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Gusties Going to Law School . . . Some Fundamentals

The ideas below *are* generic and *not* tailored to you personally – we really should do that together in a 1:1 conversation. But they outline some of the fundamentals that you need to know. Read this first, then let's talk.

- **Don't go straight to law school.** Nobody really recommends going straight to law school from college. Law schools view “direct-from-college” applications more harshly than ones from more mature students. In other words, you will get better financial aid and get into a better school if you wait 2-5 years, get a job, learn some things, travel, join Lutheran Volunteer Corps, the Peace Corps, go work for the Environmental Protection Agency or its state equivalent, work for a consultancy or accountancy, work in the court system, work in the family business, start your own company, whatever. Taking time off after college also improves your effectiveness in law school – you'll be rested and ready to go. This is a very real phenomenon – ask anyone who went *back* to grad school after taking a few years off in their 20's. Incidentally, law schools won't tell you this as clearly as I just have: they want students to enroll. That's their job. So they might say – hey, yeah, just apply and you can start next Fall! But elite law schools have all the students they could ever want, so they're clearer on this point. Harvard's incoming 1L class is roughly 80% *not straight from college* because Harvard is clear that they prefer that law students to take some time off after college to get some experience and clear their heads. At Chicago it's about the same – around a quarter to a third come straight from college, then the rest of the entering class is divided more or less evenly between students who took 1-3 years off and those who waited longer before returning to school. So – you *can* go straight to law school from Gustavus, but I strongly discourage it.
- **LSAT prep.** If you're not going straight to law school, you're taking the LSAT *well after* you graduate – not while you're at Gustavus. Let's talk about prep strategies, what's right for you. It's horses for courses – a matter of finding the right fit. It may be that you need to do a private, expensive class to prep for the LSAT. It may be that you can do it totally solo for cheap. It may be that you can do it online for middling-to-little cost. There are options. Let's make sure you know what they are and are equipped to figure out which are best for you.
- **Don't go to a middling law school (unless it's free).** The legal market has cratered since 2009 and the economic wreckage is piling up at the bottom – there are many thousands of young people with massive law school debts and no prospect of getting a job at all. (Please, [read this today](#). Don't get any further in considering law school until you've read it.) If you go to a non-top-30 law school, you will get a good legal job only if you graduate in the top 25% of the class or if you have exceptional family connections. Even if you go to, say, the University of Minnesota – which is an excellent and well-regarded law school nationally – you may take on debt that you can't

repay. Many lawyers will say that in this market you should not go to law school unless you get into a very good one – say, top 10 nationally. That’s a little extreme – I don’t quite agree with that perspective. But the point is – look very hard before you leap.

Now, if your parents are happy to pay for law school (and I would support them in that – I’d do it for my kids if it were the right fit) then I have a totally different point of view. Go for it. You will get a great education and grow as a person wherever you go. I just don’t want anyone laboring under \$150k in debt that they can’t repay - and can’t discharge in bankruptcy.

- **Know what you want to do.** This runs counter to the liberal arts ethic of learning your way to a calling, but the stakes are too high for young would-be lawyers to monkey around. Get a feel for what you want to do with your law degree and set up in your mind – and on paper – some likely pathways and alternatives to making that happen. You can get away with going to a top-five law school and not having a real clue what you want to do with it, that’s fine. Have fun. But below that you have to have a plan. So – what are you going to do with your life for the 2-5 years you spend after college but before going to law school? You’re going to consider, test, talk about, pray about whether this path you’re considering is right. What do you want to do with your law degree? Look – you don’t have to be right in your assessment; we rarely are. But your career path will benefit tremendously from the analysis and consideration. You have to do the work.
- **Consider what relevant learning you could bring to the profession.** You don’t have to have any particular major at Gustavus, but do know what your gifts are and develop a sense of what you might want to do with the law degree. Think about your intellectual gifts, your personality types, your strengths, different personal or career assessments you’ve done. You can take some courses at Gustavus that align with all of that. It will help you consider options, think about whether this is really your calling, whether you have been given gifts that can be of service to others through the legal profession.
- **Find lawyers – Gusties or not – and spend time with them.** I’ll help you do this. But you need to take initiative to do it yourself – with me, and on your own. It’s the only way to find your North Star. You need to look around for it if you want to find it – it’s not going to come find you.