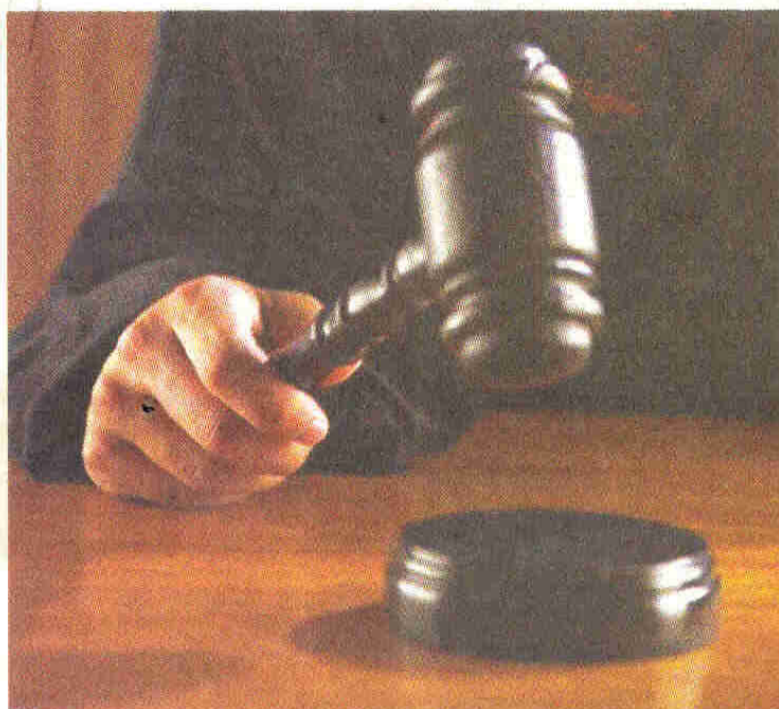


MAKE YOUR LAWS

Lawyers are one of the pillars of a democracy. Besides civil, criminal, corporate and cyber law, law graduates can be found in avenues as diverse as civil services, joining ministries as researchers, policy makers and social workers. SACHIN MALHAN gives you a lowdown



Successful practising advocates make by far the highest money in the legal profession. Top lawyers in the country charge Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh per appearance, in court, and appearances may often last for just a few minutes



Except for those fortunate ones with lawyers in the family, the rest of us grew up thinking of lawyers as black and white attired professionals chirping the occasional 'my lord' in Bollywood flicks.

Most of us never even contemplated law as a career option when we made those vital decisions of picking careers. However, over the last decade the popular perception of a law degree has changed dramatically. Law has become a strong and versatile career option inspired by world-class law schools such as the National Law School in Bangalore and subsequently NUJS in Kolkata, NALSAR in Hyderabad, NLU in Jodhpur and NLIU in Bhopal.

Job profile

Alumni of the top law schools have excelled in diverse fields, they walk the corridors of the Supreme Court, the various High Courts, the top corporate law firms and business houses, agencies of the United Nations and the other stellar organisations. Alumni of these colleges even teach at leading law schools such as Oxford and Harvard. The reason why such a variety of jobs and further study options are available is the versatility of the five-year law degree. Civil and criminal law are no longer the principal pillars of the five-year law degree as students also study corporate and commercial law, mediation and negotiation, international law

mediation and negotiation, international law, intellectual property law, environmental law and human rights law, just to name a few disciplines. The traditional career path for a lawyer, is to "go into practice," or join the chambers of a senior advocate as his junior. The traditional image of a lawyer is based on this career option. Regarded by many as the true calling of a lawyer, this option involves arguing in court on a daily basis, and applying your mind to a plethora of different

Pioneer

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Date: 14-05-2008 | Edition: Delhi | Page: 1 | Source: Bureau | Clip size (cm): W: 20 H: 29

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issues in order to win the case for your client. There is, of course, scope for specialisation even in this field — some lawyers practice criminal law, some company law and at a later stage, even Constitutional law.

Other lawyers work with corporate houses or in law firms that service corporates. Here, lawyers work mainly as facilitators, helping companies work smoothly, efficiently, and within the boundaries of the law. Lawyers help business work in the best possible manner, and are an extremely important part of any business transaction. Huge mergers, large stock market issues, and foreign investments are all cool to talk about, but unless you have someone who understands how these things work, and can get them done in the best possible way, all you'll ever do is talk about them! Simply put, without lawyers, many corporates would find themselves struggling to understand how to actually put their ideas in place. Lawyers are sometimes also referred to as 'social engineers'. Many lawyers help people in distress, advocating areas that they are concerned about, such as child rights, women's issues, or the protection of refugees, trying to make a difference to people's lives.

Remuneration

Successful practising advocates make by far the highest money in the legal profession. The top lawyers in the country charge Rs 50,000 to Rs 2 lakh per appearance, in court, and appearances may often last for just a few minutes. Similar fee is charged for rendering a legal opinion on a case. Top Indian law firms offer average salaries to the tune of Rs 8-12 lakh a year (with the

occasional offer reaching as much as Rs 18 lakh). Foreign law firms (with foreign postings) offer salaries that can go as high as \$100,000. Some of these numbers include bonuses, which can be quite generous in most instances.

Opportunities

Other than the above mentioned avenues law graduates can be found in journalism, academia and research. Also with the advent of Legal Process Outsourcing (LPO), the list of avenues, which open up for a law graduate gets longer. Numerous law graduates have joined the civil services and are a regular feature in Print as well as electronic media. Theatre, music and even cinema are some fields where law graduates have demonstrated

their capabilities.

Law is a discipline, which offers you a holistic degree empowering you with those vital abilities, and skills, which are required in all walks of life. Law graduates can be found in avenues as diverse as civil services (law is a subject in the exam) joining ministries as researchers and policy makers to social work. Which other degree gives you the option, to name a few, to work with the worlds best law firms including Linklaters, Amarchand Mangaldas and Freshfields; companies such as Infosys, GE or HLL; international organisations such as the Red Cross or Amnesty; or with NGOs such as the Narmada Bachao Andolan or Action-Aid. The placement offers made to students at the national law universities this year are at par to the top B-schools and a few notches above than those offered at top engineering schools. Monetarily, law as a career is hugely rewarding.

Consequently, the degree equips you, not just to be an accomplished lawyer but also a businessman, bureaucrat, diplomat, social activist or academician. Job applicants amongst the graduating batch at the National Law School this year were recruited at average annual salaries comparable to the top management schools. It goes without saying that financially the profession is hugely rewarding.

Though academics form a core part of life at law school and there is a strenuous curriculum, and the rigmarole of presentations, the lectures and the moot court activities, is inescapable. But, you will soon come to realise that academic or moot court achievements during the five years will not be the things that you treasure most, there will be other invaluable experiences and realisations which you will cherish for times to come.

In case you are trying to figure out a path that would lead you to the top law schools, there is good news for you. 2008 will be significantly different from the previous years where the admission process to the national law universities are concerned.

Until 2007, law schools

conducted separate entrance examinations as a part of their admissions process. The impact of this was that in 2007 students gave more than 15 exams in the May and early June. The only relief was that the papers were largely similar since the areas being tested were the same.

However, judicial directions and consensus amongst the law schools has led to the creation of a Common Entrance Examination for the national law universities. The recent being the first Common Law Admission test (CLAT) on May 11 for national law universities.

The five-year law degree is extremely versatile. In fact, laws such as medical negligence law and patent law require scientific knowledge. The boundaries between science, commerce, arts and law have disappeared and you can select the area of law closest to your interests. Believe it when I say that is a law that ensures that the moon cannot be made the colony of any one nation!

Areas of specialisation

Let's take two areas of law, which have grown tremendously in the last decade — corporate laws, and laws relating to new media, IT and technology (crudely categorised as 'cyber laws'). As world and national economies have developed the need for diverse forms of legal advice have also increased. Today, companies don't just need advice on how to function without breaking the law but how to use the legal systems to maximise business opportunities. For example, tax and securities laws are often used to structure (design) companies and relationships in such a way as to increase revenues and profits. A corporate legal advisor is to any company as Jeeves was to Bertie Wooster in Wodehouses novels — a right hand man to the CEO. Corporate lawyers handle corporate mergers, Initial Public Offerings, huge investments in India and so on. The role of a corporate lawyer has no boundaries.

The growth of cyber law has been as explosive. Internet, computers and technology play a greater role in business than ever before. There is the constant need to look differently at standard concepts like property, crime and business as applied to the Internet. Hence, the need for lawyers who understand various legal concepts in their new avatar — on the Internet and as applied to technology. A single technology can significantly impact the future of a company — hence protecting technologies under what is called 'patent law' becomes critical. A law degree is being increasingly looked at as a huge value add in any profession and combinations of law, such as the law and MBA, are also being valued by the industry. Some law schools including the national law schools in Jodhpur and Gandhinagar as well as Symbiosis, Indraprastha University actually include business management courses within the curriculum.

— The writer is alumnus of NLSIU Bangalore and founder LST, preparatory institute for law entrance exams

'Logical reasoning surprised aspirants'

The first impression about the first edition of the CLAT which concluded on May 11, 2008 is that the test was moderately difficult. As expected, it was a 200 marks, two-hour test with no negative marking. There were 190 questions.

◆ Section I: English: It was fairly easy with 40 questions from following topics: Reading Comprehension with 10 questions following an easy passage, based on 'experiences of a wildlife photographer.'

There were five foreign words with a legal element. Spellings made a comeback, and parajumbles were there as usual.

There were 10 questions in the 'fill in the blanks' format

CLAT analysis

By Kunal Mehra

testing one's knowledge of prepositions and articles.

◆ Section II: GK: 100 questions for half mark each. If a student has consistently been reading newspapers and magazines regularly, then the GK section would not have been difficult at all. We would say that the GK section was of easy to moderate level of difficulty and a score of 30-35 out of 50 should not be a problem for even an average student in General Knowledge.

GK was easy, though there were a few bouncers from legal knowledge.

◆ Section III: Maths: Maths was definitely the easiest of



the lot, with questions largely based upon arithmetic. In all there were 10 questions of two marks each.

◆ Section IV: Logical Reasoning: This was the trickiest part, with most questions different from the usual CR asked in LST Mocks. Twelve questions were lengthy, but a few were easy.

◆ Section V: Legal Reasoning: The format was different from the usual pattern, with three principles being given and a set of options along with reasoning, and the options had different permutations and combinations of the answer and the reason. Few questions were logic-based and easy.

Overall the section was manageable and moderately difficult.

As suggested earlier, the first three sections (English, Maths and GK) should have

been finished in 50-55 minutes, leaving you with about an hour to tackle the two problematic sections. Time management was important, as it was possible for one to exhaust all the time on legal and logical reasoning and messing up on the easier ones just because of lack of time. It has been stressed that NLS/CLAT is expected to be a lengthy paper. The right strategy would have been to score the maximum from the easy triumvirate (English, GK and Maths) and gather as many as possible from logic and legal.

Let's see what May 17, (the expected date of CLAT result) has in store for everyone.

— The writer is national academic head, LST, Career Launcher