

Law School Exams

Law School Exams

A Guide to Better Grades

THIRD EDITION

Alex Schimel



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Foreword

Joanne Harvest Koren

When I started the Academic Achievement Program at the University of Miami School of Law in 1994, I knew that I wanted to design the Law School's pilot academic support program using upper-level law students as Dean's Fellows (or "teaching assistants"). My plan was to find twelve upper-level students who were willing to do just as I thought and said. At the time, I believed that would lead to a successful program to serve the needs of our 1L students.

I soon learned how naïve I was in my thinking. After hiring twelve intelligent, dynamic, clever, and creative students as Dean's Fellows, I quickly realized that they often had different ideas about how things should be taught, planned, and done. Happily, I also discovered that this was a very good thing. I was willing and enthusiastic about incorporating those students' ideas into my own plans. As the program grew and developed, I depended on the student Dean's Fellows to help me create and shape that initial vision into a successful multi-faceted program.

In the more than twenty years I directed the program, I was extremely fortunate to hire, train, supervise, and work with hundreds of successful law students who chose to spend a great deal of their 2L and 3L years working with me in the Academic Achievement Program. Among those students, Alex Schimel stood out. He is a remarkably intelligent and creative person, who has innovative ideas and a talent for teaching. In addition, he has the unique abil-

ity to make his clever ideas and methods of teaching and learning seem quite straightforward and sensible.

I met Alex when he was a new first year law student. He sent me an email thanking me for presenting a program that he found very helpful. The program, called “1L Boot Camp” was offered during the second week of classes and was facilitated by a 2L student Dean’s Fellow. I invited Alex to come to my office so we could discuss the program. Even as a 1L student, in the second week of class, Alex was insightful, thoughtful and analytical, and he saw things with a clear and discerning eye. It did not surprise me to learn that Alex finished his first year of law school at the top of his class.

In the fall of his second year, Alex began working with me as a Writing Dean’s Fellow in the Academic Achievement Program Writing Center. We spent many hours in my office talking about student learning, teaching, exam writing, and law school in general. He had observed and participated in the process of “law school learning” and he had some well-developed and interesting ideas. Although (and perhaps because) Alex’s ideas sometimes differed from mine, I always enjoyed those conversations and appreciated his insight and vantage point. I was delighted when Alex offered to assume the role of Dean’s Fellow for the Academic Achievement Program’s Spring Exam Workshop series. In that role, he had the opportunity to work with students who were trying to find ways to improve their academic experience and acclimation to law study. The Exam Workshop sessions were voluntary, but students were expected to commit to the eight-week program.

In discussing the planning of those sessions with Alex, it became quite evident that he had a theory and program model for exam-taking success. Hundreds of students flocked to the weekly sessions that Alex taught. Sometimes there was “standing room only” in the classroom. Word got out around the law school, and in the two years Alex taught the Exam Workshop, several hundred students benefited from insight into Alex’s law school and exam-taking advice. Alex’s advice became somewhat institutional-

ized. In fact, around the University of Miami School of Law, current Dean's Fellows and students call Alex's "IRAHNC" method of exam writing the "Schimmel Method."

I was honored and delighted when Alex sent me the draft of the first edition of this book and asked me to write the forward. Since publication, this wildly successful book has provided valuable and practical guidance to countless law students. Now, as I write this forward to the much anticipated third edition, I am even more honored and delighted. Following publication of the first edition, Alex came to work with me full time at the University of Miami School of Law, choosing to give up his successful law practice career, to become Associate Director of the Academic Achievement Program. In the years we worked together as colleagues, Alex designed and implemented numerous innovative new programs focused on law student success.

In 2015, after 21 years of directing the University of Miami's Academic Achievement Program, and 30 years of Law School teaching, I retired. Alex Schimmel seamlessly took over as Academic Achievement Program Director and in the six years since, he implemented additional law school early acclimation programs as well as multiple bar exam readiness and preparation programs. He brings all that experience and shares those strategies with the readers of this book.

Alex is an excellent and effective teacher. He presents useful and valuable lessons in an entertaining and matter-of-fact way. In writing this book, Alex shares his insight and his methods with readers, who will, no doubt, enjoy an experience similar to those who had the benefit of Alex as a classroom teacher. Readers are in for a treat. This book offers valuable advice and strategies for students new to law school—and also to students who may have already completed their first or second year and are seeking alternative strategies for greater competency and academic achievement.

There are many books available that offer new law students advice and strategies for success in law school. What makes this

book so unique is the vantage point of its author: An intelligent, successful law school graduate and long-time law teacher, writing a book for “fellow” law students. It offers realistic insights, sound advice, and tried and true strategies. The book is sensible, practical, comprehensive and . . . funny! In reading the book, the reader hears Alex’s voice. It sounds just like Alex does when he speaks. Any law student would be wise to listen.

Joanne Harvest Koren, Esq.

Retired, Director

Academic Achievement Program

University of Miami School of Law

Preface

Michael Serota

Fifteen years have passed since Alex and I first became 1L study partners at the University of Miami School of Law. During that tumultuous first year of law school, we met frequently, devoting countless hours to learning the art of law school exam writing. Our brainstorming sessions, convened at various patio-tables-turned-war-rooms scattered around the University's bright and sunny campus, ultimately produced the test-taking skills and techniques at the heart of this book.

Application of those skills and techniques to our 1L exams propelled Alex and me to the top of our class. When the dust of the 2006–07 academic year settled, we were ranked as the top two students in our class of 400, with a near-perfect academic record between the two of us and a collection of awards to go along with it.

After that year, Alex and I went in different directions. Based on my 1L grades, I transferred to the UC Berkeley School of Law. Alex chose to stay at Miami Law, where he continued to fine-tune and build upon our systematic approach to exam writing. Alex also disseminated his insights liberally, offering free—and widely attended—exam-writing seminars during his 2L and 3L years.

Since completing law school, the paths Alex and I have taken have further diverged. Initially, Alex—who graduated from Miami Law *summa cum laude* and Order of the Coif—accepted a position with a top Miami law firm. While at the firm, Alex quickly discov-

ered that his true love was not for drafting contracts, but rather for preparing law students to succeed. So with that personal insight, Alex decided to devote the little spare time his demanding firm job allowed him to write a book on exam writing, with the hopes of turning his passion into a career.

Unsurprisingly, Alex succeeded! His book proposal quickly received an offer of publication from Carolina Academic Press. Soon thereafter, Alex transitioned to a position at Miami Law's Academic Achievement Program, and he eventually became the Director of that department. This book, *Law School Exams: A Guide to Better Grades* has since gone on to become a top-selling and frequently utilized resource for law students around the country. Alex continues his work in higher education as a senior administrator and professor, as well as frequent speaker on the topics of law school academic success and bar passage.

Like Alex, I also spend a lot of time mulling over the nuances of law school exam writing—but from a different vantage point, having become a law professor. The exam-taking skills and advice I provide my students draw on my work with Alex and the methodology we developed as first-year law students.

As a law professor, I also share with my students a basic lesson I learned through my experiences as a federal law clerk and chief policy counsel in Washington D.C. Good law school grades are not necessary for success but they do make it easier to get your foot in the door of competitive entry-level positions. As a result, today's law student has an important choice: Learn the art of law school exam writing now, or endure the additional burdens of navigating a competitive job market with sub-optimal grades later.

If you're the type of person willing to read the preface to a book on law school exam writing, you're probably also the type of person who's interested in the first option. So with that in mind, dive into the following materials, take Alex's suggestions to heart, and make them your own. Be confident in your training and preparation,

and, perhaps most importantly, strive to make the law school exam a labor of love.

Michael Serota

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