So you got your grades; now what do you do?

You received your final Fall Semester grades. Some of you are happy and others disappointed. I have never met a student who was just “meh” about grades, but maybe that is you. Whoever you are let’s just agree from the outset that you are a very smart person, in fact, you would not be here at CSU Law unless some really smart people thought you were smart, too. Just remember this, success in law school does not determine intelligence, it determines aptitude in the very specific tasks of legal reasoning and writing. Some very smart people struggle with this stuff. Others get it pretty quick. Wherever you fall on this spectrum don’t doubt for one moment that you are one smart cookie!

Okay, let’s talk about ways to improve your performance if you did not do your best last semester. The first thing you need to do (besides reviewing your exam with your professor in detail) is to truly mourn your grade. Go experience the emotion and frustration that is inevitable when you experience a setback firsthand. Go cathart! (Yes, I know that is a made up word but I like it so deal). Here is the problem though—it’s the fourth week in the semester and you don’t have a lot of time. Whatever you do, or how ever short a time you devote to this task, don’t skip it. Dealing with the emotional aspects of a setback is the first step in moving past it and getting back on the path to academic success. You cannot afford to be pulled down all semester long by unprocessed negative emotions or, even worse, get caught up in a self-fulfilling prophesy of doom.

Second, you need a plan to achieve your best result. A good plan takes into account what works for you and what does not. Take time to evaluate your study habits last semester. Did you devote enough time to your studies? Did you miss any classes? How did you class preparation work for you? Did you outline? Did you start too late? How about practice hypos? And your social life – was there too much or too little? Was there any external distraction cause by money, family, or a relationship that you need to deal with now? You get the idea, right? Be through and brutally honest.

A good plan also encompass the totality of your daily life in law school. It has mental, physical and emotional components. From a mental standpoint, you need to understand what you are being asked to do in each of your courses. Start by looking at your syllabus and understand what the professor is asking you to learn. Next, you need to understand the time it will take to complete your daily assignments while also keeping up with your outlining on a weekly basis. Remember, finals prep does not start in reading week; finals prep starts now! You may also need to plan for completing your legal writing assignments. Don’t let a 30 page motion sneak up on you in April. You absolutely cannot ditch keeping up with outlining your classes while you focus on a paper that you should have been working on for weeks.

You also need to plan for living a healthy life! Exercise, eat right and maintain a social life. Do not abandon “life” while in law school! Please take my word for it, you will burn yourself out or be just plain miserable. Whatever you decided you need to do from a physical and emotion aspect in your plan, make sure you budget some time for it on a weekly basis.

Finally, and most importantly, engage in your legal studies! Remember the biggest differentiator from undergraduate and law school is your mindset. In undergrad most of the time the student’s mindset is to be taught. Here, at law school, one must have the mindset of an active learner who is responsible for one’s own education. Why do I say this? Because it will help you *and* it is also your responsibility for the rest of your professional career. Each day as a lawyer involves at least one novel task that you must undertake on your own. Getting in the right mindset now will help you down the road, trust me!

Ok, so what can you do from a practical standpoint? Dive in to the material! Do practice hypotheticals on a topic as soon as you have completed it. This will help you evaluate whether you really know what you think you know. It will also help you form a model analysis which you can use as a basis for your answer on the exam. Visit your professors. Take advantage of the Peer Tutoring Program and the various other resources offered by The Office of Academic Support. We are here to help you. Don’t be a stranger.

Good luck and remember that you can do this!

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