Getting through law school is no easy feat. From understanding the right way to brief cases to realizing you have to up your game with studying, it can be daunting as you navigate through your experience as a law student—be it a 1L or 3L.

Thomson Reuters understands your pain. Along with your friends at Above the Law, they bring you this handy Law School Series eBook—your insider’s guide, complete with tips and tricks to surviving law school relatively unscathed. This is designed to help you be prepared and do your best so you can be your best.

To learn more about the tools available for law students and new attorneys, visit thomsonreuters.com/legal

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Whether it’s a recent law school grad or a retired law firm partner, mention briefing a case to any lawyer and you’re sure to get a strong reaction. Along with outlining and the Socratic method, briefing cases is a law school rite of passage that law students have endured for decades. If you’re currently in law school, you’re all too familiar with the task.

Much to many students’ dismay, there is no electronic tool that will perfectly digest and predictively code their cases for them. Students still have to do much of the legwork themselves. There are, however, resources available to law students that make the process much less painful.

BRIEFING CASES

If you have just started law school, you may be wondering what the heck briefing a case even means. A month into your first semester, you still might not know.

There’s no point in sugar-coating it: Most cases are mundane and dry, and understanding them can be difficult. Nonetheless, case decisions are the fundamental building blocks of the law, and you’ll spend much of your career reading them. To keep all the facts and reasoning straight, lawyers and future lawyers brief the cases, breaking them down into their key parts:

PROCEDURAL POSTURE: This is a description of how the case came to be. The main things to know are whether the case had previous proceedings in other courts, what was decided in those proceedings, and how the case ended up in the current court.

THE PARTIES: Before you can understand any case, you must understand which party is bringing the case, and against whom they’re bringing it. Quite often, there are more parties involved than the two names that appear in a case citation.

THE ISSUES: What question or questions is the court being asked to answer? The issues are what the court is deciding as a matter of law.

THE FACTS: Every case is built around a set of underlying facts that led to the legal issue being alleged. More often than not, the case will include a lot of facts that provide context, but are not necessarily relevant to the legal issue at hand. In briefing a case, it’s important to focus on the facts that are necessary to the court’s decision, and not be distracted by unimportant background information.

THE HOLDING: This is what the court ultimately decides on the issues presented. Sometimes the holding can be found right at the end of a decision; other times, it’s buried somewhere in the middle. Picking out the holding is the ultimate purpose of briefing the case. Be careful, however, not to confuse the holding with the judgment, which is what the court does procedurally to give effect to the holding.

THE REASONING: This is where briefing can get really tricky. Decisions are often long and contain a lot of exposition that is not the actual holding of the case. This exposition is also known as dicta, and sorting through it is where Westlaw comes in (see below). While dicta has no legal weight, it can be crucial to understanding the reasoning behind the court’s decision. Without parsing the dicta, it can be impossible to know why the court reached the decision it did.
HOW WESTLAW HELPS

Technology is key to helping lawyers and law students alike quickly understand the “why” of legal decisions, without getting lost in page after page of dicta.

Long recognized by attorneys as a leading platform for conducting legal research, Westlaw is now the go-to tool for helping law students efficiently and accurately brief their cases. If preparing case summaries is the bane of your law school existence, Westlaw just might be your new best friend.

Westlaw is specifically designed in a way that mirrors a case brief. Any time you pull up a case on Westlaw, you will see that it has already been broken out into the following categories:

**SYNOPSIS:** This is an introduction to who the players are in the case and how they got there. In essence, this is your procedural posture, parties, issues, and facts all rolled into one.

**HOLDING:** Westlaw tells you up front what the holding of the case is, so you don’t have to waste time trying to find it in a lengthy decision. When you know the holding at the outset, you can better understand the dicta (the “why”) that leads to the holding.

**HEADNOTES:** These are summaries of the “why.” Westlaw’s Headnotes highlight the reasons for the decision and parse through the confusing dicta to get at what really matters.

Westlaw Headnotes are written in plain language, so they’re easy for an unseasoned law student to understand. Think of them as a translator from Legalese to English. Reading a case while having Headnotes as a reference will guide you the best understanding of a case and why you might care about it.

Some Headnotes present pure issues of law, while others give you a combination of legal principles mixed with the facts of the case. Why? Attorney use case law for different purposes. Sometimes they’ll rely on a case strictly for its legal holdings. Other times, they’ll like a case because it talks about the law as applied to facts that are similar to their own case. Headnotes give you the best of both worlds, allowing you to determine what the most important aspects of a case are for your specific purposes.

As an added bonus, many cases on Westlaw offer a Brief It function, which pulls out the key information with the simple click of a button. While it’s always still important to read the whole case, this is as close as you will get to technology that will brief your cases for you.

The reality is, today’s law students rely heavily on technology to manage their demanding workloads. While there are lots of expensive options on the market, finding a product that actually works is what really matters.

Thomson Reuters is here to help you navigate the confusing waters of law school by providing technology designed to help law students and lawyers succeed.

With your cases properly briefed and a wealth of information at your fingertips, you’ll no longer have to dread being called on in Civil Procedure. It’s time to make technology work for you so you can focus on your future.

This is the first post in the Introduction to Law School, a series powered by Thomson Reuters.
The Career Services Office should be the most important place on campus. It’s not like the Registrar can help you find a job; missing out on the Law And Interpretative Dance seminar will not impact your professional future.

Despite its importance, the CSO is a poorly understood place. Many students don’t know what the CSO is even supposed to do, much less how to take full advantage of what the CSO has to offer.

But ATL is here to help. We reached out to career service professionals at the Arizona State Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, Harvard Law School, and Vanderbilt Law School. We asked them a few questions about what students should know about the CSO and how it’s there to help.

First thing’s first: Students should know what Career Services is there for. Here’s Nicholas Alexiou, Associate Director of Career Services at Vanderbilt Law:

“My job is more about career advising than it is career placement. Unfortunately, I do not have a Roger Sterling-esque Rolodex which I can employ to get all of my students jobs. Instead, I am here to help put students on the right path to obtaining the job that they want. That being said, there are some instances in which I can connect a student with a firm that has a particular need well suited to that student’s interests and skills. However, that is not typical and if you wait for your CSO to find you a job, you might find yourself without one.”

Ray English, Assistant Dean for Student Career Services at Arizona State, echoed the same theme:

“With ASU, the CSO has three primary roles:
1) Create employment and networking opportunities;
2) Help students to develop the skills necessary to compete effectively (résumé, interviewing, etc.);
3) Provide career counseling and coaching (helping students figure out what they want to do and how to get there).
In a nutshell, we find employment opportunities for students and make sure they are prepared to take advantage of those opportunities.

Knowing what it’s there for only gets you into the office. Mark Weber, Director of Career Services at Harvard Law School, explained the benefits students receive when they fully take advantage of what the CSO has to offer:

“Students who avail themselves of all our resources (including our advice blogs and emails, and programming, and career advising) invariably find themselves more aware of their choices, more adept at navigating the processes involved in pursuing those choices, and definitely less anxious and stressed generally about their job search and career prospects.

We’ve long argued that the CSO should be your first stop on campus. All three of these professionals disagreed with us. That doesn’t change our opinion, man. But, uhh, as Weber put it:
I don’t think it’s imperative that a student come by immediately upon beginning law school. In fact, I prefer to see students settle in for a bit and get comfortable with their classes, classmates, and the general experience of law school before meeting with a career advisor to discuss career options. NALP guidelines allow Career Service offices to begin meeting with 1Ls after October 15th, but even that seems early to me. I like to see students when they feel comfortable and ready to discuss their options without causing themselves any additional pressure or stress. As long as they are at least paying attention to the written material we regularly send out (emails, blog posts, etc.) and participating in the programming we offer throughout the semester, I think they can wait to meet with us until late in the fall semester, or the beginning of spring semester.

From English of Arizona State:

A law school is following the NALP guidelines, currently Oct. 15 is the first day 1Ls can seek direct contact with their CSO. However, some schools, like Arizona State, require 1Ls to attend some type of professional development seminar. Arizona State also sends incoming students an assessment designed to start the process of figuring out where in the legal field they fit in. Finally, 1Ls should attend all general programming provided by their CSO.

Alexiou mentioned that the guideline had been softened for the upcoming year, but echoed the sentiment of settling in:

That being said, taking some time to settle into your new law school’s surroundings and getting your bearings before starting to intently focus on getting a job is not going to put you impossibly far behind. A simple rule of thumb is that if you are starting to outline (which you really don’t need to start doing on Day 1 of classes) and you haven’t contacted the CSO, rectify that quickly.

Fine. Go buy your Property casebook first. And know that the CSO will still be there when you figure out you can’t adversely possess a job.

In our next post in the Introduction to Law School, a series powered by Thomson Reuters, we will share what students can do once they find their way to the CSO.
As part of the Introduction to Law School series, powered by Thomson Reuters, we recently examined The View From The Career Services Office. In a follow-up on this topic, we share what students can do once they find their way to the CSO.

Hedging your bets on landing your dream job solely based on good grades isn't wise. But discounting the importance of high marks—even in the first year of school—isn't smart, either. How can you be sure you’re on the right path as you look to life after law school?

We reached out to career service professionals at the Arizona State University Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, Harvard Law School, and Vanderbilt Law School. We asked them a few questions about what students should know about their Career Services Office and how it can help.

In fairness, doing well in your first-year classes is critically important to landing a job in the future. I asked the officers about their thoughts on the importance of grades in the job search.

Nicholas Alexiou, Assistant Director of Career Services at Vanderbilt Law, put that plainly:

"Grades, especially first-year grades, play a significant role in a student’s employment search, and anyone who suggests otherwise is doing students a disservice. That being said, I often tell my students that grades serve to open doors, but they alone aren’t going to get you the job."

Mark Weber, Director of Career Services at Harvard Law School, said employers were making more holistic decisions on new hires than only looking at grades:

"[A] few years ago I had a student transpose his first semester GPA on an application for a diversity internship. The application packet included transcripts and one employer noted the mistake... Most of the employers participating failed to notice the mistake and the student was selected to be interviewed. He wowed employers and was offered an internship at a silk-stocking firm. That student went on to transfer to more prestigious law school and complete a second summer at another silk-stocking firm, intern at the White House, and went on to become an associate at a silk-stocking firm. I firmly believe if he had not inadvertently transposed his GPA, he would not have been selected to be interviewed and gotten that internship. I further believe that there is a strong possibility that the course of his professional career would have been drastically different."
My impression, from these CSO officers and many others, is that they believe there is a good job that is the right fit for every student.

Finding it might be difficult, but all these people think their current students are coming into law school now with a realistic picture of the job market. From Weber:

> Given the amount of information readily available to students, I think students are well-informed about the market and realistic about their prospects. Presently I think the market is very good for young attorneys entering the practice. We routinely provide students with information about the legal market generally as well as local geographic market issues that arise in the market. At a minimum, students should understand the economic drivers of a particular market, including the client base, the key practice areas, and the size of the practice areas, along with the current hiring demand of each practice.

And if that knowledge leads to students finding jobs that are a better fit for them than perhaps boom-time students who followed the easy path into Biglaw, English suggested that's not a terrible thing:

> Students tend to express a much more realistic view of the employment market than they did five years ago. The first phase of a 1L’s journey is to determine their own strengths and what they enjoy doing. Then they can examine the employment market with a better understanding of the type of employment that best fits their desires and needs. Far too often students focus on a job, rather than the job for them, and end up where they thought they wanted to be, only to find themselves miserable.

Some of those people who made a bad fit will find themselves back at Career Services as a 3L. Or even as an alumnus. I can tell you from experience, career services can still be very useful even after you graduate. When I quit my Biglaw job, Mark Weber was one of the first people I called. He talked about the value CSO can provide to 3Ls and recent grads:

> I think this is one of the most important functions of our office, or any Career Services Office. There are many reasons students may still be looking for a job as a 3L or even as a recent grad, and we are here for those students in the same capacity as we are for students in their earlier years. We have a wealth of resources to assist students who are still seeking. All of our advisors are seasoned attorneys with many years of career advising experience who work closely with students still seeking to craft a personalized job search plan tailored to each student’s particular situation. And of course, we have an amazing network of alumni who are always eager to help!

Truth.

And Alexiou was downright bullish on the market for 3Ls and lateral hires:

> In the wake of the Great Recession, firms are seemingly being more precise when it comes to their 2L summer associate classes. If the firm needs 50 first-year associates to start each Fall, they could have previously hired 60 summer associates, knowing that some would have offers from other firms, go off to clerk, etc. Now, it appears that firms are eliminating that slack. This means that often times, firms are going to CSO around the country and looking for 3Ls to fill holes in their incoming first-year associate class. So 3Ls without a job should make sure to keep in close contact with their counselor, so that person can pair them with a job opening that might become available on short notice.

In addition, we can continue to provide the services we provided to the student as a 1L and 2L: brainstorming firms/organization to which they could apply, developing alumni contact lists, reviewing résumés, cover letters, and even email text. As for alumni, different schools will likely tackle recent (and even not so recent grads) differently. At Vanderbilt Law, one of the several hats I wear is Director of Alumni Advising. I probably get a couple of calls a month from alumni who are considering making a change in their career or looking to get into a full-time legal job. I work with them in a similar fashion to 3Ls trying to find a post-graduate position.

My message to law students from 0Ls to alumni is simple: Use these people. Use the ever-loving heck out of them. They're here to help. If someone asks if you are a God, you say yes.

Stay tuned for the next post in our Introduction to Law School, a series powered by Thomson Reuters.
I had Elena Kagan for civil procedure during my first year of law school. I was bad at civil procedure. I went to law school to argue about social justice — and zoning; I freaking LOVE zoning regs. I didn't go to figure out all this juris-my-diction crap. You can cram your International Shoe right up your you know where.

After being bad at her class for a while, I decided to go to her office hours. I had a plan. A mission. I decided that, instead of just being anonymously bad at civil procedure, it made sense to go and try to explain why I didn’t like paying attention to her class. I wanted to explain why I had better things to do with my brain.

Just... think about that for a second: I’m a 1L, and in my 1L brain I thought I could explain to a law professor—one who now sits on the Supreme Court, no less—that her class wasn’t for me. To her face. Evidently, I didn’t want her to think I was an idiot; I wanted her to know for sure that I was an idiot.

My actual argument is kind of a blur. I mentioned something about how the “white man’s” rules were actually part of what was holding the country back. And that focusing on procedure was just there to trip up valid plaintiffs the court didn’t want to listen to.

I remember her smiling. I remember her not arguing with me. Then she said: “I clerked for Thurgood Marshall. He would be disappointed in this argument.” (Ouch.) “Marshall once said to me that the RULES are what allow all people to play on an equal footing.” Then she stood up and pulled a book off her shelf.

“How have you read this?”
“No.”
“I want you to go to page [whatever].”

See, when Kagan tells you to read something, she doesn’t mean it in the abstract. She means for you to sit there and read it right away. She’ll wait.

She invited the next student in while I read, and the next one, until our time was up. “I hope you’ve learned something today.”

I had. I learned that you shouldn’t go to a professor’s office hours solely for the purpose of making a total fool of yourself.

If you’ve recently started law school, chances are people have been shoving down your throat the importance of attending office hours. Most of those people, however, probably can’t articulate why office hours are so important. They’re just one of those things people like to tell you that you should do—like flossing.

There are lots of websites that regurgitate advice on how to get the most out of office hours, but there are not enough that tell you what you really need to know — namely, what not to do during office hours.

Thankfully, we’re here to help. If you plan to take advantage of office hours, here’s a list of “Don’ts” to keep in mind:

DON’T GO JUST FOR THE FACE TIME. LET’S BE BLUNT: You shouldn’t go to office hours if you don’t plan to actually get something out of them. At the very minimum, have at least one vaguely intelligent question ready. Law professors are busy people, and many, quite frankly, wouldn’t even have office hours if they weren’t required to. While everyone is always so focused on making a good impression, it’s also important to avoid making a bad impression. The last thing you want is for your professor to remember you as the student who wasted her time.

DON’T GO IN UNPREPARED. The purpose of office hours is pretty simple: You’re there to learn something. So, not only should you have a question ready, it better be a pretty good one. You want your professor to see you’ve actually been studying the law (this is law school, after all) and are there to seek help with something you’ve already tried to figure out on your own. A vague “I don’t understand the rule against perpetuities” isn’t going to cut it. No one understands the rule against perpetuities, and your professor doesn’t want to spend his office hours giving yet another lecture on it. At least have a specific fact pattern ready that you’ve thought through.

DON’T TREAT OFFICE HOURS AS A PRIVATE TUTORING SESSION. Office hours are not a substitute for actually doing your work. You should only take a question to your professor when you’ve
exhausted every other means of trying to figure it out. Asking your professor is your last line of defense, not your first. Also, remember you’re not the only student in the class. You should expect others to be there, and you need to have realistic expectations about how much time you can monopolize. There is no chance you’ll get 10 questions answered or your whole outline reviewed, so choose your battles wisely.

DON’T USE OFFICE HOURS AS A WEEKLY BROWN-NOSING SESSION. Generally speaking, law professors are a smart bunch, and with this intelligence comes a finely tuned BS detector. Professors can spot suck-ups a mile away. While brown-nosing can occasionally work, more often than not it results in an epic fail. Waste your professor’s time with stupid questions and you’ll likely find yourself in the Socratic hot seat for an uncomfortably long time. Moreover, law school grading is typically anonymous, so becoming teacher’s pet is useless when it comes to the final.

DON’T EXPECT TO GET SECRET INSIGHT INTO THE FINAL. Speaking of the final, office hours are not the time to demand answers about what will be on the exam. In fact, they’re not a place for you to be demanding anything. Particularly with respect to the final, there’s no reason for your professor to give you an advantage over anyone else in the class. Law school is about learning the law, not just passing the exam (at least from your professor’s perspective, even if it’s not yours). Disregarding what your professor is trying to teach you and only talking about the final is a sure way to get on her bad side.

DON’T GO TO SHOW YOU’RE SMARTER THAN YOUR PROFESSOR. As we said, law professors are smart. Unquestionably, they’re smarter than you are when it comes to the law. It doesn’t matter how many news articles you’ve read about stop and frisk, we can guarantee that your Con Law professor knows more about it than you do. While intelligent debate is one thing, telling your professor that he is wrong about his area of expertise won’t do you any favors. At best, you’ll leave feeling like a fool; at worst, you’re now his new favorite punching bag in class.

DON’T GO LOOKING TO MAKE FRIENDS. Office hours are not happy hour. You’re not there to make friends with your professor or with other students. For starters, you shouldn’t be surprised if your genius professor is antisocial; a lot of academics choose the field precisely because they don’t have to interact with a lot of people. Moreover, professors meet hundreds of students every year. There’s simply no incentive to befriend every one of them, nor would it be possible to do so. And if you’re looking to bond with other students, try study groups or Bar Review rather than wasting your professor’s time.

DON’T GO DRESSED LIKE A SLOB. Now, we’re by no means saying that you need to don your best interview suit before you stop by office hours, but you should take it somewhat seriously. You never know when you’ll end up working with a professor down the road or when you might need a recommendation. So leave the lululemon gear at home and clean yourself up a little bit. As they say, you never get a second chance to make a first impression.

Stay tuned for the next post in our Introduction to Law School, a series powered by Thomson Reuters.
An Interview With Charlotte Rushton of Thomson Reuters

We recently sat down with Charlotte Rushton, Thomson Reuters managing director of large and medium law firms, to discuss trends in female leadership at law firms and ways to improve diversity to benefit today’s law school students.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN OVERSEEING THE LARGE LAW SEGMENT AT THOMSON REUTERS?

Two years, since September 2014. I’ve been with Thomson Reuters for nine years; I was previously the head of the Asia Pacific and EMEA Division for our tax and accounting business.

TELL US A LITTLE BIT ABOUT WHAT THE LARGE & MEDIUM LAW SEGMENT DOES.

The Large & Medium Law segment is responsible for seeing that Thomson Reuters satisfies the needs of its large and midsize law firm customers. This includes account management, customer service and overseeing a product roadmap to satisfy customer needs, as well as focusing on sales and revenue growth to ensure that Thomson Reuters continues to invest in the products that the large and midsize customers value.

WHAT TRENDS HAVE YOU SEEN IN RECENT YEARS WITH RESPECT TO THE ROLES THAT WOMEN ARE PLAYING AT LARGE LAW FIRMS?

Honestly, there doesn’t seem like there’s been an awful lot of improvement in terms of management roles. Going back to the 1980s, the proportion of women going into law school was under 40 percent; it’s now much closer to 50 percent. Looking back 15 years, it’s been close to 50 percent that whole time—law school enrollment and recruitment have proportionally been about a 50-50 split between men and women. However, if you look into higher levels of the organizations, women make up approximately 18 percent of equity partners in the Am Law 200 and 4 percent of firm-wide managing partners. While these numbers are not unusual in business in general, the situation seems starkly bad in law firms in terms of getting women up the ranks.

HAVE THE LEADERSHIP NUMBERS CHANGED AT ALL AS FEMALE LAW SCHOOL ENROLLMENT HAS GONE UP FROM 40 PERCENT TO 50 PERCENT?

It has improved, but only very slightly. If you look at the last 15 years—the percentage of female equity partners was 16 percent in 2001, 17 percent in 2006, 18 percent in 2016—so it has gone up 2 percent in 15 years. It will be a long time before we ever reach parity at that rate. Recent statistics from analysts looking at similar data in corporations have estimated that, at the current rate, it will take approximately 100 years to get to parity.

ARE THERE OTHER ASPECTS OF LAW FIRMS THAT ARE CATCHING UP MORE QUICKLY ON THE GENDER EQUALITY FRONT?

Clients and general counsel of corporations have started to pay real attention to equality and diversity on the teams they hire. The hope is that this will start to drive change within the law firms. Thomson Reuters has launched an initiative called Transforming Women’s Leadership in the Law, which strives to connect our clients from both the law firm and the general counsel sides. We run a series of programs to get both sides of the equation together to talk about how they can work together to facilitate change.

Within law firms, we have seen a focus on coaching, mentoring, and flexible working arrangements, which are all valuable—but influence from the clients is what can really help push diversity forward. The initiative has been really well received; the women on the general counsel side really want to help their counterparts on the law firm side bring in their business, and this helps open the door to that.

WHERE DO YOU THINK THE EFFORTS WOULD BE BEST FOCUSED WITHIN THE FIRMS THEMSELVES IN ORDER TO TRY TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE?

There’s no silver bullet, but in looking at other similar professions like accounting or consulting, the key thing is that they’ve really focused on the issue, through diversity initiatives and getting the whole firm involved to fix the problem. The one thing we’ve been very clear about in our initiatives is that it’s not about fixing the
women, it’s about fixing the processes. So shining a light on it is step No. 1. Starting right from the managing partner down through the ranks, the firm needs to be committed to making diversity real.

After that, it’s a matter of adopting programs that can help with that, like flexible working arrangements or alternative career paths that are not seen as taking the easy option, where the possibility of becoming partner is still very real. Firms have to make some structural changes to really make change happen. Perhaps most importantly, it’s crucial to have the men involved—it can’t only be the women leading the women’s initiative.

THE GENDER PAY GAP HAS TAKEN CENTER STAGE IN RECENT MONTHS, AND THE CALL FOR EQUAL PAY IS AT AN ALL-TIME HIGH. HAS THIS HAD ANY EFFECT ON THE AVAILABILITY OF LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR WOMEN AT LAW FIRMS?

I speak to a lot of managing partners about this issue, and, without exception, they all want to make improvements. I do think it’s a really good time for women in law firms to really step up—they’re in a good position to fight for change because there’s such a spotlight on the issue right now. Firm management knows diversity and equality are good for business because clients are demanding it. And everyone knows that diversity of thought is good for case outcomes and the work you produce for clients.

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT FOR LAW FIRMS TO HAVE WOMEN IN UPPER MANAGEMENT ROLES?

From a business perspective, obviously it’s important because the clients are asking for it. You need to be able to satisfy those client needs. We’re seeing a lot more RFPs now that specifically request a diversity breakdown of the team that will be handling the client’s work.

It’s also necessary to have diversity of thought and approach in terms of how the firm is run and how the cases are run. We’re currently trying to do some work with McKinsey specifically related to law firms, but studies they’ve conducted in corporations have shown higher earnings for companies with more female executives. They saw a 66 percent increase in earnings for companies that were in the top quartile for number of female executives, as opposed to those companies that don’t have female executives.

Finally, it’s important for the younger women coming in to be able to look up and see that it’s possible to get to the top of the firm or be a partner. They need to have role models and sponsors and coaches who can show them how to do it.

WITH RESPECT TO SHOWING A COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, WHAT FACTORS SHOULD FEMALE LAW SCHOOL GRADUATES LOOK FOR IN POTENTIAL EMPLOYERS?

First, look to see if there are senior women in the firm, and how many. Second, look to see if they’re focused on diversity and interested in it — do they have diversity programs, do they talk about diversity, does the managing partner speak about diversity being important? Third, look to see if the men are involved or if it’s just all about the women. If you see the men supporting and driving advancement for everyone in the firm, that’s a real bonus.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN WHO ARE CONSIDERING LAW SCHOOL OR ARE ABOUT TO GRADUATE AND ENTER THE LEGAL MARKET?

Go for it. It’s a tough and demanding career, but it’s really rewarding.

In terms of specific advice, try to be better at self-promotion. Speak in terms of “I” rather than “we;” get out of your comfort zone and talk about yourself. Focus on relationship-building, which is something that I think that starts in law school and continues through your whole career. Being able to bring in a book of business is ultimately how you progress once you’ve proven you’re a good attorney. It’s never too soon to start the networking and business-building part of the job.

Women can polish business development skills and work on developing client relationships right from law school. The connections you make there can become your book of business in the future. Surveys show that there’s a gap between men and women in terms of bringing in business, and it’s important to address that early on.

Most of all, have fun and take some risks!

Stay tuned for the next post in our Introduction to Law School, a series powered by Thomson Reuters.
What’s The Best Thing You Can Do While Not Studying?

By BRIAN DALTON

Ed. note: This article is part of the Introduction to Law School series, powered by Thomson Reuters.

Recently we asked you which of the myriad extracurricular options available to law students — journals, moot court, clinics, student government, and so on — are most likely to help you land a job. We had an excellent response; more than 1,200 of you weighed in, and today we share our findings.

Our survey had two components. First, we asked you to rate, on a scale of 1-10, the relative “prestige” — i.e., the value added to a student résumé in the eyes of a potential employer — of the various categories of law student extracurricular activities. Here are your ratings:

While it is certainly no surprise that law review experience is the most highly prized, the degree to which it was valued more than any other activity is something some might find striking. On our 10-point scale, law review’s mean rating was 2.5 points higher than any other, in an exclusive tier of its own. But chances are, you’re not getting on law review. So now what?

Other activities fall into two other distinct tiers. The “mid-tier” comprises clinics, moot court, secondary journals, mock trial, and research/teaching assistantships. The bottom tier is made up of practice area societies, SBA, political and affinity organizations, intramural sports, and student theatrics. A few other observations:
Topical or secondary journals are not “runners-up” to the law review—their perceived value is clearly behind moot court and clinics/externships.

When we separate the perceptions of attorneys from those of students, we see that practicing lawyers value clinics/externships consistently higher than moot court experience. For students, the reverse is true.

The one other instance where lawyers and students disagreed on ordinal rankings, was political organizations (e.g., Federalist Society) versus affinity groups (e.g., BLSA). Lawyers prized affinity groups higher—and political groups lower—than current students.

The second piece of our survey asked you to place in order of relative value, a series of generic hypothetical résumé items:

1. Editor-in-chief of law review at a mid-tier school (mean = 1.30)
2. Staff of environmental law journal at a top 14 law school (2.03)
3. Housing clinic at midtier school (3.36)
4. Moot Court captain at unranked school (4.02)
5. SBA president at a tier 3 school (4.28)

(“Mean” refers to the ordinal rank assigned by respondents for each of the five items.)

For this question, there was no significant difference between lawyers and students in the relative value of the options. One way to characterize what we see here is a sort of rough hierarchy of Law review EIC wherever > T14 school whatever > other extracurricular options in the order we saw above (when the schools are indistinguishable).

Next, we’ll have a look at the considerable qualitative feedback we received from our survey.
We recently published results of our survey about the *most useful law school extracurriculars* in helping you land a job. It’s not going to shock anybody that most of the legal profession regards law review as the only worthwhile thing to do with your free time. It shouldn’t shock anybody that being on the SBA is an active waste of your time.

But now we want to share some of the comments from our survey, which garnered more than 1,200 participants. About that SBA:

> SBA is the biggest joke of all time. Honestly, if I’m ever hiring for a firm, I think I will actually mark down candidates who do SBA. It shows poor judgment and an inability to decipher good uses of time from total wastes...unless they were the ones planning bar review; then they get a gold star.

In my experience, involvement with SBA is almost a negative—I know three law schools fairly well, and it was almost always a proxy for planning events to maximize alcohol consumption.

One of the only things that ranked lower on our list of importance than the SBA was “theatrics.” But it seems to me that if you are going to law school to be president, acting and organizing events is the better use of your time than studying.

Not everybody can be on law review, and so we had a lot of discussion about the value of secondary journals. One clear theme emerged: It looks bad if you don’t do one.

I think not being on a journal is like earning negative points for your résumé. Even if you can’t be on your school’s flagship journal, it shows that you’re not willing to roll up your sleeves if you don’t join a secondary journal. So while I don’t see secondary journals as particularly prestigious, I think that being on a journal is something you simply have to do while in law school.

I feel like people should probably do a journal, but non-Law Review journals aren’t necessarily impressive, it’s just that the lack of them seems lazy. Also, I don’t give a shit about editorial board positions on whatever journal you are on.

Not that employers and students agreed all the time: Students indicated political groups, like Fed Soc, were important. Employers thought affinity groups were more important.

But here are the two things everybody agreed upon:

> Nothing will overcome going to a bad school.

Unless...

> If you have an engineering degree, there is no need to spend any time doing anything but studying. The undergraduate engineering degree (+ engineering work product, if possible) is more than enough.

Now head out to bar review so those SBA types can feel like they’re not wasting their lives.
Tips For Taking The Stress Out Of Law School Exam Prep

By ABOVE THE LAW

Ed. note: This article is part of the Introduction to Law School series, powered by Thomson Reuters.

December is here. For law students, that means only one thing—exams. Walk through any hallway of any law school in the coming weeks, and the tension will be palpable.

There’s no getting around the fact that law school exams are way more stressful than they need to be. For starters, in most instances your entire grade rests on the outcome of this one test. And to make matters worse, law school professors rarely come right out and tell you what will be on the exam. This guessing-game factor only adds to the pressure you may be feeling as a law student staring down the exam gauntlet.

The good news is, there are a lot of things you can do to make preparing for exams easier. Whether you’re a 1L about to take on your first round of exams or an experienced 3L closing out your electives, here are some tips to help make the law school exam period as painless as possible.

GENERAL ADVICE

START EARLY. Cramming for tests may have worked in undergrad, but law school is a whole different ballgame. The single most important thing you can do to make exam prep easier is to get a jump on it as soon as possible. Ideally, you’ve already been working on your outlines for a while. If not, there’s still time—but you need to start now. No one can outline a whole semester overnight.

OUTLINING. By now, the idea that outlines are crucial has likely been shoved down your throat. But outlines are only worthwhile if they’re actually useful. So, what makes an outline useful? Being selective. You need to pick and choose what you include in your outline, and be as concise as possible. Creating an outline that’s as long as your textbook defeats the purpose, and come exam time, your tome will be utterly worthless because you won’t be able to find the information you need.

TAKE ADVANTAGE OF FREE RESOURCES. Going it alone during exam time can make you a nervous wreck. The good thing is that there are plenty of resources available to help you that won’t cost you a dime.

Review Sessions: Most classes will offer a review session before finals. You should go, even if you feel you don’t have time. Any last-minute insight you can get into what might be on the exam is worth it.

Study Groups: If you’ve been in a study group all semester, now is the time to really take advantage of it and bounce your questions off your fellow students. If study groups aren’t really your thing and you never joined one, chances are you can find others like you to go over the exam and exchange outlines with. Regardless of who you’re studying with, though, be sure you focus. The second it becomes distracting or devolves into a social gathering, it’s time to leave.

Office Hours: Office hours are your chance to ask your professor questions. Don’t go in expecting him or her to tell you what will be on the exam. But if you have a particular topic you’re struggling with, this can be the perfect chance to get clarification.

PRACTICE EXAMS. Practice exams are perhaps your best insight into what your actual exam will look like. Be sure, however, not to focus only on the topics that are covered in them. It is less about the specific questions and more about getting used to the process and learning the types of answers your professors score well. Be sure to always take practice exams under the same conditions as the actual exam, including time constraints. If your professor or TAs offer to review practice exams, take them up on it.

FOCUS ON YOURSELF. It’s easy to get caught up in what everyone else is doing, and there will always be gunners who think they’ve cracked the code to acing exams. They haven’t. You need to focus on what works for you, and not let what other people are doing stress you out more than you already are.

OUTSIDE RESOURCES

If you’re like most law students, you’ll probably find the resources available at your school aren’t enough to truly make you feel
prepared for your exams. To that end, there are a number of other tools that can help ease your exam prep stress.

**COMMERCIAL OUTLINES.** Law students have been relying on commercial outlines for decades. While they can certainly be helpful and fill in some pieces you’re missing, don’t go overboard. If you buy too many you’ll never get through them all. They should supplement your own notes, not replace them. If funds are low, Westlaw offers some free ones here.

**OLD OUTLINES ON FILE.** Nearly every law school offers old sample outlines for most courses. These can fill in the holes in your own outline, but again, shouldn’t be seen as a substitute. Also, it should go without saying that you need to make sure they’re up to date, as the law is constantly evolving.

**WESTLAW PRACTICAL LAW RESOURCES.** The folks at Westlaw provide a vast array of law school resources among their Practical Law offerings. Each designed to help law students gain an in-depth understanding of key legal concepts, Practical Law’s useful tools include:

- **Flowcharts:** Aimed at helping you understand the processes and steps involved in the central legal concepts of your most critical classes, from Civil Procedure to Contracts to Bankruptcy.
- **Classroom Materials:** Providing general guidance keyed to common syllabi on Civil Procedure, Contracts, Business Organizations, and Bankruptcy.
- **Practice Notes:** Straightforward how-to guides giving clear explanations of laws and how they’re applied, prepared by actual attorneys.
- **Checklists:** A handy resource for double-checking that you haven’t missed any crucial issues in your exam prep.
- **Back to Basics:** Focusing on the fundamentals and providing lists of key resources on many subject matters.
- **Glossary:** Definitions of key legal terms, both as a list and hyperlinked across all Practical Law content.

Whether you choose to rely on any or all of the above resources, remember to stay calm and take care of yourself during exam prep. Mental breaks are necessary, as are eating, sleeping, and exercising as you normally would.

And remember: You got this far, and you can get through exams. It’s not about acing the test; it’s about doing your best.
Access to justice is a phrase that can be difficult to define. Some consider it a problem, pointing to shortfalls in the ability of everyone to access the courts and obtain adequate legal representation. Others speak of it as a means of rectifying that shortfall — and that’s where legal technology can play a crucial role. In today’s digital age, technology can go a long way toward increasing access to justice.

The realities of today’s legal market demand reliance on technology. After all, we all know that time is money when it comes to the practice of law. Technological advances have drastically increased attorney efficiency and cut down on wasted time. Thanks to technology, tasks that were previously impractical or impossible are now routine and expected. But technology isn’t just about saving time. Too often, we ignore the fact that technology has the ability to make us better lawyers. It can help us work better and faster, allowing us to bring the focus back to servicing the non-legal community. Technology, therefore, has a real ability to increase access to justice if the right products exist in both a direct and indirect way.

**HOW TECHNOLOGY DIRECTLY INCREASES ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

There’s no question that technological advances have broadened people’s access to justice in a very literal way. For starters, online resources now provide an abundance of information for self-represented litigants, helping to demystify what was formerly an inscrutable process for anyone lacking a law degree.

In addition, technology such as customizable templates and document assembly software make it much easier for inexperienced litigants to properly file documents with the court and produce court-worthy papers that won’t be rejected.

These advances have undoubtedly made it easier for everyone to access the courts and have made legal proceedings more understandable for everyday people. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

**TECHNOLOGY’S ABILITY TO INDIRECTLY INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE**

Technology has the unique ability to free up lawyers to better serve their clients. With the right resources, attorneys can devote their attention to what they’re doing rather than worry about how it gets done. To capitalize on the freedom technology offers, however, we need to constantly update and find ways to improve it. We need to rely on those using legal technology, including law students, to help determine what lawyers really need from the products they use. Only then can we ensure they have the best resources at their disposal.

To that end, Thomson Reuters recently tapped the brains of tomorrow’s legal stars to gain insight into what they most wanted to see in legal technology. We recently hosted the Product Design Challenge, where teams of students from five law schools worked to develop improvements to the offerings of Thomson Reuters Practice Point. The purpose was to get to the core of what truly makes certain products or software useful for the practicing lawyer.

Above all else, the results highlighted technology’s potential to increase access to justice. Each of the groups shared a common goal: to develop technology to make legal services more accessible to the average person. Chief among priorities were giving better insight to clients about the legal process and creating better access to the courts.
While many software developers tend to focus on design aesthetics—things like attractive interfaces and pretty color schemes—our day with these law students showed us that functionality is what really matters. While it’s great if an application looks nice, it’s more important that it serves as a useful bridge between the real world and the legal world.

Product development needs to take into account the technology’s end goal—to best serve the client. The law school perspective is crucial to developing cutting-edge legal products. Every new crop of lawyers brings new needs to the market, and technology must evolve to meet those needs for clients to receive the best possible representation.

At Thomson Reuters, we’re committed to creating products that work for you so you can focus on what matters—serving your clients. By enabling better, faster work, we can strive to provide access to justice for all.
How To Know If You Are A Gunner

By ELIE MYSTAL

With the first semester winding down, it’s a good time for people to take stock of where they are. First-year law students are reassessing their study plans. Third-year students are picking their bar review courses. Second-years who have secured offers for the summer are entirely checked out—second semester 2L year with an offer is maybe the best time in life to do absolutely nothing for months and not feel bad about it.

The holidays are a good time for self-awareness, so we want to help by providing a little questionnaire to help some of the least self-aware people in law school: The Gunners. Some of you know who you are, but many of you don’t. Many of you think that if you have questions, likely many of your classmates have the same questions, and you are doing them a solid by asking those questions. Many of you think that “class participation” is still a thing because your high school history teacher said so in a rec letter. Gunners aren’t necessarily bad people, they just missed the social cues that are supposed to tell them to shut the hell up when the expert professor is trying to explain something.

If you answer “yes” to all of these questions, you are a gunner and you are cool with your station in life. But if you answer “yes” to only some of these questions, there is still hope for you. Reflect on your life choices, and maybe next semester you won’t be the central square on somebody’s “Gunner Bingo” card.

**DO YOU SIT TOWARD THE FRONT OF THE CLASS, EVEN WHEN IT IS INCONVENIENT TO DO SO?**

See... there are some people who hide out in the back of the class because they think the professor won’t find them there. That’s silly. The professor can see you no matter where you sit. Modern classrooms have good sight lines.

Gunners try to sit toward the front of the class, so the professor can see them. THAT’S SILLY. The professor can see you anywhere.

Normal people sit next to their friends. Because they have friends.

**DO YOU RAISE YOUR HAND WHEN THE PROFESSOR SAYS SOMETHING YOU DISAGREE WITH?**

A statement is not a question. A counterpoint is not a question. I don’t care if the professor says “there is no moral difference between murder 1 and murder 2” and you are the damn New York Times ethicist. Did the professor stutter? No? Then you don’t have a “question.” You have an “issue” that you should probably take up at office hours instead of interrupting whatever kooky train of thought the professor is on.

**DO YOU RAISE YOUR HAND IN EVERY CLASS SESSION? CAN YOU HONESTLY NOT REMEMBER IF YOU SPOKE LAST CLASS OR NOT?**

I don’t care how interested you are in the subject, there is no excuse for speaking up in every single class. NO. EXCUSE. If your class meets three days a week, and you have your hand in the air three times in a week, your assessment of when you should ask a question is entirely off. Sometimes it’s better to just sit there and listen.

By the same token, normal people are aware of when they last volunteered to get mouthy in class. They think, “Man, I got into it on Wednesday. This Friday I’m not going to speak unless spoken to.” That’s just a normal human thing. It works in law school, it works in romance (“I initiated the texting the last two times, this time I’m going to wait and let them text me.”). It works in life.

The reason “gunning” is the metaphor for people who talk in class all the time is that it connotes indiscriminate firing. Normal people use their bullets judiciously.

**DO YOU ACCEPT THE ANSWER AS GIVEN?**

Please note: Gunning has nothing to do with the legitimacy of the questions asked. You could have fantastic questions. Many people do. But after you ask the question, do you accept the answer (not that
you ever have to agree with it) and move on? Or do you keep pressing an issue that, at that point, matters only to you?

Here’s a normal conversation:

Gunner: “But, teach, why is an excited utterance an exception to hearsay? Seems like we should value what people say when excited very little.”

Professor: “The law thinks we are less likely to lie when we are about to die. As you are, if you ever call me ‘teach’ again.”

But the gunner version doesn’t stop there.

Gunner: “Is there any evidence that people are more truthful when they are about to die? And how do we know that they know they’re about to?”

Professor: “I was being flip because I want you to stop talking. Spontaneity is the key here. You should be allowed to report, as evidence, what a person said unprompted in the heat of the moment.”

Gunner: “[but but but]”

Class: [Thinking to itself] “Holy God, we have 12 more hearsay exceptions to go. I wonder if SHUT UP BEFORE I MURDER YOU counts as an excited utterance?”

DO YOU RESPOND TO OTHER PEOPLE’S QUESTIONS?

This is truly the most socially inconsiderate thing you can do in law school. When somebody else has a question for the professor, you’re supposed to let the professor answer it. Nobody asked YOU anything. Nobody is paying tens of thousands of dollars a year to hear your opinion on the matter. People who answer questions that aren’t addressed to them belong on street corners handing out “literature.”

If they ever make “gunner rehab,” apologizing to all the people you’ve done this to would be one of the 12 steps.

Like we said, if you do all of these things, you’re a gunner and you know it, and... best of luck to you. You can only be who you are.

But if you only do some of these things... take some time off during the holidays and think about what all that hand raising has gotten you. Is it really helping you learn? Might it be better to just sit back and listen sometimes?

At the very least, you should try doing what most of your classmates do. Set up your laptop so you can ALT-TAB between your notes, Overwatch, and Above the Law. That way, there’s always something going on that’s more interesting than the sound of your own voice.
Breaking Down The Winter Break For 1Ls

By THOMSON REUTERS

Ed. note: This article is part of the Introduction to Law School series, powered by Thomson Reuters.

Congratulations, you've made it through your law school exams! What now? As a first-year law student, you have just endured the most grueling and stressful semester of your academic career—and are just now coming up for air.

You've longed for a breather, and it is finally here. But before you crawl into bed for two weeks or kick off a bender you'll soon want to forget, consider some suggestions for how to approach your winter break.

LET IT GO.
A law student is more likely than not to be something of a control freak. You burn a lot of calories attempting to plan, predict, and prevent things under your control, and even some things outside it. Don't wake up on the first morning of next semester having wasted your break pointlessly rehashing every final and fretting over your grades. Your first set of law school exams is over and done, kaput, and finis. Stop obsessing over them. Your grades are not a mystery you can solve on your own. Embrace your ignorance. Enjoy the fact you don't need to crack a casebook for a few weeks.

So even if you are constitutionally incapable of taking the Serenity Prayer to heart, try to take some comfort in the wisdom of Professor Orin Kerr:

“[]It's important not to let lower-than-expected grades become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Recognize the psychological game going on here: many students expect their fall 1L grades to give them a lightning bolt of insight about their future in the legal profession. Grades don't do that, though: all they can do is measure how well you did relative to your classmates on a few three-hour exams taken at a particular place at a particular time. Too many students think that grades are destiny, and begin to take steps to readjust their expectations to what they think is their destiny.

REMEMBER: “IT’S NOT THEM; IT’S YOU.”
The holiday season is precious opportunity to reconnect with loved ones, right? Here's the catch, though: you are no longer the same person you were back in August. Even just one semester of law school forces you to unlearn a lifetime’s worth of mental habits. It can’t be helped; you are now more critical and analytical than the person you used to be. Sorry, but some of you might even have lost a bit of your sense of humor.

It's a difficult thing to simply flip a switch after a sleep-deprived and stressful stretch of weeks and pick up where you left off with friends and family. Be careful. On the one hand, don't bore everyone silly by expounding on the Rule Against Perpetuities or tales of intra-study group bickering. On the other, be patient with well-meaning but clueless questions from your sweet aunt about how you did on your exams.

FLIP YOUR SCRIPT.
Ideally, the semester break is a chance to recharge your batteries. How to go about this depends on your own personal wiring. Take

Much of conventional law school wisdom would have you believe that your 1L grades will make or break your legal career and/or life. Of course, your first-year grades are very important. And, yes, if you completely bomb your first year, you're not going to land that SCOTUS clerkship. Inevitably, your GPA/law school combination will be used as a sorting mechanism by employers. But it's important, especially for 1Ls, to keep a little perspective. First, law school exam-taking is a highly specific skill. Students can and do figure out how the game is played. With experience, you can make up ground on your GPA. Also, although it might seem like cold comfort now, there will come a day when no one cares what your grades were, only how good an actual lawyer you are.
long naps. Go skiing or biking all day. Catch back up with the Kardashians. Play video games for 12 hours. Volunteer at a soup kitchen. Stare out the window. Eat. Pray. Love. Whatever. Just so long as: 1) You feel like doing it, and 2) It has nothing at all to do with studying law.

But only for a few days...

**REFLECT AND QUESTION.**

After you’ve got your head back more-or-less straight, take time to really think about what the hell just happened. What went well? What didn’t work? What should you do differently going forward?

This is the time to reexamine your study habits and schedule. Too ambitious? Not enough? By now, you should be able to spot some inefficiencies and modify accordingly. Maybe study groups aren’t for you? Or perhaps you need to find a new one.

Can you even remember why you went to law school in the first place? It’s not uncommon for your motivations and aspirations to take a sharp turn, and that’s okay. In any case, take time to revisit your long-term goals and think about what you can do in the coming semester to help realize them.

Some poor souls will be unable to see any light at the end of the tunnel. The grind and anxiety of classes is unleavened by any intellectual excitement or optimism for an eventual career. So, it should not be taboo to mention that there will never be a better—or less expensive—time to drop out than right now.

**RESEARCH AND NETWORK.**

For most of you, the very point of law school is to obtain a job as a lawyer. It’s time to get going on that. You’ll be glad you got started once next semester gets busy and deadlines start bearing down. Get your résumé in order. Make an appointment with your career services office. Your CSO exists to help you figure out what you need to do over the course of law school to put yourself in the best position to get a job you want. Take full advantage, but be sure to treat the CSO folks like the valuable allies they are.

Research your face off. Consider which professors might write you a recommendation or even take you on as a research assistant. Learn about possible internships and clinics. The Biglaw track is assured for no one, so consider a range of potential employers, from small firms to government agencies.

Many lawyers and law students claim to hate “networking,” but unfortunately for them, it’s a non-optional aspect of the profession, playing a central role in everything from getting a job to landing clients. While networking over winter break might sound anathema to you, Jason Levin, a career coach and consultant for lawyers, suggests you reconsider: “Reality is that your winter break is prime time to further your professional relationships. Too often a voice in our heads tells us that people are too busy to take a phone call or a meeting during the holidays. That is only half true. Some professionals actually go to the office to catch up on administrative things because the office is quiet. Pick up the phone. While it may be easier to email and see if they are available, a phone call shows you care.”