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Law Library Briefs

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Roger Williams University School of Law Library



No. 39, November, 2007

Preparing For and Taking Law School Exams

In a few weeks, classes will end and exams will begin! Hopefully, you have been diligently reading your assignments, taking class notes, outlining, and/or studying with a buddy or a group. In addition to these activities, there are some other resources that you can consult as you prepare for and take exams. Resources include past exams on Reserve, CALI tutorials, study aids on the subject, and books on test taking.

You can search the Law Library's WebCatalog by Professor or Course to locate past exams on Reserve. Note that making past exams available on Reserve is at the discretion of the professor! The items circulate for two hours and are limited to use within the library.

The CALI (Computer-assisted legal instruction) tutorials in various subjects are accessible at www2.cali.org. In order to sign up for individual access, you must obtain the law school's authorization code from a reference librarian.

To review the legal concepts of a particular subject, check out the study aids consisting of the Thomson/West hornbooks and nutshells, the LexisNexis "Understanding..." series, and the Aspen Publishers

Examples and Explanations series. The August/September issue of *Law Library Briefs* describes these study aids in further detail.

Some books on preparing for and taking exams are on Reserve. *How to Study Law and Take Exams in a Nutshell* by Ann Burkhart and Robert Stein (Reserve, KF283 .B87 1996) has sample exam questions and answers. John Dernbach's *Writing Essay Exams to Succeed (Not Just to Survive)* contains two essay questions with three sample answers to each and an analysis of each answer to illustrate common mistakes made by law students in writing answers to essay questions (Reserve, KF283 .D47 2007). *Getting to Maybe: How to Excel on Law School Exams* (Reserve and stacks, KF283 .F47 1999) is authored by two law professors, Richard Michael Fischl and Jeremy Paul. They provide sample questions and answers for Torts, Property, Constitutional Law, and Contracts. For an annotated listing of other materials on studying law, consult *TimeSaver No. 2*, "Introduction to the Study of Law." You can obtain this *TimeSaver* by selecting Research Guides from the Law Library's pull-down menu at the law school's website.



Good Advice!

Assistant Dean of Students Lorraine Lalli and Alex Ruskell, Associate Director of Academic Support provide the following advice:

As You Prepare for Reading Period and Final Exams, Don't Forget These Important Things:

⚡ **Balance.** Balance is more important than ever during late November and December. While the scale representing your "free time" and time devoted to school work will be tipped towards preparing for final exams, not every minute can be spent studying. During exam time, do not cut back on sleep, exercise, and good nutrition in an effort to find more time to devote to studying! These activities keep your battery charged and are critical to your exam performance. Take better care of yourself during exam time, so that you can work at your peak.

⚡ **Perspective.** During exams, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the volume of material that you need to master to earn top grades. The stress and anxiety of your classmates can be contagious. Remember, all of the hard work and preparation of the entire semester has been leading up to final exams.

Because you are assigned to read “case books,” law students naturally tend to assume that you are learning cases, and that class preparation is over once you have briefed the two or three cases assigned for a particular class. This is not what your professors expect. The cases you read are the starting point and not the ending point of your studies. In life, the next case or problem will never be exactly the same as the case you just read. The question is how the doctrines the court applied here will or should work in the next case – which of the facts were critical, what different procedural question was posed, and so on. Once you have finished your case briefs, use them. Apply the cases to new problems, answer the questions in the book, do any problems you can find or think of. Probe deeply beyond memorizing the cases to thinking about the cases. Only then will you be ready for class.

Professor Niki Kuckes

🔗 **Support.** Remember, there is support for you! Professor Alex Ruskell and Writing Specialist Kim Baker are able to assist you with your exam preparation. If the stress of exams is overwhelming you, contact RIEAS for support (1-800-445-1195).

🔗 **Arrive Early on the Day of the Exam.** Plan to arrive on campus early. That way if something happens, you will still have time to make it to campus for your exam, or you can contact Student Services and the Dean of Students office to let them know about your circumstance.

🔗 **Start now!** You’ll need more study time than the December 3-5 reading period. Get your outlines up to date and get going! The goal is to be overprepared for the exams, so much so that any anxiety has been replaced with “boredom” with the

topic because you know it forward, backward, and sideways. Plan to be set, psyched, and ready for exam day.

Some Questions to Ask Yourself as Exams Approach:

🔗 **Where are you?** Are you caught up with everything? Are your course outlines up to date? Have you done all the reading? Do you have a study group? Have you left any questions unanswered throughout the semester?

🔗 **Where are you going?** Have you checked the syllabus to see if the exam is described? Do you know how long the exam will be, what kinds of questions will be asked, how much time you will have? Have you done any of your professor’s old or practice exams? Do you know what

the professor is likely looking for in a good answer?

🔗 **Prepare skeletal outlines.** Start to pare down your course outlines to make them shorter.

🔗 **Create study schedule.** Most of your studying will revolve around practice. 1. Create a schedule by using your skeletal outlines as a guide. 2. Decide on the number of short hypotheticals to answer in writing for each topic. 3. Decide on the number of long exam questions to answer in writing for each topic. 4. Figure out the number of hours necessary to prepare for all your exams, and divide by the number of available study days. 5. Determine how much time is available between now and finals. 6. Allocate specific study tasks to specific days.

🔗 **Where to find questions.** Your professor may have questions on reserve in the library. Questions from other professors can also be found on the Internet, CALI.org, and in commercial study aids such as *Examples and Explanations* and *Questions and Answers*.

Sample Study Schedule

Monday, November 26 (9 hours study time)

Torts - Answer short hypotheticals (3 hours)

Battery, 5 questions; Assault, 5 questions; False Imprisonment, 8 questions; Intentional Infliction, 3 questions; Conversion, 3 questions

Contracts - Answer short hypotheticals (6 hours)

Offer, 5 questions; Termination of Offer, 5 questions; Acceptance, 10 questions; Unilateral Contracts, 5 questions; Bilateral Contracts, 5 questions; Consideration, 18 questions

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