

Confessions Of A Law School Asshole

by Steve Mendelsohn

I remember feeling anxious as I looked over the section assignments posted outside the registrar's office at the beginning of my first year of law school two years ago. I wasn't looking just to see which section I was in; I was also looking to see who was going to be there with me.

I'm not talking about checking to see which attractive women were in my section, or even whether I was going to be with friends that I had already made. No, I was checking to see whether I had been stuck with certain individuals who had already established, in those few short days of orientation, specific reputations for talking a lot in class, sounding pompous, and being generally abrasive. Little did I know that I was soon to become one of them.

Yes, I admit it. I am a Law School Asshole. And I am not alone.

You know who we are. We're the ones who always have our hands up in class volunteering to answer the professor's questions, or ready to ask one of our own at seemingly any and every opportunity. Everytime you hear one of our names called, you groan and turn to the person next to you and slowly shake your head from side to side.

Asshole Bingo

I talk so much in class that during the first-year asshole bingo game, I was the center square, the free space, the one everyone gets because there was never any question as to whether or not I would speak.

I later found out that they kept count during first semester of how many consecutive days I spoke. I believe the total was 42. I don't think they bothered to keep track second semester, but I can't remember a single day going by without speaking at least once.

Oh sure, a class here and there, but never a whole day. I remember once during first semester trying to go the entire day - three whole classes - without talking. Civ Pro was easy: Professor Levin hated me anyway. Contracts was no problem: Professor Summers rarely took questions - he was too busy trying to figure out the seating chart. But then came Property and that was too much to ask. I liked Property; I liked Professor Schill. I can't

remember exactly, but we were probably studying something fascinating like adverse possession or the takings clause. In any case, I didn't make it. I couldn't. I just had to talk.

(Of course, my predilection towards speaking in class during the first semester of first year excluded Torts with Professor Austin, but that's another story - I never talked in Torts other than to feed my questions through another classmate.)

University of Michigan

I don't know why it is and I don't know whether this is true about other classes but there seems to be something about being an undergrad at the University of Michigan that promotes Law School Asshole-ism. Suffice it to say that Aaron Krauss, Eric Laumann, and I are all graduates of the University of Michigan.

Self-Conscious

I have always been self-conscious about being a Law School Asshole. (Obviously, not self-conscious enough to make me shut up, but somewhat self-conscious nonetheless.) I don't necessarily have to be friends with everybody in the world, but I don't want anyone to hate me either. At least, not for this reason.

It was obvious to me though that some of my classmates did not like me. There were certain people (and I won't bother to mention their names just in case they didn't really hate me after all) who seemed to grow cold towards me after the first few days - they would no longer return my daily greetings. I have to admit, that hurt a bit.

But then, when I was feeling really depressed about my status, someone would come up to me and thank me for talking a lot in class. One reason given was that I slowed the professor down. One classmate remarked that she could always count on me to ask a question at quarter of, which would keep the professor from getting to the next case, thereby reducing that night's reading assignment a bit. (Although a Law School Asshole, even I refrain from asking questions at 11 minutes before the hour.)

Sometimes people would come up to me and thank me for asking the very same question they had, but were afraid to ask. I can still remember all the

heads turning and shaking approval on the third day of torts class when I asked Austin: "What's a tort?"

Simple Questions

I ask a lot of simple questions in class. I remember prefacing a question ("What's a magistrate?") to Prof. Levin, by stating that I had a simple question to ask. Before I had a chance to ask the question, he interrupted and explained to the class that there is no such thing as a stupid question. I told him that I didn't say it was a stupid question; I said it was a simple question.

I don't mind asking simple questions. I figure that if I don't know the answer at least one other person in the room also doesn't know. And besides even if I am the only person who doesn't know, I'm still paying over 15 god-damn thousand dollars a year to be here and I'm going to ask questions and talk in class if I feel like it.

Reasons

Despite what people may think, there are actually many reasons why I talk in class - it is not just to show off. The fact is that I am usually genuinely interested in the subject matter. You see, I actually like law school. I know that many of you who came here right after graduating may find this extremely hard to believe, but trust those of us who have already been in the real world and escaped back to the ivory tower: law school ain't so bad.

Most of the time, I ask questions because I really am confused. But there are other times when I ask questions for fellow classmates. The person sitting next to me may lean over and suggest that I ask the professor a certain question. Sometimes, when a professor is being needlessly obtuse, I'll make a statement to clarify or ask a question which I know that at least a few other people must have. That may appear patronizing or condescending, but I look at it as a type of public service to those too intimidated to ask for themselves.

Many times, I talk in class out of embarrassment or to avoid being rude to the professor. It's awful when a professor requests a volunteer, or directs a question to the class in general, and everyone just sits there like log lumps. I often raise my hand just to end the pain of that silence.

Anyone who has had Professor Lonsdorf, and actually bothered to show up for class, can empathize.

Of course, I also talk in class to give professors a hard time. I just love to argue. In addition, I happen to suffer from a mild strain of George Carlin disease. I admit it: I like the attention that comes with being a class clown.

The best reason for talking in class was one I only realized after some time - I talk in class to avoid being called on unexpectedly. If you volunteer in class enough, the professors will get so sick of hearing from you, that they will never call on you when you don't have your hand up. This way, you never get called on when you don't want to talk (although a true Law School Asshole *always* wants to talk in class). In over two years of law school, I have never been called on unexpectedly to give the facts of a case.

Professors

Different professors react differently to Law School Assholes. I've experienced

everything from total rejection (Professor Austin) to total acceptance (Professor Kreimer, as anyone from Section A first-year Con Law will attest).

Professor Rudovsky usually gives me a limited number of chances to talk in class. He'll call on me anywhere from one to three times, maybe four times tops, in any one session. This makes it imperative that I pick my opportunities carefully; I usually try to ask questions rather than give answers.

Professor Gorman and I had an unspoken understanding: If anyone else in the entire class besides me had his or her hand up to give an answer, he would call on that person. Otherwise, as a last resort, I would get the nod. That was okay with me; I didn't mind that at all. You see, I'm the kind of Law School Asshole who doesn't mind letting other people talk in class, too.

While it may well be a liability here in law school, from what I can see of our future profession, being an asshole can only be an asset to my legal career.



Former Really Senior Editor Steve Mendelsohn. A modest fellow, he begged us not to print this photograph.