

Tips for First Year Women Law Students

....you can come to law school for any reason, and you can be interested in any field of law!

There are women who are here because they want to

- (a) save the world
- (b) change the world
- (c) live comfortably in the world
- (d) rule the world
- (e) all of the above

There are women who are here because they want an income sufficient to support their:

- (a) children
- (b) ultimate frisbee dreams
- (c) future literary careers
- (d) student debt load
- (e) all of the above

There are women who are here because the law once touched their lives and

- (a) it inspired them
- (b) it made them angry
- (c) it made them feel lost
- (d) it made them feel powerful
- (e) it made them feel safe
- (f) it did all or none of the above

There are women here who view law school as

- (a) a training ground for a respectable profession
- (b) a scholarly endeavour
- (c) something to do when an earlier career proves unsatisfactory
- (d) an enclave of world-shaking activists

There are women who are here because they want to practice any or all of

- (a) Aboriginal Law
- (b) Administrative Law
- (c) Commercial Law
- (d) Competition Law
- (e) Constitutional Law
- (f) Corporate Law
- (g) Criminal Law
- (h) Entertainment and Media Law
- (i) Environmental Law
- (j) Family Law
- (k) Health Law
- (l) Human Rights Law
- (m) Immigration and Refugee Law
- (n) Insolvency Law
- (o) Insurance Law
- (p) Intellectual Property Law
- (q) International Law
- (r) Labour Law
- (s) Marine Law
- (t) No law at all
- (u) Poverty Law
- (v) Public Law

- (w) Real Estate Law
- (x) Sports Law
- (y) Tax Law
- (z) Trusts & Succession Law
- (*) Women's Law

NOTE: You are in first year and need not decide this today.

.....you can make law school fit your life and who you are. You don't have to fit your life and who you are into law school.

Not every law student is a 25-year-old guy, likes beer and corporate law, and has enough free time to pull all-night study sessions (although if you are any or all of those things, there is no shortage of things for you to do in the law school culture). There are some strategic actions that you can take if you find that law school as it currently exists isn't a perfect fit:

1) Find a study group you like. Who you study with and how you study can make a big difference in your enjoyment of course work and your ability to meet your own academic goals. There are a lot of factors that make a successful study group, including the dynamics of your relationship with other people in the group, and how well you match in terms of time available for studying, skills (i.e. really good at making hand-outs, strong at explaining concepts out loud, listening to others), and personality traits (i.e. assertiveness, shyness, ego, etc.). And if your study group can accomplish the following things, you're well on your way:

- Everyone can understand and articulate the key concepts in the course.
- Everyone has a full outline or set of annotated notes for the entire course.
- Everyone still feels comfortable and content in the company of the group.

You can (and should) also study on your own. But having a supportive group against which to check your own comprehension is a really essential way of getting through first year law.

2) Find a social space that you like. There are many different social currents in a law school as large as UBC. Extra-curricular activities are the usual way of finding students (and sometimes professors) who share similar values, make you feel welcome, give you a place to vent frustrations when you need it, and can keep you grounded in a challenging year. Time commitments are up to you and often organizations or clubs that have ongoing work also provide drop-in style events, such as guest speakers, open houses, dinner, etc. Your network expands the longer you're at law school, and you will have lots of opportunities to link up with future friends and colleagues. In the meantime, seek out the people who make you feel glad to be at UBC Law.

3) Get to know the flexible aspects of law school. Your ability to make a flexible education increases in upper years, when there are fewer required courses. There are options about how you structure your education: full-time/part-time, reduced or increased course loads, specialized course streams, and taking required/recommended/interest courses or pass/fail options.

4) Troubled? Disturbed? Frustrated? If you have concerns about something or someone you have encountered, in your classes or in the school, there are formal and informal channels for dealing with them. Formal channels for complaints include: Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Law Students Association Ombudsperson. Or seek advice from the university Equity Office. Informal channels for concerns can include: seeking the advice of a professor you like and trust, asking other students for their thoughts, or speaking out in student-focused publications such as *The Legal Eye* or the CFLS newsletter.

5) Keep an eye on the underlying values. There is an element of competition built into many aspects of law school: how we get in, how we are evaluated, how we eventually get jobs. It certainly isn't value-free competition, and is to a large degree based on one's ability to write final examinations. It is important to remember that, in first year, the only examinations that count significantly for your transcript are written in April. You will have had eight months to get used to the culture of law school, to try out different ways of articulating legal principles (including practice exams in December), to develop your studying skills, and to manage your time. As well, first year is only one of three years spent getting your degree, and the rules that guide your education change in the upper years when you can choose what subjects you study and seek out the methods of teaching and evaluation that will do the most for you. Finally, images of law students wearing suits at all times, hiding library books and giving false information to other students, although occasionally based on true incidents, are not typical of how first year students act. Work collaboratively, have fun, and be nice – lots of others will be doing the same. Overall, competition is not what it first appears to be.

In the same way, a lot of other concepts that you will meet early on are complicated, and are worth considering critically: the sources of Canada's legal system, the idea of legal practice and what a lawyer does, and notions about what kind of backgrounds, skills and identities that law students bring with them to school. Students have different levels of critical understanding, different motivations for going to law school, and different ideas about how deeply they want to participate in the law school environment. It's tricky. It isn't always comfortable. And you may get the impression from being in the school that everyone is of a single view or perspective, but it becomes apparent over time that this is simply not the case. In the end, how much you want to challenge others, or yourself, is up to you. Don't forget your own principles and goals. As you go through law school, you will likely discover many students who see things your way.

6) Accept or reject all advice as you see fit. As is obvious here, lots of people involved in legal education have formed their own impressions about the best way to navigate through law school. You will get a lot of advice, invited or otherwise, and it might not all ring true for you. It's ultimately up to you how much of it you take seriously, and how much any suggestion is in line with the pace and the goals you want to set for yourself.

.....women are a fundamentally important part of the law school....

A generation ago, there were far fewer women in the law school than men. Now, women are more than 50% of the law school population at UBC, and at most other law schools in Canada. A lot of women means a lot of different kinds of women, and at a school the size of UBC, there is a niche where all of them can feel affirmed, challenged and engaged.

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