

B | BAYLOR LAW SCHOOL

IS LAW SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

An Essay by Baylor Law Professor Ron Beal

*Cheryl Blount,
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DO I WANT TO BE A LAWYER?

This is a difficult question to answer. Some people claim that they have known they wanted to be a lawyer since they were quite young, but most have struggled with the decision to apply to law school. In fact, many law students and even recent graduates are still unsure of the answer to this question.

While it is not often possible to be certain of your answer before entering law school, there is value in talking with practicing lawyers, attending criminal and civil trials, attending law school classes or even working as a messenger at a law firm. These activities can help you gain insight into what a lawyer does; however, it will be a somewhat superficial view of the legal profession, highlighting the excitement and overlooking the real complexity, difficulty and demands of the job. Television shows dealing with lawyers have perfected this superficial view of the legal profession.

The decision-making process is also complicated by the difficulty in defining exactly what a lawyer does on a day-to-day basis. There is no “typical lawyer.” Today the legal profession has embraced specialization to a significant extent. Depending upon one’s specialization, there are differences in workload, client contact, work environment, compensation and overall quality of life. Specialties include criminal law, family law, personal injury or defective product litigation, trust and estate law, business transactions and litigation, tax law, employment or labor law, environmental

law, patent and trademark law, civil rights litigation, and other areas. There are many “professions” within the profession of law.

The only meaningful way of determining whether you want to be a lawyer is to look at the type of skills at which you must develop proficiencies in order to be a competent lawyer in any area. Even though there are significant differences in the various practice areas of law, the essential skills required of all lawyers are much the same.



ASK YOURSELF THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS

“Do I enjoy working closely with people regarding significant events or issues affecting their lives?”

YES NO

The practice of law is a “people business.” Lawyers do not work merely on “cases” or research interesting legal issues. A lawyer makes a living by helping people who have come for aid and advice regarding personal, criminal, social, or business related problems. Necessarily, a client has already concluded that he or she cannot solve the problem on his or her own. The client knows it will be necessary to divulge very personal or private facts to a lawyer. Usually, the client will not perceive the problem as merely “ordinary,” but as a personal or business crisis. A lawyer must enjoy working with people and must derive specific satisfaction from helping people work through difficult, threatening, and significant events in their lives.

“Can I empathize with a client’s situation, yet have the ability to objectively analyze the issues and their consequences in light of the existing law?”

YES NO

The main task of a lawyer is to solve a client’s problem. A lawyer must be able to empathize in order to properly understand the needs and concerns of his or her client; but a lawyer must also develop objective, analytical skills to identify the potential legal issues that must be addressed and to formulate a plan to reach a result that is consistent with the desires of the client as well as the requirements of the law.

“Do I enjoy educating or teaching a person about a subject which he or she may be ignorant or have significant misconceptions?”

YES NO

We live in a complex society that has required the development of far-reaching, often technical laws. Understandably, most clients are either wholly uninformed about many existing laws or have significant misunderstandings of what the law prohibits or requires. A lawyer must be able to competently educate his or her clients. This teaching task is complicated by the fact that the “student” has a direct interest in the subject area. The degree of comprehension will be affected by the client’s subjective interest, an unwillingness to hear bad news, a strong disagreement about the goals of the law, etc. The need to educate is critical, however, so that a client can make an informed decision about how to proceed. Tact is required in telling a prospective client that his or her view of the applicable rules is incorrect.

“Am I able to articulate my analysis of a problem to others in a clear and concise manner, whether verbally or in writing?”

YES NO

Two vital skills of a lawyer are the ability to speak and write in a clear, articulate manner. Since a lawyer’s job is to solve problems, the key to success is the ability to convince others of the correctness of one’s analysis of the factual problem, the requirements of the law, and the best result that can be reached for all concerned parties. A lawyer must be able to educate and convince his or her client, other lawyers, juries, judges or mediators. He or she must have the ability to perform this task equally well by speaking or writing. The skill and art of verbal communication is an important key to becoming a successful, competent lawyer.

Q & A CONCLUSION:

Did you answer “yes” to many questions? Were these answers enthusiastic or were you thinking, “if I have to do it, I will”? To be a competent lawyer, it is not necessary that you currently possess all these skills or that you have developed them to a high degree. You will have plenty of time for that. However, utilizing these types of skills on a weekly, daily or hourly basis is the “life” of a lawyer.

Television dramas portraying attorneys are correct on one point: the practice of law is exciting, meaningful, and rewarding. Throughout your career, you will have the ability to make beneficial and significant contributions to the lives of many people. You will come into contact with a variety of people, events, and areas of knowledge that you may not otherwise have experienced within the confines of your personal life. The practice of law is a broadening educational experience that is ongoing, never ending, and demanding.

As in many fields of endeavor – for instance, medicine, science, education and law – your attitude towards life and work is crucial.

Simply put, you must be an individual who truly enjoys learning and who strives to achieve the best with your work.

“Do I enjoy being an advocate? Can I argue both sides of the question with enthusiasm?”

YES NO

A lawyer’s personal satisfaction must come from helping others achieve a desired result or avoid or ameliorate the consequences of a difficult situation. To allow the client to make an informed decision, a lawyer must provide the client with sufficient information concerning all possible alternatives. Ultimately, the client must decide what is best for him or her. Providing the attorney stays within the ethical parameters of the Code of Professional Responsibility, he or she must be able to accept and advance the client’s decision, even if the lawyer would not have personally chosen that particular course of action. Whether writing a will, negotiating a contract, litigating a lawsuit, or settling a divorce, a lawyer is advocating the personal needs, desires, and goals of the client. To be an excellent lawyer, one need not be flamboyant or overreaching, only capable of persuasively articulating concrete positions.

“Do I like detail work? Do I enjoy searching for the facts of a situation?”

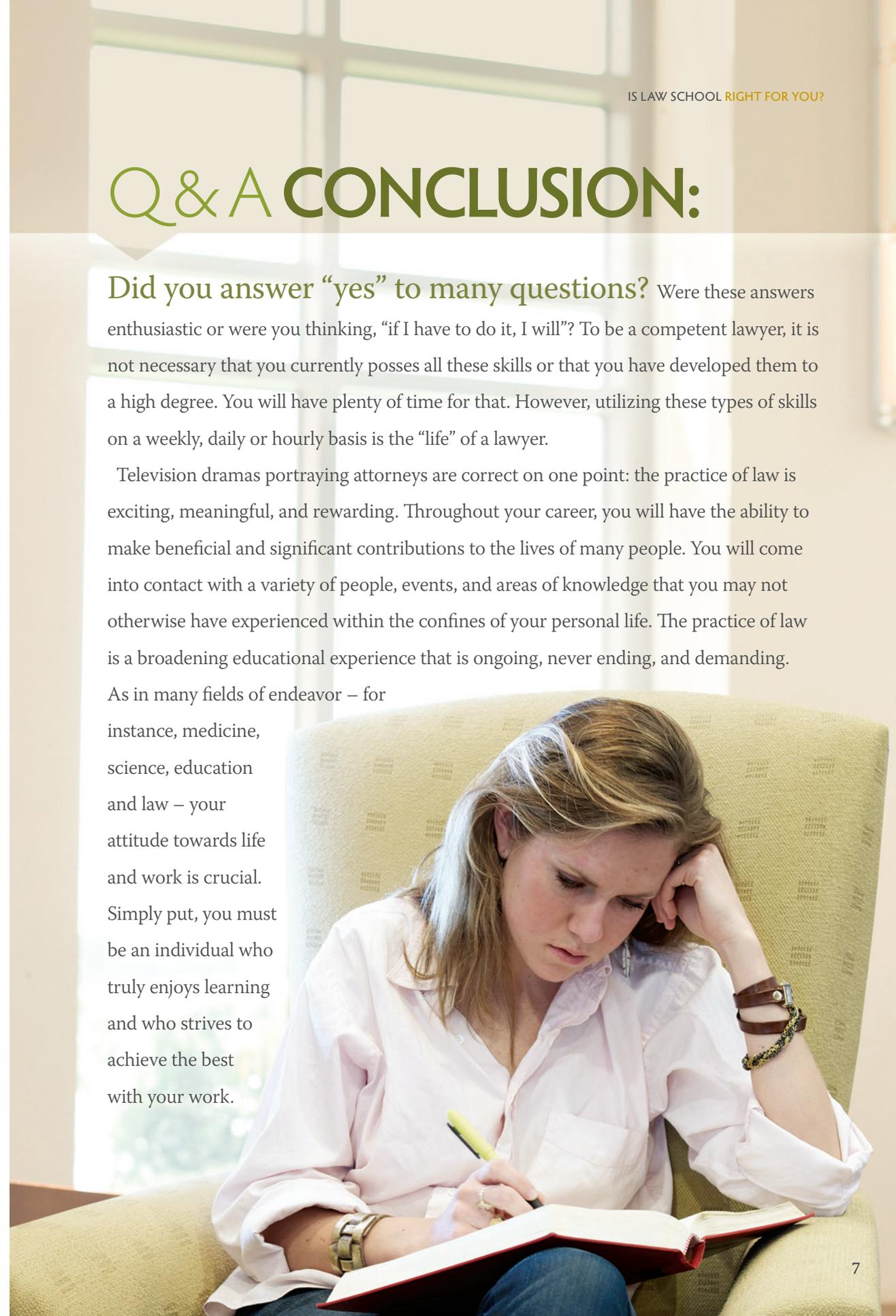
YES NO

The practice of law is a jungle filled with pockets of quicksand for the sloppy, lazy lawyer. A lawyer must pay strict attention to facts and details, for detail work is a significant aspect of the practice of law.

“Do I like to read and study?”

YES NO

A lawyer never stops reading the law. From the day one enters law school until the day before retirement, a lawyer must keep abreast of ever-changing laws. Every competent lawyer must dedicate a significant number of hours on a regular basis to continuing education. This study time is in addition to many hours spent researching specific issues of law pertaining to particular cases.



STUDENT PROFILE

Kia Lusk

Kia Lusk carefully considered being a teacher during her undergraduate education, but soon realized she really wanted to pursue her passion of being a lawyer. After she graduates from Baylor Law School, she hopes to either become a sports and entertainment lawyer, a sports agent, or explore her newfound interest in trusts and estates law. “Not only does obtaining a law degree allow me to pursue my dream of becoming a lawyer, but it gives me so many other opportunities to be successful when I enter the workforce.”

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR LAW SCHOOL?

As you may have concluded from the previous discussion, the well-prepared student is one who is well-rounded, broadly educated, and mature. That’s because lawyers deal with clients from all segments of society regarding almost any potentially significant personal, social or business problem that can arise in everyday life.

Thus, a prospective applicant who has not yet completed his or her undergraduate work should consider this in planning a course of study. For example, a well-planned liberal arts education, in which the student has intentionally attempted to gain the broadest knowledge possible while concurrently focusing on a chosen major or area of study is an ideal preparation for law school and the practice of law.

Law curricula are designed based on the assumption that the student has no specific knowledge of the law. Law schools are seeking mature, well-rounded individuals who demonstrate the aptitude to excel in legal analysis. All laws are a product of our history, our governmental structure, our social, religious and political norms and policies, and the past and present technological developments. Therefore, a broadly educated person with an aptitude for critical thinking and analysis is the best prepared student to appreciate and understand the function of legal analysis, planning and advocacy in our society.



CHOOSING A MAJOR & DEGREE PLAN

No specific undergraduate major can be recommended, and in a very real sense, there is no such thing as a “pre-law” major. Your decision regarding a major should be based on personal desires and needs. One approach is to select a major that would prepare you for an occupation other than the law. You can pursue an alternative career in this manner and simultaneously be “preparing” for law school. This will allow you the option of foregoing a legal education (for whatever reason), or will allow you to pursue an alternative career for a few years before law school in order to gain experience and maturity. For example, it is not uncommon for students to choose a major in accounting, finance, economics, or business, with the intention of working for a few years before applying to law school.

Another approach is to select a major in one of the subject areas recommended by most law schools as an area in which students should take at least one course sometime during their undergraduate education. Those subject areas include literature, history, political science, logic, philosophy, language, psychology, sociology, economics and accounting. A background in history and political science is necessary because our laws are a product of our culture, our history and our governmental structure. Psychology and sociology give a student an understanding of human interaction on an individual and social basis. Economics and accounting may be helpful because a large number of law courses address business transactions. Logic, philosophy, math and natural science courses will all train a student in analytical thinking, the core skill of a competent lawyer. Language education recognizes the globalization of our world.

None of these subject areas are “required” for entrance to law school. A lack of knowledge or skill in any of these areas, however, may impede your ability to excel as a law student or lawyer. Thus, choosing any one of these areas for your major will be beneficial in law school.

The most important aspects of choosing a major are that (a) you personally choose it, not someone else, and (b) you enjoy the discipline and believe that you can excel in this area academically. Why? A very important criterion for admission to law school is one’s GPA. If you select a major based on what someone else wants you to do, there is a high likelihood that you will be unhappy, and your grades will reflect that dissatisfaction. Never choose a major based on the ease of attaining high grades, but recognize that you are not likely to excel if you have no interest in the subject area.

Did you know?

The ABA does not recommend any undergraduate majors or group of courses to prepare for a legal education. Students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. A sound legal education will build upon and further refine the skills, values and knowledge that you already possess.



THE ABILITY TO WRITE AND SPEAK

This discussion clarifies the need for an undergraduate student to develop his or her verbal and written skills. Rigorous courses in English grammar and persuasive writing are highly encouraged. A course in journalism could be helpful. One should also seek out courses that require essay exams and term or research papers. Law School grades frequently are based solely on one's performance on one essay exam or a research paper. The inability to write coherently under the time demands of an essay exam will bode ill for success in law school.

A lawyer must be able to speak articulately and persuasively in the presence of one person, a small group of people, and also before a large audience. You can develop these skills by participating in extracurricular activities. Deliberate and knowledgeable training can be achieved by electing to take speech courses in the areas of public and persuasive speaking. Participating on debate teams is an excellent way to develop your skills, although certainly not a necessity. The key is to seek out any opportunity to refine your ability to speak, for it is a skill that is improved by repetition.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

An integral aspect of a well-rounded person is his or her involvement in social, religious, and service activities within the community. You can develop empathy by working with people from various ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds in diverse settings within the community. You are encouraged to become a meaningful participant in, and contributor to, the community.

Extracurricular activities, however, are just one aspect of a person's life. Too much time spent in extracurricular activities, no matter how meaningful, will not make up (or serve as an excuse) for inadequate grades. A balance is necessary to maintain proper development.



ADMISSION TO LAW SCHOOL

Selecting a Law School and the Law School Admission Test

There is no need to think about admission to law school during your freshman and sophomore years. Study hard, become involved in university and community life, and enjoy the social activities of college life. In one's junior year, a prospective applicant should commence his or her research to determine which law schools can fulfill his or her needs pertaining to reputation, curriculum, size, faculty availability and cost. Pre-law societies, pre-law advisors, and other faculty members can be a good source of information. Visiting law schools can also provide valuable insight, as well as attending any major law fairs at your school or within the community.

You must also plan to sit for the LSAT exam. No one should take the exam until the completion of three academic years of college because the exam is designed for students at that stage of their academic careers. Because it is an aptitude test, you can not study for the exam. However, there are study courses available to help you understand the testing techniques and to allow you to become familiar with the type of questions presented during the exam. Contact your pre-law advisor for advice regarding study books and professional organizations that may be helpful to you in preparing for the exam. Do not take the LSAT for practice! All scores will be reported to every law school to which you apply for admission. Most schools average your scores. Plan to take the LSAT only once. Old LSAT exams are available. You can take a practice exam on your own or through your pre-law society, but never take the real exam to practice.



STUDENT PROFILE

Travis Plummer

Travis Plummer was the student body president at his undergraduate institution and was actively involved in student leadership and government. At Baylor Law School, he's stayed busy participating in student organizations, competition teams and internships. Travis says he chose Baylor Law because of the "training it provides its students. Baylor Lawyers are successful because they work harder than most are willing to do."

Most applicants will have at least two choices, if not more, of various law schools around the nation that will accept them for admission. Selecting the "right" school is a difficult decision. One important factor is cost. Lawyers are well-paid, but most young lawyers begin at a modest salary. How quickly and how high one's salary climbs is largely dependent upon the type of law one practices, the size of the community where one works, and the size of the law firm. Before committing to borrowing a large amount for law school, one should sit down and seriously consider the degree of difficulty one will face in paying back student loans.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS:

1. What are my other educational debts?
2. What types of contributions can you expect from parents, grandparents, a spouse, etc.
3. What are your existing or future family expenses if any.

Lawyers are well paid, but that conclusion is based on a lifetime view, not necessarily on what he or she will earn the first ten years of his or her professional life. One has a choice in this regard because the cost of legal education varies widely across the nation and per school.

Another significant factor is the reputation of the law school. Before we became such a mobile society, the "old" rule of thumb was to go to the "best" law school that one could get into in the state where he or she wanted to practice law. Now, one should apply that rule to the place one believes he or she will live for the first three to five years after graduating from law school. Next, what is "the best" law school? There are no simple answers.

QUESTIONS TO ASK LAW SCHOOLS:

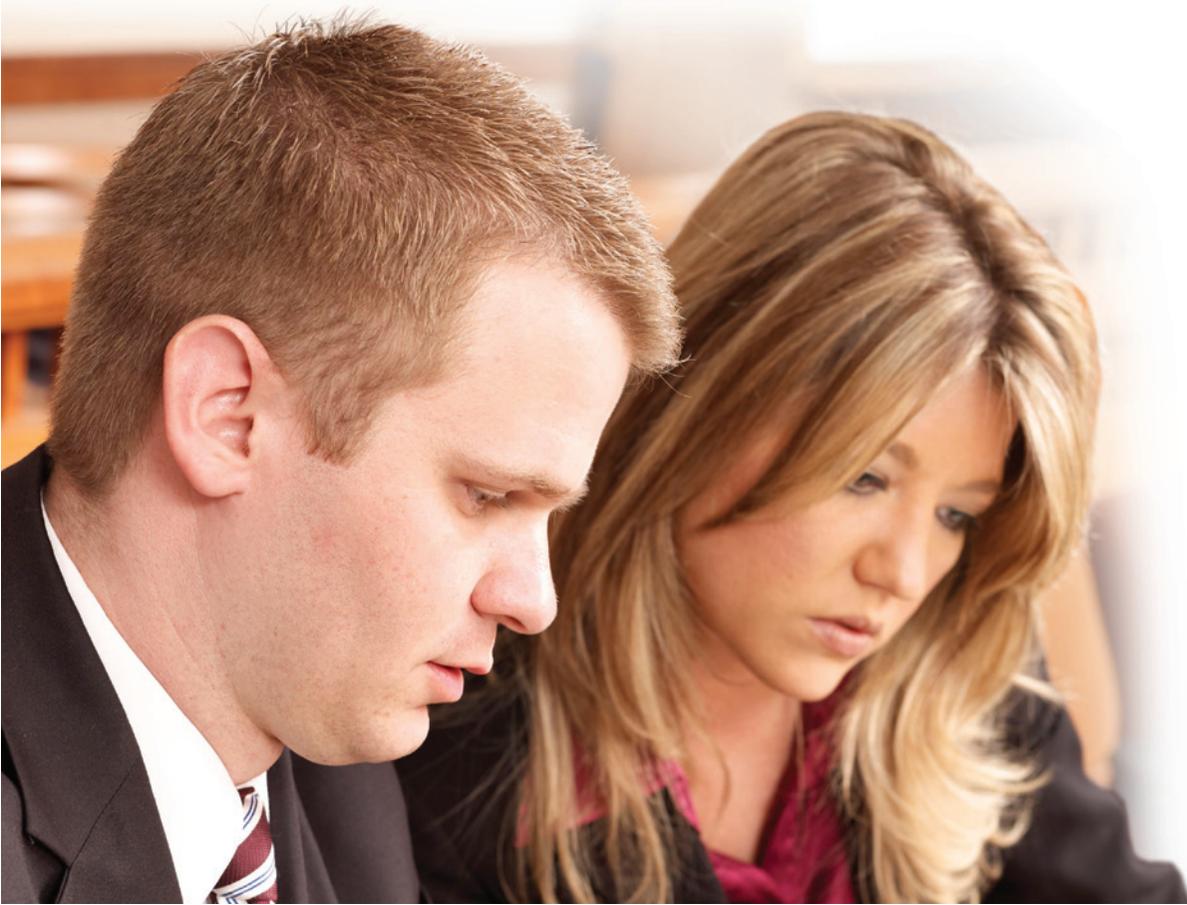
1. What portion of a law school's graduates practice in the state where you want to live? ?
2. What type of firms do they work for?
3. What do judges and lawyers who are graduates of other schools think about the school's reputation?
4. How active are the graduates in the state bar association?
5. What percentage of the judges in the state graduated from the law school?
6. Based on the quality of students attending a particular school, what are the chances of graduating in the top 25% of your class? (Practicing lawyers consider this group to be the "cream of the crop.")
7. What is the school's bar exam passage rate and what percentage of its graduates are employed within six months of graduation?

Another rule of thumb is that lawyers tend to hire graduates from their alma maters first, and then "the best" graduates of other law schools. Does the school that you are contemplating attending have a lot of graduates working in the state where you want to practice? If not, do you think that you can graduate in the top 25% of the school you want to attend? Finally, does the law school have a reputation of graduating students who have received a quality legal education? Another fact to consider is that law school will probably be the most rigorous educational training that you will ever experience. Therefore, you should be careful not to choose an environment that presents additional challenges to your success.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ABOUT ENVIRONMENT:

1. Do I thrive in a small or large school atmosphere?
2. Do I need contact with professors or can I succeed with the support of my fellow students in study groups?
3. Do I need guidance to plan my legal education or do I wish to choose my own courses?
4. Do I want a school that teaches the theoretical view of the law or do I want a school that also teaches hands-on application of the law to real life scenarios?
5. Do I dislike living with big-city issues, such as security, traffic jams, etc., or do I want a small-town atmosphere where daily life challenges are at a minimum?

To find the answers, go visit law schools, talk to students and professors, and read about the law school curriculum so you can choose an environment that will allow you to thrive in your academic studies. The school and the city where it is located will be your home for three years, and how well you succeed during this time will affect your career for a lifetime.



Finally... A warning! There is one other factor (unfortunately created by the law schools themselves) that causes applicants to be misled about choosing a law school. Twenty years ago, all law students graduated with a J.D. that signified that they had completed a liberal arts education in the law. Today, many law schools advertise that they offer “specializations” so that one can graduate with a “label” that signifies that one concentrated in a certain area of the law. Many applicants infer that these specializations are necessary in order to practice in certain areas after graduation, or that they are necessary to get a job with a firm in a particular area. This perception is absolutely false!

When one graduates, he or she is highly knowledgeable of the law, but is still a novice! One becomes a specialist by concentrating one’s practice in a certain area or areas after graduation and ultimately becoming board-certified, if one’s state bar recognizes that particular specialty. Specializations simply give one added exposure to certain areas of the law. *For that reason, Baylor Law School refuses to use the term, “specialization,” preferring the label, “concentration.”* After one graduates and passes the bar, one can practice in any area of the law. The “concentration” simply gives a graduate more knowledge than a lawyer that did not complete that particular course of study.

Therefore, while the specializations or concentrations that a law school offers may be a factor in the choice of a law school, they should not be the only factor! Until you study it, you won’t know if you will actually enjoy a specific area of the law. And when you graduate, there may not be jobs available in a specialized area. Most important, law school is the time in your career when you will have an opportunity to study the full breadth of the law. When you’re in practice, you will be too busy. Don’t “waste” the opportunity that law school affords by focusing to such a degree that you are unable to see the whole “forest” of law because you spent your law school education studying the details of the leaves on one particular “legal tree.”

Admission Criteria

There is no set of criteria that all law schools follow in selecting students for admission. However, most law schools attempt to make selections based, in part, on objective criteria. The two most common criteria are an applicant’s LSAT score and GPA. The common approach is to utilize a formula that combines the two scores to allow for preliminary comparisons of different applicants.

As you can see, this formula considers your general aptitude, as evaluated by the LSAT, and your aptitude and work ethic, as demonstrated by your GPA. In your undergraduate years, you can increase your likelihood of admission by working diligently to maintain the highest possible GPA, while also maintaining an overall balanced life.

Also, hard work in your studies logically will impact your performance on the LSAT. Extracurricular activities, work experience, letters of reference, and other criteria may impact a law school’s admission decision, but the predominant factors are LSAT score(s) and GPA.

Did you know?

Many law schools run on a semester system and only admit students in the fall or spring. However, Baylor Law runs on a quarter system, allowing students to enter the fall, spring or summer.



STUDENT PROFILE

Nick Chu

Nick Chu's background had him interested in politics and government as a young child. He was actively involved in governmental representation before attending Baylor Law. Nick is now focusing on studying criminal law. After he graduates from Baylor Law School, he hopes to work as a prosecutor in Texas and stay involved in politics.



THE PRACTICE OF LAW

Many Professions within the Profession

If you think it is difficult to decide whether you want to go to law school and then where to go to law school, you have another tough choice after graduating from law school by having to figure out what type of lawyer you want to be. There is a consistent theme that we have mentioned throughout this discussion; you need to obtain a broad liberal arts education before law school and then you receive a liberal arts education of the law in law school. In other words, at the time of graduation from law school, you are simply a generalist.

As we mentioned earlier, even though law schools have “specialties” or “concentrations” that you may elect to study, these programs do not make you a “specialist” in reality, but simply allow you to pursue a specific interest in the law which results in you having a little bit more knowledge than the average law graduate in that area of the law. State licensing boards will not immediately certify you as a specialist in an area of law upon graduation, but require that you spend a significant amount years practicing in the area, that you engage in further study of the law in that specific area, and ultimately successfully pass an exam demonstrating your expertise.

Therefore, one defines his or her area of the law or expertise after graduation by the choice of jobs he or she decides to accept. The good news is that your legal education has prepared you for and provided you the tools to master a specific area or areas of the law during your practice. In addition, the value of the liberal arts education in the law is that even though you will specialize in one or more areas of practice, clients often times not only have a personal injury claim, if that is your area of specialty, but may potentially have tax issues, trust and estate issues, workers’ compensation claims,

and other legal issues that need to be addressed. As a specialist, you will not deal with those issues, but you need to be able to identify them and help your client obtain adequate legal advice about them.

It is also good news that you do not have to make a commitment for life by the choice of your first legal job. You are equipped upon graduation to learn and study (yes, learning does not end in law school!) any type of legal practice. Most lawyers do not stay with one firm during their entire career. In fact, most law graduates change jobs three times in the first 10 years of practice. Thus, you can take your time in figuring out exactly what type of law you want to practice and/or to change paths along the way if some type of practice proves to be unsatisfactory for you.

There are also some non-legal issues involved in deciding what area of practice you desire to pursue and they focus on your values, economic needs, lifestyle and other goals you wish to pursue during your lifetime. They include deciding whether you desire (1) to live in a major metropolitan area versus a small town versus working in the military or other areas of government that might involve fairly constant reassignments around the world, (2) to work in a job that might routinely require working at night and/or on weekends versus generally dedicating only 40 to 50 hours to work each week, (3) to earn a significant six figure income with no economic ceiling in sight versus being a salaried employee with a middle to upper middle income with job security, (4) to work for yourself as a solo practitioner and/or in a firm with other self-employed partners versus working for a corporation or other business entity as well as local, state or federal government, and (5) to achieve any other type of goal that might impact your choice of jobs.

In looking generally at the practice of law in the United States, there are approximately 780,000 to 800,000 lawyers: 73% of them are working in private

practice either as a solo practitioner or in a firm with other lawyers (27% of those are self-employed as a solo practitioner or as a partner in a law firm with the remainder being employees of a firm), 9% work for local, state or the federal government, 12% work in private industry, 2% work as public defenders or in legal aid clinics, 1½% are law professors, with the remaining 2½% working in jobs that do not directly utilize a person's legal skills.

To talk in gross generalities of which there are always numerous exceptions, the lawyer in a small town or community in a solo or small firm practice tends to be the last of the generalists in the profession of law. The lawyer will most likely handle civil and criminal matters, family law, trust and estate issues, bankruptcies, consumer law, personal injury actions as well as property and contract matters. Over time, even this lawyer will tend to select a few primary areas of practice and tend to have a heavier load of certain types of cases than others even though he/she will occasionally handle a wide variety of cases. One tends to be the master of his/her own workload and can work as much or as little as he/she desires based on other quality of life issues and the desire or not to earn a substantial livelihood. Income can be substantial but would rarely reach a high six figure income. The lawyer will also have to be wary of taking highly complicated cases in any area of law or need to collaborate with a specialist or simply refer a client to a specialist when the issues are highly complicated or require the services of a large law firm.

In larger metropolitan areas, the opportunity is present to allow one to pick a special area of the law or even a sub-specialty within an area due to the potential numbers of clients with such legal issues or problems. A substantial number of lawyers join a large firm that is comprised of many lawyers who are all specialists or are training to become one. This arrangement is particularly advantageous to serving

large corporate clients and/or to handle complicated cases for certain individual clients because the firm can offer expert advice in all areas of the law within one law firm instead of it requiring the lawyer to seek outside advice on issues outside of his/her specialty. These firms also allow the rookie graduate to learn from others within the firm to attain a high level of expertise within a specific practice of law. In general, these type of firms tend to demand a high volume of work even though the financial incentives are very generous and normally lead to middle and high six figure incomes over the years of one's practice. However, most large firm attorneys may tell you that life is governed by billable hours and the demand for quality work with high productivity is the standard norm.

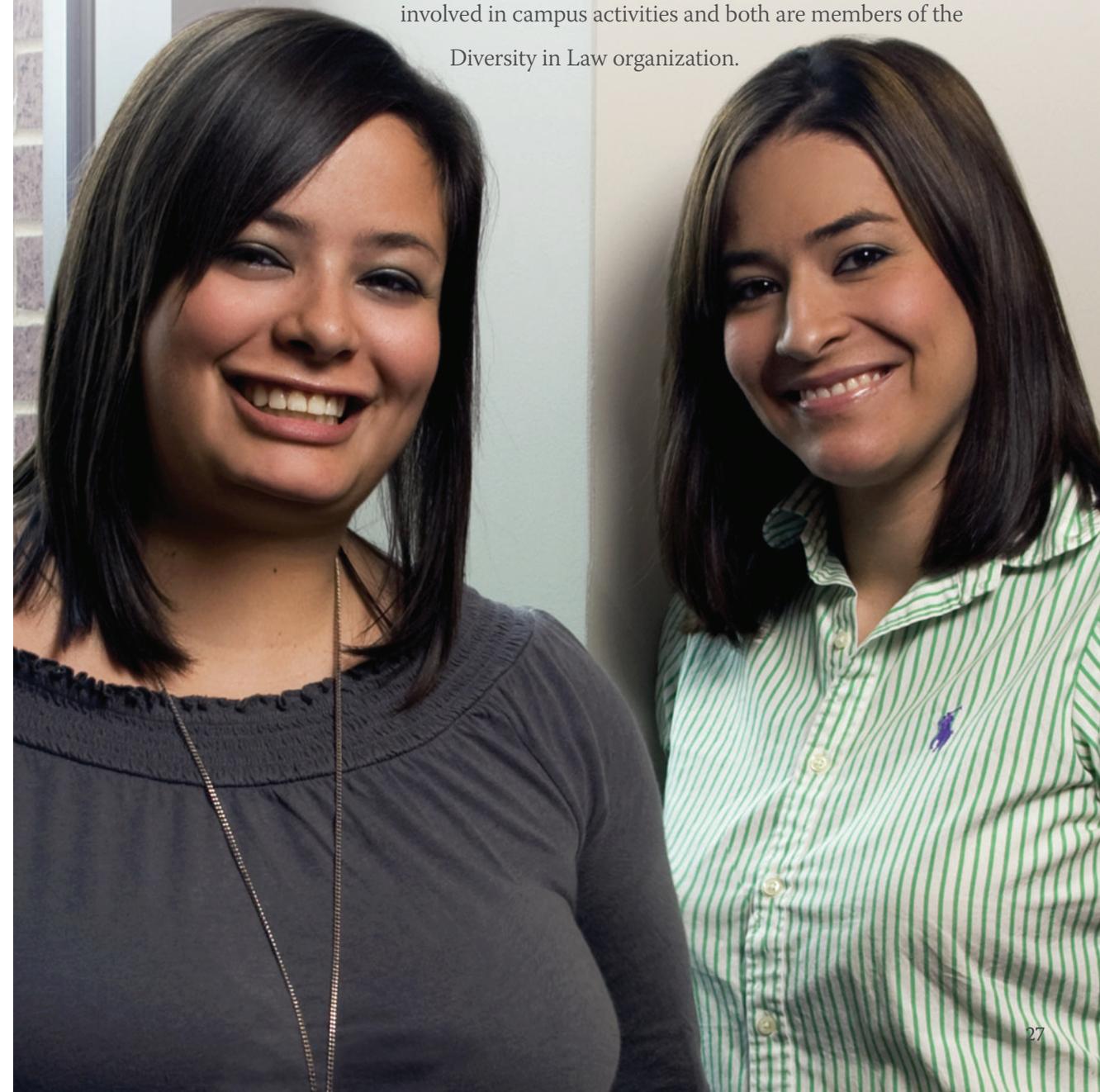
Other lawyers will start their career in small firms in large metropolitan areas or move out of a large firm to a smaller one over time where the firm tends to specialize in certain areas of the law. Due to the large population, the small firm can maintain a successful practice in one or two specialties and decline all other types of cases they would take in a small town. By focusing in a few areas of law, the rookie lawyer can attain a higher level of expertise in a shorter period of time than the small town lawyer due to the high volume of cases in a specialized field. However, even in large metropolitan areas there is a place for the generalist lawyer who is willing to take a high variety of different cases to serve clients who do not have the type of problems that need the expertise of a specialist.

Most lawyers in large metropolitan areas also make a choice within their field of expertise between a litigation and transactional practice. Transactional lawyers deal with clients outside of the litigation context in various settings. Lawyers aid clients in negotiating and drafting contracts, setting up estate plans, applying for and obtaining licenses or permits from federal and state agencies or complying with ordinances of city or county government, applying for and securing patents or

STUDENT PROFILES

Lauren & Ronnie Sepulveda

Lauren Sepulveda didn't know her sister Roni would be joining her just one short year after she began law school at Baylor, but they were reunited when Roni decided to become a part of the Baylor Family. Originally from the Texas Valley, the inseparable duo is actively involved in campus activities and both are members of the Diversity in Law organization.



trademarks, complying with tax laws, or forming a corporation, partnership or some other legal entity. They also work with clients to advise them as to what laws apply to their situation, what such laws require and aid the client in setting up policies, and procedures to ensure compliance so that litigation will not be necessary.

The litigator becomes involved when the contract is breached, the heirs dispute a will, the federal government a state, county or city pursues an enforcement action, criminal or civil, for violation of its laws, a patent or trademark is infringed, a corporation or partnership is sued or a client failed to understand and comply with any law applicable to them and a lawsuit has been filed. In a large firm, the transactional lawyer hands the litigation over to another member of the firm that specializes in that type of litigation. The small specialty firm or boutique law firm may or may not have litigation specialists and need to refer the litigation to another firm or the firm's lawyers in fact practice in both the transactional and litigation arenas. The small town practitioner will normally handle both types of practice or refer the case to a larger metropolitan firm or litigation boutique law firm if the litigation is complicated.

In private practice, the variety of areas of law is simply broad. We have laws of our federal government, state government and cities and counties that cover a broad spectrum of our daily lives.

RECOGNIZED SPECIALTIES INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO:

1. **Criminal law:** representing defendants in matters as small as misdemeanors to drunken driving arrests to felony prosecutions for assault and battery, rape, or murder and what are called "white collar crimes" where corporate executives may be facing criminal prosecutions for their conduct related to corporate activities.
2. **Administrative law:** issues of licensing and compliance with governmental laws administered by governmental agencies at the federal, state, county and city level relating to the administration of regulatory schemes of industries or professions.
3. **Commercial and Corporate law:** issues related to the formation of business entities, mergers, their continued administration, issues related to tort, contract, copyright, trademark, and property disputes.
4. **Personal injury and Property Damage Civil Litigation:** handling lawsuits as plaintiff or defense attorney with individuals or corporate clients related to personal injuries arising out of negligence, gross negligence, strict liability, defective product liability, and malpractice.
5. **Business litigation:** handling lawsuits as plaintiff or defense attorney with individuals or corporate clients related to contracts, debts, antitrust issues, and other commercial transactions.
6. **Environmental law:** issues related to compliance with and litigation arising out of federal and state environmental laws.
7. **Family law:** issues related to family members including wills and estate planning, child custody, adoption, divorce, prenuptial contracts, and child support.
8. **Intellectual Property law:** issues related to copyrights, trademarks, and patents.
9. **Immigration law:** issues related to deportation, applying for entry, business compliance with employment of illegal and/or legal residents.
10. **Employment law:** issues related to employees and businesses regarding unions, compliance with discrimination laws, equal pay laws, family leave issues, etc.
11. **Real Estate law:** issues related to the purchase, sale, use, financing and a myriad of other issues related to property.
12. **Tax law:** issues related to compliance with and payment of taxes of individual and other legal entities at the federal, state, county and local level.
13. **International practice:** issues related to aiding foreign companies and investors to ensure compliance with federal statutory and treaty law; aiding domestic companies and investors to ensure compliance with federal and state law for their activities in other countries.

Another choice a recent law graduate can make is to work for the federal, state, county or local government. At the federal level, the 50 plus regulatory agencies have attorneys serving on their staffs. This is in addition to the Department of Justice which is the main legal enforcement arm of the United States Government. There are approximately 140,000 legal-related positions in the government where attorneys are engaging in transactional and litigation areas, both civil and criminal. Every state government has an Attorney General's office that engages in practice analogous to the Department of Justice. All states have many regulatory agencies that employ attorneys in managerial, transactional and litigation positions. At the county and city level, there are numerous district and county attorney positions that are involved in criminal enforcement. Cities and counties are in need of attorneys in areas of contract law, condemnation proceedings and dealing with ordinances and ensuring compliance by the citizenry.



In general, these positions offer a satisfactory but not high salary by private firm standards but tend to have generous benefits. Such positions generally allow a lawyer to have a balanced life with no expectations of seven day work weeks or constantly being subject to a billable hour standard. There is also the satisfaction of ensuring that government acts towards its citizens in a beneficial, reasonable and enlightened manner. In addition, it is fair to say that the government lawyer will have the opportunity to engage in significant legal matters early in their careers in contrast to such opportunities in a large private firm. This can lead to one's ability to transfer to the private sector at some point in time with a high prospect of employability due to the extensive experience gained, transactional or litigation, over a relatively short span of years.

Another route is finding a position in a public interest career. A lawyer interested in this area normally works for a nonprofit agency or organization that has a goal of meeting the legal needs of a particular group or a particular type of legal issue. This could include immigration issues, clients in poverty who have family law, landlord tenant or consumer issues, or acting as a public defender in criminal matters for those who cannot afford an attorney. Public interest organizations are often dependent upon state and federal grants, public donations and/or grants from foundations. They tend to have relatively small staffs and attorney salaries tend to be at the low end of the compensation spectrum. However, for the properly suited attorney, a high degree of satisfaction in one's work can be attained by accepting such a position.

Did you know?

Law degrees are extremely helpful for you career, even outside of the legal professions. Baylor Law graduates have used their degrees to become politicians, sports agents, directors and entrepreneurs, just to name a few.

However, such satisfaction can be achieved when working at a for-profit private law firm. Many firms have accepted the challenge to not only serve those who can pay, but to engage in significant pro bono practice as a part of their business. Therefore, many firms not only expect but highly encourage their attorneys to engage in the representation of clients that, in the past, could only receive help from a public interest law firm.

Many lawyers also work directly for corporations or other legal entities in a position that is commonly called “in-house” counsel. These lawyers are employees of the entity and engage in a wide variety of work from contracts to employment and/or labor law to intellectual property to tort law, etc. in either a transactional or litigation context. In-house positions are attractive for many because there is a lack of expectation for profit of the legal enterprise per se, so billable hours are not a major focus. The expected work week is normally stable and balanced. There is also the possibility of advancement into a management position at the company if the attorney so desires. The possibility of engaging in significant legal controversies or transactions at a relatively early period of one’s career versus such opportunities in large law firms is seen as a plus for many young or inexperienced attorneys.

Finally, a small percentage of persons attend law school never intending to practice law or come to such a conclusion during school or some time after graduation. The law permeates all areas of our lives. Having the training to understand and be able to analyze legal issues can be beneficial to many companies or the individual lawyer starting his/her own business. Many law students enhance their employability by earning a JD/MBA while in law school or earn their MBA or other masters degree before or after law school. This equips such attorneys to directly enter the marketplace in management or entrepreneurial positions. It also

prepares individuals who choose to work in public interest positions to help others learn to advocate for themselves or to have a more meaningful impact on the society in which they live. To have a mentor who is skilled in the law can be a valuable asset in helping the disadvantaged to achieve success in this complicated world.

Thus, the choice to become trained in the law is simply the first step. After graduating from law school, one commences a journey of discovering just what type of law practice fits their values, economic needs and lifestyle. One’s first choice is not always the last and normally most attorneys do not find the “best” position until 10 years, if not more, after graduation. However, all along the way, if one truly enjoys the practice of law, an attorney will gain experience and insight as to exactly what type of practice is best for them in the long run.

On the other hand, the beautiful aspect of being a lawyer is that we are all trained to deal with new and unknown problems and issues, and therefore, many lawyers gain satisfaction over the years knowing at any time they can quit the job they have, and commence a new journey utilizing their valuable skills learned during law school and constantly honed while on the job.



Ron Beal — Professor of Law

Professor Ron Beal has developed an expertise in Texas administrative law. He has authored numerous law review articles that have been cited as authoritative by the Texas judiciary, taught training courses for administrative law judges and lectured in advanced courses for practicing lawyers.

Professor Beal earned a J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law in 1979 after receiving a B.A. in 1975 from St. Olaf College. After graduation, he was a civil trial lawyer for three years in St. Paul, Minn., at Murnane, Brandt . Professor Beal then earned a LL.M. at Temple University School of Law in Philadelphia, Penn. In 1983, he joined the faculty at Baylor Law School.

In 1991, he was honored by the State Bar of Texas Administrative and Public Law Council for writing the Outstanding Administrative Law Review Article and in 1994, Baylor University conferred upon him the award of Outstanding Research Professor. In 1997, he completed a treatise, Texas Administrative Practice and Procedure, which is considered the “bible” of Texas administrative law. He also has served as Editor-in-Chief of the General Practice Digest of the General Practice, Solo and Small Firm Section of the State Bar of Texas for the last 25 years. He has also been the contributing editor for Texas Administrative Law for 25 years.

The practice of law is an exciting and rewarding profession. The skills you will hone as you prepare for the practice of law are those skills also needed to live a full and meaningful life. Your goal is to become a well-educated person who has developed a common-sense attitude by your involvement and commitment to the community, state, nation and world. — *Ron Beal*

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