

# Are Law Journals Really Worth Your Time?



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I know lots of things, but most of them are wrong. However, a larger category is things that I do not know. I do not know the Federal Rules of Evidence. I do not know the meaning of Shemini Atzeret — it has something to do with praying for rain, right? And I do not know the purpose of law journals.

Certainly, the most basic purpose of law reviews and journals is obvious: to serve as peer-reviewed scholarly journals focusing on legal issues. All professional and academic industries seem to have these, from the *New England Journal of Medicine* to the *American Historical Review*. But unlike law journals, these professional publications are run by, well, professionals.

Even those journals outside the area of law that are run by students, such as the *Journal of Philosophy* at Columbia, require more than two years experience in their respective fields. Graduate students do not merely have more years of training, but generally have demonstrated a certain undergraduate proficiency in their field before admission to their programs. Law schools require absolutely no legal knowledge, besides the LSAT's important questions concerning whether Abigail can go to the store on Tuesdays if Cassie is there as well, but Bertram is buying Broccoli.

There is no doubt that the editors of law journals are very good at their jobs. However, after a semester of Professor Hanks yelling "because the judge says so," it seems like it would make more sense for an editor to have the years of experience that can discern the subtleties of the legal process. Indeed, journal editors only have about a year to develop the talents of their positions. Unless these positions require little training or expertise, it would certainly make more sense to relegate these positions to people who could hold them for longer than a few semesters.

Of course, there are reasons why law journals should be run by students. One key argument is that journals provide students with the legal writing and research experience they cannot get in class. However, if this is the case, it should be more of a testament to the poor quality of writing and research classes that law schools provide than the high quality of journals. If the purpose of law school is to teach students the law or how to be lawyers, then certainly the skills acquired from serving on a journal should be available to any student who wants it. One could argue that certain students simply do not have the minimum level of talent to serve on a journal. If this is the case, then perhaps law schools should raise their admission standards. Then again, maybe the purpose of law school is not to teach the law or how to be a lawyer. But that would be awfully cynical.

Perhaps the real purpose of student-run law journals is the one expressed by students themselves in that oft-heard expression of late-September relief: "Now that I've finished my interviews, I don't really need to be on a journal anymore." The key purpose of student-run journals is to look impressive on a resume or in an interview. If this is the case, then firms should merely look at grades and writing samples on their own, rather than outsource the job to journals. After all, those seem to be the key criteria to get on a journal. This would grant firms greater control over their application process, rather than merely outsource it to student-run groups.

One could call this sort of outsourcing as lazy, but it does not seem to be too out of the ordinary. Journals run by getting students to do menial blue book work. Law firms get journals to vet students through their own process. Law schools relegate the application process to the LSAT and undergraduate grades. For a legal industry that seems to pride itself on hard work and rationality, both often seem to be in short supply.

Of course, I could be missing some key facts. After all, I'm not a very good law student. There are lots of things I don't know. But I do know this: I didn't try to get on a journal, but somehow I'm getting published at Cardozo every month.