

An OWLS View: Is Education Wasted on the Young?



Submitted by [Jennis Hemingway](#) 05/25/2010

OWLS (Older Wiser Law Students) and traditional students prepare for law school exams and paper deadlines differently. Younger students frequently comment about being up all night cramming or writing before the test or paper due date. I've never heard these comments from older students. OWLS may lack the ability or endurance to pull all-nighters. Or, perhaps more seasoned students have learned that sleep is necessary for them to function well. Maybe older students have learned to plan better, to budget time and therefore don't need to miss a night's sleep.

In addition to cramming, in their third year, many students don't attend class or even purchase the casebook. Students report that attending class is unnecessary or not the best use of their time. These students learn what they need to pass the exam from outlines and supplements. So, why attend class? What is the purpose of law school? If we could learn what we need to pass the bar without attending three years of school, why sacrifice the time and money?

My partner is an engineer. He believes what matters is the bottom line. We should care about results; not whether students spend class on Facebook, cram all night, or never attend class,— what really matters is the end result, not the means to the end. Society values performance, the grades, reports, and presentations.

So, why are so many results-oriented Baby Boomers worried about Generation X and Y and their fixation with technology, social networking, and instant communication? Why argue about Internet / laptops in the classroom if the students can absorb the material and pass the exams? Is law school simply a means to the end? Do students come to school to learn the black-letter law, how to write for exams, and pass the bar? I think there is distinction between OWLS and traditional students in what they want from law school.

Although there are definite exceptions, older students come back to school for more than the J.D. Many want to grow and really learn. They value the knowledge and want to understand more than what will be tested. The means may be as important as the end for many older students. Yet, employers care about results. Higher grades lead to better jobs. Employees can usually learn what they need to know on the job. Thus, for younger students the end, (the title/job) probably justifies the means, (the all night cramming and secondary interest in absorbing the knowledge). It pays; it works.

My physician, an M.D, Ph.D. who attended one year of law school, told me that education was wasted on the young. He does not believe younger students appreciate the knowledge. In my case he may be right. Twenty years have passed since I earned my undergraduate degree as a means to a career. But now I care about personal growth- about really learning and retaining information for the long term, not for the exam or the grade. Now, I want to remember what I'm learning – I want to build on my education. I hope to be wiser, better, and smarter than I was before law school. My goal is to grow and be successful in various aspects of my life. We are more than our careers, more than our jobs. Even if the ends justify the means, students with that mindset ultimately lose, because life is in the journey.