

The ABCs
of
LAW SCHOOL

DIARY OF A FIRST-YEAR STUDENT

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STAFFORD-HOUSE-BOOKS

INTRODUCTION

How to Use this Book to Survive and Thrive in Law School

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR decision to go to law school! Or, if you've already been accepted, kudos to you. You studied hard in college, binge-watched every episode of your favorite law-related television shows, and have an idealized picture in your head of what law school will be like. So did I. But nothing in my life or previous schooling had prepared me for the adventure I was to embark upon. I had graduated college Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Arts degree in History. I was a member of *Phi Beta Kappa* and used to getting top grades. Yet, within the first three weeks of starting law school, I received a C on a Legal Research and Writing paper and felt like throwing in the towel.

My first year of law school was definitely a humbling experience. I wasted so much time trying to decipher the lawyering process and translating the specialized legal jargon my professors so freely meted out. But, by my second year, patterns began to

INTRODUCTION

emerge as to what my professors were looking for. I learned to study smarter and began to crack the code. Soon, I had received two American Jurisprudence awards, which are given to law school students for achieving the highest grade and rank in the class for a particular subject. My only regret was not knowing what to expect from that first year. But don't worry—this book will show you what *really* goes on behind closed classroom doors so you can start and finish strong.

You hold in your hands a secret weapon to law school success. This book will help you to:

- **Survive**, by understanding the bigger picture of your core classes and how everything is interrelated; and
- **Thrive**, by mastering a sound strategy to both prepare for examinations and participate in your classes.

In addition to scratching the surface of the core subjects taught during law school (**Torts, Legal Research and Writing, Contracts, Civil Procedure, Criminal Law and Procedure, Real Property, Constitutional Law, and Evidence**), we'll also cover:

- Briefing a law case
- Using the IRAC method to analyze a case and to write papers and final exams
- Preparing course outlines (detailed outlines for each class are provided at the end of this book and are available for download at www.abclawschooldiary.com).

INTRODUCTION

The law is immense, with volumes of books and treatises available on each of the subjects covered in this book. Upon starting your education, you do not need a full, in-depth understanding of every nuance, especially since each school follows a different curriculum. Instead, this book will help you to connect the dots in a strategic way from the get-go.

You may want to read (or re-read) the chapter on each course before your first day of that class. By having an overview of the subject matter and how professors generally teach the information, you'll make a better first impression and also have an edge over your classmates. Plus, class will make more sense overall, which better facilitates learning. This guidebook can also be used to refresh your memory of important concepts as you maneuver through school.

Although I started out my legal education in the dark, I definitely made it through that first year in the light. As a bonus, I became very close to my fellow classmates and am still friends with many of them today. A very special bond is forged with those in the trenches with you. Not only did I share a sense of community with my classmates, but also with my professors. Once I got over the fear of being called on in class, I began to take advantage of the individual help offered by the faculty and appreciated the open-door policy at Pepperdine Law School.

My goal in writing this diary is to give you a better understanding of a typical first year law student's experience. Although I have tried to simplify complex ideas that we spent an entire year studying, my coverage of each individual subject is in no way exhaustive. Rather, I hope you will learn from my personal

INTRODUCTION

experience and will be better equipped to survive yours. I wish someone would have given me this book when I started law school. It would have saved me a lot of time, stress, and anxiety.

Thirty-four years ago, I embarked on a journey to become a lawyer, and that decision has shaped the direction that my life has taken. I hope that this book will become a trusted tool to help you to survive and thrive in law school by providing you with a firm understanding of the materials, mechanics and tools used to teach each particular subject. As a bonus, I am also including a section on stress management through yoga for law students.

This book is divided into three sections, each corresponding to the **ABCs** of Law School. Section **A** is about applications and admissions, **B** goes behind-the-scenes of your first year, and **C** covers class outlines and survival skills. So, without any further ado, let's move onward and upward to pursuing the noble legal profession, starting with the law school preparation process.