

University of Colorado Law School
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David Getches, Dean, Univ. of Colo. Law School,
Welcome to Admitted Students (Mar. 31, 2011).

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Welcome to Admitted Students

Friday, March 31, 2011

David Getches

Welcome! You came here from a variety of locations and backgrounds, but you have this in common: our Admissions Committee decided that you would fit well at the U of C Law School. To get their nod you had to be competitive at some of the best schools in country, plus you had the elements of leadership, character, and diversity in your backgrounds that we seek for Colorado. The committee looked hard at you. Now it's your turn to look hard at us. We are delighted that many of you are already committed to joining us. You are all wise to take the time to do this, as you surely have several attractive choices.

There are two things you need to reflect upon:

- Why you want a legal education
- The law school that is the best fit for you as you pursue that goal

The beauty of a legal education is the ambit of careers you can follow. It is not one career. Not everyone ends up at Boston Legal, becomes Atticus Finch or the Lincoln Lawyer.

Take, for example, the people we recently honored at the Colorado Law Alumni Awards banquet.

with 500 of our alums present. Dick Bratton is prominent water attorney from Gunnison where he has given away as much time as he has billed for, and has donated river-front land that will make the road to Crested Butte park-like paradise for fishers and picnickers and he helped to propel Western State College to a fine institution. Larry Naves recently retired as Chief Judge of the Denver District Court; he had been a pillar of the Sam Cary Bar Association, the black bar association in Colorado. Anne Castle is the Assistant Secretary of the US Department of the Interior. Jim Carrigan was a US District Court Judge and state supreme court judge, and formerly a trial

lawyer and initially a professor here at Colorado Law. The practice courtroom next door is named for him. Another award winner was a trial attorney, former president of the Colorado Bar Association who has given countless hours to promote ethics and professionalism in the legal profession.

You will find our alumni leading, helping, serving, in multiple capacities. This can mean putting problem-solving skills you develop in law school to work to:

- make the economy and the environment healthy,
- keep families intact,
- propel new ideas into new products,
- ensure that people accused of crimes are treated with the fairness our constitution guarantees,
- making laws as legislators,
- brainstorming policy in committees and in think tanks
- deciding cases as judges.

If you like a life of service, of leadership, and understand what it takes to earn the respect of others around you – by impeccable, unwavering ethical behavior – this can be the ideal career. You don't have to know as you come in the door next August where you will end up, only the kind of person you want to be. So you need not be daunted by the uncertain economy: you have a large menu of first jobs to pursue that is as wide as your ambition and imagination, even if the menu of traditional first jobs in law firms is more limited.

As for your choice of law schools, there is no such thing as “the best” law school for everyone. Ranking law schools is a function of your own needs, interests, and aspirations.

You many have seen the recent *New Yorker* piece by the best-selling author Malcolm Gladwell on the popular magazine rankings industry. He points out there is, for instance, no “best car.” It depends on

what you are looking for – speed, fuel efficiency, dependability, style, and so on. The same with colleges or law schools. So he debunks the US News system by taking just 3 of the factors they use – top 75% LSAT students, faculty-student ratios, the influence of faculty as measured by their publications, and he adds in affordability. He shows that, if these measures are equally important, Colorado Law is in the top ten law schools in the nation.

And my advice to you is that you will make a better choice of law schools if you look hard at the qualities of the faculty and students, the costs, and also at the programs and the community of any school you consider.

The faculty of the school you choose is important, so look at their accomplishments. Ask existing students about the faculty's passion for their work in the classroom and for their research. Is there a critical mass of professors national and international

reputations? They will be the ones exposing you to a wider world of learning, counseling you, writing you letters of recommendation.

And as for students, selectivity, the measurable qualities of your future classmates, matters – LSAT and GPA. It is more challenging to have classes that are full of intense discussion with people who want to learn and have shown their prowess by succeeding in undergraduate work.

And seek a school where you will experience a diversity of backgrounds and attitudes. Most of all, you are choosing colleagues – friends, associates, fellow-travelers in an exciting journey.

Consider costs. Limiting your debt upon graduation is important. It gives flexibility in your search for satisfying employment; some jobs pay less than others, and those may be more desirable to you than others. Some jobs take longer to find, especially in

this market. Be a wise shopper and look at the net cost for all three years.

Another consideration is **programs**. There are no “majors” in law school, a fact that you know by now. But you may be attracted to law school by the opportunities that it offers to achieve depth in areas where you have already worked or studied, or pursuits that you care deeply about – the natural environment, building businesses, technology, protecting the welfare of children, civil rights, making government work, ensuring order in our society.

There are surely boutique law schools where you can lose yourself in a peculiar interest touted in the form of a program. Look for programs, centers, clinics and the like, as enrichment that will stimulate and maintain your interest and add value to an excellent all-around education. But don't let the signature strengths of a school eclipse the value of a first-rate, all-around legal

education; lawyers, whether specialists or generalists, need confidence in all the essentials of the law.

Another factor is community. You will live in a place defined first by four walls within which you will spend most of your waking hours and second by what is outside.

You can find schools that are cutthroat competitive, and those where a healthy spirit of competition means testing yourself in an intellectual environment, where everyone wants to do her or his best, and revels in the successes of one another, though they may vary in kind from seeking the highest grades, to being on the winning moot court team, to logging the most public service hours, and so on.

You can find places where religious or political conformity is the norm. You can find places where cynical pursuit of material gain is widely accepted as the goal of spending 3 years and \$100,000 on a legal

education. But if you want to come away with a mind at least as open as it is when you entered, if you believe that leaving the world a bit better through your service is more important than becoming rich, you will have to examine the values that define the community you are entering.

The location of a school also matters if it's important to you to have a life beyond the classroom and law library. It matters if you want to do part-time work or externships in courts, law offices, or businesses.

Also, look at the opportunities for the kind of recreation, social interaction, and cultural activity you want.

So how does this place measure up by these standards? You will not find the answer in a magazine or book. You are the only one who can say what is best for you. Being here should be enormously helpful.

My own characterization of Colorado Law – enthusiastically biased as it is – sees our law school:

- as a place where talented students come in with a breadth of impressive achievements and diverse experiences, with a determination to succeed at solving problems in a way that makes society better off.
- As a faculty with extraordinary though widely different interests, whose reputations would make them welcome at a hundred other schools, but whose excitement about working with bright students and with one another keeps them here.
- Our tuition and fees are competitive with all but a few heavily subsidized schools.
- It's a place where dynamic programs in natural resources and environmental law, telecommunications and technology, American Indian law, entrepreneurship, and family law co-exist and enrich the educational experience as well as the reputation of the place without

eclipsing our fundamental mission of providing an uncompromised full legal education.

- And the community of Colorado Law is one where values of public service, community engagement, and mutual, collegial support prevail. We are surrounded by outdoor beauty that beckons physical activity, and a town full of excellent entertainment possibilities, accessible to one of the country's great cities, a center for government and business activity, culture, entertainment, and sports.

Ask yourself “Is this where I would be happy working prodigiously on my legal education for three intense years?” Look at the surroundings. **Imagine having a *life*** as well as an education here.

Please take the rest of this day to get to know our faculty and students better so your decision is informed and confident. Ask our students, faculty, and our graduates about the school. Today, get a

feel for whether this community is where you want to pursue a legal education, and build relationships with other legal professionals that you will take with you the rest of your life.

We are eager to have you join us.

Thank you for coming.