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Academic Assessments, Plan Bs, and Challenging Conversations: What to do and say when law school isn't in your advisee's (immediate) future

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Thank you for attending our presentation.

We enjoyed the vigorous Q&A and the appreciation of the diverse students we serve. We look forward to continuing the discussion

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Who we are

- Two pre-law advisors at urban, liberal arts, women-centered institutions with high % first generation and/or minority populations and non-trationals
- One director of admissions from that same urban area who sees many of our (and your) applicants



One of the challenges we face as pre-law advisors is working with the non-traditional student, broadly defined. For us, this is more than simply the minority student or adult learner. It is also a traditionally-aged student with exceptional circumstances. For example, the significant % of “traditional” students (i.e., age 18-22) who are already parents of young children.

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Why we're here

- We deal with many of the less reversible or high consequence scenarios
 - High transfer rates
 - Low GPAs (i.e., multi-Fs)
 - Babies
 - Disciplinary/court records
 - Unsupportive families/communities (low expectations)
 - Arriving late to the process
- We will discuss the ABCs:
 - Academic assessments
 - Plan Bs: Preparing students to construct alternatives to law school for legal careers
 - Challenging Conversations: Working with students who need to hear tough news about the process

Because of the nature of our student populations, many of their life conditions and their academic backgrounds are not reversible, or come at with significant consequences that require the concentrated time and attention of an advisor to help navigate the admission process. For example: How to present multiple transcripts in narrative and not just through the credential service? What impact do children, court records, and lack of support or understanding from one's family play in the aspirations for law school?

Helping students make appropriate academic assessments, construct a “plan B” for their admission (rejection or delayed admission), and being ready for the difficult conversations about gap years, alternative careers in the law, and the implications of one's previous choices are key elements of successful advising.

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Why Difficult Conversations Happen

- GPA and academic preparation – assessing law school readiness
 - What does the transcript say about you?
 - Taking on challenge?
 - Transfers that make sense
 - Timely degree completion
 - Balancing work/family and school = time mgt
- LSAT score, test preparation - assessing skills for law school readiness
 - Need to be prepared to prep the test
 - Preparation in itself a skill
 - Not every prepared student is a scoring student

Difficult conversations often result when students have either or both low GPAs, low LSAT scores.

The pre-law advisor needs to help students to understand what the transcript and the test score says about the *individual* student; e.g.:

- Does the transcript show a progressively challenging curriculum?
- Does the transcript show the student has had success (or difficulty) balancing work and/or family with school?
- Does the transcript show timely completion towards a degree, or a more scatter-shot approach?

Not all students are sufficiently prepared academically to take the LSAT. When that is the case, prep courses will not result in a competitive score. A student with a low LSAT score needs to review with the pre-law advisor whether:

- The score reflects lack of preparation or whether the student needs to “prep for prep”?
- Some students need to be counseled to improve basic critical reading, analytical reasoning, and expository writing skills *before* taking an LSAT prep course.

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Careers in the Law, but not Law School

- When law school isn't in the future or application isn't sufficiently competitive and compelling
- Gap years (they need a plan)
 - Short term of change of **education plans** (example: business courses; grad degree; paralegal; etc)
 - Short term change of **career plans** (example – interning, work in a legal field, public interest, etc)
- Explore what they were going to use law degree for that wasn't lawyering
 - Advocacy, public health, enviro policy, entrepreneurship, social justices causes, campaigning

It is important to help students to understand the alternatives to law school:

A “gap year” should be viewed as a “year on”. Students should have a plan for the time period after graduation and before they apply for *any* post-graduate study. Gap year(s) can be useful to:

1. “Rehabilitate” a GPA and create a record to evidence that the student can successfully do graduate level coursework:


- The undergraduate GPA may be fixed, but advanced study can show intellectual prowess and a new cum GPA that will more competitively position the student for law school.

2. Explore alternatives for which the student thought were accessible only via law school;

- e.g. Work (paid or unpaid) in advocacy, campaigns, social justice causes, and public policy. In this instance you are asking the student to consider *how* they had intended to use a law degree and are demonstrating to the students that they can reach many of those goals w/o a law degree.

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Deadlines?



Application deadlines are the like end of the world for advisors and students. Farm3.static.flickr.com

- Applying late . . .
 - A sign of low prep or low commitment to endeavor
 - Reduces option even for good students; informed choice w/ advisor help
 - Revisit the gap years; use for applying on time to appropriate schools and building resume
 - New options emerge

What to do when a student comes late into testing and/or application process?


Applying late is often a sign of either poor preparation or lack of real commitment. Late application reduces options even for good students, as most law schools have rolling admissions policies.

In lieu of late applications – which may get good candidates waitlisted or even rejected – have students consider a gap year, during which time they can work to make their applications more competitive & compelling and be better positioned to enter the process earlier in the next year.

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From the other side of the application . . .

- Two major issues:
 1. The GPA/LSAT nexus in the “post-average era”
 2. Managing your status
 - Wait-listed
 - Rejected
- Appropriate responses to these issues from the:
 - student?
 - advisor?
- Regarding contact, follow up and re-positioning



Duquesne mock trial in Post Gazette.com

A word from the Dean of Admissions at Duquesne University School of Law:

Two seminal issues in the law school application process: the GPA/LSAT nexus and managing an applicant’s status when the applicant is either wait-listed or rejected.

1.GPA/LSAT: Numbers do matter, but they are not considered in a vacuum.

(a) Admissions are attentive to when a student’s exceptional circumstances (illness, children, and family) may have impacted the GPA.


(b) Law schools see *all* LSAT scores. Even in the post-averaging era, multiple test scores, with little to no improvement, may evidence that the student has not properly prepared for the LSAT.

2. Wait-lists and Rejections: A student who is wait-listed is advised to contact the Dean of Admissions and write a brief (and single)

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Best Practices

- Difference between information and advice!
 - A note about the web
- Model the advocate role
 - A campus outreach & presence
 - Programming and alumni resources
- Advising alumni
- Advising laterally
- Know your admissions officials



www.sidetaker.com

respectfully worded email (or letter) reiterating his/her interest in attending the particular school. The email or letter should not reiterate the entire application.

(a) The pre-law advisor may also initiate contact & this is most helpful to also determine whether there is likely to be any movement on the waitlist.

(b) Advisors may also make contact if a student was rejected, particularly if the student had a competitive application. Sometimes the rejection is an indication that the student applied late or that the number of applicants increased significantly.

We have suggested several “best practices” for pre-law advising to handle the “difficult conversations”:

First, make certain students understand the difference between information, which is intended to be general, and advice, which is intended to be specific to the particular student.

Recognize that in digital era, students derive a great deal of *information* from the Internet, blogs, and social media, but are often unable to determine what information is most relevant to them. They *should use* the pre-law advisor for such *advice*, but may not even know about the advisor’s services unless the advisor is online or present in places where the student can meet her.

Second, pre-law advisors should model the advocate’s role. Students can make informed decisions about law school when they have: taken law related courses; engaged in law related internships; and participated in law related programming (alumnae/I can be instrumental in this regard).

Third, advise laterally; i.e. advise your colleagues regarding writing letters of recommendation; engage student services to increase programming options.

To this end, develop a campus **presence** through networking with colleagues in admissions, student affairs, career centers (if faculty), or faculty in key departments (if prof staff), orientation leaders, and alumni associations. Be visible at key events and online.

Fourth, know your admissions officials, particularly those in the law schools in your area. You may need this contact should you have a student who is wait-listed.

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Thank you for attending!

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Again, thank-you for your attendance and interest in our presentation.

We welcome email inquiries and invite you to browse our respective websites.

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