St. Thomas Law News

Some Guidance and Suggestions on Dealing with the Stress of Law School Exams

By: Nicole Davis White, Psy.D., J.D. (Guest Contributor)
Executive Director, Delta Psychological Group
2750 N.E. 185th Street, Ste. 305
Aventura, FL 33180         (305) 933-5733

Normal life is stressful at times. But life during law school can be inordinately stressful, more than you ever imagined it would be. Stressful to the point that you believe that you are the only one who can’t finish your reading for class, you don’t need to eat three meals a day (or even one!), or you can effectively study for 12 hours at the library without breaks. On my hardest days as an LS, I sometimes thought that the law school experience was purposefully designed to stress us out – thousands of pages of cases to read, midterm and final exams that lasted longer than a double feature, and hours of studying and outline preparation each semester, only to begin the same thing again just a few short weeks later. Not to mention Bar applications, intern/externships, research assistantships and Moot Court or Law Review. And if all of that isn’t enough, life continues to happen concurrently (I missed several Thanksgivings studying for Fall exams … but the family still got together for their usual holiday shenanigans).

So if part of being in law school is in fact to learn to cope with the stress that comes along with being a litigator or corporate in-house counsel, then that begs the question: What do I do to manage when the stress gets overwhelming? Here are a few tips to get through the grind:

1. Get an adequate amount of sleep. Believe it or not, sleep is a fundamental part of a healthy lifestyle, and getting a solid seven to nine hours each night helps with focus, concentration, mood, organization and other cognitive and emotional functions. If you are sleeping well, then you are probably thinking clearly and working effectively, and you are ultimately less likely to be overwhelmed.

2. Know yourself. What is your study style? Do you work best in the morning or at night? Alone or in a group? In short spurts or for several hours at a time? Once you accept your own unique way of organizing and managing the workload, you will forgive yourself for not doing things the way your classmate does and you will be a more effective (and less stressed out) student.

3. Take a Break. Remember that law school is a part of your life, not all of it. Make time for friends, hobbies and exercise – both to give you a chance to regroup and recharge, and also to remind you what all of this hard work is for (a rewarding and full life!)

4. Know your limits. Recognize the signs that you may be overwhelmed. They may be poor motivation, difficulty with appetite or sleep, irritability or anger problems, using substances to excess, or negative thinking. Stress can sometimes lead to us thinking in absolutes i.e. “I will never pass that test” or “I am the worst student” or even “I can’t make it through another day like this”. If you or a friend is having these types of thoughts or appear to be “shutting down” it may be time to see a professional for additional help.
You made it this far. And you can get through this challenging time too, so long as you focus on good self care, maintain a healthy and balanced lifestyle, and you are self-aware about your own personal limits and stress levels. And making some time for a Thanksgiving celebration with loved-ones and friends, even if it is just take-out, can’t hurt either. Good luck!

**Faculty Presentation**

Professor John M. Kang presented a paper at the Villanova School of Law conference on The Ethics of Traditions; the paper he presented was "The Burdens of Manliness." He also present at the Loyola University of Chicago, Colloquium on "How Democratic is the Constitution;" the paper he present at this event was "Cultivating Hostility: A Justification for Free Speech."

**St. Thomas Law hosts human rights symposium on aftershock of Haiti**

On November 5, 2010, the St. Thomas University School of Law Intercultural Human Rights Law Review hosted its 6th annual symposium entitled "Human Rights Aftershocks: Haiti." A thorough discussion on the human rights issues surrounding Haiti since the tragic January 2010 earthquake permeated the event. The conference shed light on Haiti’s history of shortcomings in governance and rule of law, political instability, outside influence, and extreme poverty. It also focused on issues of internally displaced persons, children’s rights, human trafficking risks, and foreign aid and reconstruction after disasters. The symposium featured eminent legal scholars, attorneys, judges, and policy makers who gathered at St. Thomas to explore ways of developing effective solutions to problems that violate respect and dignity of every human being, and of charting new directions in the struggle for human rights, justice, and equality within this country.

The symposium was very well attended, and the feedback was extraordinary from speakers hailing from Georgia State, Willamette, Southern, and FAMU as well as from our local schools, UM and FIU. One of them mentioned that STU law school deserves special national and international recognition for the kind of work that is done here; another one mentioned that he takes to Georgia State the message for its students that St. Thomas students are at the forefront in confronting and addressing issues of human rights.

**U.S. Attorney Wilfredo Ferrer Addresses Peter T. Fay American Inn of Court**

The Peter T. Fay American Inn of Court, sponsored by St. Thomas University School of Law, had its second meeting of the 2010-2011 school year on Wednesday, November 10. Its guest speaker was Wilfredo Ferrer, the United States Attorney for the Southern District of Florida. Mr. Ferrer, who was nominated by President Barack Obama and confirmed on April 22, 2010, by the Senate discussed public service, his office’s priorities, and his background. He also offered guidance for students who might wish to someday work as Assistant United States Attorneys.

Mr. Ferrer’s career demonstrates a true commitment to public service. After graduating cum laude from the University of Pennsylvania Law School, he served as a clerk for Judge Stanley Marcus. After three years in private practice, he returned to the public sector, first as a White House Fellow and Special Assistant to the Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, and later as Deputy Chief of Staff and Counsel to the Attorney General of the United States. He returned to Miami as an Assistant United States Attorney, moving from that position to head the federal litigation section at the Miami-Dade County Attorney’s Office.

The Inn brings together students, practitioners, law professors, and judges in informal settings in an effort to improve skills, to promote collegiality and professionalism, and to enable members of these groups to get to know each other and to understand each other’s concerns. Professors Tony Musto and Gary Kravitz spearhead the school’s involvement.