ABOUT THOSE GRADES…

Before talking about how you can deal with grades that are not your most impressive credential, or a grade you are not happy with in one particular class, remember this: You are a Penn Law student. You are among a unique group of very talented students admitted to this Law School from the nation's top 5% of JD candidates. This already puts you at a strong advantage and makes you an excellent candidate for legal employment.

With that being said, the issue of grades will be a part of your candidacy for law jobs of almost all varieties. The issue may arise in an interview setting, either because the interviewer asks or because you address the situation. And it may arise in your cover letter to an employer or in a letter you write after an employer asks you to forward your transcript. Whatever may be the situation, it is imperative that you become comfortable with your credentials. Often employers use grades as an opportunity to see how you bear up under the pressure of tough questions. Remember, the biggest impact grades have is on your confidence - let's discuss possible approaches you can take to keep your confidence high!

IN INTERVIEWS

Be Positive. Not to sound like a platitude, but this is an essential element of successful interviewing and of the job search process in general. You want to offer a brief but positive explanation and move on to the other strengths you bring to the table. It will not be to your advantage to dwell on the issue of your grades or to give excuses for low grades; instead, offer a quick statement about grades and move the conversation along.

For instance, you could answer a tough grade question with: "My grades indicate that I am holding my own in this very competitive pool of my classmates at this top ten law school." Or, "I'm looking forward to improvement this year now that I am selecting courses in which I am very interested."

If you've had consistently low grades (make an appointment to see a counselor!) you will want to move the conversation into areas where you excel and what you are doing or have done to improve your performance. You can say something along the lines of, "My best skills aren't taking law exams. Getting used to law school was tough, but I assure you that I've taken steps to improve my grades and am looking forward to this semester." The important thing is - don't whine and don't apologize. Immediately add things about yourself that will show why you will be a great lawyer.1

You might want to segue into, "I feel that some of my other credentials are more indicative of my potential success as a lawyer. You'll note that I..." performed detail oriented work under time pressure as leader of X in undergraduate-- have prior work experience -- have a strong labor background, and am interested in your labor practice because -- have lived abroad and speak Spanish, which may be important as you develop your practice in South America......
Keep in mind:

☑ Some students achieve an excellent academic record in college after a relatively weak start. If this was your pattern, you might mention to the interviewer that you typically need time to adjust to a new situation before you excel; you can bring along a copy of your college transcript to show your improvement and ultimate high level of achievement.

What if the interviewer looks at my transcript and doesn't say anything, but his/her eyes start to glare over...

Even if the interviewer doesn't bring up the question of your grades, it may be to your advantage to discuss them briefly at the interview. Watch the body language of the interviewer once he or she receives and reviews your transcript. If you get the sense that they are disappointed, think about confronting the issue head on: "I realize that my grades are not typical for the students you hire. However, I do feel that I have other credentials that make me a strong candidate for your firm."

Answering the tough - "Are your grades indicative of your ability?" or "Why aren't your grades better..."

As mentioned briefly above, employers might ask these type of questions to see how you are able to handle a potentially uncomfortable situation and see how you react to criticism. Whether they are concerned with your ability or just testing you, you will want to remain positive! Don't make excuses. In fact, you can even say, "I don't want to make excuses about my grades. But what is indicative about my ability is ..." and then move on to your positive attributes. Essentially, you want the interviewer to know that you are a well-rounded individual and are not defined by your grades.

IN WRITTEN CORRESPONDENCE

You should also be prepared to deal with the issue of your grades in your written correspondence with employers. Often employers request a copy of your transcript in addition to your cover letter and resume. In these instances, use the cover letter as an opportunity to emphasize your strengths. Again, don't apologize for your grades but make the connection for the reader that you are succeeding at a very competitive law school and that you have many other skills, talents, and attributes to offer.

Any of the counselors will be happy to review your cover letters.

OUR GRADING SYSTEM

We have available a statement about our grading system that is designed to give very general information that would support the candidacy of all of our students. Please pick up a copy in CP&P; you can send this along with your transcript if you like.

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