

May 1996

**SAPLA NEWSLETTER -- MAY 1996****PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

I wish to inform all that the credit and "attaboys" for the new and improved *Newsletter* should change to "attagirls." Thanks and "kudos" to Melanie Nutt and her capable assistant Janet Cromer. Of course, we must also recognize the great job of our Past President David Mann. Without David's strong push for this improvement it would not have happened. Fantastic job folks!

Though the 1995-96 Candidate Referral Service (CRS) year doesn't end until August, the numbers to date are interesting. The number of search requests from 171 law schools has already exceed the 1,341 requests made in 1994/95. This isn't surprising since this year's applicant volume and LSAT test taking is a year of significant decline. October LSAT volume was down 10%, December volume was down 8.3%, and February 1996 shows a drop of 18.4%. Some of my advisees are being admitted to schools they wouldn't have gotten into in the recent past, more are being admitted sooner and two have been admitted that might not have been admitted anywhere just 3 or 4 years ago. If you're experiencing the same trend, let me know in Orlando or call or write if you can't make it to Orlando.

**CAN'T MAKE IT TO ORLANDO? ARE YOU NUTS?!** Melanie was born a Nutt-- what's your excuse? Seriously folks, this upcoming PLANC Conference June 2-4 in Orlando, FL will be the classiest, most informative and most fun gathering in our history. The professional planning is truly awesome. If you haven't registered as yet, please do so. The "networking" alone will make it very worthwhile. I can't imagine getting more bank for your buck. If you think a letter to your Dean would help let me know. Also, note the six (6) two hundred dollar grants available from PLANC and SAPLA described elsewhere herein. Let's take Pre-Law Advising to a new level. After all, if you're not the lead dog the scenery never changes!!

See 'ya in Orlando.

Joe G. Chaney, Jr.  
President, SAPLA

T H I N K   F L O R I D A ! ! !

**What is Pre-Law Advising All About?**

by Gerald Lee Wilson, Duke University

*Editor's note: This article is reproduced from the SAPLA Handbook for Pre-Law Advisors, available to all dues-paying members. It is reproduced here as an enticement and because the editor can think of nothing better to offer.*

No seven or ten or sixteen year old, when asked, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" has probably ever said, "I want to be a pre-law advisor." For this matter probably no thirty year old being interviewed for a faculty or staff position volunteers or even knows anything about pre-law advising. But, the mere fact that the reader has read this far indicates that the responsibility has been accepted.

The PLANC (Pre-Law Advisor's National Council) statement on "The Role and Responsibilities of Pre-Law Advisors" defines pre-law advising as "a specialized function encompassing both personal counseling and career counseling." The statement, prepared by experienced pre-law advisors, continues, "The pre-law advisor is called upon to know both the individual being counseled and the educational and career possibilities within the legal profession." This definition is certainly cogent and accurate but it raises questions rather than answering them for the newly appointed or drafted or perhaps shanghaied pre-law advisor. The bottom line question is, "what is pre-law advising all about and why do we bother to do it?"

**What's New!**

*SAPLA Fall Meeting:*

[October 5th - 7th  
St. Thomas Law School  
Miami, FL](#)

*Advising Resources:*

[Financial Aid Toolkit](#)

*Paul Weber Memoriam*

[A Memoriam to Paul Weber: Teacher, Scholar, Leader](#)

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The second half of the question is easier to deal with and can be broken down into two parts. First, institutions establish pre-law advising programs as part of their total personal and career guidance services. In many cases, pre-law advising programs have come into being either as a result of student demand or from an institutional sense of obligation, or both. Recent studies have suggested that the major concern of parents when their sons or daughters are choosing a college or university is job opportunities and/or graduate or professional school opportunities after graduation. Second, as the necessity and value of pre-law advising has become more apparent over the past few years and as more assistance to the pre-law advisor has become available in terms of publications and professional organizations, the position of pre-law advisor has, in many cases, moved from being an assignment for the most junior member of a department or group who dares not refuse, to a responsibility which is recognized as a valuable, interesting and challenging task.

The question of "What is pre-law advising all about?" is again one which has been addressed by the PLANC statement on "The Role and Responsibilities of Pre-Law Advisors", a statement reprinted in the Law School Admissions Reference Manual as well as in some of the APLA Handbooks: "The basic functions of the pre-law advisor include collecting, organizing and providing for students appropriate information concerning legal education and the legal profession, sponsoring a pre-law club, and assisting students in the application process." In offering this assistance, the pre-law advisor assumes the role of a facilitator, providing aid throughout to those students actively engaged in applying for admission to law schools. Although the role of facilitator varies according to institutions, individual advisors and those being advised, there are defined limits to the role of the facilitator. The PLANC Statement continues, "Perhaps these limitations can best be conveyed by using the imagery of a coach--one who prepares the players and advises during the game, but does not play in the game itself." If the imagery is appropriate, pre-law advisors "coach" their students and "scout" their opponents, e.g., the law schools.

Much of what is accomplished will be determined by the first meeting between the pre-law advisor and the applicant. This meeting will set the tone of subsequent conferences and establish the level of trust between advisor and applicant. Applicants will readily sense both the level of knowledge and the depth of concern on the part of the advisor and, conversely, the advisor will sense the seriousness of purpose and level of thoughtful preparation on the part of the applicants.

Two caveats might well be entered here. First, students who see the pre-law advisor often assume that this advisor is a "recruiter" for the legal profession and consequently the students are reluctant to express any doubts they may have about attending law school or planning a legal career. It has been my own practice, when sensing any doubt on the part of student to try to handle the situation with humor and say something like "I don't care whether you want to go to law school or not, I don't get a bounty for each pre-law student. I am here to help you in any way I can, even if you really just want to go off and be a poet."

The second caveat centers around another assumption on the part of the applicant. Oftimes applicants see the pre-law advisor as a "gatekeeper" who can open or shut the gates to law schools or a given law school. This has the effect of giving applicants an unrealistic view of the pre-law advisor's role, raising applicants' expectations beyond reality and, incidentally, making students far less candid with the pre-law advisor. The proper role of the advisor should clearly be defined from the outset.

Both efficient use of time and effectiveness of counseling can best be achieved when the advisor has sufficiently meaningful background information on the student. Advisors should obtain transcripts and resumes; where possible, this should be done before the initial meeting. Many pre-law advisors have found it helpful to have applicants fill out information sheets which ask about the student's curriculum and courses, activities, reasons for wanting to attend law school, law schools under consideration by the student and a student's strengths and weaknesses. One pre-law advisor asks on her form, "What question about yourself do you not want me to ask?"

A quick examination of this information by the pre-law advisor prior to meeting with the students will aid in giving this initial meeting a sense of direction. A pre-law advisor, as any advisor, looks for clues provided by the students which determine the starting point of the conference. At times, gentle probing may reveal that law school is not so much the student's idea as it is the parents'. In this case the advisor may want to discuss other career possibilities with the student or make an appropriate referral to another office on campus. More likely than not, the equally important issue looming large in this student's mind will be how to confront his or her parents with the fact that he or she does not want to go to law school.

Gentle probing based on background information may also reveal that the student has an unclear vision of both the realities of law school and the legal profession and his or

her own particular skills and talents. In this instance, the pre-law advisor must serve as both an educator, informing the student about law school and the legal profession, and as a referral source, pointing the student to the appropriate counseling offices on campus.

Finally, having prior knowledge of the schools the applicant is considering gives the advisor clues as to the students' estimate of their own credentials, interests, financial status, geographic preferences. This allows the advisor to make helpful suggestions of additional schools which might be considered. Sometimes the advisor needs to inject a sense of realism into a student by suggesting schools at which the student will be more competitive, given the student's credentials. Sometimes there are schools more appropriate for a student in terms of costs, location and career opportunities afterwards.

The point is that the initial meeting will determine the future relationship between the advisor and the advisee. When an advisor is knowledgeable and concerned, it will be readily evident to the advisee and encourages a continuing relationship.

In the end, it is this continuing relationship that is the most meaningful one for both the student and the advisor, for it is from this kind of relationship that the profits of "psychic income" are realized. Over the past few years there has been a change in the attitude of those who perform the functions of pre-law advising. Formerly, many who performed these functions did so because they had no alternative. Increasingly, people are choosing to become pre-law advisors because they see the value and enjoy the meaningful relationships which grow out of this advising. In the end, that is what pre-law advising is all about.

### **Preparation For Legal Education The Pre-Law Committee of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar**

*Editor's Note: The following is a draft Proposal prepared by the Pre-Law Committee. It has not been approved by the American Bar Association and is subject to change before it is proposed for approval. Any comments that NAPLA members may have should be forwarded, as soon as possible, to Dean Lizabeth Moody, Stetson University College of Law, 1401 61st Street, Saint Petersburg, FL, 33707.*

Students who are successful in law school, and who become accomplished attorneys or use their legal education successfully in other areas of professional life, come to their legal education from widely differing educational and experiential backgrounds. As undergraduate students, some have majored in subjects that are traditionally considered paths to law school, such as history, English, political science, economics or business. Other successful law students, however, have focused their undergraduate studies in areas as diverse as art, music theory, computer science, engineering, nursing or education. Many law students enter law school directly from their undergraduate studies and without having had any substantial work experience. Others begin their legal education significantly later in life, and they bring to their law school education the insights and perspectives gained from those life experiences.

Thus the ABA does not recommend any particular group of undergraduate majors, or groups, that should be taken by those wishing to prepare for legal education; developing such a list is neither possible nor desirable. The law is too multifaceted, and the human mind too adaptable, to permit such a linear approach to preparing for law school or the practice of law. Nonetheless, there are important skills and values, and significant bodies of knowledge, that can be acquired prior to law school and that will provide a sound foundation for a sophisticated legal education. This Statement presents the recommendations of the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar concerning preparation for a good law school experience.

There are numerous skills and values that are essential to success in law school and to competent lawyering. There also is a large body of information that law students, and attorneys, should possess. The three or four years that a student spends in obtaining a quality legal education can and do provide much of the information that a lawyer needs. Good legal education also aids in developing the many skills and values essential to competent lawyering. Sound legal education, however, must build upon and further refine skills, values and knowledge that the student already possesses. While a student may well be able to acquire in law school some specific fundamental skills and knowledge that the student's pre-law school experience has not provided, the student who comes to law school lacking a broad range of basic skills and background will face an extremely difficult task.

The core skills and values that are essential for competent lawyering include analytic

and problem solving skills, critical reading abilities, writing skills, oral communication and listening abilities, general research skills, task organization and management skills, and the values of serving faithfully the interests of others while also promoting justice.<sup>1</sup> Thus individuals who wish to prepare adequately for legal education, and for a career in law or for other professional service that involves the use of lawyering skills, should seek educational and life experiences that will assist them in developing those attributes. Some brief comments about each of the listed skills and values follow.

#### Analytic and Problem Solving Skills

Students should seek courses and other experiences that will engage them in critical thinking about important issues and that will give them experience in structuring and evaluating arguments for and against propositions that are susceptible to reasoned debate. Students also should seek courses and other experiences that require them to apply previously developed principles or theories to new situations, and that demand that they develop solutions to new problems. Good legal education teaches students to "think like a lawyer," but the analytic and problem-solving skills required of attorneys are not fundamentally different from those employed by other professionals. The law school experience will develop and refine those crucial skills, but one must enter law school with a reasonably well-developed set of analytic and problem solving abilities.

#### Critical Reading Abilities

Preparation for legal education should include substantial experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual material, for much of what law students and attorneys do involves careful reading and sophisticated comprehension of judicial opinions, statutes, documents, and other written materials. As with the other skills discussed in this Statement, the requisite critical reading abilities may be acquired in a wide range of experiences, including the close reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy, or history. The particular nature of the materials examined is not crucial; what is important is that law school not be the first time that a student has been rigorously engaged in the enterprise of carefully reading and understanding, and critically analyzing, complex written material of substantial length. Potential law students should also be aware that the study and practice of law require the ability to read and assimilate large amounts of material, often in a short period of time.

#### Writing Skills

Those seeking to prepare for legal education should develop a high degree of skill at written communication. Language is the most important tool of a lawyer, and lawyers must learn to express themselves clearly and concisely. Legal education can do provide good training in writing, and particularly in the specific techniques and forms of written expression that are common in the law. Fundamental writing skills, however, should be required and refined before one enters law school. Those preparing for legal education should seek as many experiences as possible that will require rigorous and analytical writing, including preparing original pieces of substantial length and revising written work in a response to constructive criticism.

#### Oral Communication and Listening Abilities

The ability to speak clearly and persuasively is another skill that is essential to success in law school and the practice of law. Lawyers also must have excellent listening skills if they are to understand their clients and others with whom they must interact daily. As with writing skills, legal education provides excellent opportunities for refining oral communication skills, and particularly for practicing the forms and techniques of oral expression that are most common in the practice of law. Before coming to law school, however, individuals should seek to develop their basic speaking and listening skills, such as by engaging in debate, making formal presentations in class, or speaking before groups in school, the community, or the workplace.

#### General Research Skills

Although there are many research sources and techniques that are specific to the law, an individual need not have developed any familiarity with these specific skills or materials before entering law school. However, the individual who comes to law school without ever having undertaken a project that requires significant library research and the analysis of large amounts of information obtained from that research will be at a severe disadvantage. Those wishing to prepare for legal education should select courses and seek experiences that will require them to plan a research strategy, to undertake substantial library research, and to analyze, organize and present a reasonably large amounts of material.

#### Task Organization and Management Skills

The study and practice of law require the ability to organize large amounts of information, to identify objectives, and to create a structure for applying that information in an efficient way in order to achieve desired results. Many law school courses, for example, are graded primarily on the basis of one examination at the end of the course, and many projects in the practice of law require the compilation of large amounts of information from a wide variety of sources, frequently over relatively brief periods of time. Thus those entering law school must be prepared to organize and assimilate large amounts of information in a manner that facilitates the recall and application of that information in an effective and efficient manner. Some of the requisite experience can be obtained through undertaking school projects that require substantial research and writing, or through the preparation of major reports for an employer, a school, or a civic organization.

#### The Values of Serving Others and Promoting Justice

Each member of the legal profession should be dedicated both to the objectives of serving others competently and responsibly and to the goals of improving the quality of justice and fairness in the legal system. Those thinking of entering this profession would be well served by having some significant experience, before coming to law school, in which they devoted substantial effort toward assisting others. Participation in public service projects or similar efforts at achieving objectives established by a large group for common purposes can be particularly helpful.

#### Knowledge

In addition to these fundamental skills and values, there are some basic areas of knowledge that are important to a sophisticated legal education and to the development of a competent attorney. As law becomes more and more pervasive in our society, an increasingly broad range of knowledge and information from other disciplines become relevant to lawyering and to any full understanding of the legal system. Some of that knowledge, particularly that most directly relevant to particular areas of the law, can be acquired in law school or when necessary for a particular project.

There are, however, generic types of knowledge that one should possess in order to have a full appreciation of the legal system in general, to understand how disputes might be resolved, to understand and apply various legal principles and standards, and to appreciate the context in which a legal problem or dispute arises. Some of the types of knowledge that are most useful, and that would most pervasively affect one's ability to derive the maximum benefit from legal education, include the following:

- A broad understanding of history, particularly American history, and the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of the pluralistic society that presently exists in the United States;
- A basic understanding of political thought and theory, and of the contemporary American political system;
- A sound grounding in economics, particularly elementary micro- economic theory;
- Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data;
- A working familiarity with methods of discourse and persuasion, and with effective communication techniques;
- A broad understanding of human behavior and social interaction; and
- An appreciation of cultures beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.

As law has become more woven into the fabric of our society, and as that society is increasingly influenced by disparate national and global forces, an increasingly broad knowledge base is essential for success in law school and for competence in the legal profession. Knowledge of specific areas of law can and will be acquired during a good legal education, but students must come to law school with a fundamental knowledge base upon which legal education can build. Thus those considering law school should focus their substantive preparation on acquiring the broad knowledge and perspectives outlined above.

#### Conclusion

The skills, values and knowledge discussed in this Statement may be acquired in a wide variety of ways. One may take undergraduate, graduate, or even high school courses that can assist an individual in acquiring much of the requisite information, skills and perspectives. One may also gain much of this essential background through self-learning (another essential lawyering skill), by reading, in the workplace, or through various other life experiences. Moreover, it is not essential that everyone come to law school having fully developed all of the skills and knowledge suggested in this Statement. Some of that foundation can be acquired during the initial years of law school. However, one who begins law school having already acquired most of the skills, values and knowledge listed in this Statement will have a significant advantage and will be well prepared to benefit fully from a sophisticated and challenging legal education.

<sup>1</sup>These core skill and value areas are drawn, in substantial part, from the Statement of Skills and Values contained in the 1992 Report of the American Bar Association Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, *Legal Education and Professional Development: An Educational Continuum*.

### Interesting Tid Bits

The first summer LSAC-sponsored Law Forum will be held in Washington, DC on July 13.

#### **Other regional forums of interest:**

Atlanta, GA, September 27-27  
Houston, TX, October 18-19

For the dates of the other forums, please check the latest edition of the LSAT Information Book or contact:  
Sharon Kembel at (215) 968-1204.

Results from the annual Admissions Questionnaire regarding the policy on repeat LSAT -- 125 law schools responded:

- 63 (50%) average the scores
- 49 (39%) use the highest
- 9 (7%) use the higher of 2 scores and average if more than 2
- 4 (3%) use the most recent score

### SAPLA Conference News

Remember to mark your calendars for the LSAC/APLA meeting, June 2 through June 4.

The SAPLA Executive Board meeting will be June 1 at 5:30 p.m. Location to be announced.

There will be a joint LSAC/APLA pre-conference leadership workshop Sunday, June 2, from 10:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. Six (6) members of each APALA are invited to attend. The purpose of the joint workshop is to foster communications between LSAC and the APLAS and to identify current and future APLA leaders. If anyone is interested in representing SAPLA, please contact Joe Chaney at (502) 762-2661 or fax (502) 762-3482.

Each APLA will hold a reception during the conference. The SAPLA reception will be Sunday, June 2, from 6 until 7 o'clock p.m. in the SAPLA suite followed by a 7 o'clock buffet. Dinner, drinks and hors d'oeuvres will be part of the conference fee. Please register as soon as possible so we will know how many to plan.

SAPLA's general meeting will be Tuesday, June 4, from 8 until 9:30 a.m.

SAPLA has received three (3) \$200 conference grants from PLANC for prelaw advisors from HBCU schools. SAPLA will match and grant three (3) additional \$200 grants per PLANC's suggestion. If you are a prelaw advisor at an HBCU school, and interested, please contact Joe Chaney by telephone or fax at the numbers listed above.

SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF PRE-LAW ADVISORS MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Thank you.

**SEE YA SOON!!!**

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