

[MUSIC PLAYING]

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: I would say some of my favorite admitted student visit stories are when their parents are with them after they've been admitted, and you just overhear snippets of like, I'm so proud of you. And it's just really heartwarming. And they just love the atmosphere too, so that's always really special too.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NATALIE BLAZER: This is Admissible. I'm Natalie Blazer, Dean of Admissions at UVA Law. On today's episode, we're going to talk about why visiting a law school you've been admitted to is so important, and how a visit can help you make your ultimate decision about which law school to attend. We're also going to share some tips about the most out of your visit, as well as some do's and don'ts, straight from our admissions receptionist. She's seen it all.

Our first guest today is Tessa Morrison, a first-year law student at UVA. Tessa earned her bachelor's degree summa cum laude from the College of William and Mary in 2015. She majored in economics and minored in mathematics. Tessa arrived at UVA Law with several years of work experience.

She held research positions at both the Federal Reserve Board of Governors and the Peterson Institute for International Economics. And most recently, she worked as a business manager at Capital One. Tessa just started her 1L year here at UVA Law last week, so I'm truly grateful she took time out of her very busy schedule to be with us. Welcome to Admissible, Tessa.

TESSA MORRISON: Thank you so much for having me. The first week has been a whirlwind but I'm excited to be here with you.

NATALIE BLAZER: Oh, I'm so excited too. Before we dive into the substance of today's episode, as always, I wanted to remind our listeners that applying to law school is essentially about introducing yourself and trying to convey something about your personality and your motivation for pursuing a legal education. So Tessa, can you share one thing about yourself that you were excited to include in your law school applications?

TESSA MORRISON: I was really excited to talk about my love of math and how that ultimately did bring me to law and law school. I think a lot of people don't associate math and the law together. I've heard lawyers joke they don't like math that's why they're here in law, but I see a lot of parallels between legal and mathematical reasoning. So it was really affirming to be able to feel like I could be and present my whole self throughout that application process.

NATALIE BLAZER: Yes. And I actually remember reading your application. I remember that that stood out. And anything that can kind of set you apart in that way because you are right, lawyers don't typically like math. That made me just want to learn more.

So onto the topic of visits, I reached out to Tessa for this episode because I very specifically remember Tessa was quite deliberate about visiting after she was admitted. So I really want to hear more. Tell us about how you decided which schools to visit. We'll talk about UVA specifically in a bit, but which schools you visited and how you timed those visits.

TESSA MORRISON: Yeah, I visited one school, pre-admission. I had a friend who was in her final year at a law school that I had applied to. And she graciously agreed to give me a tour, introduced me to her classmates. And I used that pre-admission visit as kind of a check on how I felt about law school, in general, rather than a school-specific fit visit.

And then in early February, I started planning out visiting the top five schools that I had, at that point, available to me. And I was able to visit three through admitted student events, so like full-day programming. I visited one on my own, again, meeting up with a friend who was a student at that school. And then the last school, I ultimately wasn't actually able to go visit, but those post-admission visits that I was able to make, it ended up being really valuable to do a school-specific evaluation and ask myself, could I see myself being happy and successful at this specific law school?

NATALIE BLAZER: Absolutely. And I think that is so important. I tell people this all the time. When you set foot on a law school campus, or as we say, grounds, can you envision yourself succeeding there? Do you see yourself being supported? Were there any questions that you sort of had planned out? You seemed like a very organized person. Did you have certain questions you asked?

TESSA MORRISON: Yes. There were two questions that I asked at each school. The first was about the relationship between students and professors. I think I've really grown in my appreciation of the role that mentors and mentorship can play in your life and in your career development. And I wanted an environment where the professors also took that opportunity to be a mentor seriously.

And then the second question was about the relationship between students. It was really important to me to find an environment of students that they're motivated, they're curious, they're ambitious but not to the detriment of the relationships we're forming with one another. This was going to be my first network in the legal field, and I wanted to like the people.

NATALIE BLAZER: I think that's so important. And people think that the law is such an adversarial profession, which it can be, obviously, but most of what you do is lawyers work together, so you need to kind of start learning that in law school. So I always tell people like, the people that you're surrounded by are so important. And learning how to disagree respectfully is so important. So tell us-- you don't have to tell us like specific schools, but did you have key takeaways from visiting each school, like well, that one wasn't for me, or I could see myself there? Tell us a little bit about that.

TESSA MORRISON: Yeah, I kind of grouped them into three categories of takeaways. The first was understanding place more. So I visited schools in cities and college towns. I visited schools in the Midwest, in the Northeast. But I think what was really helpful was, being able to go and visit and explore a little bit outside the school bubble itself, let me understand, OK, when I need out of that school bubble, what are my options? A city might have more arts performances going on, the college town might have more nature for you to get out into. And I think it was really helpful for me to evaluate which of those things was I feeling drawn to.

The second category was the size of each school. As mentioned, I took a few years before coming back to law school. And I had really lost all sense of what a graduating class of 500 versus 300 versus 180 really felt like, and what that feels like in a classroom. So being able to visit and sit in on classes and sit there and think, OK, this is what 60 people in a classroom feels like. Do I need bigger, do I need smaller? It really grounded the school experience for me.

And then the last thing that was a major takeaway was getting that firsthand culture experience and just wandering the halls, and just people watching and seeing how students engage with each other. Also, just looking on bulletin boards and seeing what activities are being promoted, what events, what speakers are coming to campus, was a really great way to get to know what opportunities existed at the school.

NATALIE

Yes, I love seeing everything that's happening at UVA. I'm like, I want to go to that and that. I mean, just they're so engaged and always talking about a current event or always having some social gathering, so I think that's really smart too. So now, speaking of UVA, I'm excited for you to tell everyone-- I'm a little bit about your visit to UVA Law, specifically, when did you visit and what did you do while you were here?

BLAZER:

TESSA

MORRISON:

My first visit with UVA Law was through the admitted students weekend, so mid-March, I believe. And there was a full weekend of programming. I arrived to a welcome picnic, and then I did a scavenger hunt on main grounds, which again is UVA fancy-speak for campus. And then we ended that first night with trivia at a local brewery.

And then the following day was full of information sessions. And then I attended a mock class. And then that day ended with an alumni reception, which was really fun because it kind of felt like an, oh, the places you'll go moment, where you could see all these potential paths that could be available to you, following your time with UVA Law.

And then I stuck around for one more morning, at least, and I went to a coffee hour that the Virginia law Women's Association hosted, which was a great opportunity to have more one-on-one conversations with current students. Then about a month later, I came back for a second visit on a random Monday and attended three classes. For me, I wanted to confirm that my impression from that admitted students' day was not an anomaly.

I think everyone knows that admitted student events, it's schools putting their best foot forward, understandably, and so I kind of wanted to do a surprise visit and confirm. I think what I said to you guys was, I'm just confirming it wasn't like hired actors, that these are real students. I can see familiar faces from that visit. And it was, so it was a great opportunity for me to confirm that those first impressions were accurate, that was a day-to-day experience.

NATALIE

BLAZER:

For sure. I think you also said you wanted to experience a day in the life of a student, right?

TESSA

MORRISON:

Yes.

NATALIE

BLAZER:

Like what is being a law student here going to feel like? You sort of touched on this, but if you could really name one or two things, what is it about your visit to UVA that either made it stand out from other schools or just solidified your decision to ultimately enroll? Because? I think you had a couple of weeks after your second visit before you had to deposit.

TESSA

MORRISON:

I think the first major thing that stood out was how happy the students were. I think that's huge. I think happy people are successful people, both because you perform better when you're happy and because being happy, frankly, is a worthwhile goal in and of itself. And I heard from multiple students at UVA, yeah, it was hard, but I also had a lot of fun. And I would do it again with my classmates. And I genuinely don't think I heard that anywhere else, so that really stood out to me.

And I think the other thing that really solidified my decision to attend UVA was when I visited, just noticing how I felt in the physical space of UVA Law. I had visited one school in a city, and came out of that visit thinking, OK, this is it, this is my top pick. And then I came and I visited UVA, and I just felt really comfortable in the building. It felt open and airy. It had all this natural light. It just really drove home to me that-- there was an affinity I was feeling for UVA Law that was intangible. And I would not have gotten that opportunity without visiting not only UVA but other schools as well.

NATALIE BLAZER: I think that's so important and that's definitely something I have heard before. People who have never even been here just felt this instant sort of calm or relaxing feeling.

TESSA MORRISON: Yes, peace.

NATALIE BLAZER: Peaceful. And to say that about law school is certainly unusual.

TESSA MORRISON: A hundred percent.

NATALIE BLAZER: And one thing I tell people is you probably won't be practicing law in Charlottesville, Virginia right out of school or in any other small town. Most likely, you'll be in New York, DC, Chicago, LA, San Francisco. So I tell people it's nice to have the break from a big city. That physical comfort, that calmness will help you succeed for sure.

So I gather that most of our listeners are going to be people who are either currently applying to law school or they're considering it in the very near future. And you are really just less than a year, really, removed from this process. So what advice would you give to someone who's getting ready to send in their law school applications?

TESSA MORRISON: It's really easy to get caught up in, well-publicized rankings. They're quantifiable, they're allegedly strictly comparable, but I believe it's more important to find a school and community that supports you as a person and where you can thrive in all aspects of your life. And because you're an individual, that choice may end up being different than the one your friend or your family member or the random person on the street would make. But because you're that individual with individualized goals and needs and wants, it's still a very valid decision.

NATALIE BLAZER: Absolutely. And I think that just summarizes also perfectly everything that you mentioned about visiting. You can know what a school is ranked, but a top law school is going to open the doors that you're looking for it to open. I think it's much more important that you find where you personally can succeed.

Well, Tessa, I hope this was more fun than your admissions interview. It was probably equally as pleasurable for me to talk to you again. So thank you for taking time out of your 1L year. I know lots is going on right now. So thank you.

TESSA MORRISON: Thank you. It was a really fun conversation.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NATALIE BLAZER: So I think it is extremely valuable to hear from the student perspective about what it's like visiting a law school and how one can make the decision about where to attend after a visit, but now I'm really excited to hear from the other side of law school visits, and that's from the person sitting on the other side of the desk when a student comes into our office.

I'm really thrilled that our very own admissions receptionist, Kailey Boatright, is here today. Kailey's background is in teaching. And I have observed that her experience in that area is really invaluable for this job because it requires organization and outgoing personality and a whole lot of patience. Kailey is the front line, literally, to not only the admissions office but to the entire law school. So welcome, to Admissible, Kailey. I'm so happy you're here.

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Hey, Natalie. Thanks for having me.

NATALIE BLAZER: So, Kailey, in your experience as somebody who is sitting at the front line, at the desk, you see all of our visitors, you interact with them every day. So when a prospective student comes to visit, what do you wish they would do more of and what do you maybe wish they would do less of?

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: That is a big question. That's a very good one. So I think I'll start with some recommendations on things you should do when you come to visit. Firstly, you would not expect that I'd have to say this, but it's important that you introduce yourself to me. We have a lot of visitors that I never learn their name, which is a shame because I try to remember your name and would love to know who you are.

With that, it's important you also tell me what stage of the application process you're in, whether you're just a prospective, if you've applied. Also, if you're an admitted student, we would love to know if you're here. That's just helpful so I can point you in the right direction for different resources that may be available for you. So that would be the biggest thing when you come in the door.

Secondly, it's a good idea to familiarize yourself with a few aspects of our website before you visit. We work really hard to update our frequently-asked questions page, so kind of knowing those things before you come in, I hope, both of us, would be a really good idea to do. Lastly, definitely take advantage of not only visiting the law school, but the City of Charlottesville.

When you are looking at law schools, the city is so important to where you're going to be living for those three years. I personally love Charlottesville. I'm happy to chat recommendations all day long. So please take advantage of those resources as well. But yeah, those would definitely be the things you should do when you come to visit.

NATALIE BLAZER: I refer to Kailey as the Charlottesville concierge. She knows everything about this town. She has helped us put together updated lists of restaurants and things to do and trails and parks. And so we have all of these lovely, lovely printed resources. I think they're also online, but when you come visit us, if you don't ask Kailey where to eat, you're missing out.

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Moving on to the don'ts. I only have two, but they are definitely crucial. Please, take notes. The most important don't that I really want to emphasize is expecting a one-on-one meeting. Our admissions team is only six people. To put it in perspective, we had over 400 visitors this past year and over 6,000 applications.

There's just not enough time in the day to have one-on-one meetings, but we still want to offer you answers to your questions. And our way of doing that is our frequently asked questions page. Also, we're very quick to respond to your emails. And we do have admissions Q&A on Fridays, so those are a great way to get your questions answered.

NATALIE BLAZER: But also, you, Kailey, can answer basically anything that they want to know. Anything that they would ask me or one of the directors, you can answer. I think sometimes people think that they just want an audience with someone on the admissions committee, but you're still getting an audience with the office, and I think that's still going to be hugely important.

KAILEY BOATRRIGHT: Definitely. And I do want to add that if you are traveling, especially somewhere far, please check that we are open. Check that we're doing tours, check that we're not on our full break, spring break, things like that because that's not going to make the most out of your visit.

The second don't of visiting-- and this is the most essential piece of advice I can give to anyone-- is being mindful about your interactions with everyone that you encounter, whether that's our office, staff, faculty members, or students, because it matters how you treat people really in all aspects of life. But our admissions committee really cares about the culture and the community of UVA, and so because of that, they do take into account how you're treating everyone around the building.

NATALIE BLAZER: A hundred percent. I mean, better believe that how you speak to Kailey and how you speak to anyone else that you encounter, that will be remembered. I have something to add to dos and don'ts. So when we have visitors, they come and they sign in with the admissions office first. And then we have the daily tour if it's a day that we're offering the tour.

And then you also have the opportunity to visit a class, to sit-in on a class. And I would just say follow the rules. We have them posted like classroom decorum online and I think we might even have copies in our office. Just like about sitting in the back of the class, letting the faculty member know that you're a visitor. You don't want to get called on.

And I would say respecting the faculty members' time and maybe understanding that there are students who need to speak to the faculty member before and after class. And really just observing the class and not necessarily then trying to follow up with the faculty member or take up too much of his or her time.

KAILEY BOATRRIGHT: They love having visitors in class, they love having observers. I think we get 100% of faculty who we ask if they would like prospective students to be able to visit their class, say yes. So they love it. I just want people to be kind of respectful of time because they are also very busy humans.

NATALIE BLAZER: For the moms and dads listening, you are not invited to these classes, unfortunately. We have you try to come in, but it is reserved for the students.

KAILEY BOATRRIGHT: Natalie, I'm actually kind of curious. So with our prospective students and our applicants that visit before being admitted, would you say that that adds to the chance of being admitted?

NATALIE BLAZER: Yeah, I definitely think it can. As you mentioned, we keep track of who's visiting, we keep track of our interactions with people. I think for me, usually, if somebody is a super strong applicant, for example, and they visit, to me, I take that as a positive sign that they're interested. If somebody has never interacted with UVA at all and they live in Northern Virginia, for example, I might not think they're that interested. But again, I know people have limited time, limited resources, so a visit is by no means mandatory. I'm just saying that the visit, in and of itself, can indicate interest in the school.

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Natalie, with our prospective students who have not applied yet, I imagine that they're probably interested in incorporating that visit into their application, maybe in a why UVA statement, but what is the best way for them to do that, and how do you kind of see that throughout the admissions cycle?

NATALIE BLAZER: Yeah, that's a great question because it does happen for sure. I think people come and visit, and then oftentimes, it's the entire substance of their why UVA. I think there's more effective ways of doing it and less effective ways of doing it. What I like is when they talk about their visit and really the certain things that resonated with them on a personal level, more so than I sat in on Professor Caleb Nelson's civil procedure class, which, by the way, I could see how that could make you fall in love with the school.

But sometimes, people just read a laundry list of the things that UVA has to offer, that they may be observed during their visit, but anyone can kind of do that just by reading the website, actually. So I actually think it's much more effective when someone talks about it on a personal level. So I think visiting, you're already showing your interest.

And then if that visit truly sparked your desire to come to UVA, I think that's a great subject for a why UVA, which, by the way, are not required by our application. They are completely optional. But I would actually be somewhat surprised if someone visited and maybe didn't touch on that in their application because that would say to me like maybe the visit didn't make them interested. Maybe they're throwing in an application to all the top 14s.

One thing that we get a lot of questions about, that I would love to hear your thoughts on, is does it make a difference if a prospective student tells us in advance that they're visiting, or can they just show up?

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Yeah, sure. So I would say, generally, we do not need to know if our prospective students or applicants are visiting. The reason for that is that our tours don't have sign-ups, and so we can accommodate a very large group. There's nothing extra you need to do. We try to make it really easy and not have you do anything in advance.

The only exception, I think, is when our admitted students come. If you are already admitted, and you're coming to visit, we do want to know that you're coming. One, you will have other resources. We want to be able to maybe set you up with a meeting, whether that's financial aid or a service that you might be interested in. And on top of that, the person that interviewed you will definitely want to meet you in person. So I would say that for admits, yes. For all other stages of the application process, you can tell us or you don't have to.

NATALIE BLAZER: I love when an admitted student will reach out to me and say, hey, I'm going to be in Charlottesville. I would love to say hi. We definitely want to when you're coming. We will try our best to at least be able to say hello to you, answer any questions. We just love getting to see the people we interviewed when they come visit.

And I also think, in general, my advice to people is you can get so much more out of a visit after you've been admitted, just because then you can truly envision yourself. There it just makes it a little bit more real. And again, then we will have that one-on-one meeting with you if you want.

I want to end on a high note. I know we've said like some dos and don'ts, but you, Kailey, I know have a lot of stories. I have witnessed some of them, but not all of them. Tell us your favorite story about a person who has visited. What's the most memorable?

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Yes, that is a very hard question. There are so many stories I could tell. One that comes to mind, in the spring, we had a couple of admits that were visiting. I think it was just a random Tuesday, and they came for the tour and to see a class. And it just so happened to be a day that Justice Breyer was in the building and speaking. And that event was actually open to the public. And so they did not this beforehand, but they were invited to go. And so they got to see that.

So on top of that, it was just a day that one of our public service members actually came down and gave them a little bit of information about the public service office. And on top of that, they really hit it off with a couple of our current students and ended up going out to dinner, from what I heard afterwards.

And just to see that interaction with those admit students getting to take advantage of all the opportunities that were just kind of there on a random Tuesday. And get to see the community of Charlottesville and just get some information you might have not gotten if you hadn't visited.

And I think that one or two of them ended up making the decision to come to UVA and are in the building now, which I don't all the factors that led to that decision, but I can't help but think the visit had some sort of impact for them, yeah.

NATALIE BLAZER: We don't always have a Supreme Court Justice on ground.

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: That right. But not infrequently, I would say, so that was fun. I do remember those people and I do know that at least one or two of them committed. So thank you, Justice Breyer.

NATALIE BLAZER: Thank you so much for being here. I think our listeners are going to benefit so much from everything you had to say.

KAILEY BOATRIGHT: Thanks for having me.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NATALIE BLAZER: This has been Admissible with me, Dean Natalie Blazer, at the University of Virginia School of Law. My guest today have been first-year UVA Law student, Tessa Morrison, and our admissions receptionist, Kailey Boatright. For more information about visitation options at UVA Law, please visit law.virginia.edu. The next episode of Admissible will be out soon. Thanks so much for listening as always. And please remember to leave us a review wherever you listen to podcasts.

[MUSIC PLAYING]