Prospective Law Students May Have Unrealistic Expectations about Law School

Summary: Kaplan conducted separate surveys that reveal what law students want from law schools, and what law schools really offer.

Kaplan Test Prep recently conducted surveys of both pre-law students and law school admissions officers to evaluate their expectations as they start their journeys to a juris doctor degree. The results show that students may be surprised when it comes to the law school experience.

The results show that 77 percent of pre-law students would like to learn in a collaborative culture, and that 23 percent prefer a competitive culture. However, only 2 percent of law schools consider their campuses competitive, with 98 percent reporting that their law school culture is collaborative.

Here’s an article about the best 20 law schools in the United States.

In addition, the majority (58 percent) of pre-law students prefer an individual emphasis in law school curricula. Roughly 42 percent seek a team emphasis. Of the law schools surveyed, approximately one-third reported that their coursework is focused on the individual; the majority reported that their schools are team-focused.

Students may also be surprised to learn that 85 percent of law schools report that their environments are casual, and 11 percent report that theirs are formal. Around 55 percent of the students surveyed stated that they prefer a casual environment, and 45 percent would enjoy a more formal environment.

Here’s an article about how law students are gaining control over the admissions process.

When asked about the leniency of professors, most students (53 percent) prefer a more laid-back professor, and the remaining 47 percent would like strict professors. However, attending law school may be a harsh reality for most students, as 56 percent of the law schools reported that their professors were strict in their classes.

One area where students and schools see eye-to-eye is having practice-ready coursework. 74 percent of students demand practice-ready courses, and 26 percent prefer a more academic-based curriculum. Around 77 percent of law schools reported that their curriculum is practice-based, with 23 percent stating their schools are more academic-centered.

Here’s an article about another Kaplan survey that predicts an increase in law school applications.

As far as campus size, the minority of students (16 percent) would like to be in a large law school with big class sizes. The remaining 84 percent prefers smaller classes. A whopping 92 percent of law schools state that they maintain small class sizes.

Law schools and pre-law students are also on the same page with the Socratic method. 72 percent of students want their professors to use the Socratic method in their teachings, and 75 percent of law schools report that it is used.

Finally, roughly 63 percent of students would like an interdisciplinary curriculum, and the majority (82 percent) state that they have an interdisciplinary course offering, as opposed to specialty-focused schools.

Jeff Thomas, the executive director of pre-law programs at Kaplan Test Prep, said, “Law school culture is one of those things that’s not necessarily incorporated into schools’ reputations or rankings, so pre-law students should do some digging to find out which law school best suits their individual tastes. Culture is also a matter of perception, which illustrates why speaking with current students, alumni and professors is so important. We’d also point out that while the survey results give a good general overview of how law schools view themselves, it might be somewhat challenging to place a program into one bucket or another. For most law schools, the reality may be somewhere in between.”

However, law schools should take notice of what law students want, according to Thomas. He explains, ”While entry into law school remains competitive, it’s also clear that law schools are sometimes fighting over the best students because there are far fewer applicants now than there were a decade ago. This means intangibles like culture can make a difference. We also think it’s encouraging to see both pre-laws and law schools both recognizing the importance of a practice-ready curriculum. If law schools and the legal job marketplace are to thrive again, it is going to take new thinking like this.”

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