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You've worked your arse off for three years. You've managed to take comprehensible notes for the duration of a two-hour lecture on promissory estoppel, at 9 a.m. on a Monday morning, all with a head-splitting hangover.

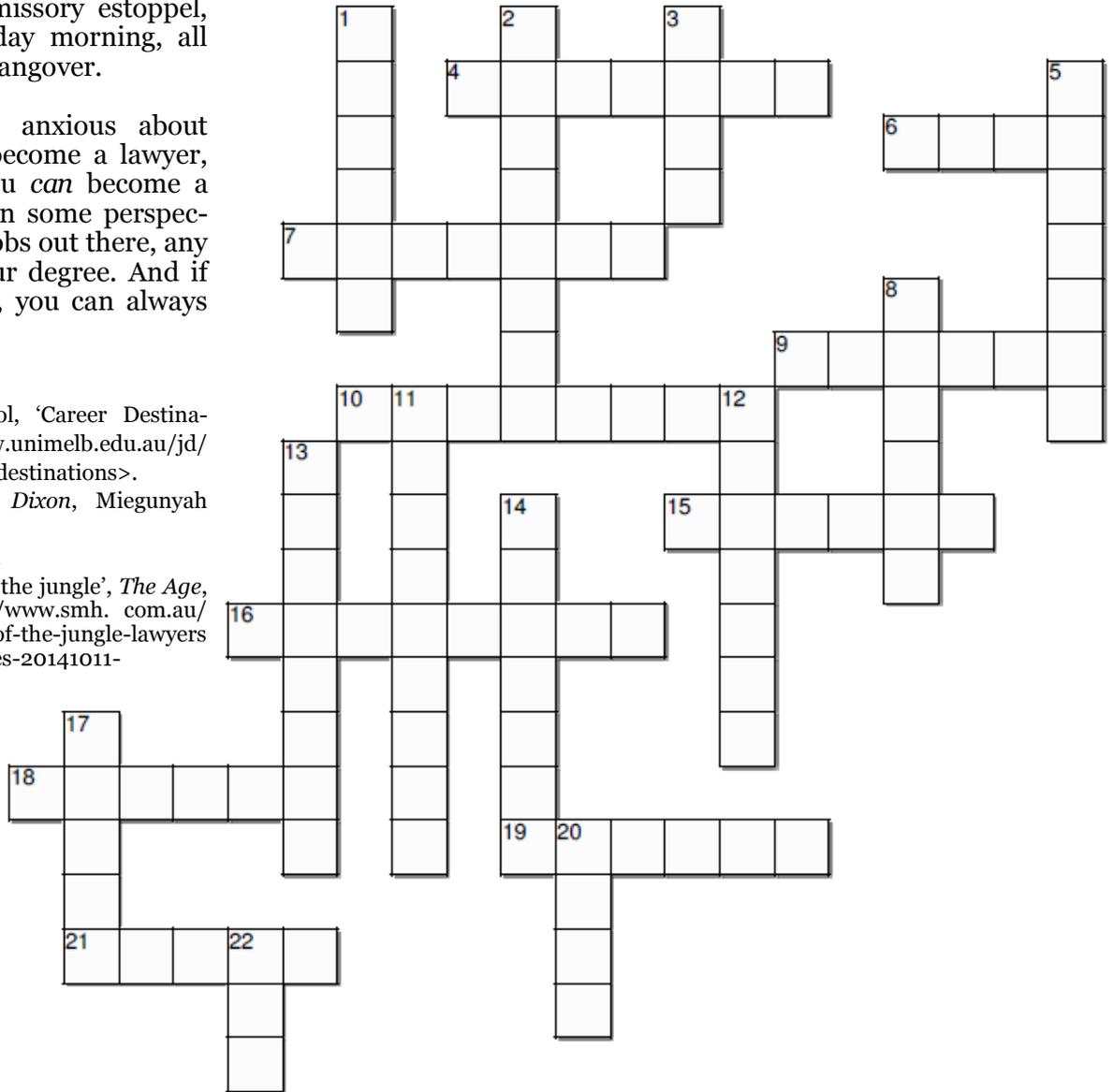
So, if you're feeling anxious about whether you should become a lawyer, or indeed whether you *can* become a lawyer, try to maintain some perspective. There are many jobs out there, any many ways to use your degree. And if worst comes to worst, you can always be a teacher.

Footnotes:

- (1) Melbourne Law School, 'Career Destinations', <<http://www.law.unimelb.edu.au/jd/becoming-a-lawyer/career-destinations>>.
- (2) Phillip Ayres, *Owen Dixon*, Miegunyah Press, 2003.
- (3) This, regrettably, is true.
- (4) Neil McMahon, 'Law of the jungle', *The Age*, 11 October 2014, <<http://www.smh.com.au/national/newscustom/law-of-the-jungle-lawyers-now-an-endangered-species-20141011-114u91.html>>.

In the News

Cross the words below



Across

- 4. Which Senator is being sued for defamation?
- 6. Which country was taken off the US terror list this week?
- 7. The naval vessel allegedly used to refoul Vietnamese asylum seekers (HMAS ___)?
- 9. Which company fired six employees for involvement in the Reclaim Australia movement?
- 10. Trials are set to begin in NSW for the medicinal use of what?
- 15. Former High Court justice who died earlier this month.
- 16. For how many days is Victoria Police seeking to detain an Anzac day terror suspect without charge?
- 18. Which country recently demanded WWII wartime reparations from Germany?
- 19. Which European Central Bank member had papers thrown in their face by a protestor?
- 21. Essendon management blamed which foodstuff for players' positive drug tests?

Down

- 1. Which insurgency group is causing civil unrest in Yemen?
- 2. Which F1 thought it was cool to spray champagne in a woman's face?
- 3. Country visited by the foreign minister for the first time in over a decade.
- 5. Drake was allegedly sexually assaulted on stage this week by which ageing popstar?
- 8. How many seconds did Bob take to skol a yard (3.3 schooners)?
- 11. Which country was found to top the purchasing power parity index this week?
- 12. Who is the leader of the federal opposition (clue: Bill ___)?
- 13. What size beer did Tony skol in 7 seconds?
- 14. Which country accidentally legalised ecstasy for 24 hours?
- 17. Which team is topping the AFL ladder (mascot)?
- 20. Which former PM is reported to be vying for the position of UN Secretary-General?
- 22. Which energy giant has decided to close its coal stations?



DE MINIMIS

A newspaper for the students of Melbourne Law School. Established 1948. Revived 2012. Made officially unofficial 2015.

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You don't have to be a lawyer

Your editor **Hamish Williamson** discusses the pitfalls of limiting your career horizons.

Occasionally—amidst the panoply of firm-sponsored talks, information sessions on clerkships, mock interviews, and other such events designed to sculpt eager MLS students into eager lawyers, ready to eat paperwork and shit billable hours—a lecturer will say something along the lines of:

'Whether you go into legal practice, or some other field...'

The nature and scope of these other fields is seldom defined. Nor is it explained why graduates might end up in said fields.

After all, given that the J.D. is an intensive program focusing on the minutiae of contemporary Australian law, it seems at *best* a little misdirected to endure three years of such study, only to end up in a field other than legal practice. At *worst*, it could be construed an admission of failure.

But a law degree is good for much more than practicing law. As the university itself says on its website:

'It is important to note that employers of our law graduates are not just law firms – they are also management consulting companies, financial institutions, NGOs, aid organisations and government departments such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to name just a few'.⁽¹⁾

Moreover, even though legal practice is the most *direct* route for law graduates, it may not be the

most enjoyable for many, or even the most secure.

Indeed, irrespective of their present intentions, many current MLS students won't be lawyers in a decade's time.

Some will have entered the degree with no intention to practice law; some will decide not to practice part-way through their degree; some will make that decision after spending years in the industry.

This article is aimed at students equivocal about the prospect of being a lawyer, especially those who feel as though aiming for a graduate position in a law firm or legal department is something they *should* do, rather than something they want to do.

My points are threefold: (1) don't feel that you should *want* to practice law; (2) legal practice is not *prima facie* the best career path; and (3) your degree is valuable in many fields beyond legal practice.

Nothing in this article is intended to disparage the career path which many of you will doubtless take, or to dissuade anyone from legal practice. Becoming a solicitor or barrister is, after all, the most straightforward application of your degree.

And, if you're the kind of person who feels a frisson bordering on the sexual at the prospect of negotiating contracts or speaking to the High Court, then you should definitely throw your energies into legal practice. For everyone else...



My study grotto from first year. Note the chair—my finances had obviously improved by this point. Photo credit: The author.

1. You don't have to enjoy studying or practicing law

Towards the end of my first semester of law school, while writing up notes for my exams, I reached the nadir of my degree. After poring over my textbook for 'Obligations' for the umpteenth fruitless hour, I decided that the reason I wasn't enjoying myself was that I hadn't yet become fully immersed in the law.

I threw down my textbook, hopped on a tram to campus, and borrowed a biography⁽²⁾ of Owen Dixon, famed High Court justice. Maybe, I thought, if I learned more about the history of Australian law, then I'd feel inspired by revision instead of dreading it.

Continued on the next page...

Feature

YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A LAWYER

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Needless to say, it didn't help. Reading the book only made me feel worse. Here was Dixon, a monumental intellect who 'never forgot a case once he read it', breezing through his studies, shining as a young barrister, and defining the whole tenor of modern Australian jurisprudence.

And here I was, sitting on a milk crate because I couldn't afford a desk chair,⁽³⁾ grinding through dozens of pages of extracts from *Commonwealth v Verwayen* and desperately trying to understand what the fuck the justices were talking about—let alone comprehend the respective merits of their views on estoppel. Even worse, my case notes were still unfinished.

It wasn't until some time later that I realised that trying to force myself to enjoy business law was a Sisyphean task. Ultimately, I could take little more than an academic interest in contracts...my career at Freehills was over before it began. Luckily, I found more interest in public law, so I didn't quit altogether.

To move from the anecdotal to the general: if you're not genuinely interested in the material you're studying, don't worry. Keep exploring your textbooks and subjects until you find something which doesn't make you miserable. You are not obliged to find everything engaging.

In the meantime, treat your studies like a game, and simply aim for the high score without worrying too much what it all means. If you find that you're uninterested in the totality of law...that's when you should consider quitting.

Even this is a perfectly valid choice. After all, legal practice is a narrow (albeit taxing) application of one's mind. Some people *will* find the kind of tasks with which they are presented in law school—scrutinising case law and statutes, and forming legal arguments—to be inexpressibly dry

and dull. After all, questions of legality are just one facet of any given issue.

(2) Being a lawyer is not necessarily a pragmatic option

Some of you may have more pragmatic reasons for deciding on legal practice. Even if you don't find much interest in law, you'll stick it out in order to get that well-paid graduate job. You can work hard for a few years, earn a tonne of money, and segue into something more interesting later. Right?

Well, here's a bit of context. The job market for law graduates is bad. Really, really bad.

A singularly depressing Sydney Morning Herald article from late last year⁽⁴⁾ highlights the central problem: there are far more graduates than there are jobs. The figure the article quoted was 12,000 law graduates per year, versus just 60,000 working lawyers in the *entire* country.

Even accounting for those graduates who don't wish to study law, these are alarming numbers. The article goes on to quote our dean, Carolyn Evans, in describing 2013 as the 'worst year' she'd ever seen, before segueing into the anxiety and depression experienced by many in the profession. Hardly heartening.

It seems likely that the effects of the weak job market are exacerbated by the way in which many students narrow their career ambitions. The prominence of corporate firms on campus is apt to mislead students into thinking that they form the majority, or even a significant proportion, of the job opportunities for graduates.

This is untrue: the firms are so visible because they want to get 'first dibs' on the *best* graduates. They aren't much interested in the remainder. So, unless you're sublimely confident in your CV, it'd be prudent to have some back-up options.

It's worth mentioning, too, that in such a grossly over-supplied market, you may find that, even if you get a job, your value (not to mention your remuneration) is not as high as you

expected. If you can't hack 14 hour days, there'll be no shortage of grads to replace you. All the more reason to keep your options open.

(3) What are some alternatives to legal practice?

So, for everyone except those few who have both the aptitude and the passion to get positions at legal firms upon graduating, a bit of horizon-broadening is in order.

Consider your educational and employment history: what other skills do you have, and how can your law degree augment them? You've already got a first degree under your belt, so start there.

At the very least, it's worth exploring opportunities for legal practice beyond the major firms. In-house legal departments, both in the corporate and government sectors, are always on the hunt for good graduates, even in lean times. So too are judges, small firms and solicitors' offices.

Beyond legal practice, the opportunities are limitless. In a nation as thoroughly legalised as Australia, every business and organisation deals with legislation, regulation or statute on a regular basis.

Few of these interactions are mediated by law firms or even in-house counsel, for reasons of cost and convenience. Thus, being able to confidently deal with such material is a tremendously valuable skill.

Moreover, the 'generic' skills which a JD degree demonstrates are pretty impressive. You're obviously clever.

Concluded on the back page...

DE MINIMIS IS...

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Romance

WHAT IT'S LIKE TO DATE A LAW STUDENT

You are a law student. That's all you are, because law consumes your life.

Explaining what it is like to be dating someone in law school is as hard as describing the colour orange to a blind person.

It's difficult to articulate how much it pains me to see you, my significant other, torture yourself over readings and revision and it's just as hard to find a way to help you when all you want is peace and time to study.

I'm forced to watch as your health slowly disintegrates. You become sleep deprived, moody and anxious. The worse thing is that no matter what I do, nothing helps. I couldn't tell you how many times I have locked myself in the bathroom – crying at the pain of seeing you slave away at law. All the while feeling secondary in your life.

But I'm not going to be Debbie Downer 'cause let's be honest, law life is miserable enough as it is. So I'm doing to dig deep to find a few things where dating you, a law student, is rewarding.

Here goes:

(1) While your law friends were intimidating at first, they're pretty darn cool. Your course is filled with kind, intelligent and downright hilarious people and it's a community in which you all support one another.

Although law jargon litters your conversations, which leaves me nodding and smiling on the sidelines, it doesn't bother me.

People watching has always been a hobby of mine and watching you converse with your friends is like being in the audience of Judge Judy – you don't really talk, you all just passionately yell on top of one another. I'll be bringing a bag of sweet and sour popcorn to your next hangout.

(2) Your appearance doesn't matter to you so it doesn't matter to either of us that I'm leaving the house in an 11 day old coffee stained tracksuit pants.

Look, I'm not saying that I've let my appearances go, but when you're dating someone who is consumed with law school, they don't notice the small stuff which makes it easy for me to get away with minor discrepancies such as dirty socks.

(3) You appreciate everything that makes you happy. Experiences or encounters that bring a smile your face are a hundred times more rewarding because it comes in small and fleeting packages.

When you're sitting down to have dinner over an episode of Game of Thrones, you truly cherish the moment.

Seeing the relief and appreciation etched on your face knowing that the next 54 minutes will be filled with dragons, incest and prostitutes instead of contracts, constitutional law and legal theory is beautiful to witness.

You get to where you need to go a lot faster... you take a quick break, get in, get out and we're both immensely satisfied. You know what I mean.

Dating someone in law school isn't easy – there's no question about that. Sacrifices are made, arguments are inevitable and emotions are always high.

But let me tell you this: even when you come home from uni angry and stressed, when you lock yourself in your room for 12 hours every Sunday to study, and when you're distracted with law instead of listening to me, you somehow make it worth it.

Anonymous is the partner of a JD student.

Don't like the content? Write your own!

De Minimis is written by, and for, the students of Melbourne Law School.

We welcome any and all quality writing that might interest our readers.

If you have insights into the student experience, the legal industry, events on campus, politics, movies, or even fashion, send an email to the editor:

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