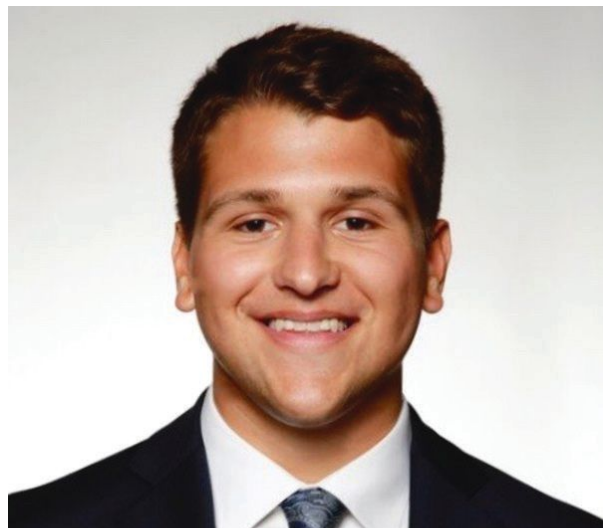


COVID-19's Effect on Law Students

By Spencer Miller



Schools across the country have moved classes online in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some schools have even transitioned to pass/fail grading systems to alleviate pressure for students who are dealing with bigger problems. This article summarizes a few challenges unique to the law school experience and advocates for a pass/fail grading system.

Many 1Ls are wondering: how will I improve my first-semester grades if classes become pass/fail? How can law

review base acceptance on pass/fail grades? 2Ls might add: how am I supposed to complete my clinic hours? What about my internship credits? Most importantly, many 3Ls are thinking: how will I get hired during this crisis? What does this mean for the bar exam?

In fact, bar exam issues transcend all classes. It is difficult for law schools to track independent learning at home, which implicates concerns for doctrinal courses. A 3L may be able to coast through electives, but can law schools expect the majority of 1Ls to learn torts and contracts online? Virtual exams may also introduce academic integrity concerns for some students. To members of the legal community, these topics probably just trigger unpleasant flashbacks and cold sweats. Unfortunately, students now have to overcome the arduous requirements of law school with added challenges.

This article is not meant to suggest law students are unduly affected by the spread of COVID-19. Everyone is living through the same pandemic. Rather, this article recognizes that COVID-19 pushes the rigor inherent to law school to new levels. And given the competition that characterizes much of law school, it follows that many students (and faculty) are contentiously debating a pass/fail grading system. Some individuals have become fiercely protective of traditional letter grades, which neatly translate to GPA points. Others, however, believe that a pass/fail grading system is understanding of the hardships that COVID-19 is forcing upon many students. There is also a spectrum of

options between traditional grading and a pass/fail system.

Hardships extend beyond illness to include complications that “unlevel the playing field.” For example, one of my classmates is a mother of six children. COVID-19 adds layers of complexity to her law school journey, and her support system is limited due to social distancing. We now hold our group meetings at 9:00 p.m., after her children go to sleep. The situation is not ideal, but we make it work because COVID-19 is affecting people in different ways. Some law schools also condition scholarships on academic performance, which presents additional concerns. A pass/fail system benefits people like my classmate and others who are facing different priorities at the moment.

Law schools are understandably hesitant to shift grading systems because they serve both internal and external purposes. But as society operates at its lowest common denominator during this complicated time, it seems unreasonable for law schools to maintain traditional grades. From an employment perspective, perhaps this is an opportunity for the legal community to ensure its patience with law schools and students alike. The gravity of COVID-19 certainly warrants mutual compassion.

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CORONAVIRUS RESPONSE - REMOTE WORKING WELLNESS

Mindfulness and the Ways It Can Help Ease Our Suffering in the Midst of a Pandemic

By Courtney Schulnick



Mindfulness is defined as paying attention on purpose in the present moment nonjudgmentally. Given the fast-paced world that we live in, we often find ourselves in what

is referred to as “autopilot mode,” constantly doing and never taking time to simply pause and check in with ourselves. Living this way—totally unaware that we have gotten lost in the past or have been worrying about the future—can lead us to burnout.

Attorneys are particularly well-suited for mindfulness because as problem-solvers, we are so accustomed to forward and backward-thinking that it becomes very challenging for us to focus on the present moment. Whether on the lookout for legal issues or reflecting on past cases to guide us in what to do (or not do) in our current cases, we often fail to appreciate the importance in just taking time to be in this moment. Additionally, as zealous advocates for our clients, it is so commonplace for us to sweep our own emotions under the carpet out of concern that if we expose our own fears and worries to others, we might be perceived as weak or incompetent by our clients, adversaries, and even our colleagues. As a result, we tend to internalize our feelings. When we internalize our feelings, we carry around arousal in our bodies, both in the form of stress hormones, as well as in the form of agitated thoughts and emotions.

Now, if we add having to deal with a pandemic to

the underlying factors noted above, it makes perfect sense that we may be feeling extraordinarily overwhelmed and incredibly challenged to just “be” in the moment. We may be worrying about our physical and financial wellbeing, as well as the safety of our loved ones. While it is very natural to feel fear and anxiety during a time of uncertainty, there are ways in which mindfulness can help us to anchor to the “here and now” so that we can lessen our suffering.

A regular practice of mindfulness meditation strengthens our ability to be in the present moment, even if the circumstances are less than ideal and not what we wish for them to be, because we learn ways to more skillfully deal with stressful situations. We become more resilient to what is and gain the ability to recognize when we are lost in thought or are catastrophizing situations. This awareness allows us to foster greater care towards ourselves and others and, in turn, better serve the needs of our clients.

To learn more about my mindfulness programs that are being offered via Zoom, please visit www.courtneyschulnickmindfulness.com or call me at (856) 261-8875.