

Boston University School of Law

Scholarly Commons at Boston University School of Law

Faculty Scholarship

2021

A Guide to Law Student Wellness and Well-Being

Angela Onwuachi-Willig

Kathryn Zeiler

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.law.bu.edu/faculty_scholarship



Part of the [Legal Education Commons](#)



A Guide to Law Student Wellness and Well-Being

*By the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Standing Committee on Lawyer
Well-Being¹*

2021

¹ In addition to the Committee, the following individuals made significant contributions to the drafting and publication of this Guide as part of the Standing Committee's Legal Education Subcommittee: Dean Angela Onwuachi-Willig (Chair), Boston University Law School; Professor Lisle Baker, Suffolk University Law School; Travis Bouche, 3L, Suffolk University Law School; Antonio Coronado, 2L, Northeastern University Law School; Eric Lassar, 3L, Boston College Law School; Professor Jeffrey Cohen, Boston College Law School; Court Diercks, 2L, Boston University Law School; Laura Ferrari, Associate Dean for Student Affairs, Suffolk University Law School; Hannah Jellinek, Assistant District Attorney, Middlesex County; Michael A. Johnson, Associate Dean for Law Student Affairs and Enrollment Planning, Western New England University School of Law; Jordan Michelson, 2L, Boston College Law School; Natalie Newsom, 3L, University of Massachusetts School of Law; Professor John Rice, University of Massachusetts School of Law; Cassidy Seamon, 3L, Boston College Law School; Professor Sarah Schendel, Suffolk University Law School; and Professor Kathy Zeiler, Boston University Law School.

About This Guide

First and foremost, our Committee wants to wish you many congratulations on your new journey through legal education! It is our hope that this document can provide you with support and guidance as you begin this new path in the law. This Guide was prepared by the Standing Committee in collaboration with its Legal Education Subcommittee – a group of lawyers, current law students, and law school faculty and administrators – to help you best prepare for success as a law student and lifelong learner.

The primary focus of this Guide is to highlight some of the resources, tips, and practices that you as a law student can utilize to improve your chances for success, however you define it. We suggest these resources while emphasizing the importance of remaining true to yourself as you assume the professional identity of an attorney. The experiences and forms of knowledge that bring you to law school inform how you learn the law and will aid you in charting your professional career.

We believe that law schools and the legal profession must do more than simply educate law students about the tools they can use to improve their own well-being; they also must be proactive in attending to the well-being of community members, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. The Standing Committee is dedicated to working with those involved in legal education to improve the structures and systems that have adversely affected law student well-being for too long. If you are interested in joining this effort, please feel free to email Standing Committee Director Heidi Alexander at heidi@lawyerwellbeingma.org.

Below Is a Roadmap of the tips and suggested practices contained in Guide. Click on each of the below subheadings to be directed to that section of the Guide:

- Resource 1.** An Introduction to Studying the Law (page 5)
- Resource 2.** Wellness & Well-Being Are Vital (page 8)
- Resource 3.** Practice Makes Prepared, Not Perfect (page 9)
- Resource 4.** Reflection + Response Leads to Flourishing (page 11)
- Resource 5.** Tending to Your Emotional Wellness (page 12)
- Resource 6.** There Is No “Correct” Way to Be a Law Student (page 14)
- Resource 7.** Tending to Your Physical Wellness (page 16)
- Resource 8.** Finding & Envisioning Your Purpose (page 18)
- Resource 9.** Tending to Social Well-Being (page 19)

Resource 10. Prioritizing Your Professional Development (page 21)

Overview of Resources

As you navigate legal education, you may encounter a situation that you cannot – or should not – try to manage on your own. There are many resources to support you:

- **Faculty** – Your Professors are there to help you develop as a law student and to become a lawyer. They want to support you and to see you thrive in law school and the practice of law. If you need help, reach out to your Professors and ask for support.
- **Your Dean of Students/Student Affairs Office** – Your Dean of Students and Student Affairs Office are there to help and support you! If you find yourself experiencing a personal or health challenge, they will likely have access to helpful resources and can help you navigate the school’s policies and procedures. Additionally, your law school may have a separate Dean or Office specifically tasked with supporting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. If you come from an underrepresented background (*e.g.*, if you are non-White, LGBTIA2S+, first generation and/or low-income, if you have a disability, and/or if you have multiple marginalized identities), or if you experience or witness any incidents of bias or discrimination, we encourage you to reach out to this Dean or Office or the Dean of Student Affairs or Student Affairs Office for support.
- **Your Academic Support Program** – Most law schools have staff or faculty who assist students in achieving academic success. These professionals usually work closely with Student Affairs and have a deep understanding of the important role that wellness and well-being play in being a successful student.
- **Counseling Center/Mental Health Services at your Law School** – Your school’s counseling center or mental health resource center is a great resource for individual assistance and in some instances may facilitate law-student-specific group discussions or workshops.
- **Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers (LCL)** – LCL is a Massachusetts non-profit organization that is funded by all MA attorneys’ bar dues and staffed with experienced counselors. LCL provides completely free and confidential advice, mental health services, and addiction and recovery support to both practicing attorneys and law students. Support from LCL can be reached via:

- Website - www.lclma.org | Phone - (617) 482-9600, 1-800-LCL-0210 | Email - email@lclma.org
- **Bar Associations and Student Groups** – Your school and broader community have numerous opportunities for you to become involved with other active students and attorneys, including affinity bar associations and student affinity groups specifically designed to provide mentoring and communal support for students from specific populations. Such connections are great networking opportunities and a wonderful way to build a support network for yourself.
- **Immediate Forms of Aid** – Know that you are not alone in navigating any hardships and challenges along the way. If you are concerned that harm may occur to you or a friend because of mental distress, contact immediate support:
 - Hospital emergency room staff (importantly, nearly all hospitals treat the possibility of self-harm or suicide as emergency medical conditions)
 - Your primary care physician, who may be able to connect you with or refer you directly to a mental health clinician
 - Your school’s medical support services/campus health center
 - Your school’s mental health & counseling services
- **Additional Resources** are available at the website of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being (lawyerwellbeingma.org) and in the *Appendix* to this Guide.

#1. An Introduction to Studying the Law

The study and practice of law are both challenging and rewarding activities. As a law student, you have the chance to learn key legal knowledge and skills that will prepare you for the next stage of your professional career.

Much of the focus of your legal education will involve learning a new vocabulary and entirely new ways of thinking. These are incredibly challenging tasks, so take it easy on yourself if it does not come easily to you right away.

In order to achieve your *academic goals* (e.g. smaller goals like completing a class assignment or final examination and larger goals like graduating from law school), you need to tend to your *personal goals* of well-being and practicing wellness.

To do well, you need to be well. But what does that mean? Here's what the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being (now the Institute for Well-Being in Law² wrote in 2017:

“We define lawyer well-being as a continuous process whereby lawyers seek to thrive in each of

the following areas: emotional health, occupational pursuits, creative or intellectual endeavors, sense of spirituality and greater purpose in life, physical health, and social connections with others.”³

But the culture, environment, and practices of law school do not always make it easy for students to be at their best. Additionally, the assumptions underlying many of the cases you will study, along with myths about the law's neutrality, equitable treatment, and equal access to justice, have disproportionately harmful impacts on students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), women, LGBTQIA2S+ students, first generation and low-income students, students with disabilities, students with a history of navigating mental health challenges, and students holding multiple marginalized identities, among many others.⁴

Given these realities, how does one make healthy, positive work-life choices during law school and beyond? This Guide aims to help you in doing so.

The remainder of this Guide will provide suggestions to help you not only survive, but thrive during your law school experience and the early stages of

² The National Task Force was formed by a group of organizations, including the National Organization of Bar Counsel, the Association of Professional Responsibility Lawyers, and the ABA Commission on Lawyers Assistance Programs. In December of 2020, the Task Force became a tax-exempt nonprofit organization, the Institute for Well-being in Law: www.lawyerwellbeing.net.

³ Bree Buchanan et al., Nat'l Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, *The Path to Lawyer Well-Being: Practical Recommendations for Positive Change* 9 (2017), available at <https://lawyerwellbeing.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Lawyer-Wellbeing-Report.pdf>.

⁴ See the more extensive discussion below.

your legal career. As you review, please keep the following in mind:

- **Everyone’s Experiences Will be Different** – The challenges that each individual law student encounters will differ based upon their own identities and their unique experiences with fellow students, faculty, administrators, and staff.⁵ The suggestions of this guide are just that: suggestions. Some of them may work for you, and others will not.
- **There Are Pre-set Aspects of Legal Education** – Some aspects of your experience (such as length of degree program, your first-year curriculum, the number of units required for graduation, the structure of class exams and grading) are pre-designed based on the course of study you have chosen to undertake. Those aspects are not the primary focus of this Guide, but they have

helped to shape the suggestions that we now offer.⁶

- **Law School is Not Permanent** – Remember that law school is only one part of your professional career. Your experience as a law student will not and does not define the entirety of your career. This truth can be easy to lose sight of as you navigate the stresses of law school, particularly in the first year.
- **Challenges of a New Profession**– As you begin your journey through legal education, in addition to the positive experiences we hope you have, you may also experience aspects of the profession that are unwelcoming, exclusionary, and alienating. Throughout your career, you will have opportunities to help create the profession you want to be a part of—including by working with peers to build a legal profession that is rewarding, inclusive, and sustainable.⁷ Be aware of these

⁵ There is no single law student experience. For an explanation of why the Standing Committee believes that diversity, equity and inclusion are core elements of advocating for lawyer well-being, see, <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/dei-statement>. For further understanding of the importance of this issue to legal education (and the legal profession), see a comprehensive set of resources maintained by the Association of American Law Schools: <https://www.aals.org/antiracist-clearinghouse/>.

⁶ Beyond this Guide, the Standing Committee is also working with its Legal Education Subcommittee and other stakeholders to encourage schools and

individual professors to reconsider some of these structural elements of legal education in order to better promote student well-being.

⁷ "For a few examples of lawyers who have publicly shared their struggles with well-being and mental health as a means of breaking down stigma, see the American Bar Association’s video “Fear Not: Speaking Out to End Stigma,” available at: https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance/profession_wide_anti_stigma_campaign/) and the “True Stories” series on lawyerswithdepression.com, including the June 23,

opportunities, but be careful not to let them consume your law school studies.

2021 posting by Standing Committee Fellow Gavin Alexander, titled: "A Lawyer with Depression's Journey from Pain to Mental Health Advocacy," *available at:*

<https://www.lawyerswithdepression.com/articles/true-stories-a-lawyer-with-depressions-journey-from-pain-to-mental-health-advocacy/>.

#2. Wellness & Well-Being Are Vital

Here is one of the most important lessons of your journey through legal education: Wellness and well-being are not the same.

Wellness concerns the state of your health. Are you feeling physically, emotionally, and/or mentally well?

Well-being, especially in the dimensions outlined by the Institute for Well-Being in Law, is how you think, feel and act about your life, your studies, and/or your work. Well-being is more than the absence of distress; it means thriving, and not just surviving.

Both **Wellness** and **Well-being** are equally important components of your life as a law student, and eventually as an attorney.

Here are some initial tips for cultivating your wellness and well-being while in law school:

- **Learning the Law Takes Time & Practice** – Learning the law is like learning a new language. Many of the terms and ways of thinking you will encounter in law school initially might seem different or unfamiliar to you but know that your understanding of the law will only grow over time, and the more legal review and analysis you undertake, the easier this skill will eventually become!

- **Challenges & Interests Change over Time** – Your curriculum in law school will change over time. As you grow in experience, your interest may shift outward to the career opportunities that await you upon graduation. As you read this Guide, reflect on which resources may be most useful to you at a particular time or season of your legal education.

- **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare** – New lawyers are often told that the key to success is preparation. During your legal education and career, you will enjoy positive experiences, but challenges and adversity will also arise. If you are prepared for these challenges, you will be better situated to overcome them. Take the time to best prepare yourself with what you need to thrive, just as you would for class or a work assignment.

Tips: Go meet the counselors in Student Affairs or your school's health office before a crisis arises. Consider using an agenda or weekly planner tool (such as the one available at

https://thinktank.arizona.edu/sites/default/files/Weekly_Planner_fillable.pdf) to map out your assignments and time allotments each week. Complete a practice exam and have the professor review your answer and give you tips before your final exam.

#3. Practice Makes *Prepared*, Not *Perfect*

What does it mean to achieve and maintain well-being? First, it means understanding what you can do now to achieve your goals in the future.

- **Seek Out Academic Assistance** – Seek out the assistance of your professors and school staff who work in academic support. They can aid you in learning how to study the law and take law exams.
- **Practice Is Preparing** – Take practice exams in all of your courses. After you have written out practice answers, seek direct feedback from your professors. Providing such feedback is part of your professors' role, and too few students take advantage of their advice.
- **Become Familiar with Upcoming Costs & Fees** – Financial preparation is of great importance in your journey through legal education and your legal career. In addition to your studies, it is important to familiarize yourself with the costs and fees associated with your program of study, as well as think through how you will pay for them. To the extent you can, you want to avoid being unprepared for or unaware of costs that may arise.

- **Financial Aid Resources** – Your law school office of financial aid and your Dean of Students can support you as you navigate questions about financing your legal education. Especially for students who anticipate taking out loans or for whom federal aid is not an option, your financial aid office can help connect you with grants, scholarships, and outside sources of funding. At some law schools, financial aid offices have funding to provide students with grant assistance to pay for unexpected costs due to unanticipated emergencies such as a broken laptop or health crisis. *Tips: Some resources, such as Immigrants Rising's Scholarship Guide (available at https://immigrantsrising.org/wp-content/uploads/Immigrants-Rising_List-of-Graduate-Scholarships.pdf), identify financial aid that does not require proof of U.S. citizenship. Further, bar associations and some law firms provide supplemental scholarships of various kinds. Consider connecting with bar association leaders to help you find and apply for these opportunities.*

Second, preparing to achieve and maintain well-being means identifying resources you may need in an emergency.

- **Familiarize Yourself with Your Law School and/or University**

Counseling Office – Consider making a brief appointment with someone who can provide support if a need arises. Prepare a plan on how you will seek help and identify who you can turn to when you need support.

Tip: Establish a relationship with LCL and/or your school's counseling office as soon as you begin law school, so you don't find yourself struggling to find these resources if you ever find yourself in a moment of crisis.

- **Be Willing to Seek Help** – Most lawyers will report that they turned to mentors or even skilled behavioral health counselors for advice at some point in their law school or professional careers. Even if you have not prepared for help, don't be afraid to seek it from mentors, professors, counselors, doctors, and/or school administrators when you need it!

Tip: If you have connected with any mentors through your law school, bar associations, or otherwise, reach out to them if you find yourself needing someone to talk to. Most mentors genuinely want you to succeed and will make time to help you if you need it. Also, if you try contacting them and they don't immediately respond, follow up!

#4. Reflection + Response Can Lead to Flourishing

The American Bar Association (“ABA”) sets standards for legal education in terms of learning outcomes, including knowledge, skills, and ethics.

This also includes “other professional skills needed for competent and ethical participation as a member of the legal profession,” which the ABA interprets to include “self-evaluation.”⁸

This interpretation recognizes that – in addition to preparation – it is important to learn from experience.

- **Active Reflection** – Intentional and ongoing reflection on your journey through legal education is important for your professional growth. Learning often requires error before success. Reflection, such as through a journal, mindfulness practices, or whatever works best for you, can be a tool for well-being. *Tip: Request meetings with your professors after receiving your grades to review your exams and receive feedback. This will help you reflect on skills you may need to improve.*
- **Identifying Areas for Growth** – Embracing our mistakes or shortcomings allow us to chart a roadmap for future growth. It can help with the challenges we encounter when we learn from

our mistakes. As someone put it, “there’s no growth in the comfort zone, and no comfort in the growth zone.”

Tip: It can be helpful to develop “SMART Goals” to measure and make your goals achievable, as shown at <https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/smart-goals.htm>.

This includes not only visualizing success in achieving your goals but also reflecting on obstacles you might encounter and how you can overcome them.

Recall that the Institute for Well-Being in Law highlighted six domains of a lawyer’s well-being: “emotional health, occupational pursuits, creative or intellectual endeavors, sense of spirituality and greater purpose in life, physical health, and social connections with others.”

Here are some of those domains recast for the law school experience:

- Emotional Health
- Physical Wellness
- Purpose
- Social Wellness or High-Quality Connections with Others
- Intellectual Challenge & Professional Development

Active reflection and regular self-feedback on how we are (or are not) tending to our many forms of wellness

⁸ ABA Standard 302, and Interpretation 302-1.

and well-being are necessary for our flourishing.

The next few resources will focus on ways that you can practice wellness and well-being in each of the above domains.

#5. Tending to Your Emotional Wellness as a Law Student

Maintaining and tending to your emotional health are important practices that are always ongoing. In law school, these are just as important—if not more important—to ensure your academic and personal achievement.

Below are several tips for tending to your emotional health during your journey through legal education:

- **Center Joy in Your Journey** – We are used to negative emotions, such as anger, sadness, fear, and disgust. In this company, joy seems outnumbered. Positive emotions are often more fleeting, but they are important to cultivate, nonetheless. The study of law often involves a focus on what is not working, including responding to injustice, and developing an unhealthy focus on obtaining perfect grades at any cost. This can take a toll on your emotional health. Seek out and intentionally reflect on

experiences where positive emotions are strong for you. Think of the reasons you are pursuing legal education, the goals that drive you, or even the letters of recommendation prepared in support of your applications to college or law school. Also, remember the strengths you brought to law school and will be able to draw upon throughout your career.⁹
Tip: Regularly, at the end of each day (or each week, if each day seems too onerous), consider writing down three good things that happened and how they came about, including who might have been helpful to you.

- **Stay Rooted in Your Purpose** – When confronted with challenging situations such as law school, it is easy to lose sight of your purpose (i.e. why did you choose to come to law school?). Remembering your purpose will help ground you, help you to make better decisions, and give you the ability to handle challenges and obstacles presented to you.
Tip: At the beginning of your law school journey, consider writing a letter to yourself about why you applied, then you can reread the letter whenever you need a boost of motivation.

⁹ You can learn more about your particular pattern of 24 character strengths at www.viacharacter.org.

- **Cherish Connectivity** – Always remember that you do not have to do any of this work on your own. Call a friend and reminisce with them or reach out to express appreciation to those who have made it possible for you to do what you are doing now. Lawyers have a unique opportunity to serve others, and it is never too early or too late to acknowledge how much of our success depends on the acts and support of others we encounter in our lives. You may often work alone but know that you are never alone in this journey.
- **Practice Gratitude** – Take some time on a regular basis to reflect on aspects of your life for which you are grateful. These can be large things, like the love and support of family, or small things, like a day with nice weather or a helpful tip you received from a friend or mentor. Active reflection on the privileges, identities, experiences, or opportunities that we may have can help foster our continued growth as advocates and leaders in the legal profession.

#6. There Is No “Correct” Way to Be a Law Student

Tending to one’s emotional health can be especially challenging for students holding marginalized identities. Law students from underrepresented and underserved communities report feeling a lack of belonging within their law school.

Classroom microaggressions¹⁰ from classmates and faculty, as well as the “perspectiveless pedagogy”¹¹ that many law professors employ, disproportionately affect students holding marginalized identities. Consequently, some students spend many days in law school feeling like an outsider or even impostor.

It is important to remember that all students navigate their journey through legal education in different ways.¹² There is no one way to be a successful and thriving law student and (like the identities that you hold) your journey is personal and specific to you!

- **Our Experiences Shape Our Journey** – The way that we interact with the world is shaped by our unique combination of identities. Our background, upbringing, education, and our experiences with racism, homophobia, transphobia, fatphobia, sexism, ethnocentrism, ableism, and classism – or even how we perceive and make decisions – give us a unique lens for understanding the law.¹³ These differences are strengths that allow us to bring a host of experiences, skills, and insights to how we support our clients and improve our advocacy.
- **Remember You Belong Here** – You are in law school because both you and your school believed in you. The school knew you could succeed as a student in law school and as a lawyer. Your instructors want you to succeed and are dedicated to helping you learn what you need to become a

¹⁰ For a definition of “microaggression,” see DERALD WING SUE, MICROAGGRESSIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE: RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION 5 (2010).

¹¹ See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, *Foreword: Toward A Race-Conscious Pedagogy in Legal Education*, 4 S. CAL. REV. L. & WOMEN’S STUD. 33, 35-36 (1994) (“[M]inority students are placed in a difficult situation [in the classroom]. To assume the air of *perspectivelessness* that is expected in the classroom, minority students must participate in the discussion as though they were not African-American or Latino, but colorless legal analysts.”)(emphasis added).

¹² See, e.g., Devon W. Carbado & Mitu Gulati, *Working Identity*, 85 CORNELL L. REV. 1259, 1279-93, 1299-1307 (2000).

¹³ For an explanation of how the ways in which we prefer to acquire information and then make decisions on it can differ vastly, see R. Lisle Baker, *Using Insights About Perception and Judgment from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator Instrument as an Aid to Mediation*, 9 HARV. NEGOT. L. REV. 115 (2004), available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2620744.

good lawyer. Every single student, *including you*, belong here and can help others feel the same!

- **Study in Ways that Work for You** – Not everyone thrives by sitting at a desk in the law library, or by joining a formal study group, or by reviewing the “best” outline they can find from a previous exam. If you try studying in a way recommended by other students and it feels like it’s not working, or like it’s adding to your stress instead of helping to mitigate it, try something else!
- **Seek Support When Feeling Overwhelmed** – Law school is challenging, and you may often feel overwhelmed. As discussed in this Guide’s *About* section, there are professionals who can provide you with support. Some students may fear that seeking help will adversely affect their ability to be admitted to the Bar or will place a limit on their advancement within the profession. In Massachusetts and an increasing number of other jurisdictions, your history of seeking help **is not** a matter of inquiry for determining your character and fitness for practice.
- **Stand Up for Equity** – If you are not a member of an underrepresented group, or even if you are, it benefits both your

own skills as an advocate and the collective well-being of your school and classmates when you point out instances of bias or discrimination that you witness and help address them so that they don’t happen again in the future. Consider joining affinity groups and attending their events to learn more about the lived experiences of students from different backgrounds, and how you can effectively advocate for equity, inclusion, and belonging.

If at some point you are concerned that law school or a legal career is not the right fit for you, never hesitate to reach out to your law school’s Dean of Students, your advisor, and/or a mentor.

It will take time to get accustomed to a new educational experience—grant yourself the space and time to get accustomed to this new journey.

#7. Tending to Your Physical Wellness as a Law Student

Your physical wellness is essential to your ability to attend class, study effectively, and perform well in exams and other assignments. But what helps support your physical health as a law student? Here are several suggestions:

- **Physical Wellness Means Different Things for Different Folks** – Both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, many law students arrived at law school with a history of beneficial physical movement or outdoor activities but found it difficult to maintain such forms of movement with the pressure of their studies. It is important to build beneficial forms of movement into your day, depending on what is appropriate and comfortable for you.¹⁴ You know your body best, and you should tend to physical wellness in ways that allow you to thrive. Remember to take breaks and prioritize rest.
- **Sleep Is Critical for Success** – Law students (and lawyers) sometimes underprioritize our need to rest. However, research indicates that sleep is a critical aspect of our lives that enables us

to think deeply. Sleep is often how we consolidate the things we learned into our long-term memory. Sleep conditions (such as a dark room, cool temperature, and/or no screens before bedtime) can help in ensuring you get the rest you need. Students face many different challenges that make getting enough sleep during law school really difficult. Some students are responsible for raising children or taking care of elderly parents. Others work part-time or financially support their families. When you find that you cannot get enough sleep, do the best you can to return to a regular and positive sleep pattern.¹⁵ It is critical to recognize the value of sleep as something enabling you to thrive in law school.

- **Transform Your Relationship with Food** – It is important to choose foods that make you feel good and that nourish you. Our relationships with food should be centered around what we need, not shame, guilt, denial, or systems of fatphobia. Systemic barriers make this especially difficult for students holding marginalized identities. Some students rely on food from

¹⁴ For how some tips on how to maintain physical movement even when inside and even without special equipment, see <https://www.lawpracticetoday.org/article/becoming-physically-active-busy-professional-life/>, which

includes a link to a video of helpful physical activities you can do in an office setting, if need be.

¹⁵ For tips on sleep, see <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/sleep-hygiene/healthy-sleep-tips>.

school/work events, SNAP benefits, and food banks (on campus or otherwise) for any number of reasons. Your Dean of Students and financial aid office can help identify resources to ensure that you retain access to food that supports your physical wellness.

you could with free time outside of a 45-hour-per-week job.

- **Engage in Short-Term Forms of Rest** – Short intervals of rest, such as blocking out hours (or days, if possible) for yourself, can help restore our capacity to thrive. These forms of rest can even be short breaks to clear your head, like taking a walk outside, especially with some trees or grass nearby, as research indicates that exposure to natural settings is not only good for mental health but can also aid cognition.
- **Approach Your Time in Law School Intentionally** – Approaching your path through legal education like a full-time job, with scheduled time for work and breaks, can be beneficial for some students. For folks with 15 hours of classes per week, and two hours of preparation or review for each hour of class, this equates to a 45-hour week. Treating school as a full-time job may help you balance the time it takes to attend and prepare for classes with your free time outside of classes, just as

#8. Finding & Envisioning Your Purpose as a Law Student

Why are you pursuing legal education? If you can connect (or reconnect) with that aim or list of reasons, you can center a sense of purpose throughout your time in law school.

Daniel P. Brown, Ph.D., a member of the faculty of the Harvard Medical School, has taught programs for judges. He reported that helping them reconnect to why they became judges was important for them to be able to manage cases and their courtrooms.

- **Rediscover the Aim of Your Legal Education** - Should the purpose of your legal education no longer be clear, it could be helpful to re-read the essay you wrote to gain admission to law school. Is it still relevant? If your focus has changed, think about what you would write to an incoming student about why you are studying law. Having a secure sense of purpose can lead to a greater willingness to take on difficult work in pursuit of that goal.¹⁶
- **Pursue Service & Action** - One way to center the experiences that

brought you to law school can be through involvement in opportunities that connect to the causes that you are passionate about. As author Emily Stefani Smith has said, “The key to purpose is using your strengths to serve others.”¹⁷ Engaging in activities that allow you to use your strengths and skills to serve others (which is central to what it means to be a zealous advocate) can help keep the challenges of law school in perspective and keep you going when your studies are most challenging.

To quote America’s youngest poet laureate Amanda Gorman on January 20, 2021:

*And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice*

- - -

*For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it*¹⁸

¹⁶ David S. Yeager et al., *Boring but Important: A Self-Transcendent Purpose for Learning Fosters Academic Self-Regulation*, 107 J. PERSONALITY & SOC. PSYCHOL. 559 (2014).

¹⁷https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_esfahani_smith_there_s_more_to_life_than_being_happy.

¹⁸ Amanda Gorman, *The Hill We Climb*, January 20, 2021.

#9. Tending to Social Well-Being as a Law Student

The study of law can often be an isolating activity. Research has indicated that those with high-quality connections live longer and more satisfying lives. Even something like handwashing occurs more when we care about our impact on others.¹⁹

Cherishing our connectedness is both important and beneficial. Different forms of interaction (such as in-person, text, social media, telephone, Zoom, or Facetime) can be vital to our wellness.

- **Prioritize Social Well-Being** – Regular forms of contact with friends and loved ones can be incredibly important, and can help you feel less overwhelmed by your academics.
- **Connect with the Legal Profession** – The law school experience can be enriched

through connection with the greater legal profession. Members of the legal community can provide mentorship, insights and fellowship to you as you navigate this new journey.

Tip: LCL identifies helpful networking and career resources at <https://www.lclma.org/resources/career-resources>.

- **Involve Yourself in Various Forms of Community** – Consider joining clubs, affinity groups, bar associations, advocacy organizations, or even just social groups to make meaningful connections with others in the field and beyond.²⁰ Having a network of peers and mentors can help you keep a balanced perspective on your own experience. Those with similar backgrounds or identities to you may have navigated a similar path as you and may be aware of resources or opportunities to aid in your new journey.²¹

¹⁹ See Adam M. Grant & David A. Hofmann, *It's Not All About Me: Motivating Hand Hygiene Among Health Care Professionals by Focusing on Patients*, 22 PSYCHOL. SCI. 1494 (2011).

²⁰ Law students can join the Massachusetts Bar Association (<https://www.massbar.org>), the Boston Bar Association (<https://bostonbar.org/>), various county and practice-specific bar associations, and most affinity bar associations for free. Massachusetts affinity Bar Associations include: Asian American Lawyers of Massachusetts (<https://aalam.wildapricot.org/>); Hispanic National Bar Association, Region I (<https://hnba.com/>); Massachusetts Association of Hispanic Attorneys (<http://www.mahaweb.org/>); Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association (<https://mablacklawyers.org/>);

Massachusetts Black Women Attorneys (<https://massblackwomenattys.org/>); Massachusetts LGBTQ Bar Association (<http://www.masslgbtqbar.org/>); New England Muslim Bar Association (<https://www.facebook.com/NEmuslimbar/>); South Asian Bar Association of Greater Boston (<https://www.sabagb.org/>); and Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts (<https://wbawbf.org/content/wba>).

²¹ Law students from underrepresented populations frequently report feeling especially isolated and lacking support. See Mass. Supreme Judicial Court Steering Committee on Lawyer Well-Being, *Report to the Justices* (2019), available at: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/supreme-judicial-court->

Additionally, bar associations can offer you positive pathways into the profession with which you might otherwise be unfamiliar.²²

- **Schedule Regular Breaks for Yourself** – Give yourself time to breathe and relax. Breaks for non-work/school activities will allow you to return to the task with more clarity. Checking your email does not count!

Tips: Set timers for yourself as you work on assignments, such as the Pomodoro Technique (as described at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/bryancollinseurope/2020/03/03/the-pomodoro-technique/?sh=1da5f0e39857>).

Setting clear breaks for yourself can be helpful to help break up your work. Make time for reconnecting with close friends who are not lawyers or in law school. Losing these relationships can contribute to feelings of isolation and loneliness. The friends you made before law school want you to succeed, and if you make time to retain those connections, they'll be there when you need them.

[steering-committee-on-lawyer-well-being-report-to-the-justices/download.](#)

²² For example, some bar associations often make job postings in various legal fields and have committees

that meet regularly to discuss developments in specific areas of the law.

#10. Prioritizing Your Professional Development as a Law Student

The study of law is itself an important occupational endeavor. Legal education will undoubtedly refine your skills of critical analysis, time management, and attention to details.

Below are several concepts to keep in mind to help you develop your professional identity as a law student:

- **Balance Is Key** - It can be important to balance the number of new challenges, involvements, or tasks that we take on. Knowing when to reach out for support and when to decline an opportunity are invaluable skills.
- **Perspective is Everything** - It may seem as though other students have everything figured out. You may feel as though you are being left behind. Especially for first generation students, it is important to recognize that some of your peers come to law school having had lawyers in the family, having taken a pre-law course, or having certain skills and experiences that other classmates do not. Remember that no one else

is on your path. Proceed at the pace and in the way that works for you!

- **We Are All Always Learning** - Never hesitate to ask for clarification or clarity along your path through legal education. It is very likely that some of your peers are wondering the very same question. It is important that we adopt a learning, or “growth,” mindset in our professional development. If you seek out help and a professor or employer is dismissive of you, do not be afraid to seek assistance from another person and to share your experience with the Dean or appropriate administrator.
- **Try to Minimize Distractions** - While we can do our best to be focused, we often face distractions during our studies. Indeed, research indicates that many of us find our minds wandering almost half the time.²³

Tip: It can be beneficial to note distractions (like phones,²⁴ music, or study locations). Pause in acknowledgement of this distraction and return your focus to your studies.

²³ Matthew A. Killingsworth & Daniel T. Gilbert, *See A Wandering Mind Is an Unhappy Mind*, 330 Science 6006 (Nov. 2010)

²⁴ See Shalini Misra, Lulu Cheng, Jamie Genevie, & Miao Yuan, *The iPhone Effect: The Quality of In-Person Social Interactions in the Presence of Mobile*

Devices, 48 ENV'T & BEHAV. 275 (2014); Bill Thornton, Alyson Faires, Maija Robbins, & Eric Rollins, *The Mere Presence of a Cell Phone May Be Distracting – Implications for Attention and Task Performance*, 45 SOC. PSYCHOL. 479 (2014).

*Do not simply ignore the distraction.
This requires regular practice.²⁵*

²⁵ For more specific guidance on how this can be done, see R. Lisle Baker & Daniel P. Brown, *On Engagement: Learning to Pay Attention* 36 U. ARK. LITTLE ROCK L. REV. 348 (2014) (discussion of attention and how to develop it co-authored with a

Harvard Medical School professor), available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2269726.

Conclusion

Understand that wellness and well-being are not just passive states, they require a series of choices as part of an ongoing journey.

As discussed, some choices are outside of our control. By incorporating some of the above practices, you may be able to situate yourself to achieve your goals and cultivate wellness and well-being in all aspects of your life. Further, it is our hope that this guide will aid you in the ever more vital work of advancing justice.

Finally, remember that even as you make these decisions, you need not make them alone. Embracing our collectivity and rejoicing in our connectedness are key to building a brighter and better legal profession, and the Standing Committee is here to help. If you have any suggestions for additional ways in which the Standing Committee can support law students' wellness and well-being, please contact Standing Committee Director Heidi Alexander at heidi@lawyerwellbeingma.org.

Remember that there are countless people cheering you on in your journey through law school. And know that this list of supporters now includes us – we wish you the very best of luck!

Appendix: Additional Lawyer Wellness & Well-Being Resources

- **American Bar Association Commission on Lawyer Assistance Programs:** The mission of this formal ABA Commission is to assure that every judge, lawyer and law student has access to support and assistance when confronting alcoholism, substance use disorders, or mental health issues so they are able to recover, families are preserved, and clients and other members of the public are protected. They have multiple resources available to law students struggling with any of these issues that are available at https://www.americanbar.org/groups/lawyer_assistance.
- **Board of Bar Examiners (BBE).** The BBE evaluates the qualifications of persons seeking admission to the bar of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. For questions about applications for admission and character and fitness determinations, contact BBE Executive Director, Marilyn Wellington, Marilyn.wellington@jud.state.ma.us. Marilyn Wellington, and Barbara Bowe at Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Massachusetts (see below) frequently discusses questions relating to character and fitness with law students who are seeking admission to the Massachusetts bar as well as other jurisdictions.
- **Institute for Well-Being in Law.** Formerly known as the National Task Force on Lawyer Well-Being, this non-profit organization is dedicated to the betterment of the legal profession by focusing on a holistic approach to well-being. Through advocacy, research, education, technical and resource support, and stakeholders' partnerships, the Institute is attempting to lead a culture shift in law to establish health and well-being as core centerpieces of professional success. The Institute's resources are available at <https://lawyerwellbeing.net/>.
- **Lawyers Concerned for Lawyers of Massachusetts (LCL).** LCL is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that provides completely free and confidential services, including mental health, addiction and recovery, and career and practice management, to law students, lawyers, judges, legal professionals, and their families. LCL works with many law schools to provide support for law students, but can also be contacted at any time, for free, by a law student in need. You can find many LCL resources, as well as their contact info, at <https://www.lclma.org>.
- **Massachusetts Bar Association Well-Being Committee:** The MBA Well-Being Committee seeks to improve legal culture and support individual well-being by providing resources, education, and advocacy toward developing a healthy and positive legal culture. The MBA Committee works with law schools and law students, and welcomes involvement from law students. Information about the Committee is available at <https://www.massbar.org/membership/committees-task-forces/lawyer-well-being-committee>. The MBA also provides resources via

its health and well-being page, <https://www.massbar.org/membership/mba-health-well-being>.

- **Lawyers Depression Project (LDP).** LDP is a group of legal professionals (attorneys, paralegals, law students, and admin) who have suffered from depression, anxiety, bipolar, OCD, eating disorders, trauma, sexual abuse, addiction and other mental health conditions, or who just don't feel quite right. They launched this grassroots project to help break the stigma around discussing our mental health and to provide peer support to each other. They host a confidential forum and bi-monthly online peer-to-peer support group meetings and offer members the option of anonymity. Information about the Lawyers Depression Project is available at <https://www.lawyersdepressionproject.org>.
- **SJC Standing Committee on Lawyer Well-Being:** The high court of Massachusetts assembled and appointed the members of this Committee to investigate and support lawyer and law student well-being throughout the Commonwealth. If you need additional resources, including those relating to diversity, equity, inclusion, and the particular well-being challenges faced by lawyers and law students from underrepresented groups, many are provided at <https://lawyerwellbeingma.org/>, and if you'd like to speak with them, you can contact Committee Director, Heidi Alexander, at heidi@lawyerwellbeingma.org.