

Personal Statement Workshop

Ben Olson and Nathan Fox
Thinking LSAT Podcast

Saturday, December 7, 2019
New York City

Personal Statement Packages
thinkingLSAT.com/admissions

Your Challenge

You sit on the admissions committee for NYU Law.

All six applicants below have applied with numbers that are close to your LSAT and GPA medians.

You have 25 minutes. Using the 5-point scale below, make a recommendation for each candidate:

- 5 — Accept
- 4 — Probably accept
- 3 — On the fence
- 2 — Probably deny
- 1 — Deny

Xander.....	2
Taylor.....	4
Ali.....	6
Eric.....	8
Gus.....	10
Anna.....	12

Xander

I have never been hungrier. During the senior year of my undergraduate degree, I took 18 credit hour semesters while working 25 hours a week. While pushing through my final two semesters, I was able to achieve the highest GPA that I have received yet. During the second semester of my senior year, I got accepted into the Washington Community Scholars Program. This program has an applicant pool of all of the students from my school, as well as three other schools. Once accepted, the program places you with an organization in Washington, DC. I was placed to work for the Anacostia Watershed Society (AWS), which is an Environmental Public Policy and Advocacy NGO.

Throughout my summer working with the Anacostia Watershed Society, I researched proposals that had environmental implications for the Anacostia River. I was able to bring my environmental science degree and practical skills to implement them into a professional environment instantly. The main project I worked on was evaluating the proposed expansion of interstates I-495 and I-270. I reviewed their ecological impact statements for continuity and feasibility. Through my research, I built reports that I presented to the President of AWS. He was then able to use these reports in feasibility study discussions, stakeholder meetings, and open forums on the proposed project.

To create these reports, I gathered the necessary information, interviewed public policy advocates, community commissioners, and attorneys from a multitude of viewpoints. Doing this allowed me to combine facts and opinions to present a case from the perspective of AWS to my boss. The goal of these projects was to conserve and rehabilitate the Anacostia river via public policy and advocacy work. I was also able to help with a proposal for increased legislation on fireworks debris in DC. Certain areas of the District, such as ward 5, struggle with firework clean up and lack public services to assist with it. This lack of clean up turns into waste. And this waste can then directly affect the Anacostia river as well as its tributaries. I worked closely with the ward five community throughout the summer. I was able to do

community walks, take pictures, interviewed locals as well as a local commissioner and council member. I gathered background information on what policies were current for fireworks in Washington, DC.

To make sure this proposal ran smoothly, I then took this information and compared it to other major cities across the United States. In attempts to figure out the best way to approach and fix these issues. I was then able to help put together the proposal for the piece of legislation. The proposal included all of the pertinent information that the council member would need to push it through. I helped present that proposal to a representative for the council member who is the chair of the committee on transportation and the environment. The proposal gained backing from that as well as other DC council members, multiple NGO's such as Anacostia Watershed Society and Earth keepers and is still moving today.

I am ready to take this hunger for hard work and dedication and apply it towards receiving my JD. Being able to decipher better pieces of information like the ones I worked with this summer will allow me to create better proposals and cases. I enjoyed learning how the DC city council works and hope receiving a law degree will let me do this work daily at a more consistent and increased level.

Taylor

The violent alarm blaring signaled the start of a life that I signed over to the NCAA. 5:00 a.m. Walk to the gym. Get my ankles taped. Practice for three hours. Strength and conditioning for one hour. Take a quick shower and grab a snack (maybe). Trek to class. Drag to study hall. Hitch a ride to meetings (10 minutes early of course!) Finish homework. Prepare for the next day. Set alarm for 5:00 a.m. Sleep. Repeat. A solid six to seven days of my week looks like multiple variations of this schedule.

My college career consisted of three, jam-packed years of discipline, structure, and self-control all wrapped in physical and mental hardships. Before I started working in the corporate world, basketball was my focus and everything else revolved around it. I was brought on to my team with five other freshmen. The six of us made up half of the team, which is a struggle all on its own. This circumstance forced me to mature quickly, learn at a high level and left minimal room for mistakes. The balance of school, basketball and a social life enhanced my time management skills. I had to figure how to get extra workout sessions in, make it to practice on time, meet with my teachers to properly schedule tests, finish work on the road before “lights out” at 10 pm, do eight hours of study hall each week, find time to sleep, and the list goes on and on.

As I progressed through my sophomore and junior years, my challenges grew greater. I was an upper classman, therefore I was always expected to perform well on the court while also taking majority of my major core classes. I stepped up into a leadership role on my team. This role included helping push the freshman through workouts, meeting with the freshman off the court and contributing to their preparation. It also included being more vocal in practice, being the one to do an extra rep and stepping up to make smart decisions during crunch time. Off the court, I got certified to tutor Spanish and business calculus on campus. As a tutor, my skills transferred over to academics and I was able to hold my students accountable, learn their weaknesses and create plans that led them to bringing back higher grades each week. However,

this was what was just on the surface. Within, I was battling severe anxiety and depression. I felt paralyzed in my bed most days. I forced a good attitude through practice. I painted a positive persona for the outside world. Physically going to practice each day got harder and harder. I was prescribed medication and a therapist visit every week. I frequented panic attacks. I truly felt like I was falling apart in plain sight, yet no one saw me.

To me, the worst part was that I told my coaches about my struggles and I was penalized for it. My panic attacks weren't taken seriously, my playing time was compromised, and my character was criticized. As my junior year concluded, I was vulnerable; although, I knew I never wanted anyone to feel what I felt. I wanted to be someone's voice one day...as soon as I could find my own. I chose to end my college basketball career at that point, graduate early and began researching the most effective ways to support athletes.

I decided that I wanted to be someone that could be hands-on in an athlete's life, fight for what they deserve and set them up to be successful during and after their careers. I decided I wanted to be someone that genuinely cared about the life of athletes and that could help give them everything they've spent their entire lives working for. That led me to wanting to become a sports agent. Attending law school will be my first step in the right direction. Studying law and becoming an attorney will set me up with the credentials I need as a minority woman in the world of sports. This will be my first step towards fighting for a voice to speak for others.

Ali

“Ali, can you run and grab my dry cleaning and pick me up a coffee on your way back?”

I had just found out that I was making \$10 less an hour than my male counterparts at my first financial services internship in college, and couldn't help but feel slighted when, as the only female intern, I was left out when the rest of the men in the office would toss the lacrosse ball back and forth.

I told my boss that “of course” I'd go run his errands while the other male interns got to work on substantial projects, and during my walk to the dry cleaners, I started to get really frustrated that I was treated so differently from my male colleagues. It simply wasn't fair – I went to the same college as the other guys, I had better grades than them, and I was a hard worker. So why was I being treated so differently? We were in 2017, so wasn't discrimination against women in the workplace a thing of the past?

When I got home that night, I started Googling to see if there were other women who were experiencing the same treatment I was getting at my internship – and sure enough, there were hundreds of women who were posting on the internet about workplace discrimination in every field you can think of. I started to look at resources for women like me, and I stumbled upon the Feminist Majority Foundation (FMF), an organization committed to advancing equality for women in all spheres of life, including in the workplace. After spending ten minutes on their site, I was hooked.

As I spent more and more time reading about the challenges facing women, and how legislation that would work to mitigate those challenges was stalled in Congress, the more I came to realize that I wanted to be a part of the fight on behalf of women who, like myself, were being discriminated against. During the next semester, I obtained my first political internship at the Feminist Majority Foundation, working to elect feminist female candidates who would fight in Congress for the rights of women. During my internship, I interviewed female candidates for

office and after interviewing the women candidates, I'd research their backgrounds, prepare reports on their chances of winning election, and present them, along with a recommendation for endorsement, to the leadership of the FMF. Once FMF endorsed the candidates, I'd write their profiles for the website. I also organized petition drives with amazing pioneers in the women's rights movement. Two of those pioneers – co-founders of the FMF Alice Cohan and Ellie Smeal – told me never to rest, because the next fight for women's equality was always on the horizon.

I've taken those words to heart – and spent the next years of my career continuing to fight for women's equality. I've used online tools to organize activists to lobby their members of Congress to pass fair pay legislation through petitions or phone calls. I've organized 500,000 activists online to tell advertisers on Rush Limbaugh's radio show to drop their support of his program after he called a young women's rights activist offensive names. And I've worked tirelessly to raise millions of dollars in grassroots fundraising through email and online advertising for candidates who are champions of equality. When I meet women whose lives are better in small part because of the work I do, I know that the work I do matters – and that I'll continue to fight on behalf of women for the rest of my life.

My mom always told me that you won't find out who you are until you've been knocked to the ground and have to get up, so it's fitting that I realized my passion for fighting for women through discrimination in one of my first jobs. And hopefully, because of my work and the work of thousands of other activists like me, when I have a daughter one day, she won't have to endure the same treatment the generations of women before her experienced.

Eric

My first experience as a member of my fraternity was the new member education process (commonly known as pledging). As one might imagine, it was not a pleasant experience: much of the process was dedicated to breaking us down, seemingly to no good end. While I could have quit at any time, I recognized that membership in the organization could still be a healthy and worthwhile experience. In addition, I didn't believe that anyone should have to endure abject suffering to enjoy its benefits.

Once on the other side and in a position to be elected by my brothers to govern the process, I considered how I might best improve it. In the past, the process was often only peripherally related to official "by-the-book" activities. In its place, I built an entirely new process to educate our new members in a fruitful manner. Emphasis was placed on studying official materials, as I believed that the principles upon which our organization was founded - friendship, sound learning, and moral rectitude - were worthy of serious contemplation. I was elected running on this platform.

I built the rest of the process around these principles. I recognized that stereotypes regarding traditional views of masculinity can often make it difficult for men to discuss mental health or otherwise difficult personal issues. Therefore, we held brotherhood meetings known as "In Your Company," in which members were provided a forum to speak their mind openly, without judgement, about the struggles and challenges that they were facing in their personal lives. For a more fun bonding activity, we spent a night eating pizza and watching the entirety of HBO's Band of Brothers in one sitting. Additionally, the new members would collaborate to write weekly skits in which they were meant to poke fun at the older members and vent any frustrations in a fun and positive manner. We instituted regular meetings with our organization's SAPAS (Sexual Assault Prevention and Support) Chair in order to teach them about positive sexuality, to ensure that our home was a safe and positive environment in which

to host social events, and to teach them how to intervene should they see problematic conduct in our home or in any other space on campus. Ultimately, the objective was to make our house a place of love, support, and community for young men during their transformative college years first, and a place to drink beer second.

When I became close friends with many of the new members whom I educated, I knew that my reforms were successful, because in previous years there would often be long-lasting animosity between the new members and those who ran their process. While I excelled academically in my time at Colgate, upon reflection I feel that my greatest accomplishment was establishing a positive precedent with regard to how to educate my fraternity's new members, thereby leaving my fraternity a better place than I found it not only for those with whom I shared it directly, but also those future brothers who will inherit it and those members of the Colgate community with whom they will interact.

To make my community a place that is better for all of its members remains my goal, and through obtaining a legal education I hope to gain knowledge and resources that will be critical in helping me to continue to achieve it. In attending law school, I look forward to joining a community in which there will be a mutual desire for the pursuit of justice and the common good. I anticipate that I will be challenged both academically and personally, and I will continually be pushed to become a better version of myself and be inspired to find new ways in which I can serve those around me. I hope to find ways to make the school's community a more positive place as well and to leave it with as many strong and meaningful relationships as I did my fraternity and Colgate.

Gus

Hundreds of tenants gathered in October for a public tribunal of New York's worst landlords. The gallery was packed and participants spilled into an overflow room I set up to broadcast the proceedings. Tenants told stories of harassment and neglect. One witness recalled that her heat and hot water were turned off as temperatures dropped below freezing last winter. Another renter charged that a rodent infestation has gone unaddressed for years, affecting his child's health. A jury of policy makers and human rights advocates heard the testimony and proposed public policy changes to strengthen tenants' rights. The signature proposal is to expand the right to counsel for tenants facing evictions proceedings in housing court—a right first secured, on a limited basis in New York, two years ago.

I helped organize the tribunal as part of the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, a collective that uses cartography, data visualization, and oral history narratives to amplify housing-justice struggles. In preparation for the tribunal, we researched landlords that sue and evict the highest number of tenants. One landlord, Ved Parkash, filed 4,663 suits in housing court between January 2013 and June 2015—an average of 1.1 lawsuits for each of the 4,214 families who live in the buildings he owns. We combed through city complaints and inspection data to find landlords cited for harassing tenants and failing to maintain safe, hygienic apartments. We researched title records and incorporation records to find building owners and financiers. We plotted our findings on a digital map to help affected tenants connect with one another and built a website with this dossier to publicize the information and galvanize support for stronger tenant protections.

These are practices I've learned over the course of a decade of housing rights advocacy. In 2010, I spent several months in South Africa studying the slow, unsteady implementation of the "right to housing" enshrined in the post-apartheid constitution. I interviewed city officials responsible for housing policy and evictions in Cape Town, pored over legal documents and municipal reports, and attended countless meetings with anti-eviction organizations like the

Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and Abahlali baseMojondolo, South Africa's largest shack-dwellers' movement. In addition to my academic work on housing rights—writing an honor's thesis and a peer-reviewed article for the *Journal of Law in the Built Environment*—I started helping anti-eviction movement organizers draft press releases and contact media to publicize their campaigns. This marked the beginning of my transition from scholar to advocate.

Several years later, I worked with anti-displacement activists in Bulgaria, where Roma people are particularly vulnerable to forced relocation from their urban homes to peripheral ghettos. We developed a communication network that alerted sympathetic neighbors and activists when evictions appeared imminent, allowing communities to mobilize to contest evictions. We also provided video equipment and training to empower residents threatened by eviction, enabling them to document interactions with landlords and police, and allowing them to narrate and publish their stories.

Recognizing the importance of media and storytelling in struggles for justice, I built a career in publishing to complement my activist work. As an editor, I've honed the arguments of preeminent intellectuals and sought to give voice to previously overlooked scholars and activists. I've championed books on housing justice, women's rights, queer theory, critical race studies, and Native struggles that have gone on to sell tens of thousands of copies. These books have shaped public discourse on topics like rent control, Black Lives Matter, abortion rights, and the Standing Rock pipeline resistance movement. With the platform of the publishing house, as with the housing tribunal, I've sought to empower vulnerable, marginalized people in their demands for justice. This is work I'll continue as a lawyer, working to address grievances with the force of law, in addition to litigating them in the court of public opinion.

Anna

A little over four years ago when I accepted a temp job, I never could have imagined that I'd be where I am today in my current role. I had just returned from a year teaching English abroad in Spain and was looking to start my professional career stateside. I did not know that the job I found as a temp in reception would yield the job I would stay at for several years. I parlayed my temp job into a full time position supporting six managers and was later promoted to my current position supporting three executives.

Today, I have become one of the more senior executive assistants on a team of almost forty. For the three executives I support, I am the person that holds everything together. If I were less organized, I would not be able to cope with the volume of work my position demands. I book and change travel daily as trips change, reconcile expenses, and manage three ever-changing calendars replete with client interactions. My attention to detail makes sure that meetings get scheduled when they need to be, my executives get reimbursed for the travel that they do, and that a car shows up at their homes before every early morning flight, making sure they arrive to the airport, and their client on time.

Beyond the constant part of my job, there are projects that come and go depending on what my executives are working on at the time. I've planned workshops, ordered lunch for our 500 person office, and coordinated end of season dinners for department executives, managing details from scoping out restaurants to getting budget approval and making sure contracts are signed.

In addition to my day to day, we have extra 10% opportunities at work. These extra tens are extracurriculars we can engage with in addition to the 100% we give at work, encouraging us to go the extra mile. I've helped out with team interviews, onboarding and training, and most recently, as a member of the "Green Team," helping lead the push towards office-wide

composting. It's taken a couple of years, but I'm so proud that we're doing our part at work to reduce our carbon footprint!

The Extra Ten I am most proud of, however, is the volunteer event I organized for the officewide women's group when I served on their leadership team as the community service chair. At work it can be easy to get caught up in last minute client demands and upcoming deadlines, and I wanted to give back to the community in a tangible way.

First, I got approval from the rest of the women's leadership team. Finding an organization set up to receive a large group of volunteers was my next task, and making sure that they had availability that would suit our group. I settled on a meal delivery service that helps the ill and homebound in New York City and the surrounding metro area. If we scheduled for time during the week, we would easily be able to round up willing people from the office, but would also risk people not being able to step out for the full four hours we would need to help. In the end, we aligned on a Sunday a couple months out that was free for the organization and also didn't conflict with other office events.

I blasted the women's group to give them first chance at volunteering, and I was pleasantly surprised that many people felt the same way I did and wanted to help the community. I was worried that people would think I was taking away part of their Sunday afternoon, and instead I got many notes of thanks. I had been concerned that we would fall short of our volunteer quota and need to open up the offer to the full office, which, while not catastrophic, would have diluted the idea that it was an event for our women's group. Instead, we were able to get more than enough people to commit.

The days before the event, I was nervous that everyone who had signed up would really come through. Any large client demand could have meant that people who were supposed to join had to work instead, and we could have had a lower turnout than we hoped for. I reminded the signees and my team at work of the outing we had planned the Friday

beforehand, and triple-checked the RSVPs. My main concern was that we would have no shows and disappoint the group we were supposed to be helping.

When I got to the volunteer spot, I was thrilled to find that I was not the first one there. Our group went through security, and up to the orientation area. We watched a video on food safety and the clients we were serving along with another group before going down to the kitchen. The kitchen was amazing! I love to cook but I had never been in an industrial kitchen before. We donned our hairnets and gloves, and each of us received cutting boards and chefs knives. At our station, we got a lesson in knife safety before receiving our charge; forty-pound bags of onions.

I learned a lot that day chopping onions. I now know the easiest way to dice an onion, and which end is up. I got to bond with my coworkers outside of work, and meet new people who I wouldn't have otherwise gotten to know. Most importantly, I got to help give back to others who are limited in ways it's easy to take for granted. I'm grateful that I can leave my house whenever I like, and I'm able to cook my own meals when I'm hungry.

I want to become a lawyer in order to give back and help others in my day to day. I realize that being a lawyer is more than chopping onions and that every day might not be so fulfilling, but I believe I could do so much more than I am currently. I am a dedicated worker who is passionate about my ideals, and I know that I would be an asset to any law school or to my clients as an attorney.

There are many areas that interest me, but I feel especially drawn to law where I could do the most work for causes I believe in. I would be proud to be an environmental lawyer, fighting for our earth, or working in immigration law, making sure everyone has a fair chance to live in this great country we call home. Law school is my path towards making a difference, and I am looking forward to the challenge, as well as the experiences that lie on the other side.