

30 WAYS FOR FIRST YEAR LAW STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS

Jennifer S. Bard and Brett Gardner***

INTRODUCTION

Law School is a scary and mysterious place and incoming students often have very little idea what to expect. Anyone who is not apprehensive about starting law school does not sufficiently understand what he/she faces. Most frightening, and least understood, is that unlike college there is no warm up period. Your grades first semester could be the most important you'll ever have. You do not have a semester to test the waters and learn the ropes. There is no freshman year to write-off. You have to hit the ground running and the purpose of this article is to give you some advice on how to do that from the beginning.

We are a law professor who has been teaching first year Torts for six years, Jennifer Bard, and a very successful law student, Brett Gardner,

* Alvin R. Allison Professor of Law and Director of the Health Law Program Texas Tech University School of Law, J.D. 1987 Yale Law School. This article is dedicated to all my first year Torts students from 2004-2009 and to the Texas Tech School of Law Hispanic Law Students Association ("HLSA") which runs an orientation "Boot Camp" available to all incoming first year students. Much of the material here was developed from presentations I made at Boot Camp.

** Brett Gardner, B.A., class of 2011 Texas Tech University School of Law.

Texas Tech School of Law class of 2011. This article represents our best effort at telling you how to get it right the first time. There are plenty of sources for advice when you start law school. All have important contributions and give valuable information. What this article does differently is that it gives you the advice in two stages. The first part is to help before you start, and the second is to help you assess how the first semester went and, if you're not satisfied with the results, what you can do differently in the future.

Brett Gardner makes the point well saying, "Preparation makes the most difference early on because you don't know anything to begin with."

Many law students find the challenges of law school exhilarating, but are taken by surprise by the very different way in which legal material is taught and tested from the way they learned in the humanities, social sciences, or hard sciences. The students most surprised are those who have pursued a pre-law curriculum or have experience working as a clerk or a paralegal. These students may find the vocabulary familiar, but the playing field is even. Pianists do as well as political scientists when it comes to law school. This is because law school does not teach you about the law. It teaches you how to use the law to benefit your future clients. There is very little specialization in law school because very few students are sufficiently aware of the many kinds of legal practice available to them.

One of the most disconcerting things about law school is that memorization is a foundation of learning, but on its own, simply memorizing facts or statutes will not be enough to pass your exams. From the beginning, law students are expected to use statutes, legal precedents, and rules of procedure as they would be used in writing a brief to a judge or drafting a contract.

Another disconcerting feature is that your final grade may well depend on one exam. No matter how often I have tried to assure law students that this is less frightening than it sounds, because it will not be until they are at the end of the course that they can put the pieces together in order to form legal arguments, this is a scary concept. Also, the grade you receive is almost entirely based on your written performance on an anonymous exam. Television gives the impression that lawyers spend most of their time talking in court. In fact, lawyers spend most of their time reading, researching and writing. Debating skills are of limited value to the first-year law student. If you cannot convey your analysis and argument in writing, you are not going to be able to pass your exams.

The good news and the bad news is that not all your exams will require you to write an essay. Some will be multiple choice exams in the format of the Multi-State Bar Examination you will have to pass in three years to obtain licensure in your state. Some students find the prospect of

multiple choice tests reassuring; after all, the answer is always there.

Others are terrified because of a past history of “choking” on these exams.

Both kinds of students quickly find out that these aren’t your Psychology 101 professor’s multiple choice exams nor are they the LSATS. A law school multiple choice exam is based on the specific material you covered in class and requires you to analyze a fact pattern and select the best, but not always the fully correct, answer from five mind-boggling similar choices. You must know the material in great detail since your ability to distinguish between right and wrong choices depends on your knowledge of the more subtle points covered in your class.

And another thing: unlike when your parents or their friends were in law school, every school has some sort of legal writing and research instruction in the first year. These courses are gold—they teach you the exact skills which will lead to your success as a practicing attorney. Unfortunately, though, to do so they require detailed and time-consuming written projects which will erode the time you have to study for your other courses. These assignments are usually due throughout the semester, creating the time management challenge of completing the writing assignments at the same time you are preparing for your other courses.

Finally, did I mention there is a grading curve? Many law schools grade on a curve which in all cases prevents a professor from giving A’s to

everyone in the class and at many schools means good students are likely to get their first C's. You may hear from some of your professors that the curve actually helps you because it raises your grade. Maybe. However, for most students what this means is that the quality of work and level of preparation that used to get them A's and B's in college get them C's and B's in law school. Part of that is that you are competing against yourselves. In many curve systems, your grade is set in comparison to the performance of your very intelligent and highly motivated fellow students—not some abstract standard of competence.

Here are thirty different suggestions on how to achieve success. Not every law professor or every law student would agree with all of these suggestions, but they are a starting point and represent my best advice as well as suggestions I have had from successful students during the year. This article cites articles and web sites my students and I have found helpful, but is in no way a complete bibliography.¹

This essay consists of two talks I gave as part of the Texas Tech University School of Law as part of a student run orientation organized by the Hispanic Law Students' Association called "Boot Camp." The first twenty suggestions come from a talk I've given before classes start and the

¹ For a very helpful compilation of websites offering advice to first year law students, see TaxProfBlog, Aug. 20, 2006, http://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof_blog/2006/08/advice_for_the_.html.

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second before the start of the second semester.²

I. IN THE STARTING GATE: BEFORE FIRST SEMESTER BEGINS:

PREPARE, PREPARE, PREPARE

1. Know Your Assignments and Follow Directions

The first day of class in law school is often a surprise because there is no warm up. Class usually begins with someone being called on at random to begin reciting the first assigned case. Too often the student called is caught out because she did not believe that the pages assigned for the first day really will be covered the first day. Believe it. Whether anyone tells you specifically or not, it is likely that your first reading assignments will be waiting for you before classes begin either on an actual bulletin board, your class website, or some other part of the law school's website.

*2. Keep Up—But Don't Get Too Far Ahead*³

Law school is cumulative. One concept builds on the one before.

² These talks are entitled *The Difference Between an A Student and a C Student in Law School* and *Twenty Suggestions for Success*, and the second at the start of the Spring term called *Second Semester First Year—Now that You Know, What Can You Do Differently?*

³ Law student Brett Gardner believes this should be tip number one. He writes, "Preparation makes the most difference early on because you don't know anything to begin with. It was only during my first recitation that I realized how little I knew about preparation in law school. It wasn't about looking foolish in front of everybody else or anything like that, because honestly I think that's a fear you get over fairly quickly, it was more of a realization that I wasn't preparing the right way. I was reading weeks and weeks ahead of schedule and not even looking over the material before class. So I would advise first years to not read ahead much, if at all. You'll just forget it and you'll lull yourself into thinking you're really on top of things when you're actually putting yourself further behind because you'll have to read it again anyway."

Getting behind is not an option for the ‘A’ student because it can become impossible to catch up. Law school is not college. You will get NOTHING out of class unless you have done the reading and worked with the material BEFORE and RIGHT AFTER class. You cannot effectively catch up just by running your eyes over the page at some later date. And there will be no convenient later date. Things will not slow down!

Page assignments are not an exact science. Sometimes a class is a few pages (or more!) behind the assignment for the next day. Especially at the beginning, you may get ahead. Beware! Things speed up, so if you are ahead now you won’t be for long. Don’t ask, “how far are we likely to get?” You don’t intend it to be, but Professors hear that as rudeness.

There is no mystery to knowing what case is coming next; it’s the one after the last one you covered the day before!

It is possible that you will have intermediate graded assignments in your subject matter classes, and you certainly will in your legal research and writing classes. Give yourself the best possible chance of success by doing what you are assigned and doing it on time. Make it your job to be aware of all potential sources of information about deadlines. This includes reading every word of the syllabus, of hand-outs, of postings to class web sites and of emails from your professors. You need to be aware of every due date and have a “tickler” system set up to give a warning a few days before so an

assignment is never late. Also, it's critical that you do what's asked. If you are assigned to write about the defendant's causes of action, you won't get points for also (or worse only) writing about the plaintiff.

Finally, all your professors have specific things they do or do not want you to do in your work. Usually, they tell you about them in the syllabus or in emails. Look for them. It is often helpful to keep a paper or electronic folder of every piece of information transmitted to you by the professor and to consult that material.

Because assignments seem so short, students sometimes believe that they can read ahead and then coast for the rest of the week. That's a big mistake. Again, treat your case book as a math book or a foreign language grammar. Do you think if you read ahead a few chapters in those classes, you would know the material?

Reading ahead gets you nowhere, and even if you read the material the night before, you should review it before class so you can have it fresh in your mind during class. Sometimes a professor can move through material very quickly and surprise you by catching up. It is never acceptable to say, "I read that last week, I don't remember." If the material is not fresh in your mind, that's your loss!

3. Brief Cases and Make These Briefs Part of your Class Notes

You will soon learn that there is a standard format for taking notes

about a case.⁴ It includes writing out things like the level of the court, the facts, and the names of the parties. The worst piece of advice you will ever get is from upper-class students who tell you that it is “not necessary” to brief cases. It’s absolutely true that the more familiar you are with reading cases, the more quickly you will be able to do it and the more easily you will remember what you have read. However, to know a law school case in the detail required to get a good grade, most people have to go through the exercise of writing notes on each individual case.⁵ Moreover, the cases you are reading first semester are heavily edited. Real cases are long and usually contain many different issues.

The most important thing about first semester first year is to do everything you can. You will not know until you receive your second semester grades, or perhaps while taking your first exams, whether you have done enough, not enough or too much. In the unlikely event you are over-studying, you have plenty of time to correct this second semester.

4. Don’t Take Shortcuts

An “A” student knows that “there are no short cuts.”⁶ There is no study aid, outline or script from a past year, or “hot tip” from an

⁴ See Orin S. Kerr, *How To Read a Legal Opinion: A Guide For New Law Students*, *The GREEN BAG, An Entertaining Journal of Law*, Vol 11, No. 1, p. 51, Autumn 2007

⁵ See Paul Bateman, *Ten Instructions for Briefing Cases*, <http://www.law.umkc.edu/faculty/profiles/glesnerfines/bateman.htm> (last visited July 26, 2010).

⁶ Advice of Ms. Shatoree Bates, Tech Law 2007 (personal conversation with the author).

upperclassman which can substitute for doing all the reading, attending all classes, and reviewing the material on a regular basis (every day if possible). The discovery that there is an entire industry devoted to producing supplemental materials for law students is often surprising. Many of you may already have been to expensive preparation courses, which promise to tell you the real secrets of success. When you're in school, the materials which come as flash cards, computer programs, charts and books, claim they are a short cut to learning the law. You can just sit down and read what the law is rather than going through the difficult process of figuring it out from cases.

Sound too good to be true? It is. The problem is that law doesn't work that way. All of us lawyers have to be able to figure out the law from new cases because that's how law comes about in the real world. These books are somewhat like having the answer key to a math test. Yes, you might know the answer to a question exactly the same as the one in the book, but could you do the problem if the numbers are different?

Final thought--it will be your law professor, not the author of the study aid who writes your exam. There can be a tremendous variety in the vocabulary used by different professors, and you may well find that the author of your study aid uses words your professor doesn't. An answer that contains terms never covered in class is not likely to be a successful.

5. Read Every Word Assigned—Skip Nothing—and Read them Slowly.

Law School reading assignments can be deceptive because they are so short. The fact that they are written in what appears to be plain English can lead many to believe that they have done the reading when they have simply turned the pages. Students used to reading hundreds of pages a week in an English or History class may think the seven or ten pages assigned for a law class a piece of cake. That's a mistake. Treat your reading assignments as if they were 7-10 pages of a foreign language to translate or math problems to solve.

Remember you are not reading for “the gist” of what happened in the case. You are reading it to understand the principles of law on which the case was decided. The issue isn't who won or lost—it is why they won or lost. What did the Judge find important?

To help you do that it is critical that you read the short “notes” that usually follow a longer case. Often called squibs, these are usually succinct examples of exceptions to the rule stated in the main case.

6. Take Initiative To Understand What You Are Reading

Look up every word you don't know (legal or not) and write down every word you read or that you hear in class that you don't know (use your Law Dictionary or Google!). It is impossible to get an exam question correct if you don't understand what it means.

7. Understand The Role Of Cases—They Are Not An End In Themselves

Lawyers use cases as tools. No one, in a final exam, is going to ask you the holding of a case or to state its facts. Cases provide support to legal arguments. But Case Briefing isn't an end in and of itself; it's a tool for understanding the law. Each Professor may have a specific way they want you to brief a case because they think that is the most effective way of understanding what it says. If a professor gives you a specific way to brief cases, it means that this is how he or she is likely to ask you questions in class. Remember, an "A" student follows instructions.

8. Draw Your Own Diagrams

It is almost always helpful (whether you are a visual learner or not!) to draw diagrams as you're briefing a case or concept.

9. Stay Alert In Class

Listen to what the Professor is asking the student on call and think how you would answer the question. Write down what the professor asks. Then, as you are reading, see if you could answer these questions if you are asked (whether you are on call or not).

10. Test Yourself---With Your Own Questions

It is possible to lure yourself into believing that everything is going well because there are so few formal tests. Resist. Test yourself. Ask yourself the questions in the book and write out the answers. Pretend your

mother or spouse or a friend has asked you to explain what you have learned that week and explain it to him or her.

11. Know Why You Are Outlining

“Outlining” is a way of reviewing what you learn in class. It reflects YOUR review of the material. Someone else’s outline reflects the work THEY did reviewing. It can help you structure your own, but it can’t substitute for your own review. That’s why it is hard for a professor or your tutor to look at your outline and say if you’re doing it “right.” Outlining is the process in which YOU review what you did that day and what YOU saw as the most important points. EXPECT to go back and revise your outline. Make an appointment with yourself to do it every week.

12. Review As You Go

It is inevitable that you will have a much better understanding of what’s important after a month or two than you do the first few weeks. Make an appointment with yourself to GO BACK.

13. Get Advice From Others, But Don’t Rely On Rumors

Some professors do exactly the same thing every year, but most don’t. Make sure that you are relying on the current information for your class. If you have a question, ask the professor or the tutor. Use common sense. Why would one of your classmates or a student from last year know what your professor is going to do?

14. Know The Limits Of Study Aids

The first limit of a study aid is that it is not written by your professor. There are differences in vocabulary and emphasis. We are simplifying everything that we teach you because you are beginners. Each individual professor and book decides how much (or how little) detail to go into. No study aid can know the choices your professor has made.

15. BACK UP YOUR NOTES

BACK UP EVERY NOTE. KEEP NOTHING ONLY ON YOUR HARD DRIVE. FIVE OR SIX OF YOU WILL HAVE A HARD DRIVE FAILURE AND LOSE ALL YOUR NOTES. BUY JUMP DRIVES. USE THE LAW SCHOOL SERVER. GET GOOGLE AND EMAIL YOUR NOTES TO YOURSELF.

16. Get Out Of The Building

Find someplace to study where you truly won't be distracted by other people. Lubbock is full of libraries and coffee houses—find them.

17. Get A Life

No one needs to be studying 24 hours every day nor need your life turn into “study, eat, sleep.” In moderation, keep doing the things you used to enjoy.⁷

⁷ Brett Gardner advises, “As quickly as possible, I’d suggest give up trying to know everything. Law school’s a lot more fun once you accept that the grind is one of the most beneficial parts. But I would still say err on the side of caution during your first semester. Study more than you think necessary, take more notes than you think you’ll need, and ask

18. Build Your Reputation As An Honest And Helpful Person

The idea that law school or legal practice is “competitive” is misunderstood. Your reputation for honesty and cooperation with other lawyers and judges is the most valuable thing you can offer a client, and that reputation starts the day you enter this building. You will look to other lawyers for referrals of business in areas they cannot handle, and the best sources of referral are your classmates. Your grades will speak for themselves; it doesn’t matter if others “think” you’re smart or not. Think about what you say. Remember that person who cannot hold confidences in law school will not be trusted with them in practice.

19. Be On Time

When you walk into a class late, you are not only making a bad impression on your professor, but on your future colleagues as well. Also, often the professor will give important information at the beginning of class.

20. Don’t Get Discouraged—Remember Who You Were and What You

Could Do Before You Came to Law School

You will leave law school more or less the same person as you were when you came in—except you will know a lot more about the law. Do not get discouraged the first few weeks when it seems like everything you know

more questions than you think you’ll need the answers to. It’s always easier to cut out unnecessary habits than it is to begin necessary ones—it definitely was for me.”

is useless. It's not. Cut yourself some slack. Everything you are learning is new but that doesn't mean what you knew before isn't valuable. You are not and are never going to be your GPA.⁸

That's a lot of advice and it's unlikely anyone can or should take all of it. Here's the bottom line. Law school is not just happening to you. You are a participant in the process, not a bystander. The path to success starts with what you do the first day and continues with the choices you make. Starting with the first day at school, you can make sure to listen (and follow instructions) in order to be prepared. You can keep up with your work. Do not expect to cram it all in the week before the exam. Finally, you can remember that everyone else is in the same boat you are. Do not let the boasts of others about how many hours they study or which secret outlines they have been able to obtain turn you off your game. You still have all the strengths which brought you here.

II. AFTER THE FIRST SEMESTER

So here you are starting your second semester as a veteran of law school. Maybe everything went as well as you could have hoped for—in which case, keep it up. It is more likely, however, that you now find yourself with 95% of your class and of practicing attorneys, outside of the

⁸ Attorney and author Julie Hilden suggests that students take a realistic and practical approach to grades, including keeping in mind the student's ultimate goal in obtaining legal education. See Julie Hilden, *Advice to First-Year Law Students*, FINDLAW, Aug. 16, 2005, <http://writ.news.findlaw.com/hilden/20050816.html>.

top 5% of your class. Given the high levels of achievement that brought you to law school, you, and perhaps your parents, spouse and friends, expected better. Get over that disappointment. You are not your GPA nor does your GPA have any effect on your ability to become a successful and satisfied lawyer. The question now isn't what grades you got, it's why did you get them? Whatever your grades last semester, the power to improve them to a point that will impress potential employers and increase your chances for passing the bar is in your hands. Whether you are in a situation where you need to bring your average up to a 2.0 to avoid academic dismissal or you simply want to improve your grades, here are some suggestions for fine-tuning your studying.

1. Doing The Reading Isn't Enough

Set aside time before every class to review the notes from the class before and the reading for this class. Most professors pick up where they left off, and it is a lot fresher in their minds than yours. You should walk in with the last class fresh in your mind and already thinking about how the day's readings connect with what you were doing before. If you wouldn't be able to tell someone how today's reading builds on what you've been doing so far, you are NOT ready for class. There is no way that you can be ready for a class if you did the reading the night before (or worse, longer ago than that) and haven't thought about it since.

2. Don't Let What You Did In Class Slip Away

Be an active listener. Simply going to class isn't enough. You have to be prepared and engaged in the material whether you are called on or not. Use your notes as a dialog with yourself. When you find out that a case means something other than what you thought, the most effective way of handling that is to write your reaction in the notes.⁹ The most powerful concept in contemporary learning research is the power of "Recency."¹⁰ We all remember best what we learn most recently.

The minutes at the end of class are the ones when you are most likely to remember what just happened. Spend them thinking about the class. Imagine there's someone waiting for you outside the door asking "what was the most important thing you learned in this class?" Write it down. This will trigger your memory when you prepare for the next class. Anything you do in between is going to wipe away this advantage. I'd

⁹ Many law students take notes by typing on a computer during class. This has benefits and weaknesses. The benefit is that you can type your notes on the same page as your case briefs so that you end up with one document containing your study notes and your class notes. Another benefit is that you can easily index your notes and search for specific words or terms. However, constantly typing can be a distraction. This is especially true if you are not accustomed to taking notes these way. Don't let peer pressure lead you to think that the only successful note taking involves a computer. Brett Gardner suggests that first years should consider taking notes by hand. He writes that "I had never used a laptop for notes before law school, but when that first class started and seemingly every other person is using one, you can quickly feel that it's necessary. I found it much easier to concentrate and much easier to take constructive notes once I ditched the laptop, but I realize it's not for everyone. Obviously the most important thing when you're taking notes and outlining is to actually listen; the professor writes the exam" not a study aid or an outline from another professor's course.

¹⁰ Per B. Sederberg, Marc W. Howard, Michael J. Kahana, *A Context-Based Theory of Recency and Contiguity in Free Recall*, (2008), <http://www.princeton.edu/~persed/pubs/SedeEtal08.pdf> (last visited February 2, 2010)

suggest not closing your computer or putting your book away without at least mentally summarizing what just happened (or even better writing something down).

3. Pay Attention To Details and Keep a Vocabulary List

Law study is very likely more detailed than what you were doing before. Every case illustrates an important concept. Every word is also important. The way to eliminate wrong answers in a multiple choice question is to recognize them, and the way to do that is to know what the legal words and phrases mean. Starting today, keep a vocabulary list for each class. Don't let words get by you.

4. Sometimes You Just Have To Memorize

The first step to learning legal material is to memorize it so that you can use it correctly in context. If you think you don't have to memorize, you are fooling yourselves. You have been memorizing things for a long time, but if you don't already have a method, there are many different methods to try out.¹¹

5. The Facts Are Important For What They Mean—Pay Attention To Them

Look for facts that change results. It can help to be on the look-out for ways to answer the question "What would I need to know to reach the

¹¹ <http://sas.calpoly.edu/asc/ssl/memorization.html> (last visited July 27, 2010).

correct legal result?” Example, X finds a wallet in the parking lot. Does it matter to him whether or not it was dropped by a thief or by the legal owner of the wallet? If so, the first thing you should be looking for is information about who dropped it.

6. Know the Relevant Burden Of Proof

You should know in every class you're taking what it takes for plaintiffs (or prosecutors) to prevail. When presented with a fact pattern, you should be actively looking for the information the person bringing the case has to prove. If your client comes in and asks if he can sue his neighbor because he slipped on the ice in front of his neighbor's house and broke his leg, you need to immediately start thinking about the elements of Negligence. (Hint—did the neighbor have a duty to keep the sidewalk in a better condition than it was when your client slipped? How would you find out?)

7. You Have Plenty Of Time To Study—If You Are Studying Right

The most successful law students are usually the ones who have worked before and know how much you can get done during a day. Hanging around and talking to friends isn't studying. Surfing the internet isn't studying (do you know you can TURN OFF the wireless component of your phone and computer so you won't be distracted?). There are so many sources of information about how to study that looking at them could

become a distraction. Here are a few oriented towards studying in general¹² and to law school study in particular.¹³

8. Make the Changes You Need To

You are in the best position to know what you did last semester and why it didn't work for you. Look around you and see how the people you studied with feel about their grades. If none of you are happy, then maybe you all have to consider together what to do differently. Or even whether it is helpful for you to study together. Sometimes people are great friends but lousy study companions.

9. There's Always a Faster Gun—That Doesn't Mean You Can't

Achieve Excellence

By definition law school is a collection of not just a lot of smart people, but a lot of smart people whose gifts lie in the skills required to be a successful law student.¹⁴ There will be people who can learn the material in less time and perhaps even with less effort than you can. So what? That doesn't stop you from learning it. Brett Gardner puts it well when he

¹² <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~acskills/success/study.html> (last visited February 2, 2010).

¹³ http://law.ulv.edu/~lawlib/pubs1L_succeed.pdf; <http://www.law.suffolk.edu/offices/stuserVICES/asp/time.cfm> (last visited July 26, 2010); Professor Randall at Dayton does an excellent job of explaining what can go wrong and how to fix it. <http://www.cuttingedgelaw.com/content/beyond-traditional-legal-pedagogy-vernelia-randall> (last visited February 2, 2010). The Humanizing Legal Education movement has an entire website devoted to information of help to law students. http://www.law.fsu.edu/academic_programs/humanizing_lawschool/studentresources.html (last visited February 2, 2010)

¹⁴ See Corrine Cooper, *Letter to a Young Law Student*, 35 TULSA L.J. 275, 280 (2000) for a brief overview of the competitive nature of law school.

advises, “there are some actual geniuses in law school. I think it’s easy to feel that that’s a necessary condition for first year success, but it’s not. I know I’m nowhere close to one. I’m not even close to somebody who’s close to one. The truth is I don’t know of anything that first year students want—grades, law review, jobs—that isn’t attainable through just hard work. I realize that that’s kind of banal advice, but in my experience it’s really been true. Even with the curve, I’ve never been shocked with a grade. It’s pretty much been exactly commensurate with the preparation and effort I put in. When I put more work into a class, I get a better grade. Same goes for Law Review or getting an interesting job after your first year.”

10. Find the Resources That Are There To Help You

Law school is stressful for everyone.¹⁵ Recent research suggests that the personality traits that make us successful as lawyers—always imagining the worst that can happen so we can make plans to avoid it—are very destructive when applied to everyday life.¹⁶ Whether you are at a large university or a private stand-alone law school, there are resources either at the school or in the community to help you meet your academic, medical,

¹⁵ <http://www.lawstudent.tv/2006/07/06/law-school-stress-what-is-it-when-does-it-hit-how-do-i-cope/> (last visited February 2, 2010); <http://lawvibe.com/depression-in-the-legal-profession-lawyers-are-the-most-likely-to-be-depressed/> (last visited February 2, 2010).

¹⁶ <http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1206096733975> (last visited February 2, 2010).

psychological and spiritual needs.¹⁷ I guarantee your law school has a dean of students who can go through this with you. Don't be put off by the fact that you need more support than you did in college or even out on your own working.

It's not unusual for the extra demands of law school to bring out issues or problems you've always had but in the past were able to work around. If you were ever diagnosed with a learning disability in school, you may have a legal right to special accommodations such as more time to take tests. You owe it to yourself to contact the dean of students to see if you can get accommodations. These are not special privileges. These accommodations are there to put you in the same position as everyone else. Many people find attending religious services on a regular basis in law school helpful to get a structure and a community that is about something other than outlines and flash cards. I certainly did. Whether on campus or in the community, houses of worship welcome and expect to see students.

If you find yourself depressed or discouraged, seek counseling. Whatever issues you have are particular to you, and you deserve to check them out with a professional. If you were admitted to law school, it is highly likely that you are capable of graduating from law school. There is

¹⁷ Barbara Glesner Fines, *Law School and Stress*, available at <http://www.lclma.org/articlenews.htm?cid=341> (last visited July 26, 2010); *see also* http://lawprofessors.typepad.com/academic_support/. The Law School Academic Support Blog is run by and for Academic Support administrators, but much of the advice given can be just as helpful to law students.

no stigma to seeking mental health help anymore than there would be if you needed prescription glasses or allergy medicine.

CONCLUSION

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You would not be in law school if you did not have a record of academic success. The demands of law school are different enough from undergraduate education that everyone will need time to adjust.

Slogging through your first year, law school may seem to be all about you and your grades, but in fact your future clients are not only waiting for you, they are depending on you for excellent advice and representation. More than that, whether you work directly for the government or not, every lawyer takes an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. This country was founded based on the rule of law, and what you are learning now in law school is essential to preserving the freedoms and opportunities which we all enjoy. The purpose of these suggestions is to help you achieve success by taking control of your life and learning while you are in law school. Good luck and welcome to the profession.