Steven Foster: Did you hear a rumor about a law school grading curve, or the special style to write your exams? When worried, did you endlessly read Reddit, and then get more worried? Great news. A team of us are here to bust some of those myths you will hear about law school.

I'm Steven Foster, the Director of Academic Achievement at Oklahoma City University School of Law, and I am joined by a team of academic support professionals with over fifty years of experience, including, Nicole Lefton, Laura Mott, and Melissa Hale.

Let's begin with our first statement. The statement is: you have to be a genius to do well in law school. I'm going to turn it over to Laura to see whether or not that's a myth.

Laura Mott: Thanks, Steven. The reality is, there is really no one mold of a successful law student. Law school, quote unquote success, has much more to do with how deeply you engage with the material and with the process of the law school experience itself than it does have to do with the static—and often subjective or contextualized—measurement of intelligence that is outside of the context of legal learning.

There's really no one characteristic that can tell you whether you're going to do well in law school or not. It's good to recognize certain things; perhaps you love to argue, or perhaps you're an amazing researcher. Perhaps you love to write. It's good to recognize those certain things in your experience and personality that might be beneficial in law school, but not having something does not immediately equal not doing well, just like having something doesn't immediately equal doing well.

Steven Foster: Thank you, Laura, for tackling that first statement. The second statement is: first semester grades determine where you will work after graduation. I'll tackle this one.

Absolutely a myth. The vast majority of law students get their first full-time job later in law school. Most years, the national average is eighty-five to ninety percent of law school graduates have a job within nine months of graduation. Your first semester is not going to put you every single time at the top of the class. So, everyone or the vast majority of them, are getting jobs even when they're not at the top of the class. So the first semester grades aren't going to determine the entirety of your legal career. People in the bottom of the class are still going to get jobs.

Here's what I want to tell you, though, is the key when you don't have the first semester grades that you want, is to continue to work hard and improve, and continue to make connections with people in areas that you want to practice. The relationships you make will have a more likely chance of helping you get a job than just grades alone.

And the other thing: if you can show people you're interviewing with a constant work ethic where there's improvement over a period of time, they're going to want you at their firm because they don't want someone who stayed the same lawyer the minute they got out of law school for five years. They want someone who can continue to work hard and get better and become the lawyer in four, five, and ten years, that's going to be beneficial to their firm. So don't worry. Your first semester grades are not going to be what determines your entirety of your legal career.

Our next statement is: In law school, you have no time to eat, shower, see friends, or have any sort of personal life. I'll turn it over to Melissa to address this statement.

Melissa Hale: Thanks, Steven. This is one of my favorites+ because it's mostly a myth. There's maybe five percent of truth there. The five percent of truth is that law school is intense and time consuming, and it might be that you're putting in more time to study than you have in prior programs. However, you still need to find balance and take time for yourself.

First of all, you still need to shower. Like that's just a gift to your classmates and your professor. But, more importantly, you need to make sure you're taking time for yourself. While this might sound indulgent, it's not. Take time to eat well, take time to sleep. This doesn't mean that you start a brand new fitness or health kick regime or never eat pizza—one of the best perks of law school is free pizza at events. It does mean that you should make sure you're eating full meals and not just snacks, and it means that you are not pulling all-nighters. Law school is not the time for all-nighters. It's a marathon, not a sprint.

Why is this important? It's important for your physical health, obviously, but also because if you're running on too little sleep or too little food, your brain is just not processing the information, and that's not great for your grades.

Similarly, if you get sick—you get a cold, the flu, these things happen—don't try to push through. Let your body heal, take the rest you need. This will actually help with your studying long term. It feels like you don't have time to take that break, but remind yourself that you really do.

And finally, taking time to see friends, family, go for a run, do things that make you you and help alleviate stress and anxiety, is so important. I don't just say this from a place of concern for you as people, but you will have a better time with grades and processing information if you do have those boundaries and have that balance.

Steven Foster: Thank you, Melissa, for tackling that one. Our next statement is: each exam or legal writing structure acronym is super different, and will lead to drastically different results for your grade, and you must figure out what your professor wants and only write in that way. I'm going to turn it over to Laura to attack this one.

Laura Mott: Thank you, Steven. In reality, all of these acronyms have the same basic structure. They're made of the same basic component parts, whether it be IRAC, CRAC, CIRAC…whatever it is, the legal issue, the rule, your analysis, and the conclusion, is really the basic structure of all legal writing tasks. Whether it be exams first year or second year, whether it be memos that you're writing for your legal writing courses, briefs, et cetera, et cetera.

There's definitely room to add things to this main structure based on the class you're in—based on the class coverage—but the main structure never changes. Take a listen to Nicole Lefton’s podcast on the same issue for more detail.

Steven Foster: Thank you, Laura. That is awesome. Our next statement is: if you're in the bottom half of the class, you don't have a chance of getting a job. I'm going to turn this one over to Nicole to get her answer.

Nicole Lefton: Well, first of all, we know that cannot be true, because half of you are going to be in the bottom half of the class. While it's certainly harder when you're not ranked at the top of the class, it arguably does not mean that you have absolutely no chance of landing that great job. What I tell my students to do is to think about areas where you can differentiate yourself—skills that you have, talents that you have, interests that you have, that set you apart from the pack—and really try to push those in your interviewing and in your job search in general.

One good example I like to give is, I had a student several years ago who was in my office, basically saying, you know he was ranked toward the bottom of the class, and that he was never going to be able to land a job and wasting all his time in law school and all this money. And I said to him, “You know, there must be something that sets you apart. Do you have any skills at all, any interests?” Going on and on and on. And finally, I said, “Do you speak another language?” And he said, “I'm fluent in French.” Well, literally that same day, I heard from somebody else here that they were looking for a native French speaker to take part in an internship. One thing led to the other. The student ended up participating in the internship, which led to a job, which led to a whole career.

Obviously a wonderful success story, but it shows you there are things that make us all different, that make us all interesting and unique, and as we say in general in life, there's a lid for every pot. Think about what sets you apart, and see how you can parlay that into a career that's right for you.

Steven Foster: Thank you, Nicole. That is great advice. Everyone absolutely has that opportunity to differentiate themselves. Our next statement is: professors are mean and unapproachable. We should never go to their office hours, because there's going to be a Socratic method in the chair right in front of you. Or, you didn't do well in answering their questions in class, so they don't really want you to come to their office. Melissa is going to tackle those statements.

Melissa Hale: Thank you, Steven. I hear this from especially first-semester students all the time. They're nervous about going to see their professors, and they're also nervous about class and being called on, thinking that if they get the wrong answer they're going to disappoint their professors.

Melissa Hale: First of all, there's always going to be a few grumpy gusses. That's true in every profession. It's down to personality traits. But for the most part, professors want you to ask questions. They want you to go to their office hours. They want you to learn, and it's their job to teach you.

So, first of all, we do have a lesson on how to talk to your professor by Nicole Lefton. But I want you to just really realize that in approaching your professors, this is their job. They set up office hours, and there's an expectation that you will come and see them. It's often a lot less formal than class, a good opportunity to know your professor as a person and get some individual questions answered, and just kind of see them when they're not in the front of the room.

As for class, everyone's going to get something wrong at some point. Everyone. The professor, when they took classes in law school, got something wrong. They know this. It's your job to come to class to learn, not to know everything. And they are prepared for this. They know you're going to get things wrong, and they're not judging you. They're not keeping track of who gets things wrong and kind of holding that over you.

So just importantly, remember that they are people, and they are people that are invested in your success and want to answer your questions.

Steven Foster: Thank you, Melissa. They absolutely look far scarier in class than they do in their office. So our last question is: you are good at arguing, so you will do well in law school.

I'm going to tackle this one, and I will say, somewhat true, somewhat a myth. Everyone in law school is good at arguing. You probably were good at advocacy and arguing in undergrad, and that might be the foundation for success in law school. But I said everyone in law school is good at arguing, and so, you are sitting in a room full of people that are all, for the most part, good at advocacy. And so, there is going to need to be more to be successful in law school.

I also don't like this statement because it assumes that law school, and arguing, is just a trait that you're given, and that you just are handed and born with, and not something that you earn through hard work. There is a great CALI Lesson on metacognition, and there's a lot of really good information out there about growth mindset.

Arguing, being good at law school, advocacy—all of those things are skills that can be improved and built that if you work on you can get better. And, we know that, because, people get better grades as they go through law school; that the grades you get the very first time aren't the grades that you're going to get in your very last semester, and that what we do is a skill that we improve that. You also know that, because, the person who walks out of law school as an attorney, if they don't get better, they're not going to be an attorney for long, or at least no one's going to hire them. Because you have to get better as you go through the practice.

So, being good at arguing—that's awesome. That means you have the foundation to be a good advocate. That does not necessarily mean that you're going to be a great law student, because preparation, hard work, improvement, going to your professors and asking for feedback—all of that—is what actually leads to success in law school.

Look at everyone around you. They're all good at arguing. You're going to have to put in the time to make sure that success is what happens in the end.

I want to say thank you to all of our guest speakers today. Nicole and Laura and Melissa tackled these myths that we have heard for many years, that we've had students sit in our office and say these exact things. And we know that many of you have those questions. We want to give you at least some of truth to them, but then tell you that most of them are myths, and that it is up to you. You have the ability to choose success, and hard work, and to still have some good work life balance, as Melissa said, to be successful in law school, and to be a great attorney. I encourage you to refer to the lessons and the other podcasts that we referenced, and good luck in law school.

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