

UVA LAW | Amazon movies intro - Behind the Scenes with Emily and Sierra_mixdown

SIERRA SHELTON: I've made it a goal-- all of the worst movies on Amazon Prime Video. Like *Lamageddon*, watched that one.

[LAUGHTER]

I made everyone watch *Philosophaster*.

NATALIE Oh, yeah. Oh, my god. You texted me at, like, 2:30. In the morning.

BLAZER:

SIERRA I texted you at 2:30 in the morning. And I was like, dear god, woman, what did I just finish watching?

SHELTON:

[LAUGHTER]

NATALIE It was hyster--

BLAZER:

SIERRA I was going to say, you enjoyed it. There's one called, like, *Killer Sofa*. I haven't watched that one yet, but it's on the list.

SHELTON:

NATALIE Oh, that I would watch.

BLAZER:

EMILY Yeah, I want to see that.

COCKRELL:

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NATALIE This is *Admissible*. I'm Natalie Blazer, Dean of Admissions at UVA Law. On today's episode, we're taking you behind the scenes of our admissions office. I've often heard the law school application process described as a black box.

BLAZER:

And while we won't be sharing everything, I do want to help dispel some myths about what really happens after you hit Submit on your law school applications. Spoiler alert, there are real people, not machines, working behind every single step of the process.

Joining me today are two of my amazing teammates, Associate Director of Admissions Emily Cockrell and Assistant Director of Admissions Sierra Shelton. Emily and Sierra are the ones doing all the hard work from beginning to end in the life cycle of our application. Without them, I literally wouldn't have any applications to read. And none of you out there would be getting your admissions letters, so we would truly be a useless admissions office.

Welcome to *Admissible*, Emily and Sierra.

SIERRA Thank you for having us.

SHELTON:

EMILY Yeah, excited to be here.

COCKRELL:

NATALIE BLAZER: So I'm going to start with a fun question for each of you, which you two know I love to do. If you were applying to law school-- I know law school is not in your plans, but just pretend for a moment-- what's one thing you would want the admissions committee to know about you that would help them to get to you better? Emily?

EMILY COCKRELL: I guess for me, it would probably be that a really big part of my identity revolves around music, and anthropology, archeology. And because of that, that kind of helps me interact with the world around me and with people around me. And I feel like it really helps me with connections, and I really value that.

So yeah, that would be the biggest thing I think I would want them to.

NATALIE BLAZER: Yes. For our listeners, Emily plays the saxophone.

EMILY COCKRELL: I do.

NATALIE BLAZER: And also spends some of her weekends on archeological digs.

EMILY COCKRELL: I do.

NATALIE BLAZER: At places around Charlottesville like Montpelier. And it's just freaking awesome, so.

EMILY COCKRELL: It's really fun.

NATALIE BLAZER: An admissions committee would definitely want to about those. How about you, Sierra?

SIERRA SHELTON: First of all, I'm a November Scorpio, which I feel like is a huge part of my identity.

[LAUGHTER]

Also like Emily, love music. Usually on the weekends, you can find me at a concert. I know my coworkers have had to hear about plenty of them, whether it be Harry Styles, or Bastille, or anything like that.

EMILY COCKRELL: You were totally the one who taught me about One Direction.

SIERRA SHELTON: I do have a small shrine to Harry Styles in my office. It's fine.

EMILY COCKRELL: Which I helped contribute to.

NATALIE BLAZER: On to the application process and what you two know from your jobs in the admissions office. So let's say I'm applying to UVA Law, and I have all the application components ready to go. Walk me through the steps of what happens after I hit Submit online.

SIERRA SHELTON: Yeah. So once your app is in, we manually check over all of your materials to make sure that they're there. Involved in that is also fixing things, like if your name is in all lowercase or all uppercase. Your address, if it's shorthand or anything like that, we have to manually change that over. So it's not-- the system doesn't pick it up. So we have to kind of scour through to make sure everything is there, everything is proper.

System will see that, oh, there are so many documents in this file. They're not going to see that, oh, you actually uploaded your resume twice and forgot your personal statement. They're not going to catch that, we will.

So if you apply GRE or GMAT only, we have to manually pull those scores. So it's definitely not an instant process. It takes a little bit of time. Especially when we get around the holidays or long weekends, things kind of pile up. And so that's why it may take 24 to 48 hours for your file to truly go complete and under review.

NATALIE BLAZER: And just to clarify for our listeners, the application has to go complete before it can get to me to read. So it's not like hit Submit and then I'm sitting there reading it. Emily and Sierra have to do a lot with that file before it's ready.

EMILY COCKRELL: Yeah. And once we do complete it, that's when we then can start assigning it to the first reader. And then once the first reader is done with their full assessment, goes to a second. And that's something else I think is important to acknowledge, is everybody's filing gets at least, bare minimum, of two completely separate reads, but usually most likely even more. So a lot of people are touching your application.

SIERRA SHELTON: So the more prepared you are when you apply, the faster it's going to go into that review. Now, that doesn't mean you're going to get an immediate answer. But it's definitely going to be a little quicker than if you apply and you don't have test scores, or we're waiting on your letters of recommendation, so.

NATALIE BLAZER: So that leads me to my next question. What happens if someone submits an application but it is missing something, like they don't have a test score yet, or they don't have a letter of recommendation?

EMILY COCKRELL: Application purgatory.

SIERRA SHELTON: Yeah, you're going to exist in limbo. Your status checker should show what you're missing, again, after you give us 24 hours or so to first touch your application. There might be a few exceptions that won't show what piece is missing.

But I recommend checking your status checker once a day until you see that it's gone under review. After that, you can kind of ease off a little bit. And you will be notified via email or phone call of any final decisions made on your file.

But if it's incomplete for more than a couple of days, at that point we encourage you to reach out to see if there's something that you need to do. Unfortunately, there are so few of us, we can't hunt down the missing piece of your application for you. So we're not going to reach out about it.

EMILY Help us help you.

COCKRELL:

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** I have a question for both of you that I'm personally very excited to hear your answer. But what's one thing you wish law school applicants did more or less of?

EMILY Read.

COCKRELL:

**SIERRA
SHELTON:** Read. I could go on about this all day. Honestly, read over our website. It is filled with useful information. Read over your application before you submit.

People really they speed through their questions. And so if the question asks for your full name, please give us your full name. Don't give us an initial. Make sure autofill is off on your computer when you're filling out an app, because you would be amazed how often I have to fix things like that.

Read your app before submitting. Have a parent or a friend read your app before submitting. Make sure there are no glaring mistakes, because we can and will notice the little mistakes if you name another school or--

**EMILY
COCKRELL:** Yeah. I was going to say, can we bring that up, how many times we get somebody who says, this school-- not University of Virginia School of Law-- is my number one school that I want to go to. I'm like, what? Then apply there.

**SIERRA
SHELTON:** Thanks for sharing. will notice. And if you email us 10 minutes after submitting your application saying, oh, my gosh, I made this mistake, we can make sure it's fixed. But by that point, someone's already noticed. And that could have been really saved with just a little bit of proofreading.

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** Yes. Also, you're applying to law school. Do you what lawyers do for a living, basically, is they read. And law students read. And so it's really great practice for what you're getting yourself into, which is very careful reading.

And they say God is in the details. So every single little detail will matter.

**SIERRA
SHELTON:** One thing I would like people to read less of, however, would be internet forums filled with bad advice. Trust the people who this is their job. As great as it is to have a sounding board of people who are in your same shoes, no one really knows what's going on behind the scenes.

We can try and talk you through it. But ultimately, there's going to be some things that you just don't the details of. And so wildly speculating of what it could possibly mean is just going to make you more anxious.

NATALIE Such a good point. Such a good point.

BLAZER:

**SIERRA
SHELTON:** One thing that will certainly be memorable, and not necessarily in a great way, is if your resume is formatted very, very oddly or it's weird colors, things like that. I mean, this-- again, this is a professional school. So please apply with a resume like would be applying to a corporate job.

EMILY Please don't send a diorama.

COCKRELL:

[LAUGHTER]

SIERRA Don't send-- right. Just a standard font, standard margins, standard color. You want your resume to be--
SHELTON:

EMILY Taken seriously.
COCKRELL:

SIERRA Taken seriously, but also just kind of-- this is a place where you do not want to stand out.
SHELTON:

NATALIE Like, the text and all of that should not stand out. What should stand out is the underlying content.
BLAZER:

EMILY Yes, for sure. And also, guys, there's no need, really, to submit things like your senior thesis.
COCKRELL:

SIERRA Nobody's going to read that.
SHELTON:

NATALIE However, I do like to read the title. I do like to see the title on the resume because I have actually asked people
BLAZER: in an interview-- some of the titles are just fascinating to me. And I wrote a thesis, and so I like to hear what people focused their studies on. But no, I will not--

SIERRA Unfortunately, if you're submitting your 40-page capstone paper along with your application, if everyone did that,
SHELTON: and we had 6,000 applications, it would take us a lot longer to get decisions out to you guys.

EMILY Oh, yeah.
COCKRELL:

NATALIE And another thing to keep in mind is I read every single file, and I read every part of it. So I don't want to do
BLAZER: anyone a disservice by not reading part of their application. So Sierra's exactly right.

So aside from that, aside from carefully reading and following instructions, what advice would you give someone currently applying to UVA Law or getting ready to apply in the near future?

EMILY One of the things I would say is, please do not wait till the last moment to set one of your exams, whether it be
COCKRELL: the LSAT or GRE, whatever. Lots of times, we'll have people who go ahead and try applying, but they're like, oh, wait, I'm not going to be setting my exam until March.

Well, you're not really setting yourself up for great success. So be sure that you just have everything really taken care of before hitting the Submit button.

NATALIE And maybe if you're not able to take it until, let's say, March 2023, consider applying for the future cycle. I mean,
BLAZER: the cycle will be wrapping up by then. So I think that's a great point. Just kind of try to plan ahead in terms of when you're taking your standardized tests.

SIERRA Take your time while preparing your materials. Again, don't wait till the last second to submit. Be sure you're
SHELTON: putting your best foot forward. Be polite to the people you're interacting with through the process. And really conduct yourself like a professional. You are applying to law school.

EMILY A professional school.
COCKRELL:

SIERRA I mean, don't be robotic. We'd love to see a little bit of your personality shine through and everything, because
SHELTON: you're more than numbers. We'd love to who this is applying.

But just really show us your best behavior. Put your best foot forward.

EMILY One thing that I really appreciate is just being authentic and being genuine, because there have definitely been
COCKRELL: times where I've read personal statements where you can tell, this person is just saying what they think we want to hear. You can really pick up on a fake vibe. And that doesn't bode well.

NATALIE I always tell people, if you are authentic, first of all, it shines through. But second of all, you'll end up where
BLAZER: you're meant to be. You don't want to put on a persona just to get into a place, because that place probably is not the right place for you.

EMILY Yeah, absolutely.
COCKRELL:

NATALIE So you two see personal statements, as Sierra mentioned in the beginning, you are often the first ones to see
BLAZER: those personal statements. You're checking in every component of the file to make sure they're complete. So do you have any advice about what you've seen in personal statements and what you'd like to see?

EMILY For me, I kind of like reading the ones where they kind of take you on a little bit of a personal journey that makes
COCKRELL: you understand that they're taking this really seriously. Usually, people can sometimes share a particular situation that happened in their life or that they observed that really resonated with them, and they were like, gosh, wait, I can do something about this.

NATALIE I always tell people, it's right there in the name, "personal." If somebody else could write the exact same
BLAZER: statement, it's probably not personal enough to you. We should, after reading it, have a better idea of who you are and why law school makes sense for you.

So Sierra touched on this before, but have other people read your file from beginning to end. And ask those people after reading this essay, would you know me more than you did before, and would you know why I want to go to law school?

So a lot of times in applications, we see that people talk about specific types of law that they are thinking about practicing. Have you two seen that? And what do you think about when they either say they don't know or say that they definitely know?

EMILY I think one of the things that we've oftentimes seen is people sometimes think that they have a really, really
COCKRELL: strong idea of where they want to go. But then when they come to law school, start taking some of the classes, they're like, oh, actually, this over here, this is really resonating with me more.

NATALIE BLAZER: What I tell applicants is if you have something you're passionate about, tell us. However, if everybody practiced the type of law that they said they were going to in their application, we would have a lot more international human rights lawyers, a lot more environmental lawyers. I'm not going to your graduation and saying, well, are you going to practice international-- we're not following up with people to make sure they're doing what they said in their application.

Things will change. Emily is exactly right. You're going to take a class in law school that completely changes your trajectory. And that's great. That's a good thing.

SIERRA SHELTON: Yeah. I mean, I would definitely say if it's something that you're really passionate about, again, be authentic. If you think that really, really want to go into this one field specifically, you can tell us that. But don't grasp at straws and try to come up with something when there's no real reason.

Like, if you just want to study law, that's OK. You will find your passion within that.

NATALIE BLAZER: Can you guys tell us, what stands out in application to you? Or what parts of the application to you are the most memorable?

SIERRA SHELTON: So one of my personal favorite sections of the application is the interests and hobbies section.

EMILY COCKRELL: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's true.

SIERRA SHELTON: You see some of the most fascinating things there. Of course, sometimes you just see like, oh, I like reading laws, or reading about Supreme Court cases.

My absolute favorites are the ones that are just slightly weird. Like, I want to hear about your weird hobbies. If you spend your weekends playing D&D or reading fan fiction, like, that's cool. Tell us about it. It tells us a little bit about who you are as a person.

EMILY COCKRELL: I'm a huge proponent of the fact that people, things, culture, ideas are messy. And so to me, that definitely shows me you have a lot of interesting depth and a lot of different complexity, and tells me that hopefully, that also means that you know how to think pretty critically and analytically because you're not looking at things just through one lens.

NATALIE BLAZER: We ask about your interests and hobbies for a reason. Obviously, to get to you. And we love to get to what your quirky hobbies are, what your pet's names are, do you run marathons, things like that.

But also, when you're a law student, you will need to lean on something other than studying.

EMILY COCKRELL: Absolutely.

NATALIE BLAZER: So when people tell us, yes, that their hobby is reading con law books, that's-- this raises my suspicions a little bit. You need an outlet-- creativity, athleticism, reading for fun, anything like that. That also plays a role into how much we believe that you will be ready for law school and how you will deal with the things that come at you.

EMILY Some of those things are going to be some of your strongest coping mechanisms.

COCKRELL:

NATALIE Absolutely. Absolutely. All right. Let's end on another fun note. Tell us your favorite story of a successful
BLAZER: applicant, or a successful admitted student, or just a favorite story of yours from the UVA Law Admissions Office.

SIERRA I mean, honestly it would be so hard to pick one. I think especially being the person who checks in files right after
SHELTON: they're submitted, I feel like I'm with you from beginning to end. I touch your file the minute you hit Submit. I'm also the person who prints your offer letters and gives them to Dean Blazer to sign.

So really, any time I think someone is offered admission, and we can see at open house or just a correspondence, how excited they are to be coming to UVA Law, it would be impossible for me to pick a favorite. You can feel the excitement of someone when they know that this is the right fit for them.

NATALIE Those moments are very gratifying. I agree.

BLAZER:

EMILY Yeah. There was somebody who at open house who Sierra and I got to interact with when she was waiting for her
COCKRELL: Uber. And it's funny. We started chatting with her.

And then I can't speak for you, but I personally suddenly started feeling very protective of her because she was just so sweet and kind and very real. And it was so awesome when she showed up a few weeks ago with her dad, who helped her get moved in. As soon as I popped around the corner, I'm like, you're here! And we just gave each other a hug. And it was just-- that was-- I don't know, that felt nice, especially since she came from so far, far away.

NATALIE Yes, she did. We really do care about each and every one of our admitted students. Those interactions are
BLAZER: awesome.

SIERRA It's amazing seeing that file turn into an actual person, you know? As we've talked about, we try to view you as
SHELTON: applicants or real people from start to finish. But it is a little different when you're physically in the building after you've accepted an offer of admission, and suddenly we're seeing every day.

NATALIE Yeah. Well, Emily and Sierra, this has been so fun for me just to talk to you more. We talk every single day all
BLAZER: day. But I think our listeners are going to learn a lot from what you just shared. And I know that this will help them calm themselves a little bit.

We're always here to help. We are real people reading real people's files. And so that's what makes this such a fun job. So thank you both for being here.

SIERRA Thanks again for having us.

SHELTON:

EMILY Yeah, it was super fun.

COCKRELL:

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**NATALIE
BLAZER:**

This has been *Admissible*, with me, Dean Natalie Blazer, at the University of Virginia School of Law. My guests today have been Associate Director of Admissions Emily Cockrell and Assistant Director of Admissions Sierra Shelton. For more information about the application process at UVA Law, please visit law.virginia.edu.

The next episode of *Admissible* will be out soon. And we'll be talking to our Dean of Financial Aid, Jennifer Hulvey, about all things related to paying for law school-- loans, scholarships everything that you need to know. Thanks so much for listening and please remember to leave us a review wherever you listen to podcasts.

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