

New York University Law School

By Amir Weinberg

New York University Law School (NYU) consistently ranks among the top five law schools in the nation, and as such, admission into this esteemed institution is an especially rigorous process. According to Dean of Admission Nan MacNamara, last year NYU Law School accepted fewer than one in seven students from a pool of more than 6,000 students, which is a selectivity rate of less than fourteen percent. The decision to admit a student is based on the relative value of the student's extracurricular activities, grade point average, Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) score, recommendations, and personality. MacNamara explained that a student might be weak in one area but still have an interesting background that would enrich the student body. Ultimately, MacNamara suggested that the admission decision is a subjective one. According to MacNamara, the admissions officers narrow down the applicant pool into several subdivisions: "first [we divide the people] into a group that could we think do the work here, which is usually most of the applicants, and then we narrow it down to who we think can do very well here, but the most important thing we look for is people who can contribute a great deal to our school," she said. As for LSAT scores, MacNamara asserted that, "LSAT scores usually confirm our impressions from the rest of the transcript."

Columbia students fare rather well among students of other top undergraduate schools in terms of acceptance to NYU Law School, and last year Columbia had an equal number of matriculated students at NYU Law School as the University of Michigan, Dartmouth, and Princeton. MacNamara raised the issue of inflated grades in assessing the value of one undergraduate institution over another. Grade point averages are meaningless in comparing two students from different schools; she said, a student's ranking in his or her grade, on the other hand, is an important indicator. On Columbia's grade inflation, MacNamara said, "Columbia's [grades] are a little inflated, but not dramatically," in contrast with the infamous grade inflation at Stanford University. MacNamara also said that admission officers judge a student's background by how rigorous the applicant's undergraduate education was, and what variety of courses the student pursued. In that respect, MacNamara said that "Columbia has a nice distribution requirement, so we're confident that the [students] have taken a variety of classes." Indeed, the Core Curriculum exposes Columbia students to a variety of challenging courses that do not go unnoticed by the admissions office at NYU Law School.

Another factor in the admissions process is affirmative action. MacNamara asserted that, "diversity is an important part of our decision, so in that respect affirmative action is important - we're called the 'gatekeepers of the profession', so we have a certain responsibility." She voiced a concern among law schools that the profession ought not continue to allow certain groups to be under-represented in the profession, as compared to their absolute representation in the general population.

On the students' end of the decision-making process, financial aid also plays an important role for the applicants, especially after the heavy loans many students

have already made to support their undergraduate education. The law school does implement need-based financial-aid, but, "[the law students] borrow more than they did for an undergraduate education," according to MacNamara. She added that, "we give benefits to those that go into the lower paying fields, such as public service; ten percent of the class that's going into public interest are on full scholarships." Even though tuition and fees can seem overwhelming (\$24,175 plus an estimated living expense of \$12,655 for the 1995-1996 school year), students have no problem repaying their debts, since the average starting salary is \$83,000.

One of NYU Law School's strengths is its placement office, which secures its students jobs after graduation. Among graduates of the 1995 class, ninety percent got their first choice of employment and eight percent got their second choice. MacNamara cited the placement office as being highly organized, and described the placement office as very structured: "we have six professionals working full-time." First year students are offered career planning programs, as well as personal career counseling, workshops on job-hunting and specialty panels featuring speakers from all areas of practice. During the late summer and early fall of the second and third years, students meet legal employers and schedule on-campus interviews. Last year 1,000 recruiters, representing over 800 private law firms, public interest organizations, government agencies, law offices of corporations, and public accounting firms visited the law school. Clearly NYU Law Students have nothing to worry about in terms of finding a job after graduation.

NYU also offers several programs by which students can obtain a graduate degree in addition to a J.D. in less time than would be required if each were pursued independently. Among such degrees are the J.D./Master of Business Administration, which takes four years; a J.D./Master of Public Affairs, which requires four years plus a summer workshop, and is run in conjunction with the Woodrow Wilson School of Public Affairs at Princeton University; the J.D. Master of Urban Planning; the J.D./Master of Arts in specializations ranging from French Studies to philosophy to sociology; the J.D./Master of Social Work, and the J.D./LL.M (Master of Laws) in taxation. Students can also earn an M.C.J. (Master of Comparative Jurisprudence), which studies the system of Anglo-American common law relative to other civil law systems. NYU Law School also offers the most advanced degree awarded in American legal education, the J.S.D. (Doctor of Juridical Science), which first requires completion of the LL.M program of study.

Undoubtedly NYU's academic and career programs are complemented by New York City's boundless opportunities. MacNamara claimed that, "The school uses the city in an intelligent way," by taking advantage of the local firms and practitioners in the area. It is no coincidence that seventy-three percent of NYU Law School graduates chose to work in New York, since the school so effectively capitalizes on the opportunities inherent in any major city such as New York. Furthermore, MacNamara asserted that NYU Law School manages to maintain a community despite the tendency of New York residents to be independent-minded. "The faculty tend to live in the square [Washington Square], so we have the best of both worlds," she said. Another advantage of being in New York is the international presence felt on campus. For instance, the Japanese ambassador to the United Nations always lectures at NYU Law School in the fall. Much like Columbia, NYU Law School benefits enormously from the city in which it resides.

Though NYU Law School has such a competitive edge in the field of law,

the atmosphere among the students is anything but competitive. According to first year law student and Princeton alumnus Paul McDonald, "there's no ranking here, so it's laid back - people won't tear cases out of the library books, because it's a very supportive atmosphere among the students." The competition is further reduced because students don't take their lawyering class for a grade. Sharon Lillis, a second-year law student and graduate of Cornell University, agreed that the atmosphere is supportive rather than competitive. "Getting into [NYU Law School] is competitive," she said, "But once you're here people are good about sharing."

Despite the enormous course load required to graduate from a top-notch law school like NYU, students have ample opportunity to cultivate a social life. Lillis said that, "students know how to balance their time so we manage to go out on the weekends." Greenwich Village is especially conducive to entertainment, and students seem to take advantage of its recreational opportunities such as jazz clubs, cafes, and the overall fun environment. The students at NYU Law School as a group seem genuinely content with their school. Outside the classroom, they devote considerable time to intramural sports, student publications, and other extracurricular activities. A first-hand visit to the NYU Law School conveys the general atmosphere of the school. It is an environment conducive to a well-balanced life, offering both academic excellence and an enjoyable extra-curricular and social life.

The University of Miami School of Law

By Shulamit Shapiro

Throw away your heavy down coat, your collection of wool sweaters, your flannel pajamas and your earmuffs. Amidst the palm trees and sauna-like humidity of Miami, these are foreign goods. The University of Miami School of Law (UM) has more to offer than just beautiful weather, though. According to the 1995-1996 Law School Bulletin, the school boasts a diverse student body, a unique first year curriculum and one of the leading legal research libraries in the country. The school's admission requirements are highly competitive. They include an undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA) of approximately 3.3 and LSAT scores around 156. Nevertheless, Michael Goodnight Assistant Dean of Admission and Enrollment at the 69-year-old Law school, emphasizes the admission committee's dedication to evaluating each application holistically. "Everyone's an individual with a different history and different life experiences. Someone with 10 to 15 years of tremendous work experience and wonderful recommendations who has a 10 to 15 year-old GPA won't be rejected on that basis," Goodnight said. While Goodnight could not precisely rank the weight given to grades, scores, recommendations and extracurriculars in considering applications, he said, "In general, academics are very important." Admission officers evaluate GPAs in relation to the school the applicant attended, as well as his or her major and coursework. Graduates of Ivy League institutions are definitely at an advantage, according to Goodnight. "Obviously, a Columbia education is valued very highly," Goodnight said.

These rigorous standards allow for a healthy level of competition to exist between students. Second-year student, Allison Hift, who as an undergraduate attended Emory University but transferred to University of Miami, confirmed that her peers are highly capable. "I am competing against people who are as motivated and talented as I am," Hift said. Competition can be fairly stressful. First-year students are graded on a bell curve, according to which only a certain number of A's are distributed for each assignment. Before she started law school, Hift anticipated that "law school would mean no life and an intense amount of work." She believes, however, that "it only gets worse when you're working."

Professor of Law, Irwin P. Stotzky, is sensitive to the difficulties students face in adjusting to the increased workload. "We have a very intense curricular component which requires students to work eight, 10, 12 hours a day and they think their life is ruined," Stotzky said. Professor Stotzky is one of the 55 full-time professors on the Law School's faculty. This faculty also includes 85 part-time instructors and many members of Miami's large legal community. The Law School both contributes to and takes part in the opportunities afforded by this community. Judges and lawyers who work in major Miami firms extend their knowledge and experience to educating UM's law students through participation in career panels, clinical programs and a litigation skills program. In return, UM makes available to attorneys the use of its newly-renovated Law Library, which holds over 400,000 volumes and is considered one of the leading legal research libraries in the country.

The curriculum, according to the Law School Bulletin, is quite unique. First year students must take Contracts, Property, Torts, Civil Procedure, Criminal Procedure and Constitutional Law, much like all other first-year law students. Each