

## “[T]he Pursuit of Happiness”<sup>1</sup>

*How to be (Sort of) Happy in Law School*

Kathryne M. Young (Stanford University Press 2018), 290 pages

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Let’s face it: there is a dearth of happiness in the legal profession. Lawyers are more depressed, suffer from more anxiety, and drink more than other professionals, such as doctors.<sup>3</sup> Law students are unhappy too—suffering at alarming rates from depression, anxiety, self-harm, and substance abuse.<sup>4</sup> None of this information is new to readers of this Journal—folks like Debra Austin and Lawrence Krieger have been writing about student well-being for years.<sup>5</sup> It is also not a surprise to me as a legal writing professor, since I interact frequently in small group or individual settings with students. I see first-hand the stress, depression, and anxiety they are feeling. So what can the legal community do about it?

Enter Kathryne M. Young, a Stanford Law graduate who concurrently worked on her PhD in Sociology while in law school. Young’s new book, *How to be (Sort of) Happy in Law School*, provides tips and strategies that we, as attorneys, can share with law students to help them thrive in law school. And, in the process, we might find some ways to make ourselves a little happier, too.

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<sup>1</sup> THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE para. 2 (1776).

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<sup>3</sup> Press Release, Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation, ABA, *Hazelden Betty Ford Foundation Release First National Study on Attorney Substance Use, Mental Health Concerns*, CISION PR NEWSWIRE (Feb. 3, 2016), <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/aba-hazelden-betty-ford-foundation-release-first-national-study-on-attorney-substance-use-mental-health-concerns-300214321.html>.

<sup>4</sup> KATHRYNE M. YOUNG, *HOW TO BE (SORT OF) HAPPY IN LAW SCHOOL* 145 (2018).

<sup>5</sup> Debra S. Austin, *Positive Legal Education: Flourishing Law Students and Thriving Law Schools*, 77 MD. L. REV. 649 (2018); Lawrence S. Krieger, *Psychological Insights: Why Our Students and Graduates Suffer, and What We Might Do About It*, 1 J. ALWD 258 (2002).

Young's book is based on an extensive mixed-methods survey that she conducted while at Stanford. In addition to surveying over 1,100 students at more than 100 diverse law schools and 250 alumni from over 50 schools, she also interviewed students, alumni, and law school drop-outs—including those who loved law school and those who hated it. Young incorporates many quotes from her interviews and surveys into the book.

The book is divided into five main sections: (1) Getting a handle on your situation, (2) Being yourself, (3) The elusive search for balance, (4) Managing relationships, and (5) Academic success. Young makes effective use of subheadings, allowing the reader to pinpoint with ease the discussions about, for example, why you aren't crazy or how you should manage your romantic life. Young expressly does not discuss in great detail the structural changes to law school that would make students happier—such as more feedback and graded assignments. But, she urges faculty reading the book to work on those efforts.

Overall, I found most of Young's advice to be spot on. For example, in the section on balance, she encourages students to ask for help with mental health challenges, to keep law school in perspective, to avoid "stealth time vacuums," and to still find time for activities or hobbies that they enjoy and that alleviate stress. The section on managing relationships encourages students to get to know their professors and administrators, something I greatly benefited from in law school. I was especially happy to see her recommend taking skills classes in her section on academic success. I also appreciated her advice to embrace chances for feedback and view them as opportunities to improve.

She also includes several helpful exercises to assist in these endeavors, including an exercise that asks readers to write down, for one week, how they spend every minute of every day in an effort to "recapture time around the margins and heighten your awareness of how you spend small bits of time." In the first section, she asked readers to make a list of the reasons why they went to law school and reflect on which of those reasons still applied or were actually being fulfilled by law school.

Despite all of the great advice, I found some parts of the book to be slightly in tension with each other. For example, Young rightly stresses the value of time management and using one's time judiciously, yet she also encourages students to live somewhere that makes them happy, even if they end up with a lengthy commute. Early in the book she advises students to use their money wisely and minimize debt, but some of her career and law-school-lifestyle discussions that come later in the book seem to contradict the earlier advice. Finally, there were a few points that I wish she emphasized more, like seeking wise counsel from others before dropping out and protecting your professional reputation in law school.

In general, Young's book is a great resource for law students that I plan on recommending to current or potential law students.

I also found the book to contain some excellent practical advice that can help us be happier judges, lawyers, and law professors. Most of us can use a reminder to be mindful in how we spend our time and to not neglect the fun activities that alleviate our stress. But deeper than that, we can all do well to follow Young's advice to "build [our] wings" by "taking a leap that scares [us] a little." We can finally write that article (or book), apply for that promotion or new job, advocate for status on campus, or submit a proposal for that conference, even if doing so stretches us beyond our comfort zone. Only by stretching ourselves can we really accomplish Young's final bit of advice on how to be happy—becoming who we want to be.