

Ep 3. Understanding the law school Syllabus.mp3

Carlos: Closed captioning for this episode is available thanks to the Office of Disability Service at the Syracuse University College of Law. Hello, everyone, and welcome to another episode of Syracuse University College of Loss Academic Success series. My name is Carlos Negron. I am a rising 2L here at the College of Law and a fellow with the Office of Academic Success. I am once again joined by my friend and colleague Zeb.

Zeb: Hi everyone, I'm Zeb. I'm a rising 2L and also a fellow with the Office of Academic Success. Today's conversation is about how to navigate a syllabus. We think it actually should be pretty interesting. We should probably start with the transition between undergrad and grad school when it comes to understanding a syllabus or law school. Carlos, you should talk to us about that since you're much closer to that time than I am, and I can barely remember an undergrad.

Carlos: Ok. Well, I think there's a lot of similarities, actually. The assignment, that's the course grading structure. They'll usually believe a blur, and they're about the student code of conduct, any attendance policies for the school or for the professor. Important due dates for the papers and tests, office hours and required readings. These are all things that you need to pay attention to, but that you have seen before in your undergrad syllabi. Yeah, there are some new things on law school syllabus or syllabi. The weirdest one for me was the first time I ever saw the ABA Standard three 10 section, which requires that schools adopt, publish and adhere to written policies and procedures for determining their credit hours that it award for coursework, which is just a really convoluted way of saying that the ABA requires the school to remind you that for every credit hour of the class, you should be spending this amount of time studying for this class. You will always see that in your law school class syllabi. It will be a little section that will say this is a three credit course or this is a five credit course. You are required or you are expected to spend at least this amount of hours per week on course related work. I believe the ratio comes down to two hours of study time per credit hour.

Carlos: So for three credit for three credit course, it might be six hours of required. Studying for five credit cards, it might be 10 hours or required studying. This is all in

addition to your class time as well. But don't exactly quote me on that. The professor syllabus is probably the best the best place to know the exact rules. I think there are good things and bad things about those three 10 hour standards. It's good because it tells you the floor like, Hey, Mr. Student, this is the minimum amount of work that you need to do to be prepared for class. It's bad because it doesn't really give you the ceiling, and it presumes that everyone learns at the same speed when really something that might take Zeb one hour to understand might take me five hours. So you take those three 10 standards with a grain of salt. Frankly, I'm sure that I always go over on them because I pretty much try to spend as much time as possible preparing for class, and I've never really stopped to tally my study time. But who knows? When you see that on the syllabus, though, it can be a good indicator of how demanding that course is going to be. What's your opinion of those three 10 standards ebb?

Zeb: Look, I agree with everything you said, but I think, listen, it's just the floor. I actually like having it because at least it gives me a framework on that I can actually work on work off of. Now I now I know, at the very least, this is how much I should be studying. And look, the professor wouldn't put it there for no reason at all. They're putting there because they also agree that that's how much you should also be studying

Carlos: For me if I like to study him blocks, for example, Friday, I'll get out my weekly calendar and I'll make a schedule like Saturday from 10 a.m. to one p.m. I'm going to be reading Sift Pro. Then from one p.m. to 3:00 p.m., I'll be reading tweets, and having those three 10 standards is a good way for me to make sure that I don't block off too much time for just one class again. I sometimes go over and I enjoy reading cases every now and then I'll get two into a case and I won't be able to put it down. Law school reading can be fun, but same mindful of those three 10 standards. I think it's a good way to make sure your week is balanced and, you know, by extension, your life.

Zeb: Yeah. And look, let's also remember, even though, let's say the three 10 standards in the recommended 30 hours may not change, a syllabus is a general guideline, so it actually may change throughout the semester. So keep track of where the professor is in class, whether they're ahead, whether they're behind, and look at it relative to the actual syllabus and also somewhere in the syllabus, there's going to be assigned

reading. A major key is to make sure that you're reading the correct edition of the book. The professor selected this specific edition for a reason.

Carlos: Remember, it's a case book. It's a collection of judicial opinions, and every year new opinions are coming out. So case books get updated to include new watershed cases. Your professors, they'll try their best to teach you the law today, and that's very difficult if you have an old edition of the textbook that doesn't include those new cases.

Zeb: Yeah, I think another key on top of that is to pay attention to any supplemental materials that you may need. So that's restatements of the law, rule books, casebook connected quizzing. All of these materials will be explicitly laid out in your syllabus, and if they're in there, make sure that you have them in class.

Carlos: That's that's such a good point that I'll never forget the day that my torts professor asked me to read something off of the restatement of torts, and I didn't have it be better than me, guys.

Zeb: Look, some professors are going to explicitly tell you, let's say, bring this to class, don't bring this to class. Some may also tell you what kinds of supplemental materials that won't help with their class and don't buy them if you have a professor that actually does that, listen. Don't waste your time and money on things that you don't need. And, you know, speaking of wasting time? Talk to us. Call us about office hours and about how professors take that specific kind of time very seriously.

Carlos: Oh yeah. A word on office hours. This is a professional school. Things might be a little more formal than your experience in undergrad. It's not wise to email a professor asking them what their office hours are or when they're available, when they've already stated it very clearly in the syllabus. Many professors even go a step further. They include links and websites that you can access to schedule a one on one meeting with them. What I'm trying to tell you all is, although the office, our section of the syllabus is very similar to your previous undergrad syllabus, you should still pay close attention to it. Same thing with professors or to communications. Some professors teach multiple courses, and they may require that you email them with a specific subject line or that

you place your questions up first or in the body of the email or with contacts, even some things more specific than that. It probably won't be all professors that are that stringent, but still be mindful of their instructions if you want to get a reply.

Zeb: And look, some some professors tell you early on in the syllabus that they're going to take X amount of hours to respond to emails. Some may tell you if you email me after this time and then I'm not going to respond until the next day. Make sure you know that so you don't send follow up emails prematurely. Another aspect is to pay attention to the week by week or day to day reading assignments. This helps when you're scheduling your readings for the week and also for reviewing purposes.

Carlos: Yeah, remember professors or people too and understand that, like Zepp told us, the syllabus might change as the course goes along. The professors may add assignments or may take some out, but be sure to stay on top of any updated versions of the syllabus throughout the semester,

Zeb: And your professor won't remind you what to read for next class, and they may not remind you to even check the syllabus. The assumption is that you've read it and you have access to it.

Carlos: That's a great point about not being reminded said. It's the same for any assignments that are due throughout the semester. Even assignments that might not be for credit, they could have specific start and end dates. My first semester, my CIF pro professor divided us. She provided us with hypos at different parts of the semester, but they would open and close on particular dates. It was a great exercise because it was a great opportunity to compare your answer to the professor's model answer. But if you missed the deadline to submit, you didn't receive access to the model answer when I got the syllabus. I flagged in my calendar each day that those hypos were going to be posted, but I never flagged the dates that they were closed because I figured, Hey, it's not for class credit, right? So I can just do it when I feel prepared to write a great answer. Well, as you can expect, some of those submission dates sneaked up on me, and I did not get to see several of the model answers. The good news is that most people in my study group were happy to review my answer, and I still did very well in the

class, but I always felt disappointed in myself that I missed those due dates because they were very clearly posted on the syllabus.

Zeb: And look, I'm going to stop. I'm going to interrupt for a quick second. I know that the term hypo might be new for some people, so if you want to learn more about that, you should check out our episode entitled Understanding Hypos

Carlos: Going back to those dates. There are important dates for a class like LCR, which is going to require some important due dates, I guess.

Zeb: Now it's time for another another new term. Lcr is your writing class here. You will be taking LCR and your first semester in your second semester and that stands for legal research and writing or legal research and writing is what LCR is. Some professors also assign quizzes on Facebook Connect or may give you hypos that are that are that? Or do all of these dates are going to be included in the actual syllabus?

Carlos: And it may also include some on call schedules. It can be on the syllabus as well, and I know that there's always a few pre class jitters, especially if it's your first time ever stepping foot in a law school classroom that you have any of those.

Zeb: Of course, definitely all of us did.

Carlos: I did, too. But if you read every word of the syllabus and you understand it, it can help a lot with quieting those nerves. And if you don't just know that you have a high chance of making a bad impression on your professor, if you ask something which they already took the time to include in the syllabus. Now that we were talking off air and I know you did not want to end this episode without giving our listeners some advice on class etiquette, which you will all see a section on the syllabus on.

Zeb: Yeah, so look, some professors are very specific about how they like their classes to be to be structured. Now I'm going to use a simple example, which is class part participation everywhere from undergrad. If you've been to grad school in our law school, you've seen that some professors give points for class participation and some

don't. Now it is OK to believe that class participation includes raising your hand, asking a question or raising your hand and answering a question. Some professors in their syllabus are going to include very specific instructions as to how they like their classes to actually be. So some will say that they don't want hands raised until they actually give you a prompt and say, Hey, does anybody have any questions? Some may say if another student is talking, they actually don't want anyone else raising their hand because it seems rude to the student who's talking. Now, some of the rules will be as simple as what I said. Some of the rules would be really complex, but this is the thing law school is preparing us for the real world and in the real world as lawyers. Whether you're in the courtroom or outside the courtroom courtroom, there are a set of instructions which are going to have to follow in order for you to be successful, and it

Carlos: Follows you everywhere.

Zeb: Yeah. If a judge is speaking, you can't just interrupt that person. You can't just raise your hand randomly while someone else is doing something. There is an order of operations and there's a certain procedure that goes along with this profession and, quite frankly, any other profession. And you know what? Thanks, Carlos, for giving me a chance to actually speak about that because I was nervous that we actually wouldn't really get around to it.

Carlos: It's great advice.

Zeb: Yeah. So just pay attention to that because the professors are training you for a very specific profession, and no word on that syllabus is written by accident. But overall, I think this has actually been a great time. Understanding the syllabus is obviously an integral part of your success as a law student, but that concludes this episode about understanding the syllabus. We hope we gave you enough information, and if there's absolutely anything we missed will be more than happy to answer that question for you if you see us around campus.

We hope you tune into later episodes.