

Coffee with Classmates Sample Questions

Uses: For facilitated small group discussion among peers or for use in a climate survey to find out how your institution can better serve its first generation students.

Sample Introduction Setting the Stage for the Discussion:

We come from different places and have different first generation stories. As the only lawyer and professional in my family, I spent my early undergraduate and graduate education as well as legal career running away from parts of who I was in an attempt to act out what I perceived a professional lawyer role to be. I didn't realize until much later that this had to do with how I defined failure. In my effort to "get ahead" I was running from parts of myself. It is not until recently that I realized I can own my education and reconcile it with the community and background in which I was raised. They can in fact be intertwined and not conflicting. I had a fear of being my authentic self which I have only recently be able to embrace.

Introductions:

1. Tell us about yourself, your family and who encouraged you to go to law school.
 - a. Faculty or Staff Facilitator shares their story and then the most senior student (2L or 3L shares followed by the 1Ls).

Preparation and Expectations for Law School:

2. Why did you decide to go to law school? Did you have any advisors, champions, supports along the way that encouraged you to go to law school? Who were they?
3. Was law school an expectation for you? Who talked about it and encouraged you to go?
4. Did you feel prepared for law school?
5. What most surprised you about law school?

Access to Law School Cultural Norms:

6. After arriving here on the law school campus and in the _____ community did you feel welcomed and at home? Was there anything that surprised you about the community or the school environment?
7. Do you feel part of the law school culture? Why or Why not? If why not, what could be done to make you feel more welcome?
8. Did you ever feel that you had no one to talk to or no one to relate to? If so, what did you do?

Access and Approachability:

9. How many of you have gone to your professor's office hours or spoken with a professor outside of class? If no, why not? If yes, did you feel comfortable doing that?
10. Do you/have you ever felt like your work and comments are not well-received by your professors and peers? Why/why not?
11. Were you ever unable to attend an event during your law school career due to cost?

Problem-Solving and Resiliency:

12. Can you provide an example of an obstacle that you faced when you came to law school and how you resolved it?
13. How have you or do you deal with others who might project a sense of entitlement?

Balancing Personal and Professional:

14. What are some ways that you balance school work and life work?
15. Have you ever felt pressure from your family to secure a well-paying job?
16. What were some ways you were able to successfully communicate to your family and friends about the pressures and demands of law school?

For more information on how sharing diverse first generation personal stories can impact achievement, engagement and psychosocial outcomes see:

Closing the Social-Class Achievement Gap Study (Stephens, Hamedani, and Destin, 2014) <http://www.psychology.northwestern.edu/documents/destin-achievement.pdf>