

The Reality of Law School: The Greatest Experience You Will Never Want to Relive.

Imagine that it's mid-August and you are walking through the hallways of your law school - it's your first day of class. You are nervous, possibly more nervous in this moment than any "first days" prior to this one. You are desperately trying to not wrinkle your new pant suit that you've just purchased to look like a "real lawyer," and you can feel sweat beginning to bead on your forehead. You see some people that you recognize from orientation and join their group as they walk into the large lecture hall for a welcome speech from the Dean of Students. A yellow legal pad and pen in hand, you watch as the Dean walks into the lecture hall, welcomes you to the "first day of the rest of your lives," and launches into an intense rhetoric regarding how easy it is to fall behind if you are not diligent at reading every assignment prior to class, and then eventually wraps up his speech by explaining that law school students can also be at a high risk of drug and alcohol abuse, and even at risk of suicide. Wow, where was that information prior to signing up for this? That was what my first day was like, and I'm sure it was similar to everyone else's first day as well, give or take a few details. After the lecture that morning, my nerves were shot, and I struggled to focus in my next class as I mentally prepared myself to follow all the advice and instructions the Dean had provided to us.

Overall, I was excited, nervous, and motivated – all of this fueled by my "change the world mindset." I knew I would have to push myself through these next three years, but I could not imagine it being too bad considering I would be enduring the same pain as my fellow classmates. Over the course of the next three years, I watched as students self-destructed, visiting the local bars six days a week, and going to class hungover and/or high on drugs. Conversely, I also watched as some students packed up their apartments at the end of 1L or 2L year because the pressure and burden to succeed with a high GPA, secure a clerkship before the end of the year, and build an impressive resume had become too great.

Things really took a dive when I began to see students sabotage each other. I knew, having already experienced all of the hurdles to get into law school, that the journey was not going to be an easy one; however, I never anticipated students self-destructing, much less trying to take their peers down with them: spread lies and rumors.

So, what happens when the reality of law school strikes harder than anticipated? One of the best services offered, that very few students know about, is the Judges & Lawyers Assistance Program, better known as JLAP, which is a free and confidential service that is offered to not only licensed attorneys, but law students as well. Don't be afraid to reach out to them. The counselors that work for this program are solely there to provide you with the opportunity to talk to a licensed professional about anything going on in your life. You are not alone, even if it may feel like it at times; don't ignore the pressure to succeed until it festers into an uncontrollable wave of anxiety that forces you to turn to substances such as drugs and alcohol to cope with the stress of law school; recognize when you may be reacting to stress in ways that aren't healthy, safe, or are distracting you from your ultimate goal of attaining that J.D. Ultimately, if you reach out in time to save yourself from struggling, I promise that you will make it through.

Now, a law school graduate, I marvel at the naïve thoughts that once flowed through my mind on the first day of class in comparison to the reality that hit hard after the first month. I realized quickly that it is nearly impossible to read assignments twice, and sometimes, I was not able to read the entire assignment at all. In the end though, there is a light at the end of the tunnel, and as I begin to prepare for the bar exam, I can tell you that life truly is not a sprint, but a marathon, and if you take a moment to breathe and pace yourself, you will make it to the finish line.

About the Author:



Thank you so much for reading this blog! My name is Paige, and I recently graduated from Valparaiso Law school in May, 2019. I am prepping to take the bar exam in July and wanted to share a brief encounter of my three years of law school so that others may be able to gain insight from my experience. I hope that you enjoyed reading, and if you're currently a law student, I encourage you to keep pushing hard to reach your goals and remember you're never alone in the struggle to make it to the end.