

McLean County Bar Association Scholarship Essay

My law school education is incredibly important to me because I see it as the only way I can move through the world and promote robust, meaningful systemic change. While I was studying at Illinois State University, I found that I was extremely interested in policy work. This naturally led me to political science, a degree that I planned to use to get a job in politics. As I went through the program, however, I found myself incredibly uneducated about almost everything. I was learning to think like a policy-focused politician, which is incredibly important, but I felt like I would be the most ineffective politician ever. I didn't really understand the laws, and I felt like I had a duty to learn more before I could consider going into politics. For that reason, I decided to go to law school to actually learn the laws I'd be helping to create.

My legal education is what grounds me in reality. I spend my time in law school thinking beyond what the law says; I also think about what the law should be. I've learned to take my time, take in new information, and change my mind. These skills are not only crucial for my future career; they're also fundamental to my sense of self. My law school experience has radically changed who I am and how I think, and it has forced me to think beyond myself and my own views.

During my externship at Legal Council for Health Justice, I was taught a very helpful model for solving problems: look beyond the client. For example, we had a client who was transferred into a special education program at the elementary school she attended. However, the special education program was only through part of the day, and when she was transferred, she lost the free lunch that the school would ordinarily provide. Instead of just helping our one client, Legal Council began working with the school to fix this loophole and ensure that kids with special needs are provided a free lunch. This model of finding and solving systemic problems is exactly why I went to law school.

The biggest contribution I want to make to Illinois communities and to society as a whole is to make the Earth a safer place to live. I plan to use my legal education to fix the myriad of environmental problems across the state. As a Decatur native, I've seen what pollution can do to a town; from ADM to Lake Decatur, the entire community has been devastated by environmental waste and corporate greed. When I left Decatur, I realized that this problem runs much deeper than my own community.

My time at PATH Crisis introduced many, many obstacles that people face – obstacles that I never faced. It's a life-changing experience to talk to someone who has gone through the worst things imaginable and to ultimately come to the realization with them that they truly do not have many options. Although I was born to a teen mother and experienced a bit of homelessness as a child, I was in many ways sheltered from the worst things in the world. I feel that it is my duty to help those who didn't have the advantages I have.

I also want to dedicate myself to fixing substantial systemic issues. As an example, I'm currently writing about the importance of community-wide wi-fi programs and how these can be used to lower poverty rates, promote crime prevention, and eliminate barriers to education. I believe that by tackling the systemic roots of society's ills, I can use my legal career to truly change the world.