

Law School Mastery

Does a Law School's Elite Reputation (or lack of it) Matter?

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2009-07-09 15:45:05

David Feldman offers some thoughts and observations on the value of graduating from a top name Law School. Read the whole blog entry at [Crisis Post...](#)

Does the Law School "Name" Matter?

by David Feldman

A college student I know is contemplating law school. I was asked, "Is it better to go to the best possible school I can get into, or go to a lesser school and really stand out? What's the best way to get a job from that?" With the new US News law school rankings out recently (happy that my alma mater, University of Pennsylvania, was #8), it seemed a good time to ponder that age-old question.

Well, if you're seeking a Supreme Court clerkship, it sure does matter. According to the ABA Journal, Supreme Antonin Scalia told law students that he only picks clerks from the schools that "basically are the hardest to get into." Virtually all of his clerks have come from Yale and Harvard.

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So these days school does not really matter in terms of getting your first job. As long as you can stand out as one of the top students of a lower-ranked school, you will do fine. But we should also keep in mind what happens after that first job. Well, if you get to a top law firm, that pedigree will stay with you as you get your next sets of jobs.

As for my own opinion, I think he is essentially right.

That being said, you'll have more flexibility in your life voyage if you have more choices available to you, rather than have fewer choices available to you. And the better quality school you attend, the more choices you will have in terms of employment opportunities.

Many top law firms largely recruit from the top law schools, predictably. This is a symptom of top school ranking, prestige, and reputation, but also a symptom of the alumni network at work. Graduates of top law schools tend to find work in top law firms, and when it comes time to hire new young lawyers, they naturally have a bias for their alma maters. There's nothing terribly controversial about this, and indeed it's not unexpected or an unusual phenomenon.

Top firms often develop special recruiting relationships with lower-ranked schools, but strong regional reputations. Again, don't underestimate the value and strength of the alumni network.

In these rough economic times, the fact is that top students at non-elite law schools are having a difficult time landing their first job. Middle ranked law students at a variety of law schools everywhere are having a tough time, too. And graduates of poorly ranked schools, regardless of their own class ranking, have a tough road ahead.

So the best answer to the question posed is to attend the best, highest ranked law school that accepts you. If that school just isn't very impressive, it may be worth your while to sit this wound out, work on your LSAT skills, take the test again and apply again next season. The difference in your short, medium, and long term career path, as well as income, could be staggering.