Law School 101

Your Friendly Neighborhood BSAs
Wait, who are you guys again?

We’re your BSAs!

The **Board of Student Advisers** has three main roles:

- **MENTORS**
- **TUTORS**
- **COORDINATORS**
What questions should I be asking right now?

**Questions I think I should be asking**

- How do I study for class?
- What are exams like?
- How do HLS grades work?
- How are office hours with professors?
- Where should I work after 1L year?
- What are student organizations like here?
- What’s a clerkship?!
- What are student organizations like here?

**Questions I probably also want to ask**

- If I’m not stressed right now, is that a bad thing?
- If I am stressed right now, is that a bad thing?
- How’s the gym? Where are the locker rooms in the gym?
- Will I have time for things other than school?
- How’s bar review?
- What are good food options around? Is the Hark worth it?
What Is Law?

Wikipedia says: “a system of rules that are created and enforced through social or governmental institutions to regulate behavior.”

Black’s Law says: “That which is laid down, ordained, or established. A rule or method according to which phenomena or actions coexist or follow each other.”
What Is Law School?

While law school is foundationally about learning the law, there is so much more to the experience. This is your opportunity to learn as much as you want to, have a chance to practice the law (under a supervising attorney), and form lasting relationships.

Many of you had little experience in Cambridge/Boston before now, so make the most of it!
Coming up...

The rooms you will fill with your intelligence
Understanding your schedule

I opened the book...what now?
Understanding the context of your reading

What, like it’s hard?
Understanding how to study
The Rooms You Will Fill With Your Intelligence

Understanding your schedule
What classes will we take?

- Criminal Law
- Civil Procedure (Civ Pro)
- Property
- Torts
- Contracts
- Legislation & Regulation (Leg Reg)

- International or Comparative Law Elective
- Legal Research & Writing (LRW)
- Problem Solving Workshop (PSW)
- An upper-level elective
- A reading group (encouraged)
The Cold Call
I Opened the Book... What Now?

Understanding the context of your reading
Before you start reading...

Do what makes you comfortable and what helps you succeed.

That might mean finding a quiet, secluded spot where you won’t be interrupted — or a bustling café where you can take breaks with your friends!

If you’re worried about a reading assignment, you might want to do some background research to prepare — though outside research is never required!

There are plenty of blogs and other free resources about law school, and even many on the famous cases you’ll be reading

It’s not cheating to Google the case, skim the Wikipedia, or read a summary
So, what are we reading, anyway?

When we “read cases” in law school, what we’re actually reading are courts’ opinions.

Although they’re called “opinions,” you can’t just disagree with them. A court’s opinion is an interpretation of the law, and thereby the creation of new law.

Most of your law school reading assignments will be appellate-level opinions.

This means that, at the time of the opinion, the case had already been decided one way or another by a lower court. That decision is now being reviewed by a higher court, which may agree or disagree with the lower court.

Your readings will come from both state and federal jurisdictions.
Why does this matter?

The United States legal system is one of common law. Courts look to previous decisions, commonly referred to as precedent, to determine what rules, principles, and methods of analysis to use.

Precedent can be binding on a court if the case was decided by a higher court in the same jurisdiction.

In other cases, precedent is not binding, but may be found persuasive.
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The Forms in Which You Will Read Opinions

- Case book
- Case print out
- LexisNexis
- Westlaw

2 main legal databases
In fact, according to a 2002 study, less than 2% of federal civil cases, less than 5% of federal criminal cases, less than 16% of state civil cases, and less than 4% of state criminal cases make it to trial. Not to mention the disputes that are settled by administrative bodies or alternative dispute resolution.
What, Like It’s Hard?

Understanding how to study
A FEW QUICK TIPS

Prepare — in a way that works for you!

If you prefer to study alone... study alone!

If you prefer to study with people... find a group of people who will make studying an enjoyable process (or as much as it can be)

Remember that you are here, because you arguably know how to study. Channel that spirit! But do not hesitate to reevaluate when necessary.

Make time for the things that matter to you and make you happy. It will make you a more productive studier.
OK, OK, but what about exams?

Keep in mind, your exams are all at the end of the semester.

Focus first on keeping up with reading and gaining a good understanding of the course material.

BSAs will reach out about halfway through the semester about an optional outlining Q&A session.

BSAs are happy to chat about exam formats and the grading system on an individual basis anytime during the semester.
On to the Next One...