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Book Review: Letters to a Law Student

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INTRODUCTION

‘Letters to a Law Student’ is a book that delves into the simplification of complex legal education and is an attempt at making the career of law understandable to those who are trying their hand at it. The author of the book, Nicholas McBride himself has been a law student and has firsthand experience of what it’s like to stand in the eye of the storm, the ‘law’. Everything written by him has been through years of perfecting the lessons he has learned as a student and as an adult.

As the editions progress, parts of the book get redefined from a different and newer perspective, a moral imperative, to be precise. The gap between the fourth and the fifth edition was a period of two years and the chapters have been rewritten in a way that they conform to the changes in the education sector after the Covid-19 pandemic while keeping the essence of the book in sync with its first edition.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Voted by The Guardian as one of the top six books for law students to read, this book consists of a series of 28 letters as a response to the questions of aspiring law students. In addition to that,

it also answers any lingering questions about making the most of university both academically and socially while learning law.

The book is divided into 5 parts- thinking about studying law, preparing to study law, studying law, writing like a lawyer and after studying law. It builds confidence in the students and encourages them to pick up the area of law and pursue it as their career. It does that by introducing them to the various advantages and their practical importance in life-like scenarios while also suggesting effective study skills that will assist them in acing the law exams thereby opening new doors for them.

SUMMARY OF THE BOOK

The book begins with the simplest definitions of basic terms like law, legal mind, rule of law and statutes. It answers questions like how to read a law book, how to mitigate difficulties in reading and how to practice law. The 28 letters of the book are split into 5 sections and each section deals with questions of a particular type.

The introductory part or the first part can be said to be addressing letters in the preliminary stage. It comprises questions like What is law, five reasons for studying law, Defending the law, why not do something else, whether Is law the right subject for me so on and so forth. Each question is then examined in detail with simplified reasoning and an attempt is made to invoke interest in the subject.

The second part can be referred to as the novice stage where it addresses questions of how to make a successful application to the college, tips on acing the interview and avoiding mistakes that other students may make. In order to solidify the chances of getting into a good law school, suggestions for checking websites and attending open days are made and two hard truths are brought out namely the failure to say thank you and the problem of time management. It also provides ways of preparation for studying law through YouTube channels, documentaries and reading on a wide range of topics.

The third and fourth parts address the letters of a law student who is admitted to the university. It can be called the intermediate or advanced stage where questions pertaining to case briefing, time management, and reading of lengthy cases are answered. The students are also acquainted with the present legal system while being taught to write like a lawyer thereby enhancing their writing skills.

The fifth part addresses letters in the last stage which is 'after studying law'. It answers questions pertaining to options in the legal field after graduation. It focuses on students to build up their extracurricular activities and negotiation skills as recruiters from top law firms focus on those after the regularity in the grades of students and on being one of the top scorers of the respective classes.

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

The author explains through a series of letters the nuances of knowing the law, learning the law and applying the law. It contains advice on how to ace the university exams, widening the array of thoughts and emotions while also explaining ways to get the most out of studying law and getting a kickstart in a career in law.

Overall, the book engages in the main task of establishing a relationship between tasting the subject of law and the possibility of excelling at it. It is filled with answers to all possible questions of aspiring and practicing law students. The author exhorts the students 'not to kill the curiosity' while reading the law because the entire profession entails reading throughout life since if one gets bored halfway through it then he or she may never pick it up again.

It is a beautiful journey for a student who is initially hesitant in taking the first steps but later falls head first into the subject of law and explores the core principles and critical aspects by learning to read the fine print and becoming an accomplished law student. This approach by the author brings to mind the famous words of Francis Bacon, "reading maketh a full man and writing an exact man".

This book is written for all those who feel stuck or are facing challenges seemingly insurmountable while in law school. It is written in a concise and honest way that puts out the brutal truth while preparing one for 'life in law'. The author emphasises the importance of good research skills for saving time and utilizing it more effectively. He also sheds light on important matters such as striving for the ideas of perfectionism and 'burnouts' which many youngsters often go through. He deals with it by addressing it as a rather normal thing and gives practical advice on not overworking oneself. In the words of the author, "Any student who is restless and easily distracted will tend to not do very well in studying law"¹. The only negative aspect of the book is that it is directed towards students studying in the United Kingdom. However, it does not have much implication for Indian law students as most of the legal text has English roots.

Various life-altering messages are conveyed in the book through anecdotes to ensure that the readers connect well with them and learn the lessons that would've otherwise taken them years to understand. One of the most influential statements made would be, "Your desire to become a lawyer can only be realized by a thorough consciousness of this fact"².

CONCLUSION

It also contains various hard truths of life embedded in between the chapters which requires careful reading on the part of the reader to find meaning behind them. This book is a perfect start to law and it is imperative that all aspiring law students must read it. As per the author, it does not matter whether one is a first-generation college student, the first in the family to take up law or has a legacy of thriving legal practice to fall back to. All this advice is good for law students to keep themselves one step ahead of others.

In conclusion, this book is written in simple language while also explaining the legal jargon. It has in-depth discussions without seeming too overbearing on the reader and it is suitable for all types of students, whether they are thinking about their career options, starting their law school journey or are far into it. It is also useful for those contemplating their career choices after

¹ Nicholas McBride, *Letters to a Law Student: A guide to studying law at university* (5th edn, Pearson 2022)

² *Ibid*

graduation. At all stages, extensive discussions are done with the aim of compartmentalising the topics with an endeavour to simplify the study of law. It is a must-have book throughout the journey of law school.