

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Law school country band names that were suggested by Dean Blazer included Friends in Law Places, The En Banc Honky-tonk.

NATALIE BLAZER: Oh, yeah. I love that.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Specific Performance, and Moot, Scoot, and Boogie.

NATALIE BLAZER: Oh, God. And that was the cut of what I thought was acceptable to send.

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This is *Admissible*. I'm Natalie Blazer, dean of admissions at UVA Law. Today's episode is centered on a topic we get asked about a lot, which is dual degrees, sometimes referred to as joint degrees. My guest today is Peter Lee Hamilton, who is somewhat of an expert in the area of dual degrees since he's currently pursuing his JD-MBA at UVA Law and UVA's Darden School of Business.

Peter hails from both Washington State and Virginia. He graduated from Georgetown University in 2020 with a degree in government and as an entrepreneurship fellow. As a student at UVA Law, Peter is involved in far too many extracurricular activities to list, and I may have him tell us about some of those little later in the show.

But I do want to highlight that Peter serves as one of our amazing student ambassadors in the admissions office, helping us to recruit the next grade class of 1Ls. So, as a bonus for our listeners, he has some added insight into the admissions process. Peter, welcome to the show.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Thank you, Dean Blazer. It's great to be here.

NATALIE BLAZER: It's great to have you. So, Peter, you started at UVA Law fall of 2020?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Fall of 2020. COVID year.

NATALIE BLAZER: COVID year. Well, I started as dean of admissions in October 2020, so I actually cannot take credit for your admission to UVA Law. Although I assume the outcome would have been the same.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Hopefully.

NATALIE BLAZER: [LAUGHS] As you know very well, since I was not involved in reviewing your file, I'm very curious to hear what was one thing that you wanted to make sure the admissions committee knew about when you were applying.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: I can only just speak from my experience in that sense. And for me when I was applying, and the advice that I always give to folks who are interested in coming to UVA Law, is that it's really important that you're sharing a cohesive narrative and showing who you really are. My personal statement was about going on a walk-and-talks.

It wasn't some grand vision or big idea about how I was going to change the world as a lawyer. It was about how when I was a kid and would go on walks with my dad, and we would just have conversations, and he would do a good job of asking me questions and keeping me engaged. And as I got older and when I went to college, I started doing those with my friends. What's important to me is being able to spend time with people and have authentic conversations, and be learning and growing together.

NATALIE BLAZER: I love that. And it does not have to be a great vision. And often when people try to do that, I think it's not that successful. But I think that exactly shows who you actually ultimately did end up being at UVA, which is someone who is very involved in getting to the community. So I think that's great.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: I went on a walk and talk today with a 1L who's interested in doing the JD-MBA program.

NATALIE BLAZER: Get out.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: So we're keeping the process going.

NATALIE BLAZER: What good prep. So that brings me, actually, to my first question. When we do get questions about dual degrees quite often, I always find it interesting because I thought getting a law degree was hard enough, or enough work, I should say. And so, people are always very excited to add more to that. And I always tell them to start by considering why.

Why do you want to add, let's say, an MBA, in your case? So, what led you to that decision?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: When I was going through the process of applying and thinking about why I wanted to apply and why it would be useful for me, one thing that stood out to me is I'm very interested in entrepreneurship. I studied it in undergrad. I love entrepreneurial ventures. I love business. And I knew that business was something that I was interested in.

And I would talk to folks and alumni at UVA and professors and ask them, what do you think about this decision? And I had never heard anybody who had graduated with the UVA JD-MBA say, man, I wish I hadn't gotten one of the degrees. But I did meet a lot of UVA Law alums who said, I would have really appreciated the opportunity to learn business through the MBA program.

But now that I'm there, I am learning so much. It's just an incredible experience and opportunity. The case method that they utilize has just given me an education that I don't think I could have gotten anywhere else. And so, overall, I don't regret a single minute of it. It's a lot of work. I would not undersell that.

And it adds a year of time, which-- time is the most precious thing we have. But overall, I would definitely say it's worth it.

NATALIE BLAZER: I want to start at the beginning with the basics because, I think, for any prospective applicant that's listening, they won't really be sure where to begin. So talk us through the timing of when you applied to law school and the timing of when you applied to business school.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Yeah, absolutely. So I applied to UVA Law in the spring of 2020. This was the COVID year. And I knew I wanted to get a law degree, and so I sent my application in. Was lucky enough to get in.

And honestly, I did not expect to get in. My expectation was that I was going to apply to a bunch of schools, get rejected, work for two years, and then apply again. So I basically had not planned at all to get into grad school.

And then, when I learn more about UVA and the culture, and after talking to alumni, it was the perfect fit. And so, one of the things I did before I even-- when I was making my decision between different law schools, I reached out to UVA Law alumni, but I also spoke to UVA JD-MBA alumni. And they talked a lot about how this was a great program even if you just went the law school route because, at the time, I hadn't been applied to the MBA program.

But they also talked about why being able to pursue a dual degree was something that made this a great experience for them, and something that was a wonderful part of their time and their transformation as a student. And when I got here in the fall, I did the kind of crazy thing, which was during 1L fall, I also applied to Darden. And then I was waitlisted.

And for me, I understood why they waitlisted me. I had zero years of work experience, which is very unusual for business school. And also, they could probably guess that I was going to reapply. So for me, it was like, I wanted to get my reps in. I wanted to show that I was interested.

And what I ended up doing after that is, there was a program offered at Darden called the Venture Learning Series. And part of my narrative and what I was expressing to them was I'm somebody who's really interested in startups. I want to explore this space. And having an MBA is important to me for that.

So, during the spring, every Friday I would go to Darden and I would sit-in on this lecture series and just learn about the venture capital process. And then I would do things like I would play squash with Darden students, and I would try to reach out to folks at Darden and just be a part of that community and showcase that when you're here on North grounds at the law school, you're also a part of a bigger and broader community. That's why I try to touch as many different parts of the law school and the UVA community as possible.

So, there I was, sitting on the waitlist. That summer, I ended up doing research for a professor-- Professor George Geis, who actually is one of the head advisors for the JD-MBA program here. And so I was on the waitlist until August, when they officially just closed the waitlist. So I managed to write out the entire waitlist and all the dings from the waitlist, but they closed it out.

And then, when they opened up applications, my 2L fall-- I just, early decision, first round, just sent it in. And then, a couple of weeks later, I was lucky enough to be accepted there, as well.

NATALIE BLAZER: Wow. I love a good waitlist success story. I obviously see these all the time in the law school. But that persistence paid off. But then, I'm curious how you structure your four years.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: So the rule is you have to do a full-time first year at both schools. Because your first year at law school, you're doing the basic intro classes that everybody's taking. Crim, constitutional law, torts, property, et cetera. And your first year at the business school, you're doing something called the core, where all business school students every day are taking the same classes and covering the same material. So you can't really do classes at the law school in the business school at the same time during your first year at either school.

Now, I and several others did two years of law school and are now doing our first year at business school. And it's just whatever matches your profile and personality better. For me, I think it was helpful to wait-- and I think for younger applicants, it's helpful to wait-- because I learned and grew so much being at the law school. The average age at UVA Law, I think, is 25. And the average age at the business school is 28. And the average years of work experience at the business school is greater than five.

So then you have a guy like me, and one of my concerns coming in was that being younger and not having as much experience, I wouldn't be able to add as much to the classroom. And the admissions there explicitly told me. They were like, that is a concern we have with you. You haven't done a lot in your private career, and so what makes you think you'd be a value add to Darden?

And so now, part of a unique value add that I can bring to the classroom-- earlier today and yesterday, we were asking questions about contracts, and when do you recognize revenue from a contract that you engage in. And then, the question became to the class, well, what it even is a contract, and what is the legal requirements there. And I and another JD-MBA are in the class. And so, we're able to chime in and say, well, this is actually some of the things that we've learned about contracts in a class called Contracts. So, it's definitely helpful there.

I will say, I think the one major benefit of waiting two years is that I got two full years with my original class because I was class of 2023. Now I'm class of 2024. So, unfortunately, I'm going to miss them. But the people that I start business school with, I'm going to graduate business school. Versus if you do one year of a JD, and then one year of an MBA. You're still going to have two years left, so you're not going to graduate with either your law school class or your business school class, which kind of weakens your connection to the community.

NATALIE BLAZER: That's a really good point that I don't think I even realized. And I don't if you noticed, but I did not introduce you at the beginning as I normally do with student, which is 3L or second year or whatever, because I wasn't sure.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Right.

NATALIE BLAZER: Do you call yourself a 3L?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: My joke is that next year I will be a 4L.

NATALIE BLAZER: OK.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: But I think if you want to get technical, technically I'm not a law student this year. But I love my friends that I've made here, and I definitely am going to miss them next year. But that's why it helped to constantly be expanding outside of your close-knit community.

NATALIE BLAZER: Right. Does anything stand out in your mind is different between the two application processes? Aside from your waitlist saga.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: They were definitely different. And I think I'll let another podcast guest walk through the UVA Law interview process because I think that's a pretty unique thing. So I'll speak primarily to the business school process, which is that their application-- it's much shorter. There's no personal statement. All their essays are limited to 250 words.

I think it's a lot more there about your resume and what you're bringing to the table. The way that they then evaluate your total package narrative is they do have an interview. And the interview is interesting because at Darden, they ask you to come into the room. And then the first question is, OK, tell me about yourself. And you're expected to talk for 10 to 15 minutes.

So the first time I did that interview, I talked for 25 minutes, and the feedback I got later on when I got [INAUDIBLE] and was kind of curious was it wasn't really clear about why an MBA. And that was really helpful for me for the next year. And, again, part of the maturing process of being at law school, now that I understand myself better, I was able to better communicate about what I wanted to do and why an MBA would be helpful in that next year.

NATALIE BLAZER: You're giving me an idea for a whole new episode of *Admissible*, which would just be focused on re-applicants because you've already hit on some great points, which is feedback and just being open to understanding how you can improve. But then also, really, truly working on yourself and being persistent, and coming to an authentic place of why you are pursuing this path.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: The way I think about it-- and we can use a softball analogy here-- it's like going up to plate. If you don't swing, you will never get a run. But also, just because you go up to the plate and take a swing doesn't mean that you're going to get a run or get on base. And one of the things that's important is that, if you're definitely at a place where you can't hit a home run, then you need to go out and practice.

NATALIE BLAZER: So, in terms of course loads right now in the path that you've taken, how would you compare it to a regular law student's?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: I am happy to provide my personal take on this with the huge caveat that pretty much every person in the program I've talked to has disagreed with me.

NATALIE BLAZER: [LAUGHS] OK.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Or at both programs. The joke always is, is that law students are-- they're working so hard, and the MBA students are just kind of chilling, and they're doing their coloring books and whatever. But I have found that I am working much harder in business school than I ever did in law school.

Now, part of the factor there is that, for me, when I first got to law school, a big priority of mine was being involved in the community. And then the one big difference is that recruiting happens during the school year for business school, versus for law school, most of the recruiting happened during the summer. So right now, everybody is spending a couple of hours a week networking, going to events, preparing their applications, editing their resumes, editing their cover letters. Versus while I was at law school, I didn't have to do that until the summer. So, just in terms of workload, it's very intense.

NATALIE BLAZER: Right. It's concentration. It's not idle time. So you did touch on what I do want to focus on now, which is the career path. Obviously, the goal of going to law school or business school is to get a great job at the end of it, right? For most people, that's what they're going to professional school--

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Just the learning.

NATALIE BLAZER: Yeah, just to learn. So, how have you found it in terms of-- you do get the extra summer. So can you tell us how you are structuring your summers, and anything you can tell us about that recruiting process?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: I'll talk it through my three summers of doing two years at the law school, then one year at the business school, and then next year it will be split between the two. So, looking at those four years, that gives you three summers instead of the regular law school experience, which gives you two summers. And then you're going and working your full-time job after you graduate following your third year.

My first summer, I applied to a couple of different corporate positions and a couple of different law firm positions. Didn't get any of them. But the kind of narrative at law school is that what you do your first summer-- you should do something that's interesting and you should learn a lot, but it's really like, if you're recruiting for the big law jobs, you kick it into gear during that 1L summer. And your 1L summer, you can do whatever almost, as long as you're learning and doing something substantive.

So I ended up doing research, again, for Professor Geis during that summer. Then that allowed me to spend a lot of time networking and preparing for the big law OGI process. So you recruit for your second year summer internship during your first year summer, which I had no idea was the case before I applied to law school. I had never heard of that before. I didn't have any family who went to a law school like this.

So I applied. And then, during OGI, I interviewed, I think, with 21 different firms. I think that's almost like the standard number. So a lot of different firms come here. They want to talk to UVA students. I've talked to a lot of them and was lucky enough to get a position at a law firm based out of Palo Alto, California. So, first summer doing a research assistant position, second summer working at a big law firm.

And once I got to the big law firm-- normally, when you're working there for the summer, at the end of the summer, if they want you to return, they'll give you a full-time job offer for when you graduate. But because I got into the business school program, I ultimately decided that I didn't want to work at a law firm during the summer. I wanted to expand what I could learn. And I went into the semester, no offer lined up for the summer, and I'm recruiting right now.

But I basically am going recruiting through recruiting like any other MBA student. But the one thing I have that the other MBA students don't have is a JD.

NATALIE BLAZER: Right. Well, I have no doubt, whatever you do, it's going to be something super impressive. One question I had was, what's the most difficult part of doing the dual degree?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: The hardest part is maintaining relationships with the communities that matter. I've made really good friends at the law school, and I'm making great friends at Darden. But you have a finite amount of time, and you can only have so many relationships at once. And it's forced me to learn to be better at managing my time and be very thoughtful about how I spend my time with people, alternating between those two communities.

NATALIE BLAZER: So, from your unique perspective-- I have a question, which is-- you're already smiling. Do you what my question is? [LAUGHS] What do you think is the number one difference between law students and business students?

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Yeah, the first answer is, there's more athletes in business school.

NATALIE BLAZER: Oh, interesting.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: The line I use is that law school selects for IQ, and business school selects for EQ. And you can definitely see that. It's funny going out to the different social events that the two different schools host because you really get a feel for the different types of personalities.

And don't get me wrong. I mean, there's people at the law school who are incredibly social and great friends, and they're extroverted, and they like to host social events and go out. But there's a lot more people at the law school who are totally comfortable sitting in a library and just diving into their work and really reading things closely.

NATALIE BLAZER: And we will need those lawyers, by the way, just for the listeners to know. We do need the ones who are just going to think the big thoughts and really, really, really dive in.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: Absolutely. And one of the things that I always try to do, even when I was just a law student, and what I try to do now is to promote cross-pollination between the schools in the sense of there's things that we can definitely learn from one another with our distinctive cultures, and it would be good to just spend time at both.

NATALIE BLAZER: Definitely. So, for listeners who are either currently applying to law school or are planning to in the near future, what advice would you want to offer them if you could distill it down into one piece of advice? Whether they think they might pursue a dual degree or not, just broadly for applicants.

PETER LEE HAMILTON: First rule, run your own race. Also known as get off Reddit. I never looked at Reddit once. I didn't look at any of the law school forums. I just never got into it.

Yeah, it can be great to get the supplemental information of, oh, what are the essays that are important thing, or what are themes to hit on. I just don't really think it's necessary. And most of the time, you're going to get either wonky advice, or it's not going to be that helpful, or it's very case specific.

So, go to the source. Go to the actual admissions pages. Talk to students and do those sorts of things. And be your own person. We talked about this. It's about being authentic to your true narrative.

I don't think there's anything wrong with taking time before starting law school. There is no rush. There's a lot of people of various different age ranges that come to UVA Law at different stages in their career. And the key thing there is, focus on yourself and focus on your journey. The process will work itself out.

And when you're running your own race, you can train with other people. You should get advice from coaches and mentors to help you run better. But at the end of the day, the only person running the race is you. And don't put yourself in the wrong position when you're running.

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** As a marathon runner, I very much appreciate this advice. Trying to copy somebody else's training plan or signing up for a race that you have not trained for, it's never going to work out well. I love that advice.

I do want to end-- I keep promising that we're going to come back to some of your activities. I would love to hear about one in particular, which is your law school country cover band.

**PETER LEE
HAMILTON:** That's right. I am the lead singer and rhythm guitar player for Florida Georgia Lien, L-I-E-N.

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** What a clever name.

**PETER LEE
HAMILTON:** Yes, I wish I could say that I came up with it. But, in fact, Dean Blazer was the one who came up with it herself, so we have to give props to her. It is an incredible name. Everyone either groans or laughs when they hear it, which is--

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** That's the goal.

**PETER LEE
HAMILTON:** That's the sign of a good pun.

**NATALIE
BLAZER:** A good law pun, yeah.

**PETER LEE
HAMILTON:** And so, we are a law school cover band. We've just been doing jam sessions. I've been rallying the troops, actually, to get one together for this week. But we've got a fiddle player, we've got a banjo player, a drummer, a mandolin player, multiple guitarists. So, we really cover all the bases.

And we do Johnny Cash, and Tyler Childers, and "Country Roads," and "Wagon Wheel," "Sweet Home Alabama," just the classics. It's always a great time. We're in the process of recording stuff so that we can get a gig going which we can invite the community to. But for me, one of the things that's really important and that I didn't have a lot of it the first couple of years at UVA Law, I didn't really have time for music, which was part of my experience in high school and also in college.

And I remember, actually, the first jam session we had where I was able to sit down, I literally could not stop smiling because it felt so good to make music again. I think it's important for humans to create. I think we consume a lot in our society right now. And so, being able to just sit and be part of a jam session and play good music, express myself, and also just to listen to them play because the other folks in the band are incredible, it's such a joyful part of my life.

And so, if you are applying to law school, have hobbies. You will work for the rest of your life, so learning sooner rather than later about how to work well and have balance, it'll actually make you a better worker, in my opinion. Florida Georgia Lien is one of the ways that I find balance in my life. It's one of the ways that I find the time to create. And it's just been a pleasure.

**NATALIE
BLAZER:**

Any of our listeners who have looked at our application know, I mean, we ask for that very intentionally. We love reading about your hobbies because you're absolutely right. In law school, those are going to be the things that keep you balanced and keep you going.

Peter, thank you so much for being here today. This was awesome. I love seeing you in the office, but this was extra fun. I learned so much. Genuinely learned a lot about the program. So, it was a pleasure having you.

**PETER LEE
HAMILTON:**

Thank you, Dean Blazer. And good luck to everybody listening.

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**NATALIE
BLAZER:**

This has been *Admissible*, with me, Dean Natalie Blazer, at the University of Virginia School of Law. My guest today was class of 2024 UVA Law student Peter Lee Hamilton. For more information about dual degree programs at UVA Law, please visit law.virginia.edu, and click on the Academics tab.

The next episode of *Admissible* will be out soon. And in the meantime, you can follow the show on Instagram at @AdmissiblePodcast. Thanks so much for listening, and please remember to rate the show wherever you listen to podcasts.

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