

## Advice for Soon-to-be 1L

A friend of mine wants to collect the best advice lawyers would give to someone entering law school to give to her son. What is the advice you would give to a 1L (other than not to go to law school)?

Mine was to remember IRAC and that law school is an endurance test - if you're smart enough to get in, you're smart enough to graduate as long as you hang in there, do the work, and are disciplined (and barring unforeseen circumstances like a serious illness).

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Neither a JD nor a license to practice law is a winning lottery ticket. You need to understand business and marketing to make your career successful whether you're an associate, a partner, or a solo. Some people get very lucky and hit the gold mine, but those people are few and far between. Even then, making a lot of money is not necessarily the same as contentment, satisfaction, or happiness.

The practice of law can be a great career. It has treated me well. If I had it to do over again, I'd do things a little differently, just like almost anyone would.

Mike Phillips, North Carolina

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Investigate a joint degree program such as JD/MBA.

Roger M. Rosen, California

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Sort version: What got you here will get you through.

Longer version: When you graduated from Kindergarten, people told you that 1st grade was so much harder; but you made it through. When you went from 5th grade to Middle School (or 6th grade to Junior High School), people told you that Middle School (or Junior High School) was so much harder; but you made it through. When you started High School, people told you it was so much harder than Middle School/Junior High School; but you made it through. When you started college, people told you how much harder it was than High School; but you made it through. Now, people are telling you that Law School is so much harder than college. But you've gotten this far, and you can get through by continuing to do what you did up until now that got you here.

If you kept up with all of your school work every night, keep doing that, and it will get you through. But if you were the kind of person that goofed off all semester long, and then crammed like crazy for two weeks before finals, the chances are that will get you through, also. (Personally, I don't recommend the latter, but if that's what got you through high school and college, then it works for you, and should get you through law school).

Brian H. Cole, California

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IDK but here is some guy who has a blog post on this.

<http://flawyer.us/ProbateThoughts/http://flawyer.us/ProbateThoughts/advice-to-the-new-law-student-or-one-1>

Ronald Jones, Florida

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Study. Read the cases and assignments for understanding, not merely for regurgitation. Immerse yourself in the law school experience. Appreciate the immense amount of work and wisdom contained in the law library, and pray that you may someday stand on the shoulders of giants.

Barry Kaufman, Florida

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- (1) Work in a law office during law school. Right away if allowed. Do it for free if you have to.
- (2) In law school, what professors are looking for is "playfulness." Seriously. An A+ exams is nothing more than, "Plaintiff might be liable for negligence, because the facts show [list facts maybe meeting elements]; on the other hand he might also be liable for trespass because [same]. . . or maybe nuisance [same]. But, wait! Defendant has [discuss silly but plausible defense]." This sort of noncommittal playfulness is where the points are. Law professor do not care for answers; they want to see ground covered. Same for the bar exam.
- (3) During study time, avoid other law students like the plague. You're not there to help each other. You're trying to step over everyone else and claw your way to the top. If that doesn't sit right, avoid law school.
- (4) Clerk for a judge. Any judge.
- (5) Don't act like a law student after you become a lawyer (see especially #3).

Tony LaCroix

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I object to Tony's #3. My law school is known for being friendly and folks go out of their way to help one another. Of course, most of us end up public service or government attorneys, so that might have something to do with it too.

My advice: Get involved; law school is going to be miserable if you are only focused on your classes. Join a clinic, so you know how to be an attorney after graduation. Take out as little debt as possible.

Corrine Bielejeski, California

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I agree with you Corrine. Like you, I went to UC Davis Law School, where not only didn't we claw each other's eyes out, we helped each other.

L. Maxwell Taylor, Vermont

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Well, I think Tony may be a bit sarcastic. Personally, it might be a good idea to avoid other students at exam time; not because you're not there to help others but because sometimes people drive each other into a panic frenzy. And so does conducting post mortems on exams. I knew one student, good student, bright, diligent, but she's fricking panic after exams; "oh, my god, I blew it, I blew it, I'm going to fail". She didn't fail; she might not have gotten top grade but she passed and did very well.

As I note on my blog post on this:

Working with other people, study groups and using other people's outlines; Be nice to your fellow students. They are as stressed as you are. If someone is stuck on a point, help them out (the exception to this is legal writing; generally, you are responsible for your own writing and are prohibited from helping others). On the other hand, I, personally, was never a fan of study groups; they always struck me as trying to reduce work; and frankly you need to work on this stuff yourself to learn it. Likewise, using someone else's outline, you don't know if they are right; and you didn't learn anything if someone else developed it. Now, if, near the end of the semester, you want to have a meeting with a small group and compare outlines and maybe discuss hypothetical questions, that's fine; sometimes someone else will see something you missed; but the primary work should be your own.

Ronald Jones

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"Plaintiff" might be liable for negligence, trespass and nuisance? No wonder your class was clawing at each other... Sorry. Just being playful. ;)

Seriously tho, that was not my experience at all. I went to Northwestern; everyone was generally friendly and helpful.

Amy A. Breyer, California

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I have three pieces of advice.

1. Take a broad variety of courses and try not to specialize too much in one area. Even a specialized practice will involve interactions with other, often unanticipated, areas of law. Also, it is much easier to become knowledgeable about a specialized area after law school than it is to acquire a basic overview of many areas.

2. Never fall behind in your studies. I kept up easily in law school by spending three hours per day studying. Skip one day and you have to study six hours to catch up. Skip two days and it takes nine hours.

After a few days, it becomes nearly impossible to catch up.

3. Reserve judgment on the process of teaching in law school and the value of what you are learning. I ran into lots of instances where other law students and even some practicing attorneys described law school as bull\*\*\*\*. Looking back, I think they were wrong. It may not teach you everything you need to practice law successfully, but it gives you the foundation you need in order to learn the rest and do a good job of representing clients. The same can be said for studying medicine, engineering, and art. Life is a learning process and don't let the naysayers denigrate the value of what you are learning.

Bert Krages, Oregon

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“2. Never fall behind in your studies. I kept up easily in law school by spending three hours per day studying. Skip one day and you have to study six hours to catch up. Skip two days and it takes nine hours. After a few days, it becomes nearly impossible to catch up.”

I think this is a good approach.

I had a friend in law school who had taught high school for several years before enrolling in law school. He decided to treat law school like a “real” job: He arrived at 8:00 and worked straight through until 5:00. When he was not in class, he was in the library studying. Every night, he went home and had dinner with his wife, and then they did other stuff together.

By contrast, if most of us had an hour between classes, we’d hang out with friends. Then, we’d have to go home in the afternoon/evening and study for several hours. If you didn’t, then (as Bert observes), you’d fall behind.

But (in retrospect) I think my friend’s approach of spending a normal work day studying, then having your evenings free, probably made more sense.

Brian H. Cole, California

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Yeah. As I note in my blog post:

The first year of law school you are going to taking 15 hours of class per semester; 3 hours of that is going to be legal research and writing and probably 3 substantive courses of 4 hours each; maybe

contracts, torts and property, or what have you. That's 12 hours of substantive courses; figuring 2 hours of prep time for each hour of substantive course you're looking at 36 hours a week between class and reading cases for class; plus 3 hours on legal writing plus whatever time you spend out of class on your writing assignments; figure another 5 hours there. So, do the math:  $15+24+5=44$  hours a week. That's a full time job; that's about 9 hours a day 5 days a week in class or actually working.

And, frankly, this is where a lot of law students fall down; time management. They have to spend a minimum of 44 hours a week on this stuff; that can be done reasonably efficiently if you are willing to get up, get breakfast, shower, and hit the books before you go to class; once you get out of class you hit the books, eat lunch, hit the books again, go to your afternoon class, hit the books until dinner and then maybe you have some free time in the evening. By hit the books, I mean, cloister yourself in the library, or in your dorm room on campus, and read and brief. I don't mean, hang out with your buddies in the lounge, watch TV there, play on the internet, go out and have a two hour lunch, or watch Netflix. I mean, walk out of class, find some quiet place and read and brief the cases. If you don't take advantage of your down time out of class in the daytime, this means you have to spend all of your evening doing the work; and I mean all of the evening; don't think you can crack your books at 9 pm while keeping an eye on TV or whatever for a couple of hours; It's not going to work, unless you are up till 3 AM. If you do this, you should have most of most of your weekends reasonably free; to do chores, to socialize, to relax.

Ronald Jones

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I think we speak in generalizations too much. There are a LOT of nontraditional law students. I was one of them. And, I was a lazy one. Well, either lazy or fortunate. We took 11 hours of classes our first year. Crim law. Torts. Contracts. Legal writing (which was only 2 hours).

I worked full time and had a job where I was on call one week a month. I missed class due to work. I also may have spent 3 hours a week studying.

Maybe 4. I took time off before finals and crammed. And I did okay.

I also get that I was not your average student, either full time or nontraditional. I went in with some knowledge of torts and contracts from my day job and I test well. But, everyone is different and we should appreciate those differences.

Jonathan Stein, California

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Get a lot of exercise. It is good for reducing stress, good for your brain, your memory.

Roger Rosen, California

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Oops. And even swapping the parties, I'd STILL get most of the points on the exam!

Friendly and helpful is how I hope we all strive to practice law. But law school pits every student against the rest of the class. Aside from the handful of students who don't care about class rank (which is, frankly, unwise), the goal is simply to beat everybody else. As noted, my advice is not directed toward social encounters, just studies. Don't be an asshole in law school. Just be . . . away. And if you're lost and alone, who is going to be a better resource, your professor (who is writing the test . . . probably based on her conversations with you and others who take the initiative to meet with her), or your fellow lost souls who are still trying to understand the difference between a court's holding and its reasoning?

Tony LaCroix

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I think how cutthroat things are academically probably has a lot to do with the culture of the law school. My experience was much like Amy's. UVA law was very social--maybe too social--and the academics were never cutthroat.

Having a very strong B mean probably had something to do with that. But I have heard stories of other schools where academics were much more competitive and trusting other students unwise.

Personally, I did much of my studying on my own, but got a lot of value out of study sessions with small groups as finals approached. Conversations with the professors helped too, but they were much more helpful for answers to specific questions rather than for helping you to chew on legal concepts and think through their implications.

Kevin Grierson, Virginia

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I will add something very important:

Take care of your mental health. However, you do it, counseling, friends, hobbies, yoga, taxidermy, etc. Law school isn't worth losing your life.

Our class lost a student to suicide in our second year. There were a lot of struggles she was facing, and while not all of them were about school, enough were. She left her 3-year-old son with no parents.

Drew Winghart, California

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. . . probably based on her conversations with you and others who take the initiative to meet with her), or your fellow lost souls who are still trying to understand the difference between a court's holding and its reasoning?

Huh? Let me start with the top:

1. Law school does not have to pit every student against the rest of the class. I went to McGeorge School of Law, or whatever the hell they call it these days. It was competitive but only for the jackasses who made it that way. Plenty of us, especially in the night program, never felt pitted against anyone else. Maybe it was because we were "night students" - we had jobs and families and just wanted to get through the program.

2. It is unwise to care about class rank? Why? I had no idea what my class rank was until graduation - maybe the week before. Never knew. Never cared.

16 or so years later - still don't care. Nor has anyone ever asked me.

Never. Ever. Why would anyone care? Is the person who graduated #1 in the class smarter than anyone else? Probably not. Is the person who graduated last not as smart? Definitely not. Look, I know everyone who graduated in front of me. Of that group, 2 are still practicing law and, while I like them, they can't hold my jock strap in court. Nice people, though. I have referred work to them. They have referred work to me.

Again, though, this shouldn't just be about law school. Why do high school kids care? College kids? Why do we put such an emphasis on made up numbers that don't mean jack squat. My high school graduating class was 812. My class rank was 530 or so. My college class for my major was 32. My class rank was 28. I think I turned out okay.

I know a guy who has invented products that everyone has used. Well, almost everyone. Very well known products. He was almost as bad a student as I was in high school and college. Damn smart in his post-graduate degrees. Not only did he tell me not to worry about grades, but I know an IP attorney who worked with him. The IP attorney always told me this guy was the smartest guy he had ever worked with and he could have done very well anywhere. But, if we were to focus on his grades in school, he probably never would have gotten a chance.

Jonathan Stein

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Every law school is different, and so is every law student. Do what works for you as far as studying goes. Don't forget about life outside of school.

Make friends in law school, there are some really terrific people going to school with you. There are also some jerks there. Hopefully, you'll be able to sort them out. The friends you make will be great

contacts for your life and for your career (and I don't mean this in an instrumental way), as you will be for them. Have fun. Don't take yourself or law too seriously.

Enjoy Law school. You'll probably be working for the rest of your life.

Miriam N. Jacobson, Pennsylvania

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1) Learn the basics of the black letter law before the class starts, from a crib book. Also, learn the vocabulary in advance. That way you'll have a mental "file cabinet" in place, and you can focus on fitting cases and information into it. Old cases are great and interesting but they're not an efficient way to learn basic black-letter law.

2) If you aren't a fast typist, learn to type fast BEFORE school starts.

Take a course, buy a program, whatever it takes. Speed is time; time is flexibility and GPA. I was at 65 wpm and many times I could literally keep up w/ the professor as they would talk (and pause), which meant i had pre-typed notes for papers and take home exams. moreover, on timed exams i would spend half as much time writing (since I type fast) which gave me that much more time to work on the exam.

3) You probably won't ever be a constitutional attorney. You will, however, have to answer some questions from ordinary people. Consider at least one class in family law, trusts, secure transactions, and corporate.

4) Do law review, if you can.

5) Esoteric knowledge is the engine; life basics are the tires. If you can't write a cogent sentence, fix that. If you don't know how to use semicolons, learn. If you don't have semi-expert knowledge or better of at least one major word processing program; if you don't know how Boolean search works; learn. Etc.

Erik Hammarlund, Massachusetts

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Erik and others, do you know about or recommend any online programs to improve typing skills? Also, does anyone know of any good classes re typing with WordPerfect documents and typing with word documents?

Roberta Fay, California

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Hmmmm..

I was ranked in the top 25 of my class after my first semester (a girl I liked convinced me to go with her to find out our ranks). I made Dean's list twice. Times I cared? Zero.



In high school, I was 85th out of 700+, and that was only because I sloughed off for the first year-and-a-half (I put in effort when my dad found out I'd be eligible for a small scholarship if I finished in the top 15%). In college? No frickin' clue. I didn't even know how to find out my class rank. Grad school? Don't think they ranked us, but if they did, didn't know how to find out. Why? Because, like Jonathan, no client has ever started a conversation with "what was your class rank?" It only matters to law firms (such as Gibson Dunn, which demands a transcript, no matter how long you've been out of law school, or what you've done - even Obama would have to give them his transcript), and has absolutely zero meaning in life. I've beaten Harvard-educated lawyers in court and had Stanford-educated lawyers compliment my ideas and writing, among others.

And I went to a 'T2' law school.

So with that rant out of the way, what would I advise?

Well, having taken 2 bar exams and the CPA exam, I can say this: don't let others get into your head. Studying in the hallway before an exam is a waste of time - by then, you either know it or you won't. What WILL happen is you will come across some arcane point of law (Section 467 leases) that you won't know, and you'll panic that you're not prepared. And then you'll be in the exam, and the question will be something pretty easy and basic that you knew cold the last 22 years ("what tax form does an individual file?") and you'll stare at the paper, unable to recall the answer. And Section 467 will not be tested at all.

Gregory Zbylut, California

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Prepare for class and be ready to argue. That was how I learned. Studying afterwards didn't do me much good.

Mitchell Goldstein, Virginia

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Take practice tests, multiple times. IRAC.

Michael Boli, California

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My friends in law school made a darkly humorous video (when YouTube was just starting up), and the summation of the video was that the prize in law for success was just more work & eventually one day you will fail for sure, and at that moment, you will feel miserable like the person that failed the first time around, but if you get over it, it will put you on the path to the much easier life of happiness and relaxation that the so-called "failure" always has enjoyed.

It scared the crap out us, but I think a eerily good moral.

I went to a law school whose motto was "The Place Where Fun Came to Die" - yet I had an amazing 3 years - made some wonderful friends, learned from brilliant profs and students, and it opened doors for the future. And I enjoyed my adopted city alot, and I also worked a lot.

Did I brief every case? No. Was I 100% ready for every class? No. But I did all of it, but on my own pace. Did I get upset at small stuff in law school that I don't even remember 13 years later? Yes, for sure.

Do I love every minute of my work today? No, but I love most of it, and it pays the bills.

There were people in law school that did all of the above, got on law review, and were uber-successful in the law - until one day they didn't get the best clerkship, or job, or promotion to partner, or Top Lawyers award.

It happens to most (if not every) lawyer.

When I went back to my 10-year reunion, I had a chip on my shoulder - "I am just a solo" and these folks are Biglaw partners / in-house / top govt officials - yet I felt this vibe that they envied my freedom and my flexibility. I am not anywhere near to buying that second vacation home, or bribing my kids into USC or Yale (though I do pro bono legal work for their Montessori school, so maybe I can get them some more crayons).

Either you get on the path you want for your career and your life, but that means you quit the path that others feel is right for you.

And tell this 1L not to let anyone tell them they are a failure for doing what is right for them or their family / loved ones. In the end, those are the only people that matter.

Murtaza Sutarwalla, Texas

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More crayons. Lol!

Amy Breyer

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Lots of good advice in this very long thread.

I think this was not mentioned and it just involves the first meetings of 1L classes.

Back in the day it was hallway bulletin boards. Nowadays I am sure it is all digital/online.

FIRST MEETING ADVICE. I speak of getting your class books and learning the assignments for the first meetings.

I did not know this but I had some good luck. I did not have my torts book for the first meeting. Fortunately, I had glanced at my roommate's book and by coincidence the first case in his book was the first case in my as yet unpurchased book.

Commented [j1]:

The first minute of the first meeting of my first class I get called on to come sit down front next to the professor. Turned out the prof wanted us to sit next to him when called on because he was nearly deaf; he had two huge hearing aids on his ears. (He was also way up in years. He drove a 4-door Ford red sedan. All four fenders were dented from him ricocheting around the city. And his forte was torts!)

I was able to recall enough from glancing at the very first case in my roommate's book to bluff my way through.

I doubt if any of my classmates have any memory of that first meeting.

Rob Robertson, Texas

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I turned 40 as a 1L. I knew I needed to take good care of me to keep pace with those decades younger. I stopped drinking caffeine. I made sure to get plenty of sleep and to eat well. I'm convinced that doing so made a difference. I'd do only one thing different. During my last semester I took a non-law school class that was a sampler on different types of relaxation techniques. It would have been very beneficial to have taken it sooner. I was in a year long trial advocacy class that was competitive to get in. The final was a "trial" before a DC Superior Court judge with real rules of evidence. The matter was complex and the judge said a real trial with our issues would have been 4 days. You can imagine the zillions of things going on in my head that were compounded by stress. I did a guided meditation before and my mind was entirely clear. I got the critical piece of evidence in and won.

Deb Matthews, Virginia

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My standard response/advice for every pre-law-school person who asks this =  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMvARy0IBLE>

E. Seth Combs, Kentucky

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There were people in law school that did all of the above, got on law review, and were uber-successful in the law - until one day they didn't get the best clerkship, or job, or promotion to partner, or Top Lawyers award.

It happens to most (if not every) lawyer.

Well, the other aspect of this is that certain types of lawyers are simply driven; to excel, to wring every billable dollar out of their work, to not leave the office until all work is done or at least until they hit a certain billable hour.

And some of those lawyers lose their marriages; one of my buds from law school basically worked himself into a divorce; his wife wound up running around on him because he wasn't paying attention to her (obviously, the wife had something to do with it but even he concedes he was ignoring family for the sake of working nights and weekends); other lawyer lose their lives; I've mentioned how many lawyers I know locally who have died in their early to mid 50's; Pick up the paper one day and see "X, prominent local attorney, dead at 53" or whatever.

And I've also mentioned, my own uncle, was a lawyer, he used to joke that "in law school I'd stay late at the library and pick up a cold sandwich at 7-11 for dinner; now that I'm a lawyer the difference is I stay late at the office and pick up a hot sandwich at 7-11 for dinner'. Ha Ha. John died one Friday morning; his secretary left his office to type a letter, comes back 10 minutes later and he's slumped over the desk dead from a heart attack. John was 42. Jesus. Sorry, but G-D. Unfortunately, that's the way certain types of lawyers think and act.

Personally, I resolved to try to do well in law school but also keep some study-life balance; I did reasonably well; wound up with cum laude degree, was on law review, but as staff, not editor, received one book award, received (smallish) scholarship 2nd and 3rd years, was awarded a (small) fellowship but I certainly wasn't top 5 % or even 10%. On the other hand, I had the better part of my evenings free, went home most weekends, saw movies, read novels, did some non course related law readings (mostly relating to legal history) and frankly, didn't stress over law school any more than I had to.

Ronald Jones

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Not exactly advice, but if your friend wants to know what makes people go to large professional firms (large law firms, large accounting firms, large consulting firms, etc.), a recent book suggests that the people drawn to those firms are "insecure overachievers."

See: <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180924-are-you-an-insecure-overachiever>  
<<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180924-are-you-an-insecure-overachiever>>

Those are people who are "exceptionally capable and fiercely ambitious, but driven by a profound belief in their own inadequacy."

Brian H. Cole

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I see lots of good advice here. I don't know where they are going, but here's my 2 cents as a person who actually enjoyed law school:

1.) Have some idea of what you want to do with your career before you sign on to a huge amount of debt. If you go to a fancy school like I did, and were paying for it yourself, you will be stuck on a much narrower path for several years while you work a ton of hours in a potentially miserable environment and pay off that debt. I made that choice because I was afraid I couldn't get a good job if I didn't go to that kind of school. I was wrong. Many wonderful firms will hire the best students from any decent law school, so saving a hundred thousand dollars and going to a respected state school will not significantly limit your employment options if you do well.

2.) Realize that law school isn't your whole life, life is life. I didn't hang out with the uber competitive kids at school and I NEVER studied in the library. Yes, it was a pretty building but the tension and stress are palpable in those places. I went to class, and left. Don't get me wrong, I'm very competitive, but I recognized the path to a nervous breakdown when I saw one. No one needs unnecessary pressure. I found a small group of amazing people who became life-long friends. We all regularly engaged in local outings, dinners, happy hours on a local patio, etc., as our studies allowed. It made law school bearable and that group was my refuge. Find one of your own.

3.) Exercise and mind your health. Obviously, law school can be stressful.

Whether you live relatively close to campus and walk, or enjoy going to the gym, make sure you get some regular activity into your schedule. I was allowed to use the tiny law school gym and the huge one at main campus. It was a bus ride away, but very much worth it.

4.) Do a clinic if you have any interest in litigation. I was able to start my first job with court experience under my belt, which was a huge comfort. Plus, I represented clients whose stories are still with me today. It was a big personal reward.

5.) See if you can find past exams given by your professor in your classes, but do not expect they will be the same. Our library kept copies of old exams, but in at least one of my classes, the professor completely changed the exam in every possible way and it was not helpful. In others, they only slightly changed the hypotheticals.

6.) Do not fall into the trap of joining a study group on a mission to create a 300 page outline. It will NOT help. I used the outline function in Word to take notes in class directly into my laptop (which I bought from a classified ad in the newspaper and had less memory than my kid's basic smartphone, ha ha). Those became my outlines, which I then reduced to no more than 5-10 pages per class. Those short, bullet-point outlines were priceless after I figured out that's what would help me.

7.) Go to class. Do the reading.

Enjoy, it is an experience you won't forget.

Deena L. Buchanan, New Mexico

