to file an application for admission to The Florida Bar, visit the Board's website at www.floridabarexam.org.

WHAT INCOMING 1L'S MUST AND NEED TO KNOW

Students entering law school in the first year are designated as "1L's". In the subsequent years of law school, they will advance to the status of "2L's" and "3L's" before graduating and going on to practice law after they pass The Florida Bar requirements.

It is important that seniors in undergraduate school considering entering law school, as well as students presently starting the first year at law school have an updated and realistic picture of what that first "1L" year is all about. It is important that they understand the challenges and demands that first year presents and what, if any, advance long-term law career planning be started in that 1L year. It is always important for aspiring law students to obtain realistic expectations so as to diminish anxiety and fear once faced with these expected issues and conditions.

A wonderful book written by Scott Turow, entitled *One L*, attempted to outline the difficulties and challenges faced by 1L students. Mr. Turow documented what he experienced that first year, in 1973, when attending the Harvard Law School. He documented the "shocks" 1L's experience in the "turbulent first year of law school" such as "hazings, betrayals, and an emotional ordeal so grueling that only the finest will survive."

Although Mr. Turow's documentation was, at the time and at that school, realistic, it must be recognized that he was attending one of the most competitive law schools in the United States and at a time when the kind of behavior he experienced was considered the norm. For that reason, it is important to update the 1L experience and to lay out the kind of challenges and experiences one can expect in that first year and from a more typical law school environment. That is the purpose of this section of the handbook; that is, to identify what an incoming law school student can expect to experience in that first year, including the major challenges and planning that the student may face.

For additional information about the law school/lawyer experience, including how to accustom oneself to the first year of law school and general productivity advice, please visit the [reading list provided by the American Bar Association](#). This summer reading list is specifically recommended for all incoming law students. While this reading list is comprehensive, please feel free to select a few titles that appeal to your interest and, hopefully, they can help assist you in developing your best law school experience.

I. 1L COURSES

In most law schools, the 1L courses are, for the most part, compulsory and considered "foundational" courses: such as Property, Civil Procedure, Contracts, and Torts. These courses are designed to introduce an incoming law student to the basics of the most used and practiced legal subjects. It is hoped that the student can use these courses to develop a "feeling" as to what area of law the student may be interested in the upcoming academic years. It is also considered an important aid for 1L's to use when they get a chance to identify what courses they would elect to take in the subsequent two years of law school so as to develop a better understanding of an area of law they appear to be interested in as a possible future law career.

II. 1L COURSE TEACHING METHODS

In many law schools, and in many 1L courses, professors utilize the “Socratic” method of teaching. This was a method used and developed by Socrates, a renowned Greek philosopher. It involves several teaching techniques that an incoming 1L may never have experienced in any prior education and which may find very intimidating, very challenging, and that could produce great anxiety.

The method starts with the professor having at his disposal a chart listing the names of class participants, approximately where they are seated, and a photograph of each student. The basic strategy of this form of teaching is to ensure that a student has completed the homework readings and is fully prepared to discuss an evaluation of the court cases included in the assigned homework readings. The professor would then use the random questioning of students as to specific parts of the homework readings. The emphasis is more on the questioning of students and the quality of their responses than on the teaching skills of the professor.

Once a student is randomly called on by the professor, the student is asked to stand-up in front of the entire class and respond to questions by the professor. For many schools, this intimidation of standing up has been reduced. In many cases, the professor will first ask what the specific logic of the judge’s rationale was in deciding on the case. It is imperative that all assignments are read before class.

If the selected student gets past the first round of questions, the student would then be asked by the professor what the judge’s opinion would have been if the facts of the case had been changed. The questioning and responding could go on for minutes while the student’s responses are watched by the entire class. In a way, the student’s very intelligence is being tested in front of the student’s classmates and peers.

This form of teaching accomplishes its main goals; that is, to ensure that students complete their homework case readings and analyze the thinking and rationale of the judge and what changes the judge may have made if the facts of the case changed.

As a result of high levels of anxiety, alleged intimidation, and several societal issues, teaching with the Socratic method has been reduced in many 1L courses and, for the most part, is not utilized in the 2 and 3L years. The logic being that students have developed excellent learning skills in the 1L year and do not require further pressure to effectively learn law in subsequent years.

In addition to a vastly different teaching method, a 1L may encounter a vastly different testing method. For the most part, there is only one course exam administered at the end of the course period. Typically, there are no pop quizzes, no mid-term exams, and the entire grade is based on that one final exam. There is no way for the student to gauge how they are doing during the course period. This forces 1L’s to ensure they are developing excellent study documents, summarizing case readings and taking effective class notes for use as a study guide for the final exams.

Finally, that one final exam is generally done by computer where a student is required to answer essay type questions by typing in the answers. For this reason, and to better prepare for the state Bar exam after graduation, where the entire test, essay, and multiple choice, are done by computer, the 1L should begin to sharpen their typing and computer skills in that first academic year. Additionally, learning how to write a coherent and well-structured response to a law school essay exam is

foundational to the 1L learning experience and to one's success in law school. Most significantly, law school essay questions are unlike any essay questions you might have seen in undergraduate school or high school. Law school essay exams are written to test students' skills in reading comprehension, issue spotting, legal analysis, and legal writing. In law school, your exam will present a complex, hypothetical scenario involving one or more parties who have various legal problems. Your job as a law student will be to spot all of the legal issues, define the relevant law, and then apply and analyze the law to the facts described in the scenario. Due to the complexity of many of the law school exam scenarios, it is important for a law student to apply time management while taking the exam, giving yourself time to read the scenario, comprehend the exam question(s), issue spot, draft an analysis, and proofread your response.

When drafting an essay response to a law school exam, it may be helpful to first draft an outline that includes each issue you have identified. In the response itself, however, there is no need to discuss the issues in the order you spotted them. Instead, in your response, you should address the most important legal issues identified first, saving the minor issues for the end of the essay. For each issue spotted, plan for at least one full paragraph for each of the elements in the following essay formats: IRAC (issue, rule application, and conclusion), CREAC (conclusion, rule explanation, application, and conclusion), or TREAT (topic sentence, rule, explanation, application, topic sentence). Regardless of the acronym selected for your exam response, the key components of the legal analysis are the same – that is, stating the legal issue spotted, clearly identifying the rule of law governing the particular issue, analyzing how the law applies to the hypothetical scenario presented in the exam question, and concluding with how the issue should be resolved.

III. THE 1L AS A FOUNDATIONAL EXPERIENCE

As mentioned previously, the design and purpose of the 1L year is to try and give the student an idea of what their future interests and areas may be in a law career. It is hoped that a student will be able to determine from the basic 1L courses what specific areas of law they may be interested in pursuing. Accordingly, the student can then decide to reinforce those areas of interest in developing a better understanding and expertise in that specific area. Accordingly, many students consider the 1L experience as a “foundational” experience. The building blocks of a successful law career stems from this foundation.

Every law student must realize that employment opportunities in the legal profession are becoming more and more competitive. They must realize that law firms, government prosecutors, and court organizations will try and eliminate the need for considerable training of new lawyers and will try and hire those lawyers that, for the most part, can add immediate value (and revenue) to the law firm with minimal to no training. For these reasons, it is important that law students, right from the 1L year on, try to maximize their employment opportunities after graduation by considering the actions listed below.

First, a student can identify what prior experiences, education, employment, and training they had before attending law school that would be helpful in the development of a specific law area. For example, if a student had shown a deep interest and has had experience in reading and preparing business contracts, they may want to begin to focus in the area of contract law for a future law career.

Second, if a student begins to focus on contract law, that should help the student in preparing for what elective courses they should select in the second and third year of law school. The student may elect to take advanced contract courses or take elective individual and targeted research courses that focus on the specifics of contract law.

Third, with a focus on a future career in contract law, the student may apply for intern and externship assignments with law firms or courts that work on contract law issues. These assignments can be done during the school year or during the summer break periods. These assignments are probably the most important in sharpening a student's knowledge of the preferred area of law and making that person an extremely valuable and immediate asset to any future employer.

Fourth, the student should attempt to find out if there are any recent court ordered or statutory impediments to the area of law they are considering for the future. For example, if a student has an interest in practicing in the area of personal injury or wrongful death, they should find out, as soon as possible, that a recent court ordered requirement was that no lawyer could contact the victim or the victim's family for at least 30 days after the accident. Although there are some limited exceptions to this rule, it would require a practicing lawyer to try to wait until after the 30-day period to contact the victim or their families. For the most part, victims would most probably already have contacted and retained a lawyer either by referrals from friends or from massive advertising of the selected law firm. Per Bar rules, this would exclude any other lawyers from involvement in the case. This limitation would probably require a new lawyer to work for a law firm that has a huge advertising budget. Working as a solo lawyer would, most probably, not be effective in getting personal injury or wrongful death cases. For those new lawyers that planned on practicing on their own this new legal restriction could seriously affect and impede their law career planning.

IV. PLANNING AHEAD FOR WHAT ELSE IS REQUIRED TO PRACTICE LAW

Many law school students find out that there are many requirements one must accomplish before one can begin to practice law in the state of their selection in addition to successfully finishing a three-year law school education. For many students, they find this out too late. These are a few of the potential "surprises":

Passing the State Bar Exam

First, and foremost, is the fact that no graduating lawyer can practice law in their preferred state unless they have passed that state's Bar examination. This is different from other careers such as engineering, management, or accounting when, for the most part, graduates of these programs can immediately begin professional practice in these areas after graduation without passing any special exams. For this reason, it is important that a 1L student, or a student considering attending law school, research the success that school has had in the student's pass rate. Typically, state Bar exam student pass rates vary from 50% to 90%. Many law firms may not hire a lawyer until they pass that state's Bar exam. Many supporting parents may lose patience with an unemployed graduate after spending years supporting that legal education. Many government loan agencies will begin to demand repayment of student debt - a difficult demand when one is not employed. It may be a good idea for the future law school candidate to check the school on the correlations, if any, between LSAT scores and the school's Bar passage rate to see if their LSAT scores may be an indication of their probable Bar passage.

Finally, and more important, prospective students should also ask the school for correlations between law school GPA's and Bar passage rates to measure the level of school effectiveness in passing the Bar exam - what has become a more accurate predictor of Bar passage.

The typical state Bar exams consist of a grueling two-day affair that tests the student's knowledge of individual state laws in several legal subject areas in addition to the knowledge one has of a uniform national law also in several subject areas. The exam typically consists of a combination of essays and multiple-choice questions. Accordingly, in addition to evaluating the pass rates of a law school, a student also needs to check on what law school courses or support and guidance programs are offered that would help a student pass the state Bar exams before they graduate. Finally, since the writing style in which a student answers an essay format question is almost as important as the content of the essay, students should also evaluate if a law school provides courses and programs on how to "write as a lawyer" and how to write to pass a Bar's exam essay test.

Typically, law students look to receive supplemental support and guidance in passing the state Bar exam from outside sources such as Barbri Bar Review, Kaplan Test Preparation or Themis Bar Review. Taking these postgraduate courses are an absolute necessity if the law school does not offer Bar exam preparation courses. Although these outside sources help in passing the Bar exam, a student needs to stay focused on the basics they learned from the law school education as a much more valuable and essential source in passing the exam. It is best to schedule the taking of these supplemental courses immediately after graduation and before the next scheduled Bar exam testing date.

Finally, it should be noted that most state's schedule Bar exams only twice a year (typically in July and February). That means if one fails the exam in July, they must wait for six months to try again to pass. Having to wait six months could be challenging since most students find that they may have forgotten much of what they learned in law school courses some six months after graduation. Potential employers may also lose patience. For that reason, it is best to schedule the Bar exam immediately after graduation.

Passing the State's Professional Ethics Exam

In addition to passing the state's Bar exam, law school students are also required to pass a separate Professional Ethics exam that is offered some time after the 1L year. Failure to pass this special exam will prevent a graduating law school student from being admitted in the state Bar and from practicing law in that state. Accordingly, a present or future law school student should evaluate if a law school has special courses and programs designed to help its students pass this special exam. It would then be recommended that the student try to take these courses as soon as possible and to schedule to take this special exam as soon as possible. It would be tragic if a student passes the state Bar exam but finds out that they also needed to pass the Professional Ethics exam before they can practice law. Get it out of the way as soon as possible!

Passing the State's Credentials Search

In addition to passing the state Bar exam and the state Professional Ethics exam there is one more "test" a law student must "pass" before being admitted to the state Bar association and to enable that student to practice law; that is, "passing" the Bar's credentialing process. Most state Bars demand that a student undergo an extensive and deep search of their backgrounds prior to attending and while

attending law school. That search may involve numerous areas of a student's personal and private lives. Everything from the student's prior employment records to the student's criminal and civil violations (i.e., traffic violations) to the student's prior educational records will be reviewed in great detail.

This state Bar credentials requirement may involve numerous follow-up requests from the reviewing state Bar association and require student explanations of critical and possibly negative discoveries made by the Bar reviewer. The entire credentials process could take from many months to several years. For that reason, it is critical that a 1L student begin to obtain the required forms and accumulate what specific information is going to be required in the credentialing process as soon as possible. Since it may take time to obtain the required documents, the sooner a student can obtain what is needed the better!

After completion of the state's Bar exam the Bar association will issue a confidential report on whether a person has met all of the requirements of the state Bar association. Typically, this report is issued via the Bar's website a few months after the exam and individual students are identified by special Bar exam identification numbers.

Finally, prospective lawyers will receive a confirmation letter from the state's Supreme Court congratulating them on having achieved and met the difficult requirements of becoming a lawyer in that state and authorizing that student to be sworn in as a lawyer by local court officials.

WELL-BEING AND SELF-CARE IN LAW SCHOOL

You will meet many different people when you start law school, some you may already know from college or the work force. Some are older students returning to school to begin a new career. Others are fresh from undergraduate or graduate school. Law students are often amazed at the variety of personalities and backgrounds they meet. At a minimum, you will have at least one thing in common, a desire to understand and apply the law. When you begin, it is crucial to find a core group of law school cohorts with whom to build lasting relationships.

While law school may seem the most difficult task you have tackled in your life, it will only become more intense afterward. There is a learning curve in law school, and there is a learning curve to practicing law. There will be moments of intense joy, and some moments of hair-pulling aggravation; and riding that roller coaster will be easier for you and your cohorts if there is a solid group of people that each of you can reach out to and celebrate, commiserate, or just chat with about being a lawyer.

Every law school has student organizations and you can often find them listed on the school's website. These vary from school to school based upon student-body interest and continuing participation levels. Joining one or more social groups based on identity or affiliation provides the opportunity to build enduring friendships with kindred spirits. Social groups can further provide opportunities to engage with the local legal community as well as learn about mentoring opportunities.

Finding a group centered on an area of the law is another avenue to find like-minded friends. Some people have no idea what area of the law they want to practice, and others are super focused on one particular area. You may not realize asylum and refugee law, for example, is going to become

your favorite, so it may take some time before you find that related student interest group. But you will. Eventually the relationships you build in law school will become some of your most important. Building that social network while bonding with a core group will help you both personally and professionally.

Law school is more than taking a series of courses and passing exams. The experience will change the way you think, and before you know it, your casual conversations will start to include terms and phrases that your friends and family will find unfamiliar, or even a little bizarre. Sometimes those relationships change as you transition from law student to lawyer, so building enduring relationships with your fellow law students becomes even more important as you grow and become a successful practitioner.

CONCLUSION

As you pursue your course of study in law, remember that the road is a long and tough one, but ultimately, is a rewarding experience. Salary and living conditions are a consideration in any profession, but it should not be your primary reason for becoming a lawyer. A lawyer's job is to provide a much-needed service to the community. The legal profession is exciting and challenging, as it deals with vital areas of our lives, often when individuals and businesses are at their most difficult crossroads.

As one judge put it, "Although more and more people are coming into the profession, we always have room for more good lawyers." Being a lawyer is far from easy, but for the right people, it can be one of the most rewarding professional experiences with tangible benefits to communities for years to come.

The material in this handbook represents general information. Because the law is continually changing, some provisions in this handbook may be out-of-date. Additionally, it is always best to consult a lawyer about your legal rights and responsibilities regarding a particular case.



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