

CAREERS IN LAW

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So you want to become a lawyer? You must tell me a little bit about yourself first. What do you want to do in your life? If you are going to say I want to earn money or have a powerful job, I will understand but will be a little disappointed. Law can be lucrative and give you power, but it's a lot more than that, and it's the lots more part that I want you to know about.

The traditional outcome of legal education is a lawyer working in litigation. You get to wear black robes and go to a court of law where you argue for your client. It could be a contractual dispute or a property battle or a family matter. Many young people today find the image of an arguing counsel in the dusty courts of India a bit boring and uncool. It's

anything but. To argue a case requires hours of preparation, attention to detail, sharp analysis of statutory text, and an ability to convince judges who might not be inclined to agree with you. This is often exciting stuff, even if it is the case that you won't earn a huge amount of money in the early years.

In the past, litigation was the only avenue open to law graduates. Today, because of the globalising economy of which India is an integral part, there are many law firms looking to recruit bright young graduates and make them work on commercial and tax law matters. Unlike litigation, corporate law firm jobs earn a handsome amount right from the beginning. At the top National Law Universities, leading law firms tend to recruit on Day Zero,

which is a jargon term for the first day of recruitment, so that they can have the first opportunity to pick students.

Litigation and law firms are not the only avenues open to law graduates. The most fascinating thing about the law is that a law student can use the law to do whatever she is fascinated with. She can study the history of the Indian constitution, the environmental impact of international agreements, or the connections between literature, movies and the law. There are any number of policy think tanks and academic spaces that are willing to indulge lawyers who want to expand their imagination.

Today, there are exciting legal issues in the application of machine learning and artificial intelligence that your

generation will grapple with. Technology has become so pervasive in our lives that the world needs a new generation of lawyers, the ones who do not merely consume technology but use it to further both legal practice and the ends of justice. Today, contracts are made online and tomorrow, these contracts will be automated to a large extent. Today, some courts are functioning online and tomorrow, online courts will replace plenty of physical courts. You will be at the forefront of these changes, and fashion a new wave of technology driven law reforms.

What's important is not only what you study but what kind of professional and life skills that you pick up. Law school is not only about learning legal

doctrine. It's about learning how to think analytically and critically, breaking down complex problems into manageable bits, and munching on these bits to see what can be digested and what can be discarded. Law school is about time management and juggling a thousand different things into a schedule that you, not someone abstract but you with your specific interests and motivations, can manage. Law school is about learning how to write clearly, concisely and persuasively. Above all, law school is about learning how law can empower people who have no power-the poor, the dispossessed and the discriminated.

So let me come back to the question with which I began: why do you want

to become a lawyer? If you are the kind who loves analysing problems, debating social and political issues, and believes that a reflective intellectual life that helps people in their personal and commercial relationships is a life worth living, the law is for you. In law school you will begin with contract law and tort law, continue with constitutional law and criminal law, and end with international law and litigation advocacy. Along the way, you will become a person of letters, learning to lead your community through argument and persuasion rather than anger and coercion.

