Law School Essay, Research Paper

Law School Journey of a Lifetime

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of the practice of law is learning to be a lawyer. Virtually every new lawyer today is a graduate of law school. Modern law schools differ greatly from their earlier counterpart, in that many more requirements and responsibilities exist. In colonial times, students pursuing a career in law would enter institutions for instruction of the law, and would automatically become qualified to practice law in the courts after a few years of study (Neubauer 123). Today, however, becoming a lawyer takes much more training, rigorous work and effort, and many years of studying in order to take a bar exam of which passage represents qualification. There is much more consideration concerning who is admitted, what kind of curriculum is taught, how exams are offered, what kinds of affiliation exist, how much law schools differ from one another, and what it ultimately takes to be fully competent as a practicing attorney.

What does it take to get into law school? Requirements for admission to any law school, whether Ivy League or otherwise, are extensive and seemingly difficult to obtain. Almost all law schools in the United States require a four-year college degree (Neubauer 125). Ivy League schools especially prefer college graduates from prestigious universities. Nonetheless, any law school will be more interested in applicants who rank in the top percentile of their class and present an outstanding grade-point average. Another major aspect considered of law school applicants is their score on the Law School Aptitude Test a half-day standardized test designed to measure the ability to understand and reason with a variety of verbal and quantitative materials (Neubauer 125). The raw score of the LSAT is on a scale ranging from 120 to 180 (Neubauer 125). The LSAT consists of five multiple-choice sections with a total of about 101 questions (http://www.lsat-center.com/lsat-page1.html). These sections include logical reasoning, analytical reasoning, reading comprehension, a writing sample, and an experimental section, which does not count toward the final score of the law school applicant (http://www.lsat-center.com/lsat-page1.html). The writing sample is not scored either, but it is sent to every law school to which an aspiring law student applies (http://www.lsat-center.com/lsat-page1.html). Law schools usually do not use it as a significant part of the admissions process (http://www.lsat-center.com/lsat-page1.html).

Admission requirements of prestigious schools in the United States differ greatly with those of the less prominent. As written by the Dean of Admissions at Stanford Law School: Admission to Stanford Law School is based primarily upon superior academic achievement and potential to contribute to the development and practice of the law. Competition is severe:…The class that entered in 1999 numbered 93 women and 85 men, over half of whom had been out of college for two or more years (http://lawschool.stanford.edu/admissions/admidd.shtml). In contrast, other less-prominent law schools around the nation do not present nearly as strict requirements for applicants. In evaluating individual files, the faculty of any law school considers the record of both undergraduate and graduate education, and the applicant’s talents, nonacademic experience, and aspirations (http://lawschool.stanford.edu/admissions/admidd.shtml).

The curriculum of every law school is generally similar, and their purpose is the same: to teach students to think like lawyers (Neubauer 126). Discussions are viewed not with moral criticism but with a legal aspect, in which problems are examined objectively about what the law requires (Neubauer 126). First-year law students are required to take a number of courses, such as Constitutional Law, Criminal Law, Torts, Civil Procedure, Contracts, Property, and Legal Research (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). Beginning with the second year, students are allowed to elect their own courses, such as Administrative Law, Litigation, American Legal History, Civil Rights Legislation, Family Law, Health Law, Economic Law, etc (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). Law school education focuses primarily on the case method, which is designed to teach students legal reasoning via the analysis of appellate opinions (Neubauer 126). Using the case method, the process of analyzing opinions counts more than merely the outcome. Many people have rejected this teaching method in law schools, because it presents a way of learning the law to first-year students that requires independent, critical thought: something unlike anything students have ever experienced (Neubauer 127). As the years progress, however, courses are increasingly taught in seminar style (Neubauer 127). Due to the mounting need to bring together the theoretical and pragmatic aspects of law, many law schools have founded clinical training programs, which allow the students to directly deal with legal problems and offer legal advice to such indigents, as well as draft documents and file lawsuits (Neubauer 127).

Although the curriculum of virtually every law school in the United States is very similar, there are essential differences in the kind of training and education received. The most important difference is accreditation with a law association such as the American Bar Association and the American Association of Law Schools. Both organizations require standards for the qualification of law schools, including student-faculty ratios, required courses, professional qualifications of the professors (Neubauer 128), etc. There are 176 out of 200 law schools nationwide that meet these requirements, and thus are eligible for alliance with the ABA (Neubauer 128). Law schools that are ABA-approved guarantee permission for students to take the bar exam in any state, instead of merely their own, as permitted by the 24 other law schools in the nation that are not accredited (Neubauer 128). Another difference between law schools is their institutional affiliation. Most law schools are affiliated with a university (Neubauer 128), although a few (usually propriety schools) are unattached. Most law schools not affiliated with a university are not ABA-accredited.

Exams are undoubtedly the most difficult time in a law student s career in law school. Exams for first-year students are typically asked to analyze concisely written hypothetical stories with general knowledge of the law. Exams concentrate on the overall big picture of the course, and most details in cases briefed in class are ultimately considered worthless, except to prepare for class (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). Most students make outlines of each class in order to understand fully the summary of the course for the exam. Moreover, students prepare study groups, usually consisting of 3-4 people (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). Study groups help to demonstrate all points of view about a case, which helps a student to correctly analyze the broad questions given on exams. As much as law students like to speak in class, they are stressed to listen attentively to other students, and recognize their professor s reactions (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). This method of learning helps students to learn how the professor thinks. Since the professor grades exams, it is important to know how he/she analyzes cases in order to do well on any exam in law school.

Upon graduation, students are not licensed to practice law unless they pass a state bar examination (Neubauer 128). The bar examination represents an effort to improve on the loose, easy admission to the bar that characterized the nineteenth century (Neubauer 128). Without it, easy admission would allow the licensing of dishonest and incompetent lawyers, as well as more lawyers into the field than there is available legal work (Neubauer 129). Thus, all licensed attorneys are required to pass the state bar examination before beginning their practice of law. The bar examination is composed of multiple choice questions and essays, covering basic legal material, specific knowledge about the law of that specific state, and legal ethics (Neubauer 129). Most states use the multi-state bar examination, which consists of 200 multiple-choice questions. Law school graduates usually attend review courses in order to help them prepare for the bar examination (http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm). Generally, three out of four law school graduates pass the bar examination every year, although the success rate is different for every state. If a student fails one section of the exam, he/she can retake just that part. After the passing of the bar exam, a licensed attorney may not always be permitted to practice in another state (Neubauer 129). Some states require such attorneys to take the bar examination in that state to practice law, while others are permitted by experience alone.

From application to law school to passing the bar examination, law school carries students a long way in their pursuit of the practice of law, transforming the way they think through a long, rigorous process of learning, cramming, and test taking. Any aspiring law student should realize that law school requires tremendous effort and time, no matter what law school into which they are accepted. The practice of law has changed significantly from that which was considered in colonial times, where students of law (perhaps unqualified) could easily be licensed to practice. This transformation of the legal system has strengthened our trust in American law, and continues to challenge honest, qualified lawyers around the nation.

Neubauer, David W. Judicial Process: Law, Courts, and Politics in the United States. University of New Orleans: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1997.

Turow, Scott. One L. New York, NY: Warner Books, 1977.

http://www.lsat-center.com/lsat-page1.html

http://lawschool.stanford.edu/admissions/admiss.shtml

http://allsands.com/College/firstyearlaw\_rlh\_gn.htm