

Helping Law Students Launch Their Careers in Challenging Times

A NALP Presentation to NAPLA / SAPLA
June 10, 2010

Bruce Elvin, Duke Law School
Kim Fields, Wake Forest Law School
Brian Lewis, UNC Law School
Liz Peck, Cornell Law School

10 Questions Pre-Law Students Should Ask Themselves

(1) Why do I want to go to law school?

“GOOD ANSWERS”

- I took a law class in undergrad and liked it.
- I like to research and write.
- I like solving puzzles.
- I like to negotiate.
- I am interested in protecting the rights of X.

“BAD ANSWERS”

- My parents want me to go.
- I don't want to deal with getting a job right now.
- I get good grades and do well on standardized tests.
- I don't want to go med school, grad school or an MBA program.

Engaging with the “Bad” Answers

- What do YOU want to do?
- Why are you postponing the job search?
- Are you having trouble figuring out what you want to do?
- Have you thought about what lawyers really do?
- Beyond grades and tests, what other skills/interests do you have?

(2) Why do I want to be a lawyer?

“GOOD ANSWERS”

- I am committed to a particular cause/I want to make a difference in X area.
- I want to do intellectually challenging work.
- I want to do work in which I can take on responsibility to solve complex problems for clients.
- I want to advocate, in writing and orally, for my client's side.

Why do I want to be a lawyer?

“BAD ANSWERS”

- I want to solve big societal problems.
- I want to make a lot of money.
- I want to work with rich and famous people.
- I want a comfortable life style.

Why do I want to be a lawyer?

STUDENTS SHOULD:

- Review salary data and loan debt data
- Understand statistics on where people go to work: practice areas, practice settings
- Network to engage with reality
- Attend programming on law practice

(3) Do I know what lawyers do every day?

- Connect with alumni mentors
- Talk to family friends
- Consider doing an externship
- Read the “Official Guide to Legal Specialties”
- <http://www.abanet.org/careercounsel/profile/profession.html>

(4) What quality of life do I want during law school?

- Live like a student, not like someone with a salary
- Keep debt as low possible during law school
- Consider part-time work during 2L and 3L year
- Analyze costs and benefits of international study
- Visit <http://www.accessgroup.org/calculators/index.htm>

(5) What quality of life do I want after law school?

- Realistically assess
 - post-graduate employment options
 - entry-level salary
 - debt load and repayment options
- Consider geographic preferences
- Take hard look at number of hours of work
- Think about life and family outside of the office

(6) Should I go to an expensive or inexpensive law school?

- Consider long-term goals
- Evaluate debt obligations, scholarships, in-state tuition
- Does expense confer value?
- How important is prestige to you?
- Realistically analyze how successful you will be at the institution you choose.

(7) How will I pay back my student loans?

- Pay attention to finances early
- Live simply and manage costs during law school
(<http://www.accessgroup.org/>)
- Consider law schools' LRAP programs
- Learn about the CCRAA
(<http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/default>)

(8) Can I handle the pressure?

- Consider how you've responded to stress in the past
- Create a plan to address mental-health problems before entering law school
- Develop good stress-reduction habits before law school
- Consider taking time off before law school

(9) What could I do before going to law school?

- Consider getting hands-on legal experience
- Explore non-legal options of interest
- Take time to talk to lawyers about their careers/jobs/law-school experience
- Get involved in your community and learn to network
- Think about establishing in-state residency

(10) If I couldn't go to law school, what would I do instead?

- Imagine selecting a job without input from others
- Explore your interests, hobbies, preferences
- Contemplate what you're really looking for in work
- Analyze how similar or different "Plan B" is to the law