

UVA LAW | Natalie

RISA GOLUBOFF: The first order of business for me is to introduce you to Natalie Blazer. I don't think she actually needs an introduction to you, the assistant Dean of admissions. She is the one person I feel certain you all know, but I'll give her a little formal introduction anyway. Dean Blazer is a magna cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Boston College and a 2008 graduate of this law school.

During law school, she was the editor for the *Virginia Journal of Social Policy and the Law*. She was a peer advisor, and she was co-chair of the conference on public service and the law. After law school, she clerked for a judge on the UN International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and served as a senior litigation associate at Weil Gotshal and Manges before entering higher education.

Natalie served in leadership roles in admissions offices at Georgetown and Columbia Law schools before we lured her back here a year and a half ago. This is where she should be. We are thrilled to have her back here at UVA Law and delighted to hear from her now.

NATALIE BLAZER:

Welcome, Class of 2025, to UVA Law and your first week of law school. It's hard to put into words how rewarding it is to see you all here today in these seats. It was a long cycle. One of the benefits of being rather short-staffed, as Dean Goluboff said. I feel like I got to know each and every one of you, and that's special.

So I was thinking about what I wanted to say to you all this morning. I could tell you you're the most academically accomplished, the most impressive work backgrounds, the most interesting life experiences. I could tell you all those things because they're true. But our amazing communications team is writing that article as we speak, so I don't want to scoop their story. You can read it on the website in the next couple of days.

So, instead, I just wanted to tell you a story. You're going to have a lot of heavy things coming at you today. I wanted to tell you a fun story, sort of fun, from my first week of law school. I hope it will get you excited for what you have ahead of you.

So almost two decades ago, I was sitting in this exact same room on orientation. Right after welcome remarks, our peer advisors took us into a classroom just like they're going to do with you in a couple of hours. I think we had a perfunctory icebreaker or two, and then, it was down to business. They taught us how to outline a case, and what to do when we got cold-called.

This was my biggest fear going into law school, frankly, getting called on in front of a big group of people. So I started taking notes feverishly. I look around. Everyone else is taking notes feverishly, and you could feel the energy shift. The realization was dawning on us that it was on. In two days, we were going to be in class, and there was no going back.

So I think the PAs could sense this anxiousness and tension in the room. And at the end, they said, very cheerfully, and by the way, the first person in this section to get cold-called, we have a long-standing tradition here at UVA Law. Everyone else in the section gives that person \$1.

This really meant nothing to us. We were just so high-strung, and we wanted to get home and do the reading, which we did. So fast forward. It's Wednesday morning, the first day of class. Our first class of law school was 9:00 AM criminal law. It was taught by Professor John Jeffries, who some of you will be lucky enough to have.

He also, at the time, happened to be the Dean of the law school. You can imagine how intimidating it would be to have the Dean teach your first year class, your very first morning class. And by UVA Law standards, this class was enormous.

I fact checked this with our registrar last week. In Fall of 2005, there was one first year class that had four sections combined into one. So 120 people in 9:00 AM criminal law with Dean Jeffries. So we're all there. We're nervous.

Dean Jeffries enters the room. He walks down the aisle, and everybody is silent. He gets down to the podium, shuffles up some papers, looks up. Does anyone want to guess what the first two words uttered in law school were in Fall 2005? Miss Blazer.

No good morning. No welcome to UVA Law. No this is criminal law. Nothing. It was, Miss Blazer followed by please state the facts of the case XYZ. Well, of course, I had prepared like a maniac, so I answered his questions.

For those of you harboring the same fantasy I did that I would answer, and the Professor would stop and say, never in my 30 years have I heard such a brilliant analysis of-- if it were ever to happen to anyone, it would be you all because you are the most impressive class. It did not happen to me that day, but that was fine. It just happened, and it was over.

So I take a deep breath, and I get a tap on the shoulder. I look down and down the row, very discreetly underneath the desk, are dollar bills floating towards me one after the other. And I'm like, oh yeah, the dollar-- I had totally forgotten.

And each dollar bill was accompanied by little thumbs up, and silent claps, and smiles. Even people in the room that I had never seen before, the three other sections, they were giving me looks of encouragement. Probably also relief that it hadn't happened to them.

So the day goes on. I study in the library, and I decide I'm going to take those 29 crumpled-up dollar bills and walk down to Harris Teeter, which is still there. I bought a case of refreshments and brought them back up to my apartment in Ivy Gardens, and I fired off an email to my section.

I said, thank you all for your support. I would like to spend your hard-earned money on you. So please come over tomorrow night for some refreshments, and we'll celebrate getting through the first week of class. Well, my roommate said, are you crazy? You met these people two days ago. They are strangers. You just invited 30 people to our tiny Ivy Gardens apartment.

I said, listen. I felt bad taking their money. No one's going to come. It's the first week of class. People are so stressed out. Maybe three or four, probably nobody. Don't worry.

The following evening, every single person in my section showed up. For those of you who live in Ivy Gardens, no, there is not room for 30 people in those apartments. They were out on the balcony. They were spilling down the stairwell, out into the parking lot, but they were all there.

The most terrifying moment, the most daunting thing, the thing I'd feared the most had resulted in, honestly, the best memory from my three years here. So I tell you this story for three reasons. First, what I just said.

The fear, the difficulty, the challenges? Don't shy away from those moments. Some of them, you will have no control over, like when you get cold-called. You have to just get through that, but there will be other opportunities to take a risk, or to take a more challenging course, or join moot court. Those moments are going to result in the most growth and the most learning, and, I think, also, the best memories of your time here.

Second, the traditions. This dollar cold-call tradition is not even the best one. It's one of many, many, many traditions that you will find here. I also realize it's 2022. I know none of you have dollar bills in your pocket. And by the way, \$1 in 2005 is actually-- I looked this up. --\$1.52 now with inflation.

And I know none of you have nickels, and dimes, and pennies, much less dollar bills. So I urge you to honor the traditions if in spirit only. Maybe you have to Venmo your crypto, Dogecoin, whatever you're going to do. But it's the spirit. It's really the spirit of the traditions. That's what's going to tie you to all the classes that came before you, and all the classes that come after you.

Last but not least, this story, I hope, you realize is about people. The people of UVA Law, the community that you have joined. Every person showed up that night, and you know why? You have time. You have time to be there for one another even in these challenging moments.

You are going to be stressed out in here sometimes. You are going to disagree with one another about real issues issues that might feel core to who you are. But don't abandon your humanity and your decency in those stressful moments of disagreement. The people here, I think, are a big part of why you chose to come to UVA Law.

There's that law school trope that I hate from about 50 years ago. The professor, on the first day of class, says, look to your left. Look to your right. One of those people isn't going to be here next year. I hate this saying. I'm going to give you a new one today.

I want you to look to your left. Look to your right. One of those people is going to bring you notes when you're too sick to go to class. One of those people is going to stay up until 2:00 AM with you mastering the exceptions to the hearsay rule even though they already know it cold.

Now look behind you. Look in front of you, if you can. You are going to console one of those people when their contracts exam doesn't go so well. You are going to cheer for one of those people on the softball field, even if you yourself never pick up a bat or a glove.

But you're going to be there for one another. You for them. They for you. This community and these people are one of the many, many reasons I believe that you chose to come to UVA Law instead of all those other fancy schools I know you got into.

Remember, you all told me back in February, March all the places you got into. I know, and I'm very impressed. And I'm very proud that you chose to join us here at UVA Law. And I'm really, really excited for you all, and I hope you'll take advantage of your three years here.