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## Tweets to a Young 1L

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# LETTERS TWEETS TO A YOUNG 1L

*Rachel I. Gurvich*<sup>†</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

I DIDN'T EXPECT TO WRITE this article this summer, and I certainly didn't expect one of my first publications as a law professor to be a piece I was invited to write based on something I said on the internet. But here we are. One day last April, as I was cleaning out my office in an attempt to procrastinate my end-of-semester grading, I had the misfortune of running across my 1L transcript. Looking over that transcript led to a number of loosely-related reflections, which I decided to share on Twitter. For those of you who have not yet entered the Twitter age – where, surprisingly, even law professors communicate with the world in chunks of 280 characters or less – let me explain.

I was skeptical about Twitter for many years. It seemed uncomfortably public, and I think we're all too aware of its potential for nastiness. But shortly after I left law practice for academia, a member of my faculty sent the rest of us an email that made me reconsider my position. In it, she convincingly suggested that those of us who were continuing to bury our heads in the Twitter-less sand (my words, not hers) were missing out on a useful source of legal news and information, opportunities for professional connections and collaboration, and an effective space in which to promote

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our work. I took those words to heart and decided to begin cultivating a Twitter presence that reflected my professional identity.

In the time since I joined Twitter, I have been fortunate to find myself among a supportive and welcoming community of practicing attorneys, legal academics, judges, and law students from across the country. The discussions are lively and largely collegial, and cover a wide range of legal topics. I've even worked with my friend Sean Marotta, an attorney with Hogan Lovells in DC whom I met on Twitter, to launch weekly conversations covering best practices and useful tips on a variety of subjects relating to writing and the practice of law. You can follow (or better yet, join) our weekly discussions – which attract a wide array of participants – every Tuesday evening under the hashtag #PracticeTuesday.<sup>1</sup>

Which brings us back to April 2017. My series of eleven tweets ruminating about my law school experience received a positive and enthusiastic response from many lawyers, law professors, and law students, and ultimately caught the eye of one of the *Green Bag's* editors. He asked me to write a short piece unpacking and contextualizing those tweets, and that's what you currently have on your screen or in your hand. The original tweets appear below, numbered as they first appeared on Twitter.

I JUST FOUND MY LAW SCHOOL TRANSCRIPT  
(THE HORROR). I WAS REMINDED OF A FEW IMPORTANT  
POINTS I THOUGHT I'D SHARE. /1

As anyone I've taught knows, I'm deliberately open with my students about the fact that I didn't have the smoothest transition to law school. I frequently tell the 1Ls in my Research, Reasoning, Writing, and Advocacy classes that I have very easy access to my bad 1L memories, including the significant portion of the year that I spent crying. To be sure, some of the difficulties I experienced were attributable to the nature of legal education in this country. By design, and probably for good reason, it's immersive, rigorous, and even disorienting. But I intentionally share my experiences with my students – and on Twitter, as I did here – because much of the particular pain I suffered was avoidable.

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<sup>1</sup> Or you can check out our blog at [www.practicetuesday.com](http://www.practicetuesday.com).

## *Letters Tweets to a Young 1L*

Like many 1Ls, law school had always been my fallback option, and by the time I applied to All The Fancy Law Schools during my senior year of college, a law degree seemed like “the next logical step” for an overachieving liberal arts student without an overpowering passion for just one of those liberal arts. Sure, I had other options: graduate school for political science, English, or philosophy; Teach for America; international travel; accepting an offer to work for a political campaign; or *doing literally anything* to avoid going straight from one kind of school to more school, which would have been a far wiser decision. But law seemed like the safest and most familiar path, and the one least likely to get me disowned by my parents (not actually an exaggeration).

Coming to law school without the certainty that it’s where you belong – in a metaphysical sense – is disconcerting. Coming to law school at a *place* where you don’t think you belong – because you’re convinced there’s no way you’re up to snuff intellectually – and with a whole lot of your self-worth bound up with your own ability to perform *perfectly* . . . well, that’s about as bad as it sounds.

FIRST, AS I’VE SAID BEFORE, MY 1ST-SEMESTER ATTITUDE  
WAS: EVERYONE’S SMARTER THAN ME SO I MUST WORK  
MUCH HARDER (I PROB DID). /2

I came into Harvard Law School with baggage. Rationally, I know now (and part of me probably knew then) that my baggage had little basis in reality, but to this day, I have a hard time letting let go of it. I suppose that’s the nature of baggage.

I had just graduated from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (the very institution at whose law school I now teach). Carolina gave me a rich and foundational liberal arts education, for which I am grateful. But at the time, I was a snob. (Incidentally, law school is a very good place to develop a fulsome typology of snobbery. As you do so, you’ll learn that some snobbery is born out of fear or insecurity. That may make it more forgivable, in the end, but it rarely makes it any less obnoxious.)

In any event, I thought that because my diploma wasn’t from one of the Ivies, or at least a small, liberal-arts college, where the average student probably cared a little less about basketball and a little more about, say,

Hegel, I was missing out on some secret sauce that held the key to law school success. (Spoiler alert: these days I care very little about Hegel and substantially more about Carolina basketball.)

In short, I was certain that everyone at Harvard was smarter than I was. I was certain that I didn't deserve to be there, and that I had only snuck in because the Powers That Be in Cambridge thought they should probably admit some students from a redder, more rural state to their fancy school (did I mention I was really an insufferable snob?). I was certain that my intellectual inferiority would be as apparent to my professors and classmates as a scarlet letter on my clothes.

Some of you may recognize this way of thinking in yourself or others; the feeling when, “[d]espite outstanding academic and professional accomplishments,” someone “persists in believing that they are really not bright and have fooled anyone who thinks otherwise.”<sup>2</sup> This is frequently referred to in both popular media and academic work as the “impostor phenomenon” or “impostor syndrome,” and it has documented correlations with both depression and anxiety.<sup>3</sup> Much has been written about its prevalence among law and other graduate students,<sup>4</sup> and its thorny interaction with stereotype threat for students of color.<sup>5</sup> In his book *Whistling Vivaldi*, Claude Steele describes his experience as the only Black student in his graduate program:

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<sup>2</sup> Pauline R. Clance & Suzanne Imes, *The Imposter Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention*, 15 PSYCHOTHERAPY: THEORY, RES. & PRAC. 241, 241 (1978).

<sup>3</sup> *Id.*; see also, e.g., Ann Friedman, *Not Qualified for Your Job? Wait, You Probably Are*, PACIFIC STANDARD (Oct. 22, 2013), [psmag.com/economics/qualified-job-wait-probably-impostor-syndrome-psychology-68700](http://psmag.com/economics/qualified-job-wait-probably-impostor-syndrome-psychology-68700); Kirsten Weir, *Feel like a Fraud?*, GRADPSYCH, Nov. 2013, at 24, [www.apa.org/gradpsych/2013/11/fraud.aspx](http://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2013/11/fraud.aspx).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Rachael Field et al., *Supporting Transition to Law School and Student Well-Being: The Role of Professional Legal Identity*, 4 INT'L J. OF THE FIRST YEAR IN HIGHER EDUC. 15, 18 (2013); Susan Grover, *Personal Integration and Outsider Status As Factors in Law Student Well-Being*, 47 WASHBURN L.J. 419, 430 (2008); Mark Weisberg, *Epilogue: When (Law) Students Write*, 27 LEGAL STUD. F. 421, 431-32 (2003); Peter F. Lake, *When Fear Knocks: The Myths and Realities of Law School*, 29 STETSON L. REV. 1015, 1029-30 (2000).

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., CLAUDE M. STEELE, *WHISTLING VIVALDI: HOW STEREOTYPES AFFECT US AND WHAT WE CAN DO* 153 (2010); Yung-Yi Diana Pan, *To Work or Not to Work . . . Before Law School: Apprehension, Confidence, and Cynicism Among Law Students*, 23 INT'L J. CLINICAL LEG. EDUC. 5 (2016).

## *Letters Tweets to a Young 1L*

Excellence seemed to have an identity, which I didn't entirely have and worried that I couldn't get. Perhaps I could try for a while, but soon, I was sure, the veneer would wear off and the nonexcellent me would poke through. Many graduate students, I think, go through a version of this 'imposter syndrome' as they try to assimilate into a professional culture. But when the difference in identities involved is racial, this kind of professional assimilation can seem nearly impossible.<sup>6</sup>

Women – even highly successful women – are also particularly prone to the impostor phenomenon; in fact, the seminal article on the topic described “high achieving women” as its primary subjects.<sup>7</sup> This isn't an essay about the impostor phenomenon, but instinct and experience tell me that we as faculty may be able to alleviate its effects by naming it and talking about it; by letting students know that they're not alone in how they're feeling, and by reassuring them that they do belong wherever it is they have ended up. In a way, that's what this whole tweet thread was about. So, to law students who recognized themselves in the last few paragraphs, I am here to say: what you are feeling is real and has a name, you're not alone, and you do belong.

The bottom line is that to compensate for my own impostor syndrome, I studied. All the time. I didn't go to social events with my classmates. I didn't enjoy my new city, not even to join in on the collective jubilation inspired by the first Red Sox championship in 86 years; instead, I remember fuming at the cars driving down Massachusetts Avenue and blasting their horns in celebration because they were disturbing my ability to study late into the night in my 400-square-foot apartment. I took notes on every page of each day's reading for all of my classes, started outlining early, and created outlines so long that I ended up needing outlines of my outlines.

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<sup>6</sup> STEELE, *supra* n. 5, at 153.

<sup>7</sup> Clance and Imes, *supra* n. 2, at 241; *see also* Abigail Perdue, *Man Up or Go Home: Explaining Perceptions of Women in Leadership*, 100 MARQ. L. REV. 1233, 1288 & n.390 (2017).

RESULT: WORST GRADES OF MY ACADEMIC CAREER.  
DEVASTATED, I REALIZED THAT PURE BRUTE FORCE  
WOULDN'T WORK  
(ALSO, WHAT I DID WAS UNHEALTHY) /3

At the time – in 2004 – Harvard’s fall term exams occurred in January, *after* winter break. And given my exceedingly unhealthy attitude, the work of studying for those exams expanded to fill all of the (plentiful) time available for the task. During the better part of a month, I maintained a punishing schedule and only – in what I saw as a major concession to my fiancé – took two nights “off,” one of which was New Year’s Eve.

By the time exams came around in January, I had worked myself into a neurotic frenzy where I was barely sleeping or eating (I still can’t bear to eat a particular brand of protein bar because it was my only form of sustenance during that time, and now it just tastes like suffering). In terms of hours spent studying, I’d conservatively wager that I was in at least the ninetieth percentile among my peers. This is what made my performance on that first set of exams – which did not, in my estimation, reflect that hard work – so difficult to swallow.<sup>8</sup>

I don’t want to exaggerate. I wasn’t in academic peril. My performance wasn’t cause for concern from the administration’s point of view, or really anyone’s but my own. But I could feel the doors closing on all those silly trappings of prestige and success which I had been conditioned to value: law review, clerkships, graduating with some Latin words after my degree.<sup>9</sup> And because an “impostor” rejects outward indications of success and internalizes any evidence of “failures,” that felt pretty disastrous.

In fact, HLS changed their exam schedule several years later and started administering 1L exams before the holiday break in December;

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<sup>8</sup> While HLS has since moved away from this system, the grades at the time were standard letter grades.

<sup>9</sup> I did just fine on all of these measures in the end, though I confess that I didn’t even participate in the Law Review competition because I was such a mess at the end of my 1L year.

interestingly, University Health Services was one of the groups lobbying for this change based on its finding that the previous schedule was “fundamentally taxing on student mental health.”<sup>10</sup> More generally, the subject of law student mental health has been gaining traction in the media in the last year.<sup>11</sup> That’s a topic for another day, but I hope one that we will continue talking about as a community.

SECOND SEMESTER, I SAID “SCREW IT,” JOINED THE  
PARODY (LAW REVUE) & STARTED MAKING CLOSE  
FRIENDSHIPS. MENTAL HEALTH & GRADES BOTH  
SHOT UP /4

**M**any law schools have a delightful tradition of producing a “Law Revue” in the spring – a satirical roast of legal education, the legal profession, and, most deliciously, the school’s own professors<sup>12</sup> and administrators. In the modern age, this tradition has expanded to include videos, often with astonishingly high production values, that can be posted and shared far beyond the originating school. This year, the popular legal blog *Above the Law* hosted its ninth annual Law Revue Video Contest, and the finalists are well worth your time.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Andy Guess, *A Winter Break They Can (Finally) Enjoy*, INSIDE HIGHER ED (Jan. 17, 2008), [www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/01/17/winter-break-they-can-finally-enjoy](http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/01/17/winter-break-they-can-finally-enjoy). As it turns out, this schedule change was part of a broader curriculum reform effort that accompanied a redesign of the first-year curriculum at HLS. See Sacha Pfeiffer, *Harvard Law to Refocus the First Year*, BOSTON GLOBE, Oct. 7, 2006, at B5, available at [archive.boston.com/business/globe/articles/2006/10/07/harvard\\_law\\_to\\_refocus\\_the\\_first\\_year/](http://archive.boston.com/business/globe/articles/2006/10/07/harvard_law_to_refocus_the_first_year/). Either way, it was surely the humane thing to do.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Amanda H. Chan, Amanda M. Lee, and Adam P. Savitt, *Wellness at the Law School: Promises to Keep and Miles to Go Before We Sleep*, HARVARD CRIMSON, Mar. 29, 2018, available at [www.thecrimson.com/article/2018/3/29/lee-chan-savitt-wellness-at-law-school/](http://www.thecrimson.com/article/2018/3/29/lee-chan-savitt-wellness-at-law-school/).

<sup>12</sup> I recently found the script from my 1L Parody. We were not kind to the legal writing professors. UNC Law Revue: if you’re reading this, come at me. Karma is a you-know-what, and I’ll probably laugh hardest of all.

<sup>13</sup> See *Law Revue Video Contest 2017: The Finalists!*, [abovethelaw.com/2017/04/law-revue-video-contest-2017-the-finalists/](http://abovethelaw.com/2017/04/law-revue-video-contest-2017-the-finalists/) (Apr. 20, 2017).



In part, this near-universal tradition of poking fun at our own experiences as law students may be attributable to the fact that law school tends to attract people who are snarky, quick-witted, and/or natural performers. Indeed, I've observed in my time among law students and lawyers that many of us have, if not more than our share of musical talent, then at least a special affinity for music. Perhaps music trips the same brain circuitry as a well-written brief. Or maybe we just have rich emotional lives apart from our identities as legal professionals (now there's a thought!).

But I think the satirical tradition at law schools is about more than just a group of funny people being funny or a group of musical people being musical. As I discovered that spring, there's something vital and cathartic about being able to laugh (and poke fun at) the absurdity of your own daily experiences. I'm unaware of the etymology of the expression "if you don't laugh, you'll cry," but it certainly rings true for 1L year of law school (possibly also legal academia, but that's another article entirely).<sup>14</sup>

Of course, my mental and emotional health didn't improve only because I started performing in a show that skewered the thing I had spent the last six months taking excessively seriously. I also put in the time and effort needed to form deep and supportive friendships and realized that brute force was simply not going to work as a study strategy. And perhaps most importantly, because I had already experienced what I considered to be a "failure," I felt that my opportunity at a "perfect" law school career was already lost.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, what made the results so devastating in the first instance then proved liberating – and allowed me to go forward with less baggage and more success.

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<sup>14</sup> A respected colleague recently taught me the expression "lolsob." I introduced it to a former student, who told me candidly "I don't think I would have known what that meant before law school. Now I do." See [www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lolsob](http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=lolsob).

<sup>15</sup> On the subject of the pedagogical value of failure, see generally Kaci Bishop, *Framing Failure in the Legal Classroom: Techniques for Encouraging Growth and Resilience*, 70 Ark. L. Rev. 959 (2018).

SECOND, THE PROF THAT GAVE ME THE WORST GRADE  
OF MY LS CAREER DID NOT CLOSE HER DOOR TO ME.

I STILL CAME TO HER FOR ADVICE AND COUNSEL. /5

That first semester, I expected my worst grade to be in property. My property exam was largely about caves in Mongolia. That's not figurative – it was actually about literal caves in Mongolia. The exam also had a lengthy excerpt from Coleridge's *Kublai Khan* as its parting words (the poem itself was also somehow part of the exam question). So, I cried through most of those eight hours. I mean, I'd be impressed by the first-semester 1L faced with an 8-hour exam about caves in Mongolia who didn't cry.

Caves in Mongolia are one thing, but civil procedure was another matter. I thought I understood civil procedure, had put in the hours to get it right, and there were no caves on the exam. So the grade – which was the lowest course grade I can recall receiving at any point in my academic career – came as more than just a surprise. I know I met with the professor afterwards; I don't remember much about that meeting other than her patience and compassion. I probably cried then, too.

11 YEARS LATER, WHEN I SOUGHT TO TRANSITION TO  
TEACHING, SHE WAS SO RESPONSIVE, DELIGHTED TO  
HELP – DESPITE NOW BEING SO BUSY AS DEAN /6

That civil procedure professor was Martha Minow, who was also my 1L section leader; I had gotten to know her fairly well over the course of that first semester. Though I am ashamed to admit that I spent some time feeling betrayed (more by The System than by her), my most negative emotions had to do with feeling like a failure; that's what lingered, along with embarrassment about my performance. Though I had suspected – B.E., Before Exam – that Professor Minow liked me well enough as a human being, I was afraid my grade would be the only thing she'd remember about me after the fact.

It wasn't. Even years after I graduated, when I was working in BigLaw but thinking about next steps, even when she was already the Dean, she

responded to my emails with impressive promptness and happily met with me to discuss how I might prepare myself for a transition to academia. But the time wasn't right yet, and I didn't have the time or energy both to be a BigLaw attorney and try my hand at writing at the same time. (Truth be told, I didn't even know if I was interested in writing at all;<sup>16</sup> what drew me to teaching was, in fact, the teaching.)

A few years later, when I started looking more seriously into making a move, she was there again. And when I saw her last year at my ten-year law school reunion (one of the first times I have been able to be on that campus without physical symptoms of stress), Dean Minow seemed genuinely delighted and treated me as one of her colleagues in the academy.

NOT EVERYONE IS MARTHA MINOW, BUT STUDENTS OFTEN  
SHY AWAY FROM RELATIONSHIPS W/PROF THAT DIDN'T GIVE  
THEM "GOOD" GRADES; THAT'S A MISTAKE /7

To get a sense of Martha Minow as a person and a professor, I suggest watching her "Last Lecture" to the HLS graduating class of 2017, in which she chose to focus on mistakes she had made.<sup>17</sup> Not surprisingly, she has won teaching awards aplenty<sup>18</sup> and President Obama cited her as an inspiration in his decision to pursue public service.<sup>19</sup>

But even though we can't all be Martha Minow, many of us seek to emulate her generosity. And now, as a professor myself, I've observed that most students who don't perceive the grade they received from a professor as a "good" one are less inclined to go back to her for guidance or advice. But those students may very well be missing out, not only on

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<sup>16</sup> The irony of the fact that a piece on "how not to do law school" will be my first publication since joining the academy is not lost on me.

<sup>17</sup> See [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV3fjYOJkX4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV3fjYOJkX4).

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., *Martha Minow Wins Sacks-Freund Teaching Award*, HARVARD LAW TODAY, [today.law.harvard.edu/martha-minow-wins-sacks-freund-teaching-award/](http://today.law.harvard.edu/martha-minow-wins-sacks-freund-teaching-award/) (June 8, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> See Press release, University of Buffalo, Ilene Fleischmann, *Harvard Law Dean to Deliver Keynote at UB Law Commencement Ceremony* (May 14, 2012), available at [www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2012/05/13430.html](http://www.buffalo.edu/news/releases/2012/05/13430.html).

## *Letters Tweets to a Young 1L*

individualized (and therefore particularly valuable) suggestions for growth, or on a potentially strong recommendation notwithstanding a lower course grade, but more importantly, on a meaningful and lasting relationship. As teachers, our most important work – and our most fun work – isn’t reflected in a letter on our students’ transcripts, but in the growth we help facilitate and the connections we forge; connections that don’t depend on which letter appears on a piece of paper.

THIRD: TAKE THE PROF, NOT THE CLASS. YOU’LL PROB  
REMEMBER THE TEACHING MORE THAN SUBSTANCE;  
TAKE ADVANTAGE OF EXPERTS, DYNAMIC TEACHERS. /8

**D**uring my last two years of college, I arranged my entire schedule to take as many classes as possible taught by one particular professor (at the time, he offered seven different courses, and I took them all). He was brilliant, engaging, and kind, and I grew very close to him, a relationship I cherish to this day.

So I should have known better than to discount the importance of a great teacher. Nevertheless, one of my biggest regrets about my law school career – besides the misery in which I spent my first semester – is that 22-year-old-me couldn’t see past how boring the word “bankruptcy” sounded to take a class that was highly recommended by everyone I knew who had taken it. The dynamic and well-loved professor was known for making the material fascinating and was reputed to be one of the two most effective Socratic teachers at HLS at the time (the other was Elena Kagan). But the word “bankruptcy” made me furrow my brow and wrinkle my nose, and so I avoided it. The professor I missed out on, of course, was Elizabeth Warren.<sup>20</sup>

I should say: I don’t mean to encourage students to take a “big name” professor *just* because she is a “big name.” A professor who is the country’s greatest scholar on X or who played a key role in some matter of great national import may not be the right fit for you as a teacher for variety of

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<sup>20</sup> Naturally, I now think a course on bankruptcy would be both interesting and valuable, and since it’s taught by a fantastic professor at my school, I make a point of recommending it to all my students.

reasons – and that’s okay. Other things that shouldn’t affect the “take the professor, not the class” principle: how many articles a professor has published, whether she is tenured (or even on the tenure track), and her political affiliation (as long as it doesn’t seep into the class in troubling ways). The universally-beloved college professor I wrote about above never published anything besides his dissertation (by choice) and as a result was never on the tenure track. And another of my all-time best professors (this one from HLS) had a political affiliation very far from my own (though you wouldn’t know it from the class).

Some of this advice also goes to the student who feels like she “should” take a course just because it will be on the bar exam. For many – though not all – students, loading up on bar courses *just because they are on the bar* is not the best use of their scarce law school time. Many students will be able to learn certain bar exam topics – at the level at which they are tested on the bar – during the bar preparation period, without devoting a whole semester to them; on the other hand, the opportunity to study with a top-notch professor may not come around again.

YOU CAN ALWAYS READ A BOOK ON SUBSTANCE, BUT  
CAN’T REPLICATE WHAT A DYNAMIC TEACHER WILL BRING  
TO MATERIAL. & MAYBE ONE DAY YOU’LL HAVE THIS.

Spring 2007 Term: January 29 - May 14  
Administrative Law B2  
Kagan, Elena

Elena Kagan’s administrative law class was at 8:00AM on Thursdays and Fridays in the spring semester. As you can imagine, that time slot was typically a hard sell for an elective course, particularly for third-year students like me who hoped to put law school behind them as soon as possible. Yet this course was consistently oversubscribed; 2Ls rarely had a shot at registering.

“Dean” Kagan’s class was hard. Not only did she cold-call every day of the semester, but she would stay with an individual student for a very,

very, very long time. But by spring of my 3L year, I can at least say that I faced this inevitability with a healthy mix of fear and fatalism. That is, I don't think I was appreciably more nervous than the average twenty-three-year-old faced with the prospect of suddenly – and without advance preparation – having to answer the questions of an exceptionally smart interlocutor about complicated topics in front of eighty other smart people. Based on how I started my law school career, the fact that I can no longer recall when Dean Kagan called on me, what topic(s) we discussed, or even how it felt is something I view with more pride than regret.

While the specifics of my in-class “conversation” with Dean Kagan may have faded into obscurity, I *do* remember both how it felt to be masterfully prompted to think deeply about a thorny area of the law and the joy of simply being in the presence of a great legal mind at work. And that feeling is something I hope all law students can experience.

FOURTH, IF YOU POSSIBLY CAN, DO A CLINICAL. A GOOD ONE CAN BE REMARKABLY REWARDING & MEANINGFUL – REMINDED ME OF WHY I HAD COME TO LS. /10

Refugee and Asylum Law: Clinical Workshop

I said above that I didn't really know why I had come to law school, and that's true insofar as I didn't start law school confident in the belief that it was the best – or even the right – path for me. But to the extent I *did* know why I was there, I thought, like many of my young and idealistic peers, that it was to learn about how to make a positive difference in the lives of some of my fellow humans (and by extension, the world).

The place that I actually achieved that goal while still in law school was in my work with the Harvard Immigration and Refugee Clinic. I can confidently say that some of my proudest moments in the law (as well as some of the most emotionally grueling) came as a result of that stellar clinical program.

Beyond even the personally rewarding aspects of clinical courses and the hands-on training they offer, these experiences can have critical

professional benefits. For many students, even some of those who know exactly why they are there (read: their intrinsic motivation), law *school* isn't a natural fit. Many of these student extrapolate, for lack of any information to the contrary, that this painful experience does not bode well for their future in law *practice*. But in many schools, the two have shockingly little to do with one another. For students disappointed by the reality of their law school experience, or for those who find themselves questioning their previous certainty that law is the right path for them, I find that clinical work – under the supportive guidance of an expert attorney and teacher – is remarkably effective at reminding students what awaits them *after* graduation, which they often find much more enjoyable and more meaningful. And that's important.

FINALLY: DON'T LET ANYBODY TALK YOU OUT OF  
TAKING THE "LAW AND X" CLASS THAT YOU'VE BEEN  
DROOLING OVER FOR YEARS. /FIN.

Law and Literature: Seminar

For the vast majority of law students, 3L year is their last chance to formally be a student anywhere. While I am a strong advocate of classes that teach practical skills, I'm also all for those that indulge a student's particular passion, even if it bears no relation to any practical legal skill at all, because when else will they be able to sit in a classroom among a collection of smart people and discuss interesting ideas for pleasure?

In my case, I had always loved literature (I would probably have been an English major, but see above re: disowning). Taking a class that allowed me to explore difficult legal and moral questions in the context of literary and dramatic works was an important way to pleasantly cap off my law school experience and make up for being force-fed law-and-economics theories of torts and contracts during my 1L year while I really wanted to yell "but what about *justice*?!" (Yes, yes, I know.) Yet for other students, a small seminar on law-and-economics would have been the

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ultimate reward. The specific content doesn't matter. Students should select at least one class based on its potential to bring them joy. Because if not now, when?

