What’s Inside?

- How to prepare for law school
- What to expect your first semester
- A primer on the Socratic Method
- What to do before class, during class and after class
- Resources available at ONU Law
- A list of what NOT to do in your first year of law school

The first year of law school is both exciting and frightening. The faculty and staff at ONU Law want you to not only survive in law school, but thrive. To that end, we have developed this guide to provide practical information and advice on how to prepare for and transition into your first year of law school. We hope you find the included information helpful.
HOW TO PREPARE FOR LAW SCHOOL:

Over the Summer-

1. Familiarize yourself with the law school process & environment:
   - **HOW?** Read blogs, ask to speak with a first-year law professor, and/or talk to other law students or recent alumni about what to expect.
   - **WHY?** The more you familiarize yourself with the process & environment, the less stressed you will be as the school year approaches.
     - Helpful books:
       - NOTE: You do not need to read all of the foregoing books, but should look at least one or two of them for guidance before you come to school, and then use them throughout your first year as needed.

2. Take care of the basics:
   - Secure living arrangements (on or off-campus housing) and move in at least a few days before orientation.
   - Figure out your way around the area – grocery stores, banks, etc…
   - Check out the school itself and familiarize yourself with its layout – library, classrooms, study rooms, etc.
   - Make sure your computer is in working condition & has the necessary software to draft and save documents. Your law school email account will be Gmail based, so learning to use Google Drive would be a wise endeavor for easy saving and sharing of documents.

3. Develop a “big picture” understanding of core first-year subjects:
   - Be careful, this does NOT mean you should try to teach yourself the core subjects. Trying to learn from commercially prepared materials before the start of school will likely do more harm than good. Instead, try to familiarize
yourself with the general subject area by reading the general course descriptions on the ONU Law website.

• Every 1L takes the same classes during the first year, which are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fall Semester</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Procedure I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J-Term (during the month of January only)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spring Semester</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil Procedure II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Week Before Orientation-

• Get your Fall class schedule and book list as soon as it is available. Buy your books so that you can have them before law school orientation begins.

• Get your first day reading assignments and complete them before your first class:
  • Most 1L professors will have a reading assignment for you to complete in advance of the first class. It will be your responsibility to find and complete it before you show up to class.
  • Do not worry, you will be taught the nuts & bolts of how to brief a case during orientation. If you would like to get a jump-start on this, the following are helpful skill summaries:

• Develop a Study Schedule. A rule of thumb is to spend 2-3 hours of outside study time for every 1 hour of class. All together, this equates to approximately 60 hours a week of class and study time—a full-time job with some overtime. Put the time in, but do it in a predictable and orderly way, building in personal time and breaks.
**The First Day of Class**

- Do not expect an introduction or to be eased into the semester. Rather, you should be prepared to hit the ground running on the Day 1—**you might even be called on to answer questions about the reading during your very first class, so be prepared!**
  - See this Guide for more information on the Socratic Method.

**WHAT TO EXPECT FIRST SEMESTER:**

- **Reading.** Do not worry if the reading takes you a long time to complete during the first few weeks of classes—the material and terminology are foreign, and it will take some time to get familiar with the concepts & lingo.

- **Graded Assignments.** You will **not** have many graded assignments before the final exam at the end of the semester in most of your classes. Exceptions to this general rule are the assignments due in your Legal Research & Writing (“LRW”) class, and a possible mid-term in one of your substantive law courses.

- **Outlining.** After the first two weeks of class, you will need to set aside time in your study schedule to start preparing and compiling a summary study document (also known as an outline) for each of your substantive law classes.
  - See the Outlining section of this Guide for more information

- **Keeping up with new material while reviewing the old.** Although you should definitely not get behind on your reading and preparation for classes, you will need to start carving out time in your schedule to not only outline, but to also review the materials from the beginning of the semester and to test your understanding/knowledge with some practice problems. Weekends can be a good time for this.

- **TA Sessions.** Professor sanctioned TA sessions (with upper-level law students) will be held throughout the semester. You should plan to attend each one, because helpful tips are given, necessary review is incorporated, and old exams are often shared.

- **Final Exams.** Normally, you will be given a few days off before your first final exam at the end of the semester. These are called “reading days.” They are designed to allow time to prepare for final exams.
  - **Caution:** “Reading days” are not enough time for you to create an outline and study for the entire course. Rather, “reading days” should be used for reviewing your outlines and doing practice essays/problems.
You will never know for sure what issue(s) you professor will test nor will you know exactly the facts that will be presented in the final; however, by doing practice questions, you will be better prepared to answer questions involving similar legal issues on the exam.

Law school exams do not require you to repeat class discussion verbatim, list case cites from memory, or repeat the facts of every case you read....so do not memorize each and every detail of the cases covered in class.

Law school exams do test your understanding of the rule of law or doctrine that emerged from the cases, and your ability to apply that rule to a new set of facts.

This is very different from undergrad exams, which mostly test comprehension and memorization.

Do not worry: You will be introduced to essential exam taking skills in your Fall Legal Methods course.

THE SOCRATIC METHOD:

- The Socratic method is an integral part of the law school experience
  - What is the “Socratic” method?
    - The Socratic method uses questions to examine a student’s understanding of the assigned reading, and to ultimately flesh out the legal issues, rules and relevant facts that emerge from the cases examined. The Socratic inquiry is emphatically not “teaching” in the conventional sense of the word. The law school professor is not the purveyor of knowledge, filling the minds of largely passive students with facts and truths.
    - Rather, most law school professors will utilize a shared dialogue in class wherein the professor calls on one student at at time, asking probing questions about the assigned reading. The inquiry progresses interactively. The student is rarely told whether their answers were right or wrong.
  - Most frustrating about the Socratic method is that regardless of how hard you try, it seems almost impossible to perfectly respond to the professor’s questions: this is normal because there is rarely just one perfect answer to any question in law school.
    - Instead of looking for one right answer, the professor wants you to consider alternative ideas and points of view.
• You will learn there might not be an absolute answer to every question, and even if there is, your professor will be more concerned with getting you to show the process utilized in arriving at that answer, rather than the answer itself.

  o The whole point of the method is to get you to “think like a lawyer” = to think analytically = to look at an idea from every angle and to consider the pros and cons of each possible outcome.

  • Therefore, while your answers to the questions are important, the professor is more concerned with the “why” behind it and getting you to explore and explain the “why” behind the answer.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE CLASS TO PREPARE:

- Read & brief each assigned case:
  - There will be a workshop during orientation that will focus on how to brief cases. In brief, you should prepare a summary sheet that includes the following info, at minimum, about the case:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What to Include</th>
<th>Brief Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Case Caption (Title &amp; Citation)</td>
<td>case name, the court that decided it, the year it was decided, and the page on which it appears in the casebook.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facts</td>
<td>what actually happened; the controversy. This section is necessary because legal principles are defined by the situations in which they arise. Include in your brief only those facts that are legally relevant. A fact is legally relevant if it had an impact on the case’s outcome (i.e. relevant facts are facts that would change the outcome of the case if they were missing). In contrast, background facts help the reader understand the context of the dispute.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural History</td>
<td>what events within the court system led to the present case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issue/s</td>
<td>what is in dispute. the issue is really the legal rule of the case with the key facts of the case embedded in it and phrased as a question.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holding</td>
<td>how the court decided the issue/s. can be a simple yes/no outcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rule</td>
<td>what is the legal rule, test or doctrine that emerged?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale/Reasoning</td>
<td>summary of the reasons for the holding/s.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

  - If you are a visual learner, try to create charts or decision trees ahead of time
- **Look at the notes and questions section in the casebook** that typically follow the case.
  - Sometimes this section focuses on the important issues involved in the cases, and it is usually a good source to use in preparing for what your professor might focus on in class.
- **Look up unfamiliar concepts and terminology before class.** You can use a Black’s Law dictionary or utilize CALI lessons from [https://www.cali.org/](https://www.cali.org/) *(OUN has a subscription each student can use for free)* for help if you do not understand something.
- **Review what you covered in the previous class.**

**WHAT TO DO IN CLASS:**
- Be prepared to hand-write your notes *(several professors do not allow laptops...they will advise you of their individual policy in class)*.
- Listen, write down key concepts and hypo summaries. Do not be a stenographer, because you cannot write & listen at the same time.
- Use margins for follow-up notes (i.e. notes your questions with “?’s”, etc.)
- Pay attention to repetition and emphasis: highlight items the professor noted to be important.
- Do not “check out” if you do not happen to get called on:
  - Be actively listening and thinking about how you would answer if you were the one being questioned.

**A brief note on Hypotheticals**
- Once dissecting a case is finished – your professor will usually want to see whether you truly understood the rationale underlying the court’s decision.
  - To do this, the professor will change up the facts from the recent case you discussed and then ask you to determine whether this new fact pattern leads to a different conclusion
    - It is not the conclusion that is important, but rather the process you used and the reasoning behind your answer that the professor is attempting to get you to explain.

**WHAT TO DO AFTER CLASS.**
- Go over notes right after class & do clean up [i.e. fix any mistakes from case brief, fill in blanks if you zoned out, test yourself on a hypo to make sure you understand].
Resources available at ONU Law:

- **Academic Support**
  o The Academic Support team provides peer mentoring (Teaching Assistants) for the first year classes, skill workshops, and also offers its own class (Legal Methods) during the first semester to help with study skills, outlining, exam preparation, and time management.
  o At ONU – 2 full-time professors:
    ▪ Director Nancy Sabol
    ▪ Coordinator Katie Kramer

- **Professors**
  o After trying to figure out the material on your own, through your casebook, class notes, outside sources, if you are still confused about a particular case or issue, you should make an appointment to talk to your professor
    ▪ They are the ones that are going to test you and grade you at the end of the class, so they are the best source for you in clearing up any confusion/uncertainty
  o Plus, your professors want to get to know you and the more they get to know you, the more helpful they can be in the future, whether it is working as their research assistant or writing you a letter of recommendation

- **Library Staff**
  o ONU has a dedicated team of professionals (many of them lawyers) who can aid in your legal research and lead you to other helpful resources. They are incredibly user-friendly, so take advantage!

**Words of Wisdom:**

- Treat law school like a job – get to school early, study and go to class – go home at a decent hour to wind down for the day so you can physically and mentally do it all over again the next day.
- Take your responsibilities in law school seriously, but don’t forget that you need to find a balance in your life while you are at law school. It is a marathon, not a sprint.
  o You need to consider your needs as a student and as a non-student and use your time wisely to fulfill those needs – whether it requires you to spend more time at school or more time with family.
    ▪ Therefore, be honest with yourself about what you want out of your time in school and prioritize your time accordingly.
- Faculty and staff are here to help you succeed – whether it is in class, finding internships/externships, finding a job, etc… So don’t be afraid of them. They can be a great resource.
- It is hard to keep up with all of the work that is expected throughout the semester, but try your very best to stay on top of things, because it is even worse (if not impossible) to cram all of that work in at the very end of the semester right before you take your exams.
  o Law school exams are by themselves very stressful, so the last thing you want to do is add even more unnecessary stress to your life because you waited until the last minute to do the work you should have been doing all throughout the semester.
    ▪ This is why time management and prioritizing is so important – which are skills that you need to master before you practice law.
- You are not alone – everyone, even if they do not admit it, is experiencing the same feelings of uncertainty and insecurity as you are. You are in good company. Study groups and other peer activities are very helpful in the first year.

What NOT to do when you come to law school. Do NOT:

● Skip class
● Wait to outline
● Refuse to make or stick to a study-schedule
● Wait until the final exam to write your first practice essay
● Procrastinate
● Skip reading the directions/instructions
● Over-rely on other students
● Over-rely on internet and commercial study aids
● Plagiarize
● Refuse to ask for help
Now for Some Fun: A Little Binge-Watching

Distract yourself from the anxiety of waiting for law school to begin with these 5 shows. The law impacts everything around us, including television. The following shows feature a wide spectrum of the profession and how it affects people in different ways. Be sure to check these shows out while you still have spare time!

**Making a Murderer (Netflix)**

*Making a Murderer* tells the story of Steven Avery, who was exonerated by DNA evidence in 2003 after serving 18 years in prison for sexual assault and attempted murder. Avery was again arrested in 2005 for the murder of a local photographer, a crime of which he was later convicted in 2007. This docu-series follows Avery’s story, allowing you to analyze the evidence and come to your own conclusion.

**The People v. O. J. Simpson: American Crime Story (FX)**

*The People v. O. J. Simpson: American Crime Story* tells the story of one of the most closely watched American court cases of the 20th Century. The 10-episode series details behind-the-scenes dealing and maneuvering by both the prosecution and defense as they try to convince the jury to side with them in what was dubbed “the trial of the century.” This limited series tells the story from the unique perspective of the lawyers involved in the case. You think you know the story, but you’ll be at the edge of your seat from beginning to end.

**How to Get Away with Murder (ABC)**

If you haven’t gotten hooked to a Shondaland show, you’re really missing out. *How to Get Away with Murder* follows the story of Annalise Keating, a law professor at Philadelphia University, and a group of her students who become embroiled in a murder plot that will change their lives forever. It is the only show on this list that actually takes place during law school.

**Better Call Saul (AMC)**

A spin-off from the popular *Breaking Bad*, *Better Call Saul* chronicles the life of attorney Saul Goodman six years before he represents the infamous Walter White. In the show, Saul, then known as Jimmy McGill, is a new lawyer trying to make a name for himself. Through each episode, we get an inside look at how Jimmy McGill transformed into the corrupt Saul Goodman.

**The Good Wife (CBS)**

*The Good Wife* follows the struggles of Alicia Florrick, a former stay-at-home mom who returns to private practice after revelations of her husband’s sex scandal and involvement in a political corruption scheme.

*Credit to Emily Mermell at [http://lawpreview.barbri.com/5-binge-worthy-shows-you-should-watch](http://lawpreview.barbri.com/5-binge-worthy-shows-you-should-watch)*