

Episode 7: Journey to Law School (with Daphne Chu & Bronté Anderson)



Guide

Learning objectives

- To introduce students to the diverse paths available to pursue legal education and enter the legal profession, through the personal experiences of three lawyers
- To help students identify strategies for developing their interests in post-secondary education and their professional careers
- To equip students with future tools to prioritize their well-being and balance the challenges of education and career-driven stresses

Materials

- Copies of this student handout for Episode 7 - Journey to Law School (one per student)
- Copies of the “Compass Points” exercise
- Device to listen to the **“Law Syrup” podcast episode**

Teaching and learning strategies

- **Group discussion:** Students will engage in structured group discussions that encourage them to share their thoughts on career or education paths, focusing on what excites them, what worries them,

and what they need to know to make an informed decision.

- **Critical reflection:** Through a guided framework, students will be prompted to reflect on their motivations and challenges in pursuing a career. This reflective practice will encourage self-awareness and clarity of thought when making decisions about their future.
- **Interactive exploration:** Exercises like the “Compass Points” activity allow students to explore different facets of their chosen paths, giving them a holistic view of their options before making a decision. Students will be asked to consider aspects of their potential future careers or education paths they may not have fully thought through before.
- **Collaborative learning:** By sharing insights and reflections with peers, students will deepen their understanding of the complexities involved in decision-making. Peer feedback and diverse perspectives will help students refine their thoughts and broaden their viewpoints.

Episode 7:

Journey to Law School (with Daphne Chu & Bronté Anderson)



Handout

Daphne, Bronté, and Herman's journeys to law school

Daphne

Daphne is a Litigation Associate¹ at Borden Ladner Gervais, a national Canadian business law firm, focusing on commercial² and civil³ litigation. When she was in high school, Daphne thought she might go into medicine—but science courses didn't feel like the right fit for her. Instead, she began to think about a career that would challenge her and build on her strengths in writing. Taking a high school law class was a turning point for her. She loved participating in mock trials⁴ and visiting a courthouse for the first time, where she watched a lawyer question a witness. That experience helped her picture herself as a lawyer one day. Daphne went on to pursue a unique path to law school: a 6-year joint political science undergraduate and law degree (Juris Doctor⁵) program at the University of Ottawa. Unlike most students, who complete a four-year bachelor's degree and then a three-year law degree, Daphne earned both at the same time—and entirely in French. After completing a summer position and an articling⁶ term at Borden Ladner Gervais, Daphne joined the firm as an associate.

¹ Litigation is the process for settling disputes through the court system.

² Commercial litigation involves litigation between one or more businesses.

³ Civil litigation involves litigation between one or more individuals.

⁴ A mock trial is a simulated courtroom experience, where students act as lawyers, witnesses, and other courtroom actors to present a hypothetical legal case.

⁵ A Juris Doctor degree is a professional degree that prepares individuals to practice law.

⁶ After completing a Juris Doctor degree, law graduates are required to complete an articling placement at a law firm, where they gain practical work experience under the supervision of a lawyer.

Bronté

Bronté is a law student at McGill University's Faculty of Law in Montreal. Like Daphne, she didn't always plan to become a lawyer. At first, she explored careers in healthcare and sciences, and for a time, thought about becoming a high school music teacher. But when she took a high school law class, she discovered that she loved how law involves analysis, rules, and problem-solving. After her undergraduate degree, Bronté went on to earn a master's degree in public health and work in that field. Along the way, she noticed that she enjoyed technical writing and problem-solving—skills that overlap with a career in law. What drew her most to law school was how relationship-based and collaborative the legal profession can be, and the many different career doors that a law degree could open.

Herman

Herman is a litigation associate at Torkin Manes, a business law firm in Toronto. Like Daphne and Bronté, Herman initially thought he wanted to pursue a career in medicine, but science wasn't his true calling. During his high school law class, Herman had the chance to visit a courthouse and meet a judge, who encouraged him to pursue a fun degree before going to law school (the judge herself had studied opera singing!). Reflecting on his love for reading and writing, Herman decided to follow her advice and pursue a legal education—and he hasn't looked back since!

Discussion questions

Uncovering passions and career paths

Daphne, Bronté, and Herman each followed unique paths to law school. For example, Daphne and Herman both started out interested in medicine, while Bronté worked in public health before making the transition. Despite their different journeys, they all found careers that matched their passions and curiosity—like writing, problem-solving, and building relationships.

- What are some things that make you curious or passionate?
- What kinds of careers do you think would match those interests?

Planning for education

Each panelist took a different approach to their education—Daphne completed a unique joint degree program, Bronté pursued a master's degree, and Herman chose a degree he enjoyed before law school.

- Are you interested in post-secondary education?
- If so, what kinds of programs or schools interest you, and why?

Connecting high school experiences

All three panelists mentioned that their high school law classes helped spark their interest in the legal profession. They enjoyed activities like mock trials and courtroom visits.

- If you are in a high school law class, what are some experiences or activities you'd like to try?
- How could those experiences help you explore your interests or future goals?

The Law School Application Process

Daphne, Bronté, and Herman’s stories highlight the many paths you can take to law school. Herman took a common route: after finishing his 4-year journalism degree at Carleton University, he wrote the LSAT (more on this below) and applied to law school. Daphne followed a different path by enrolling straight out of high school in a 6-year joint political science and law program at the University of Ottawa. Meanwhile, Bronté pursued a Master’s degree in public health and worked in the field before applying to law school.

Their experiences show that there isn’t just one way to get to law school, but here’s a general overview of the most common path:

1. **Graduate high school:** Your first step is completing high school and earning the credits needed to enroll in a university program.
2. **Attend university:** There’s no specific “pre-law” program required to apply to most law schools! As Herman learned, you can study anything you’re passionate about. Whether it’s journalism, science, arts, or something else, the key is finding a field you enjoy. Some universities, like the University of Ottawa, offer joint programs that combine a bachelor’s degree with law school, allowing you to complete both in six years.
3. **Write the Law School Admission Test (LSAT):** The LSAT is a standardized test designed to measure your logical and analytical reasoning skills. It doesn’t require any prior knowledge of law or specific subjects. Students prepare in different ways, including textbooks, practice tests, tutors, or prep courses. Find what works best for you—there’s no “one-size-fits-all” approach!
4. **Apply to law school:** To apply, you’ll submit your post-secondary transcripts, LSAT score, a personal statement, and letters of reference through an online application portal. Each law school has its own specific requirements, such as:
 - how they calculate grades
 - the topics to address in your personal statement

- language requirements (English or French)
- additional assessment tools, like online interviews

In Canada, law schools are also divided between English common law programs and French civil law programs, reflecting Canada's unique two-system legal structure.⁷

The process of applying to law school can feel overwhelming, but plenty of resources are available to guide you. You can explore online forums, websites, and mentoring programs or talk to career counselors to better understand the process.

Finally, as Bronté mentioned, many students take time after their undergraduate degree to work, gain experience, or save money for law school tuition. This time can be a great opportunity to explore your interests, build skills, and prepare for the next step in your journey.

The challenging path to law school (and many other careers)

Daphne, Bronté, and Herman shared that pursuing a career in law—or any profession—can feel overwhelming at times. The uncertainty of the future and fear of disappointment are common challenges, especially when working toward a professional degree like law or medicine. These programs require students to maintain strong academic performance, which can create a lot of pressure.

That's why it's so important to develop ways to manage stress and take care of your well-being. Having a solid support system—people you can rely on for encouragement, advice, and comfort—can make a big difference. Being kind to yourself, especially during tough times, is also key. As the panelists emphasized, a grade

⁷ Canada's legal system is based on the English and French systems. Explorers and colonists brought these systems to Canada in the 17th and 18th centuries. After the Battle of Quebec in 1759, the country fell under English common law, except for Quebec, which follows civil law. See: <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/just/03.html>

or acceptance into a program doesn't define who you are. What matters most is that you gave it your all.

When you're feeling stressed, it can help to take a step back and put things in perspective. Remember: you're not alone. Many others are navigating similar challenges, and it's okay to feel uncertain. By focusing on what's within your control and reaching out for support when needed, you can build resilience and keep moving forward.

Discussion questions

- **Support systems:** What does having a “support system” mean to you? Who are the people in your life that you would include in your support system?
- **Stress management:** What are some strategies you currently use to manage your stress? How do you find that engaging in these activities helps you?
- **Overcoming fear of disappointment:** Have you ever felt uncertain or worried about not meeting expectations? How did you work through those feelings, and what did you learn from the experience?

Finding your place in the profession

One common misconception about law school—and the legal profession in general—is the idea that you need to know exactly what area of law you want to pursue before you even start your program. As Daphne, Bronté, and Herman shared, this isn't the case. In fact, none of the panelists had a clear idea of what type of lawyer they wanted to be until they gained some real-world experience. For example, Herman initially thought he wanted to become a criminal lawyer. However, after taking a range of courses during law school and experiencing different areas of practice, he discovered his passion for litigation.

Keeping an open mind is essential, as many students are surprised to find new areas of interest after trying them out. The legal profession offers countless opportunities, and it's completely normal to explore before deciding what suits you best.

Discussion questions

- The term “lawyer” can mean a lot of different things. What are some areas of law you’ve heard about? Are there any that seem particularly interesting to you?
- Where have you learned about these areas of law? (For example: through school, TV shows, podcasts, or conversations with others?)

The value in seeking out mentors

When making important decisions about your education and career, seeking guidance and support from a mentor can be very helpful. Mentors who have gone through the journey can provide you with valuable information that may not be easily found through other sources. Daphne, for example, shared that as a first-generation law student, she didn’t have anyone in her immediate family or circle to ask. Bronté, on the other hand, reached out to professionals on social media platforms like LinkedIn. These interactions helped her clarify her decision to enter the legal profession and provided her with meaningful conversations with people who had already succeeded in their careers.

It’s important to remember that mentors can offer guidance in different areas of your life—whether it’s for your education, career, or personal growth. These individuals can be part of your support system, people you can turn to when you need advice or just someone to talk to. Mentorship doesn’t always need to be formal—it can simply be someone who is able to provide guidance in any aspect of life.

Discussion questions

- Do you have anyone you would consider to be a mentor in your life? How have they supported you?
- Daphne, Bronté, and Herman each shared how they found mentors through unconventional means, including professional social media platforms like LinkedIn. What are your thoughts on this? Would you ever consider reaching out to someone through these platforms for guidance?

Daphne, Bronté, and Herman’s advice to their high school selves

Before committing to attending law school and pursuing a legal career (or any other profession), it is important to figure out why you want to pursue this path. As both Daphne and Bronté shared, one helpful question to ask yourself is: “Would you still make this choice if no one would ever know that you are a lawyer?” This question can help you reflect on the motivations behind your decision. If the answer is no, it might indicate that the reasons driving your choice may not be sustainable in the long run. Often, students are motivated by external factors such as prestige or the desire to “win” by securing a spot in a challenging program. However, as Daphne notes, the application process, law school, and a legal career can all be long and stressful. It’s important to make an informed decision before committing. During difficult and stressful times, having a clear understanding of why you are pursuing this path can help you stay focused. No matter what path you choose—whether in law or another field—always start with the question of “why”.

Herman also shared useful advice: find something you love and stick with it throughout the journey, such as a hobby. This can help you stay balanced. It’s easy to become consumed with what’s coming next, but doing things you are passionate about can help you stay present. Additionally, it’s important to spend time with

family and friends and take time for yourself. You don't have to sacrifice your personal life to pursue a challenging career. Many people successfully balance both by maintaining a healthy and balanced approach.

Discussion question

- As you listened to the advice shared by Daphne, Bronté, and Herman, what impacted you the most?
- If you know what kind of education or career you want to pursue, do you know your "why"? Your "why" is the deeper reason behind your desire to pursue a specific career or education path. It could be a personal value, a desire to make a difference, or something you're passionate about. Reflect on how your personal values or experiences align with the career you're thinking about.
- Were you surprised to hear from Herman that balancing your personal life and career is something that is highly attainable in challenging professions?

Exercise

Exercise: Compass Points⁸

Instructions: Think about a career path or post-secondary education program that interests you and complete the following prompts:

Consider the following participants in the trial and imagine what emotions they might be experiencing:

1. E = Excited
 - What excites you about this career/education path? What's the upside?
2. W = Worrisome
 - What do you find worrisome about this career/education path? What's the downside?
3. N = Need to Know
 - What else do you need to know or find out about this career/education path? What additional information would help you to evaluate it?
4. S = Stance or Suggestion for Moving Forward
 - What is your current stance or opinion on this career/education path? How might you move forward in your evaluation of this?

Prompt for reflection after completing: How do you feel now compared to when you first started this process? Do you feel more or less confident in pursuing this path? What additional steps will you take to move forward?

⁸ Note: adapted from [Project Zero, Harvard Graduate School of Education](#).

Purpose: Why use this routine?

This routine helps flesh out an idea or proposition and eventually evaluate it. By examining various aspects of a career or education path, students gain a clearer understanding of their feelings and thoughts.

Application: When and where can I use it?

This routine works well when exploring the various sides of an idea before making a decision or forming an opinion. It could apply to decisions about career paths, educational programs, or even broader decisions like whether or not to join an organization, how to approach an assignment, or evaluate a public issue.

Launch: What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

Modeling the Process: Start by modeling the routine with the whole group, recording responses for everyone to see. Draw a compass on the board and map out responses in the four directions: E (Excited), W (Worrisome), N (Need to Know), and S (Stance).

Structure of responses: Encourage students to begin with what excites them about the idea (E) and gradually move to the more challenging or concerning aspects (W). Next, focus on what they need to know (N), and finally, reflect on their stance (S).

Follow-up prompt: After completing the group discussion, ask students to write down their personal stance and suggest a concrete next step. For example, “What’s one thing you can do to explore this further in the next month?”

Additional ideas:

- 1. Provide an example:** To help students understand how to approach the exercise, provide an example for a hypothetical career or education path. For example, if a student is considering law school:
 - E (Excited): “I’m excited about the opportunity to work with clients directly and make a tangible impact on their lives.”
 - W (Worrisome): “I’m worried about the long hours and the stress that might come with the workload in law.”
 - N (Need to Know): “I need to find out more about the lifestyle of someone in this field, such as work-life balance and typical job demands.”
 - S (Stance): “I’m leaning towards law, but I need to do more research into the day-to-day realities of the job before making a final decision.”
- 2. Group reflection:** After completing the exercise, have students share their responses in small groups or pairs. Use prompts like:
 - “Has anyone thought about a concern or challenge that you hadn’t considered?”
 - “What other perspectives might we be missing in this discussion?”
- 3. Future you letter:** After completing Compass Points, ask students to write a letter from their future selves (5-10 years from now) reflecting on their career or education path. This activity helps students visualize the impact of their choices and reframe their thinking.
- 4. Peer discussion:** Encourage students to engage with one another and share their reflections. This will deepen their thinking and allow them to consider other perspectives on their potential path.

Further information and resources

To help students encourage further exploration and consider different possibilities, the following resources may be useful:

- [OJEN: In Brief: Careers in Justice](#)
- [Queen's University Faculty of Law: High School to Lawyer](#)
- [Emond Publishing: The Comprehensive Guide to Law School in Canada](#)
- [University of Waterloo: How to choose a career](#)
- [University of Waterloo: How to choose a university program](#)
- [University of Waterloo: What to do when you can't decide](#)