

## **The Voice Article Submission – Molly Bagshaw**

### **5 LAW SCHOOL MYTHS DEBUNKED (from a criminal defense attorney's perspective):**

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We all know those law students whose parent is an attorney and think they know everything about everything and tell us we “have” to do something to be successful...well I’m here to debunk those myths!

#### **1) “You have to do journal or you won’t get hired anywhere”**

Journal, while a helpful tool to make sure you cite check correctly, is not a requirement for a career in criminal law. Every criminal defense attorney I have ever worked for or interviewed with cared more about my interest in the subject matter and my passion for the work than anything else. If you WANT to do journal – do it! But if you’re doing it just because you think it will look good on your resume, do something else. No one should talk during an interview about how much they love seeking out italicized commas.

#### **2) “You have to take bar exam classes or you won’t pass the bar”**

You pay for a bar prep course as soon as you start studying for the bar exam and they’ve got it down pat. The bar exam is also ever-changing! For example, I took the Texas bar, but now it’s gone! Take a healthy mixture of bar exam classes and classes you’re actually interested in. Don’t take bar classes just because you think passing the bar is the ultimate goal. You have to pass the bar, but you should not skip out on classes with amazing professors or practical skills just because you think you need to do something else.

#### **3) “A higher GPA is better than clinics or clerking”**

I might agree with this advice if you were only going for a big law job, but if you’re reading this article, then you probably are not! Clinics and clerking were two of the most invaluable experiences of my law school career and more than made up for a lower GPA. Employers want you to be able to go to court and talk to a prosecutor, not recite Alito’s dissent from some random case. While grades are important, don’t give up practical and real-world experience in exchange for a number on a resume.

#### **4) “I don’t have time for mock trial or moot court...Plus, it’s ‘fake’”**

Mock trial is the reason why I had the confidence to go in to court less than 2 weeks after getting my bar card, advocate for my client, and get a not guilty at my very first jury trial. Taking advantage of the teams on campus – whether it be mock trial, moot court, or alternative dispute resolution – is never a bad idea. Those “fake” cases teach you real skills that you will use in your first and every subsequent legal job you will ever have. If you don’t have time to join a team, participate in the intramural tournaments on campus. You will interface with attorneys and learn how to advocate for your client/side, which you will do for the rest of your career. It will also help you to figure out your strengths and weaknesses, and the type of lawyer you want to be.

**5) “You have to start out in a DA’s office if you want to practice criminal law”**

While it is more difficult to find a job starting out on the criminal defense side, it is not impossible. If you do not want to start out in the DA’s office, don’t! Come to TCDLA conferences and talks. Work with criminal defense attorneys in your community. If their website doesn’t mention anything about a clerkship, call and ask! You need to be proactive if you want to make it happen, but it is an option. Going straight to criminal defense work has been a dream for me and I wouldn’t have it any other way. But I wouldn’t have gotten here if I didn’t seek it out, and you can do the same.