

Law School for Pharmacists?

The law school experience was brought into millions of American homes by the television series *The Paper Chase*, which appeared several years ago. The story of a group of students at Harvard Law School, the series

By JOSEPH L. FINK III

was a fair representation of the law school experience.

Perhaps exposure to that series, or

frustration with the plethora of regulations applicable to pharmacy practice, has stimulated you to consider attending law school. This brief article presents an overview of law school from the vantage point of a pharmacist or pharmacy student.

The Curriculum

The law school curriculum is quite different from that of pharmacy schools. In most, the first of three years is devoted to required courses in basic legal principles—contracts, torts, civil procedure, property, criminal law, and so forth. Most, if not all, schools also require that first year students take a course in legal research and writing.

After that, the curriculum is totally elective. Students are free to choose courses of interest, those they feel will be relevant to their planned field of practice. This freedom places a good deal of responsibility on the student, but in reality there are a number of courses that nearly all students elect to take due to the subject matter; evidence and estate planning are two examples. Many students also take at least one course in tax law.

The virtue of the elective approach in the curriculum is that the student can, in essence, specialize during the law school years. Students planning a career in estate planning can take a variety of courses in wills, trusts and taxation. Others planning to work primarily with administrative agencies can focus their attention on courses directed toward that goal.

The educational methods in law schools differ substantially from

those used in pharmacy schools. The majority of American pharmacy schools still use the lecture format, although use of case discussions has increased in recent years, particularly with advanced students. In law schools, the predominant method of instruction is the Socratic method, named after the Greek philosopher and instructor who developed it.

Depicted accurately in *The Paper Chase*, the Socratic method relies on discussion of cases. The students read the cases before class, and the instructor calls on students or a student to recite the case. This leads to an exchange between the professor and the student, with other class members offering their views. Thus, the instructor is like a conductor orchestrating the discussion along paths designed to instill the ability of issue analysis as well as an ability to "think on your feet."

The amount of reading required of law students is substantial. It's a rare lawyer who doesn't wear glasses! Although it varies somewhat with the electives, the average law student probably spends a minimum of three hours a night read-

ing, at least at the outset. Obviously, if one has not read the cases being discussed in class, the benefits from attendance will be minimal.

Law school also requires substantial amounts of library work. Most law schools have major legal research and writing requirements in each of the years.

In the first year it usually is fulfilled by participation in "moot court" arguments on hypothetical cases, including preparation of thoroughly researched legal briefs. In the upper years the requirement can be met through submission of a major paper for a course or through other activities that include major writing efforts.

Selecting Your School

Selecting the "right" law school is important. Obviously, students will want to attend the best school to which they can gain admission.

Law schools basically can be divided into two types: regional schools and national schools. The distinction is based on the areas from which the school attracts students. Regional schools attract students from a small geographic area; national schools draw students from all over the country.

National schools pose an advantage because, since so much of the class discussion is student-based,

Joseph L. Fink III, BS Pharm, JD, is professor and assistant dean, College of Pharmacy, University of Kentucky, Lexington, KY 40506.

the greater the diversity in the student body the better the discussion, so the theory runs. Nonetheless, if you plan to practice in some areas of the country it can be helpful to be identified with the predominant local school.

There are a number of factors to take into account in deciding which type of school to attend. The first is your ability to gain admission. Admission committees focus attention primarily on undergraduate grades and Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score, with extracurricular activities a distant third and recommendations fourth. (While you may have had the distinction of being student body president at your undergraduate school, when you get to law school you will find quite a number of former student body presidents there.)

A substantial sum can be spent on application fees. Students interested in applying to law schools would be well advised to obtain a copy of the *Pre-Law Handbook*, published by the Association of American Law Schools and the Law School Admissions Council, which contains a description of all accredited law schools and presents a comparison of each in a chart bearing grade point average on one axis and LSAT score on the other.

You can determine how many applications the school received last year from students with similar credentials, and how many were accepted. This permits an informed decision regarding where your application fees will be best spent.

What is the best law school for specializing in pharmacy law? Unfortunately, there is none. Pharmacy law exists in pharmacy schools—but not in law schools. Students must select courses that will be relevant, and apply the *principles* to pharmacy issues.

Relevant courses, in addition to the required courses mentioned above, include administrative law, insurance, antitrust law, forensic medicine, equitable remedies (injunctions and the like), unfair trade practices, consumer protection, constitutional rights and liberties, and food and drug law (offered at fewer than 10 law schools around

the country). An additional valuable course is one dealing with health care law, an area getting increasing attention at law schools.

In evaluating a school, consider a number of factors, including the number of course offerings—which is important because two thirds of the course work is elective—and the size of the law library.

A school in an urban setting may offer more employment opportunities for a pharmacist who wishes to practice part time while attending school. Urban areas also offer a greater number of part-time employment opportunities for law students in law offices, a valuable experience. Moreover, the availability of legal reference sources outside the law school library is likely to be greater.

Is a pharmacist at a disadvantage when competing for admission with political science, English and history majors? Probably just the opposite is true. Law schools strive for diversity in their student bodies and a pharmacy background would enhance that. If you are thinking about going into law, however, one thing you can do while in pharmacy school to increase your chances of gaining admission is to take courses that require you to think and write. Those are skills that are required in law.

Getting Ready

The Law School Admission Test is given at many locations around the country four times a year. (For information about the test, write to Law School Admission Services, P.O. Box 2000, Newtown, PA 18940.) A description of the test is beyond the scope of this brief article and the booklet provided by the LSAT office is informative.

Finally, a word about courses that are designed to prepare you to take the LSAT; though they are expensive, their main virtue is that, through repetition, they thoroughly familiarize you with the format of questions. This enables you to enter the test center with confidence and not waste time belaboring the instructions. That objective can probably be met, however, by studying the test booklet distributed by the LSAT office or by purchasing any of a number of books designed to familiarize you with the examination.

Law school provides students with skills that are useful in a wide variety of vocations. Certainly, most law school graduates practice law. But there are many who work in business, writing or broadcasting positions. The skills of issue analysis and thinking on your feet are valuable in many occupations, and provide law school graduates with a variety of career options. □

SAPhA Midyear Meetings

The 1981 midyear meetings of the Student American Pharmaceutical Association are planned in each SAPhA region during October or November. This year's meeting participants will not only take part in outstanding professional and educational programs and policy proposal forums, but will also elect student delegates to next year's APhA House of Delegates. The meeting dates and locations are:

- Region 1—Oct. 30-Nov. 1, Arnold & Marie Schwartz.
- Region 2—Nov. 5-8, Rutgers University.
- Region 3—Nov. 5-7, Medical University of South Carolina.
- Region 4—Oct. 15-18, Purdue University.
- Region 5—Nov. 12-14, University of Iowa.
- Region 6—Oct. 22-25, University of Houston.
- Region 7—Oct. 29-31, University of Washington.
- Region 8—Oct. 15-17, University of Southern California.

Registration fee for each meeting is \$20.00 and is paid on site. For further information, contact Donna J. Walker, APhA, 2215 Constitution Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 628-4410.