Dear Student,

First thing's first: congratulations! Law at Downing is an incredibly prestigious subject, with alumni going on to high flying solicitors firms, the best barristers' chambers in the country and even Monty Python's flying circus! Safe to say it will stand you in good stead.

I am Callum, about to become a third year lawyer (at time of writing) and as a member of the JCR committee I have been selected to write this letter advise first year law students on things that they may not know about studying law at Cambridge given that I've been in your position and survived it. I'll give you the basics, and will then give you some insight on what me and my friends found to be helpful tips.

**The Nuts and Bolts:**

1. You will study 4 papers in first year: Civil Law 1 (Roman Law) Constitutional Law (you will quickly start to call this 'Consti'), Criminal Law and the Law of Tort. This is a lot to take in, and it's hard work but it is also great fun.

2. To study these, you'll need a number of resources. You'll use what feels like a ton's worth of textbook reading over the year. You can get hold of these textbooks from online retailers or book stores in Cambridge such as Heffer's. However. The cheapest way to get hold of textbooks is from your college parents. This may be jumping the gun a bit, but you will be given two second years whose job it will be to mentor you in your first few weeks, to help you settle in, and to generally make Cambridge easier. They will sell you books they don't need at discounted prices. Anything else you will need to read will either be in the law faculty library or found online.

3. You'll be taught via a mixture of supervisions and lectures. Lectures are at the law faculty at Sidgwick Site (a 5 minute cycle or 15 minute walk from Downing). Supervisions will be mostly in Downing, and comprise of 3 or 4 students and a supervisor essentially discussing the topic that you have read about for the supervision in question. Styles will differ from subject to subject, and supervisor to supervisor, but you'll always be able to talk to experts in their fields about the things you find challenging or interesting.

4. You'll write 4-5 assignments per paper, per year. These will be a mixture of problem questions and essays. In problem questions you apply the law you have learned to unique and often weird factual scenarios (http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/sexually-graphic-questions-appear-in-cambridge-law-exam-8641966.html is a great example). In essays you have to discuss what the law is and whether you think that is a good thing, or if it is achieving its objective.

5. Studying law is hard. There will be tough times. Sorry, I can't help with that part. However, what I can give you are some practical tips and some pieces of helpful advice to assist you in navigating the crazy waters of a law degree:

**Things to Keep in Mind**

WORK HARD, BUT EFFECTIVELY: You will be given an unreasonable expectation of the work expected of you. You don't need to do 8 hours a day every day. Some times you will have to, supervisors are like that. What you will have to do is work effectively. I liked reading in the afternoon, and that meant that I wouldn't get so much done in the mornings. You will have an idea of how/where/when you work best, but explore your options.
IF IT'S NOT EFFECTIVE, STOP: Don't stress yourself until you can't sleep because you've had an unproductive day. The best law student I know has days where she sits and watches the good wife on Netflix all day in her pyjamas. Doing that, on days when you need it, is way better than slogging all day to do 20 pages of tort.

YOU WON'T FINISH IT ALL EVERY TIME AND THAT'S ALRIGHT: Long reading lists are a fact of life as a law student. If you become friends with medics, you'll spend half of your life in a 'who has more work' contest. And some weeks, you will have too much work to do. You just have to do the best you can, band together with your supervision group and just make it through. The beauty of the supervision system is that you can work towards things you know more about if you need to. If you don't complete a reading list, make a note and come back to it in the holidays.

YOU SHOULD GO TO LECTURES: Lectures are good things, people. 9am Tort on a Monday sounds about as appealing as a sandpaper sponge bath, but I promise you it's worth it. You will come to supervision reading with an extra level of understanding if you do.

COME UP WITH OPINIONS: You will read a wealth academic arguments in your time at Cambridge. I would suggest finding those you agree and disagree with, and trying to work out why you feel that way. It allows you come up with original thought (a big point scorer in essays).

DO WHAT YOU LOVE: Find something outside of law to do that interests you. You might love sport, playing an instrument or writing Justin Bieber fan fiction. It really doesn’t matter, but this thing should get you away from your work and your desk and just let you be yourself. There’s literally hundreds of societies in Cambridge, and some societies have Downing-specific branches. Also, come to Cranworth Law Society events. They can give you the chance to chat to other lawyers you might not see socially, and this can help you work through problems.

TEAM UP: Supervision groups should be viewed as teams. You can all get firsts, and helping other people doesn't preclude your success. Share notes, essay ideas, and your understanding in areas where you are strong and others will help you in areas where you are weak. Meeting an hour before a supervision for an hour for a coffee (you'll learn to like it, trust me) and a chat about the supervision can be really useful.

YOU WILL BE ALRIGHT: The best piece of advice I have ever received. Everybody hits a point where they don't think they can do it any more. When I had this moment, in my second term of first year, a very good friend of mine told me to focus on those four words. You are clearly really intelligent, and are going to be great students and lawyers. Don't forget that you were chosen to do this.
With that being said, good luck! If you need anything, contact me at cbc29@cam.ac.uk

Callum Church
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