

CORDEL FAULK: Hi, I'm Cordel Faulk, Assistant Dean and Chief Admissions Officer at the University of Virginia School of Law. In this episode of "Law Schooled," we talked to John Ghazoul from the class of 2021. John tells us how he wants to use his law degree in Syria, where he still has family. He discusses his aspirations to be a transactional lawyer and gives advice for those currently applying to law school and future 1L's. Admissions director Ashley Merritt joins us too.

Well, welcome to this edition of the podcast. John, we will let you introduce yourself. Could you give us your name and tell us a little bit about who you were before you came to Virginia law?

JOHN GHAZOUL: Absolutely, absolutely. So thank you, guys, first and foremost, for setting this up. My name is John Ghazoul. I am a current 1L. I was born out of Cleveland, Ohio. My parents were born in Syria, but moved over to Cleveland. I love that city and even though I only stayed there for four years before I moved to Arizona, those four years were enough for me.

CORDEL FAULK: Is there a large Syrian community?

JOHN GHAZOUL: There is. OK. So it's all about-- it's all about the Ford-- OK, so Ford Motor Company.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So Ford Motor--

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, so that's why-- that's why Detroit-- there's such a large.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Detroit and Cleveland.

CORDEL FAULK: Gotcha.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So I mean, before--

CORDEL FAULK: Oh.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Before all infrastructure and businesses-- industrial businesses were moved out of Cleveland, I think it was actually John D. Rockefeller who got into an argument with the mayor or something, moved everything out, there was a big Syrian population and Middle Eastern population, generally, because they were all laborers.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And my grandfather, actually, was at engine plant number one in Cleveland.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, really?

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, engine plant number one in Cleveland, Ohio.

CORDEL FAULK: That's awesome. That's pretty cool. That's pretty cool.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So yeah, it was fantastic. So I mean, we still go back and visit.

CORDEL FAULK: Because you still have a lot of family there.

JOHN GHAZOUL: All my family's still there. All of my family on my dad's side, even family on my mom's side. A lot of my mom's side is still in Syria.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But a lot of the ones who are in America are in Cleveland, primarily. So like I said--

CORDEL FAULK: Wait, wait, wait. I have to ask you about sports teams.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. We're going to be--

CORDEL FAULK: You grew up in Arizona.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

You grew up in Arizona, but you have ties to Cleveland, so which one is it? I'm going to make you choose right now.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So it depends.

CORDEL FAULK: I know you don't want to choose.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So Cleveland-- Cleveland Browns, I'm all about them. Cleveland--

CORDEL FAULK: That's rough.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I know.

CORDEL FAULK: You're taking the tough--

JOHN GHAZOUL: Cordel, we're going to be good, I promise. I was getting so much trash in Arizona for being a Cleveland fan.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But I'm dedicated.

CORDEL FAULK: That wouldn't have just been in Arizona. That would have been anywhere you were.

[LAUGHTER]

JOHN GHAZOUL: Absolutely. Yes, 100%. Yeah, they're terrible.

ASHLEY I didn't want to say anything. I want to support you, John, but I-- I don't--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: I know you can't.

[LAUGHTER]

We're going to be good eventually. That's what we always say.

CORDEL FAULK: No, but I think that's true.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's a process.

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly. Yeah, and these things are cyclical and it will come back.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. It's the dream. It's the goal. But I mean, in regards to baseball, I'm more of a D-Backs fan.

CORDEL FAULK: OK. Today, you're wearing a [INAUDIBLE] Diamondbacks.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I am. Yeah, I got the Arizona Diamondbacks.

CORDEL FAULK: That's right. Representing today.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I always rep, I always rep.

CORDEL FAULK: That's right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And then-- so I'm in the-- teams, I still watch Cardinals football. I still watch Suns basketball.

ASHLEY Cavs?

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Cavaliers.

CORDEL FAULK: That's your-- the Cavs, right?

JOHN GHAZOUL: I'm a Cavs-- yeah. Cavs are my basketball team. You know what? We got a championship and I'm so happy.

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly, exactly.

JOHN GHAZOUL: We're blessed. We're blessed to have a championship.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You know, I respect LeBron so much and I always appreciate the Kyrie and LeBron, Kevin Love trio, Tristan Thompson. We had-- what, Ashley?

CORDEL FAULK: It was a fun team.

ASHLEY I'm just saying--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: It was a fun team.

ASHLEY Yeah. You had a good-- there was a good run.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly. It was fun run.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ASHLEY It's good that you were old enough to appreciate it.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly, exactly.

CORDEL FAULK: Right, no, that's true. That's absolutely true.

ASHLEY Because it's probably going to be a long--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: You're right. There was-- oh, my gosh. It's kind of bad, but there was a memorial. There was literally like a person-- a lifelong Cleveland Browns fan passed away and his dying wish was for his casket lowered by Cleveland Browns players so they could let him down one last time.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh.

ASHLEY Stop. That's--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: That was-- that was-- that's just the life of a Cleveland fan.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's morbid, but it's hilarious because you're like, yeah, it's happened so many times.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: No, it's a good time. I don't know. In regard to weather and stuff, though, Arizona--

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, yeah. It wins.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Arizona is a lot better.

CORDEL FAULK: It wins 1,000% of the time, right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Phoenix-- I went to preschool there, you know, middle school-- kindergarten, middle school, high school. Ended up staying at Barrett--

CORDEL FAULK: Wait, do you want to rep your high school?

JOHN GHAZOUL: [INAUDIBLE] Preparatory.

CORDEL FAULK: OK, that's right, that's right.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN GHAZOUL: Go Broncos.

CORDEL FAULK: That's right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Anyway, yeah, but my little sister actually-- I've gotten accustomed to calling her "little" now. She got mad at me last time I called her "baby" sister. So she's my only sibling and she was born in Arizona.

When she turned 16, I accidentally called her baby sister-- I'd introduced her as my baby sister. And she's very respectful. She played along. And then afterwards, took me aside and said John, I'm 16 now. I can drive. I'm not a baby anymore. I said, you know what? You are so right, Marilyn.

ASHLEY She's [INAUDIBLE].

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, right, right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So my little sister.

ASHLEY Shout-out to your little sister. She's definitely listening to the podcast.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Absolutely, yeah. 100%, absolutely. And she goes to the sister school, so Xavier. And so she's out there still, and all my family's out there.

CORDEL FAULK: Your immediate family.

JOHN GHAZOUL: My immediate family.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: My immediate family. So after high school, I went to Arizona State, the Honors College there. Barrett, the Honors College. I was a finance major. I wanted something that I felt was very practical for the future and I think that finance was one of those degrees.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And one of those majors. And afterward-- I've always been interested in law. And I was fortunate growing up. I had family who were lawyers.

CORDEL FAULK: Your uncle's a lawyer.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And one of them-- my dad's brother, and then by marriage-- so two of them are lawyers. And I was always interested in what they were doing. And I felt that my interests in high school and in undergrad lined up well with law. I've always been interested in business, the finance degree, and I thought that it was kind of a good intersection-- law and business. I thought that it made sense going together. I have a long-term goal, but my intent is to practice transactional law, initially.

But my long-term goal-- so as I said, I'm from Syria and I have like a distant, distant goal and intention of applying my finance and legal educations, and trying to go back and maybe negotiate contracts and try to rebuild the economy in Syria. And that's distant, but that's just-- yeah, it's something that I hope for.

ASHLEY It's awesome.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, that's actually one of the reasons why I chose UVA.

CORDEL FAULK: Well, let's get to it. Let's get to the core question of this podcast.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: Why did you choose UVA Law?

JOHN GHAZOUL: So it started before I even really applied to law schools. One of my cousins was attending a T14 law school. And I'd always go to him for advice.

CORDEL FAULK: Not this one.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Not this one. Not UVA.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And he-- I'd always go to him for advice, and he advised me-- he goes, John, I could see you fitting in at UVA Law, in particular.

CORDEL FAULK: He's not wrong.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah. He knows me.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

CORDEL FAULK: Right, he does know you. He obviously knows you.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

He obviously knows you.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I asked him. I was like, what's so special about UVA Law? And he had come up here for the softball tournament one of his years at the T14. And he was like, John, the people at UVA Law remind me of you. They're all very social.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And he said they're all very intelligent. They have their goals, but they're fun. You know, they can-- they get along with one another. And it's a good experience. It's a very nice community feel. That's what he told me.

And so as I was applying to schools, I had heard back from T25's and I was still waiting on a couple of T14's. I had a deadline in particular for one of the T25's that I was considering probably more than some of the others.

ASHLEY Like, an internal-- like, you wanted to be done by a certain time or like a scholarship deadline?

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: No, there was a scholarship deadline.

ASHLEY OK, OK.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: So there was a scholarship at one of the schools for-- yeah--

ASHLEY Just clarification.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes. And also, frankly, everyone wants to know where they're going.

CORDEL FAULK: Right, exactly.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Everyone does.

ASHLEY Internal clock.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly. So there were a few T14's that I hadn't heard from. And one of them was UVA Law.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And so I was like, you know what? I'm not going to get this opportunity. The deadline's coming up. So I tried to cold call. I tried to cold call the T14 schools. And I got a hold of three secretaries at two schools-- two T14's-- and then UVA. And all of them told me the same thing, that unfortunately, our admissions director is not going to be able to speak with you. And I was like, oh, that's kind of demoralizing. Looks like I'm going to end up at this school, which is still a good school. It's a T25.

ASHLEY Yeah, sure, sure.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I was like-- and then I thought about it a little bit and I was like, Freddie was telling me I would really fit-- my cousin Freddie. He said I would really fit in at UVA. And from the research I'd done, I was like, you know, it seems like I really would. So I got online and I did a little digging, and I got a hold of Dean Faulk's-- Cordel's-- number, his office number.

[GASPS]

ASHLEY No, you did not.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

[LAUGHTER]

ASHLEY Oh, god.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, I know, right? Yeah. And Ashley's going-- yeah, I wish you could-- anyway, Ashley's face

is--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

[LAUGHTER]

Anyway, so I called the number and I swear-- it was meant to be. Two rings in Cordel answered the phone. He goes, hello, this is Dean Faulk. He didn't say Dean Faulk. This is Cordel Faulk. I said, hi, Dean Faulk, my name is John Ghazoul. I'm a prospective student for the class of 2021. I have a deadline coming up and I'd like to know my status at UVA.

ASHLEY Oh, you handled it well.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: No, he handled-- oh, he's sitting here.

ASHLEY I was going to say.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: He's sitting here.

[LAUGHTER]

ASHLEY Sometimes those calls go south.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, most of the time, those calls go south.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I never-- no, yeah, you never want to be rude, obviously. You probably got a million things on your plate. I just--

ASHLEY Yeah, you had a deadline.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, exactly. So I-- and Cordel goes, how do you spell your last name? I said G-H-A-Z-O-U-L. He says, OK, John, talk to me. So we had--

CORDEL FAULK: We had a very frank conversation about your application. We had a very frank conversation about your application.

JOHN GHAZOUL: We did.

CORDEL FAULK: And you handled that very well.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Thank you, I appreciate it. It was one of the most-- it was such-- it was such an awesome conversation. It went on for a while too.

CORDEL FAULK: It did.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I don't know if you remember.

CORDEL FAULK: It wasn't an-- yes, I do remember. And it wasn't an easy conversation.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It was a 45, hour-long conversation.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, it was not an easy conversation.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And it was fun. The whole time--

[LAUGHTER]

--back and forth.

[LAUGHTER]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

CORDEL FAULK: I didn't think they were zingers, but there were things, I was like, OK, John, if you want--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

We need to talk. Let's talk about every part of your application, and so we did.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Like you said, it was a frank conversation.

CORDEL FAULK: Right, yes. Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I--

CORDEL FAULK: Most people couldn't have-- most people could not have held up to that.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Thank you. I appreciate it.

CORDEL FAULK: And I know because it's happened. So, yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I appreciate it. And towards the end of the conversation, what happened was I ended on a little bit of a joke. And I didn't-- I realized that he was asking me these questions and stuff, but I didn't realize until way-- not way after, but after-- at the end of the conversation, I was like, that was kind of my interview. I was like, oh, my gosh. What did I just do?

ASHLEY Replaying everything that you just said.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly. So the conversation-- I made a joke. I heard Cordel chuckle a little bit and he goes, I like your moxie. Congratulations. And me, I had had this-- I had been trying to straight-face everything, be very, very cordial and direct. I was like, are you kidding me? And I started laughing. I was like, you are the man. And yeah, I don't know. The moxie thing, though-- my dad--

CORDEL FAULK: Your dad picked up on that.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I told my dad that and my dad-- my dad sends me-- the next day, he sent me a picture of the Moxie Cola.

CORDEL FAULK: Moxie Cola. Moxie Cola.

JOHN GHAZOUL: He was like, you got to get a case of this for Dean Faulk.

[LAUGHTER]

It was fantastic. And from that conversation, I literally-- I was like, I'm withdrawing. I want to be at UVA Law. This is the only place I want to be.

CORDEL FAULK: Wait, so I--

ASHLEY I was going to say, I'm got to pause. Everybody is going to know.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Listen. No, no, no. And I need to tell this story. So after undergrad, I was a Governor's Fellow.

JOHN GHAZOUL: OK.

CORDEL FAULK: And Governor Jim Gilmore had just become governor at the time. And he was doing a barbecue for the Governor's Fellows. So somebody asked him, Governor, why did you go to UVA Law? And he said, oh, Al Turnbull would kill me if he knew I was telling you this story, but this is what I did.

So then he told us the story about how he enrolled at another law school. He really wanted to come to Virginia. He was on the wait list at Virginia. He enrolled and matriculated at another law school, which started before UVA Law. So he did a week of class at another law school.

The first day of class at Virginia, he drove to Charlottesville and he literally just sat outside Dean Turnbull's door. And then when Dean Turnbull walked back up from orientation, Governor Gilmore looked at him and said, did anybody not show up? And Dean Turnbull said, yeah, somebody didn't show up. Because it happens. Yeah, somebody didn't show up. And so then Governor Gilmore pulls a check out of his pocket and hands it to Dean Turnbull.

ASHLEY Moxie.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know. But that was moxie, exactly. It's no surprise he became governor because he's got the stones for it. But so Turnbull looks at the check and he's like, let's go look at the file.

[LAUGHTER]

JOHN GHAZOUL: That's so cool.

CORDEL FAULK: I know. So then they looked at the file and he was like, OK.

JOHN GHAZOUL: That's so awesome.

CORDEL FAULK: So then he--

ASHLEY Maybe don't do that nowadays.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, exactly. So first of all, that would not work nowadays. That's not how that works nowadays.

ASHLEY Do not think this is advice.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: And listen, what John did was daring, and the phone call-- the phone call, while pleasant, was also withering.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes. Yeah, yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: It was a tough conversation and most people can't handle that. So don't do that. This is a unicorn. This doesn't happen. This story happened with you by chance.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: There were a couple of things that lined up that just happened by chance. This is not something everybody should be trying to do.

JOHN GHAZOUL: That's the thing. The stars align.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It was meant to be because it shouldn't have happened, frankly.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct. That is correct.

ASHLEY John, I'm so glad you're here. But I will say to everybody listening--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, like seriously, don't. It is not a good strategy. It is too risky.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: It just happened to line up for you.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: Other people have tried this in the past and it has not worked because everything didn't line up for them.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes. That's--

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah. It's a good story. It's a good story. It's a good story. But--

ASHLEY It's a great story.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: It's a great story, but it's an anomaly and people need to understand, this is an anomaly.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Like I said, it was-- I felt like it was very fortunate and it was-- beyond fortunate, frankly-- and it was meant to be. But that conversation and when I visited here--

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --and met the students and saw the campus--

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And even when I was walking around-- because I came here with my cousin to visit before school started. And we were let into the library by just a custodian at the University. And I was just talking to him about what his thoughts were, the students, the faculty. And he raved. He said everyone in here is so polite.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, wow.

JOHN GHAZOUL: He said everyone in here says hi to me. They all treat me the way I should be treated and I love that. And then I was like, Freddie was right. This is the place for me.

ASHLEY Cousin Freddie.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And we talk-- everyone talks about a collegial atmosphere.

CORDEL FAULK: I know. I don't use the word because it's so overused.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It is overused.

ASHLEY I know, I know.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's become-- it has really become overused and I heard that from so many other schools.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But then I got here and I was like, this is the most appropriate term for the students.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I mean, everyone here-- no one is going to undercut you. Everyone's competitive. Everyone wants to do well. But no one will hurt you to get ahead.

CORDEL FAULK: I think we are competitive with ourselves.

ASHLEY Yeah, that's the right way to describe it.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: We have high expectations. Everyone has a high expectation for themselves. I mean, look at our classes.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: These are geniuses in here.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: And it's-- you're right. It's just-- it's a natural thing. But for me, at least, the key was everyone really wants to get to know you. They care about you as a person. The PA-- the Peer Advisor program that we have, I think-- I know my friends at other schools don't have something like that. And I was surprised, but it seems like--

CORDEL FAULK: Actually, I didn't know that. I didn't know--

ASHLEY That it was rare?

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah. I didn't know that was rare.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's relatively unusual from polling my friends at the other law schools. Because I had a lot of friends in my grade--

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --who went to law school, and I love comparing with them because I always--

CORDEL FAULK: Because you have different experiences.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, we all have different experiences. But I'm always smiling at the end. I'm like, I chose well. Yeah, this worked out well.

ASHLEY Pat yourself on the back.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, this worked out well. And--

CORDEL FAULK: And they probably think the same thing.

JOHN GHAZOUL: They do. They do think the same thing.

CORDEL FAULK: The process works itself out.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly, you're right. I truly believe-- you're right. Everyone ends up--

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --at the place that they should end up.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct. The process works.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You're right. But no, it was an easy decision. Meeting my other students-- meeting my fellow students, meeting the 2L's and 3L's who were going out of their way to advise you on things. I just had an interview up in New York last week and a 2L who had the position that I was applying for emailed me just out of the blue.

And she said hi, do you need help with this? I said, first and foremost, how do you know that I got-- thank you so much. But yes, I would love your help. And she sat down with me. And we're friends. I mean, we're good friends. She sat down with me for hours just going over-- we

met three separate times. We spent a little bit over an hour each time just going over the interviews.

CORDEL FAULK: That was very kind.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It was so kind. And I really-- I think that UVA-- honestly, I don't know if I would have gotten that opportunity or experience at other places.

CORDEL FAULK: I like to hope so.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I like to hope so too.

ASHLEY Yeah, I mean, I don't know.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Right, right.

ASHLEY Yeah. It's hard to know, right? You can't--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Because we've never been connected with anyone--

ASHLEY --plop you in somewhere else.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly, right.

ASHLEY Yeah, whether it'd be the same.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. But it's part of it. It's a big part of it. It's a big part of why I think all of us feel so at home here.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I think the most important thing, probably, is being comfortable at the law school that you choose. This is a big part of your life. It's a significant part of your life. You're dedicating three years and money is a factor.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

ASHLEY Sure.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: You want to be around people--

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You want to be around people, you want to be around faculty that their doors are always open. I went into office hours all the time. I would just email my professor. I said, Professor--

CORDEL FAULK: And you should.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, you should.

ASHLEY Yeah, you absolutely should.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: You should.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's fantastic. And you have the opportunity to do so here. Even if it's not their office hours, you can send an email to the professor. They're going to be more than willing to meet with you and make sure that you understand. So there's so many reasons why-- and also, softball doesn't hurt. Softball is--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

[LAUGHTER]

ASHLEY It's just fun, right? It's just fun.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: No, I mean, it's the place to be.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. It's the place to be.

CORDEL FAULK: Well, John, so what has been your favorite part of law school over this first semester and a half?

JOHN GHAZOUL: Besides meeting all the people, I mean, we've talked about it. We've talked about it with one another. This is going to be our network. These are going to be our friends the rest of our lives.

CORDEL FAULK: It's the most important part of your network, right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly. We're going to be-- we're going to be working with these people. We're going to be hopefully, in the future, vacationing with these people, getting dinner, lunches, at each other's weddings.

ASHLEY You will. I can-- I mean, you will.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: You can guarantee it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I mean, that's so cool.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: And besides that, I'd probably say that the student-faculty interaction, meeting with professors, it's kind of inspiring in so many ways. Because these people are the cream of the crop in their profession. They know the subjects so well. And it's fun just also getting lunch with them because we have that opportunity. You can meet with your professors for lunches. Seeing them outside of the classroom is really cool, you know?

CORDEL FAULK: It might be more important. Those interactions may be more important than what happens in the classroom.

ASHLEY Yeah, it humanizes them, right?

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah. Right.

ASHLEY It's easy to--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

ASHLEY --get to know them as a person and get to know--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's so cool.

ASHLEY --find these connections and find--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly. Things that you didn't even know that you connected on. One of our professors loves baseball and I love baseball, and we hit it off on that.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's really cool.

CORDEL FAULK: And importantly, this is something that you guys can't know now, but you might be in practice someday, and let's say you take Ken Abraham's insurance class.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: And you have an insurance issue that comes up. And if you have a good relationship with him, you call him up and he can talk you through it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: Those relationships really do build off of each other, even after you've left Charlottesville.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, I was actually thinking about that. I was like, if I'm negotiating a contract in the future, I can reach out to my contracts professor and ask him for his advice.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Same for torts-- any subject.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I really think that's awesome. And I feel like that is a unique experience. And from all my friends who are in law schools, I feel that that is pretty unique. And I think that that's really, really one of the benefits that you have coming here. But I really like the subjects too. I was kind of--

CORDEL FAULK: Were you surprised by any of them? I was surprised at how much I liked contracts and how much I didn't like criminal law.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. So kind of similarly, I really ended up enjoying civil procedure a lot.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, wow.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Right?

CORDEL FAULK: I had the world's best civil procedure professor, but it was like him trying to jam it in my head when I was rejecting it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: My body was rejecting civil procedure.

ASHLEY It's the most lawyerly feeling, though, right?

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

ASHLEY It's these special rules that only lawyers know--

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Understand.

ASHLEY --and understand.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's kind of fun. Towards the end-- initially in the year, I went into-- I came into 1L first semester thinking, I'm going to love contracts and I'm going to--

ASHLEY All these transactional--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Anything transactional, I'm going to love. Everything else, who cares? I'm not even--

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I ended up love-- I love contracts. But I liked civ pro and torts--

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: --and crim. And I was so-- I enjoyed all the classes. I loved going in, reading the cases. And it was really cool. And I'm also-- I know we've talked about this a little bit. Property, I've really enjoyed a lot. So yeah.

ASHLEY Yeah. That's a good one.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's been a really cool class so far. But I mean-- and also, the fact is, as a second semester 1L, you get to start choosing electives.

CORDEL FAULK: What did you choose?

JOHN GHAZOUL: I am in secure transactions and common law.

CORDEL FAULK: Very good.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Secure transactions.

CORDEL FAULK: Very different classes.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, very different classes. Yeah. Secure transaction more transactional type of things and Article IX of the UCC.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And more kind of contracts--

ASHLEY [INAUDIBLE] Yeah, I was going to say.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: And then common law is more-- from my experiences so far, it's more like theoretical. What is real world practice?

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And I think that's really cool too, being exposed to the different--

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's really been enjoyable.

CORDEL FAULK: What's been the toughest part of 1L year?

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's acclimating to the workload. Because everyone says it's a lot of work and it is a lot of work, but that's to be expected. I feel like that's why people come. They understand it's going to be a lot of work. Law school is inherently that. But note-taking was different from undergrad.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, very, very much so.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Very, very different.

CORDEL FAULK: I think interacting with the class is very different.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Completely different.

CORDEL FAULK: Just period.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I totally agree.

CORDEL FAULK: Right, yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Completely-- completely different. And it's just that time period, you know?

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: The first few months, you're going to need to get as much advice from your peer advisors who are 2L's and 3L's, and other professors and 2L's and 3L's, people who've actually experienced it. Get their advice and then figure out what works for you.

ASHLEY I think that's key, right? That second part of not just doing what somebody else has done

MERRITT: because they've been successful.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

ASHLEY What's good for you is not necessarily what's good for xy.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: 100%.

ASHLEY But getting all the information you can, and then--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes. And you know, it's tried and true. Some people, it works for them, others, it doesn't.

ASHLEY Exactly.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: And as you said, it is important, figuring out what works for you.

ASHLEY Yeah, it's huge.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Right. Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But you figure it out. It's not--

CORDEL FAULK: No, you do. And that's-- that's the difficulty of law school in the beginning.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: We have a whole bunch of people who've done school well all their lives and they know how to do school. And then they come here and to them, it's just another type of school. But law school is different than any other type of schooling you've ever done.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: And you have to kind of reorient the way you interact with schooling. And it's kind of jarring because you've never had to do that. I'm good at this thing. Why am I not instinctively good at this? Because we're teaching you how to be good at it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes, yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: So it's really jarring for a lot of people when they start.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. I think, though, one of the things that helped me a lot was going to the peer advisors.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Going to my other classmates. Realizing that everyone is struggling and it is kind of a comforting feeling, so you're in it with the rest of the squad.

CORDEL FAULK: That is such an important realization because most people think this is just me. Everybody else is a genius and this is just me.

ASHLEY Yeah.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: When you realize, oh, no, this is all of us and we're going through this together, that's when you kind of-- you can breathe again and then you start to move forward.

ASHLEY The collective sigh, yeah.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Because the law-- as I've said before, the law is not practiced well in a silo. Lawyers who try to practice in a silo don't work. When you are working with other lawyers and you're pulling each other up, that's how the law is best practiced.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes.

CORDEL FAULK: And that's how law school is best done.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I agree. Working with groups has been very-- like we said, it's different for everyone. But I've found that working with groups and bouncing ideas off one another, bouncing different approaches to the same concept even. And I think just going over examples and stuff has been very, very helpful with a group of people. You know, with a friend group. Halfway through, we'll be like, OK, I'm kind of done with this for now. Let's go get lunch.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And then you get to go to the restaurants in Charlottesville.

CORDEL FAULK: Which are great.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. We have amazing restaurants. Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: We sure do.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I will say that was actually one of the things that I was really happy about. You can go on a hike and then you can go to one of the coolest restaurants.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And there's a million things to do in this city and you never get bored of it.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's a small town feel, but there's so many things to do. Have you guys been to the escape rooms, any of the escape rooms?

CORDEL FAULK: I have not. I don't like being confined.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I'm with you.

CORDEL FAULK: So I can't-- I can't-- I can't do it. I can't. I've heard they're great, but I can't do it.

ASHLEY I've done them in DC.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I would flip out. I would. I would flip out.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I felt the same way. I went--

CORDEL FAULK: I'm a black male. I don't want to feel like I'm in jail.

[LAUGHTER]

Let's just put it out there.

[LAUGHTER]

JOHN GHAZOUL: You know what? I can understand. Hey, I know what you mean. I know what you mean.

ASHLEY You need a little more space.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, exactly. I just don't want to be confined like that.

JOHN GHAZOUL: They're fun. I will say there are ones--

ASHLEY Did you go with people here?

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: I went with-- yes. We went as a group, just a small group. I only went to a two-- I only went through a two-person one, but there is--

ASHLEY Oh, that's a really--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It was small.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, no.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN GHAZOUL: That was small. I was going to say, that one is not good. That one would not be appropriate for anyone that doesn't enjoy those spaces. However, there is one that has like-- you can get a group of 10 people in there and it's not as bad. And then you get clues and stuff. So that one would be fun.

CORDEL FAULK: So Dean Davies takes the Community Fellows every year to do the escape room during the summer. And the big one in Charlottesville-- the two winners of getting out the fastest are-- this year's class got out fastest, and they beat the record of last year's class, which got out the fastest. So genuinely, our kids are very bright.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

They just keep breaking each other's records, right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: That's funny.

CORDEL FAULK: That's right, yes. That's worked out very well.

ASHLEY I didn't know that. I love that.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yes, yeah. So the two record-holders are this year's class and last year's class. That's one and two.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But I mean, that's one of the cool things. You can just go and hang out with your fellow 1L's in all the different sections whenever you want. You could always text someone or post on the Facebook page. That's how I met my first 1L Dean.

Dean Dixon posted in the 1L page right before school started. He said hey, does anyone want to get lunch? I replied and we just went and got lunch.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And it was-- yeah, I mean, we're great friends. Great people. 99% of your law school is [INAUDIBLE]. Well, not 99%.

CORDEL FAULK: I know it's a lot. A lot.

ASHLEY No, I would say it's a big part of it, right?

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It is. I mean, it's important.

ASHLEY You're learning from them, you're networking with them.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah. It's awesome.

CORDEL FAULK: So John, what one piece of advice do you have for folks who are going through the admissions process now? I'll start off. Don't cold call me. That's my one piece of advice.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Do not call Cordel.

ASHLEY Don't do what John did.

MERRITT:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

CORDEL FAULK: That was a unicorn. That was a unicorn.

ASHLEY Don't pull a Governor Gilmore either.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, I know.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

ASHLEY We don't even take checks.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I know, we don't take checks, and that's why that would never work now.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Impossible.

CORDEL FAULK: Exactly, it's impossible because that's not how things work anymore. But yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: One of the most-- I think we mentioned it a little bit earlier. The process is you want to know where you're going. I think a big part of it is be patient. Understand that you're going to end up where you should be. The law school admissions process can be strenuous, but I mean, it's also strenuous for the admissions departments that are going through, meticulously, every single application. You're going to end up where you should be. But I would say visit the campus.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I think that's a really under-appreciated part of law school, generally, is that the campus-- you want to go somewhere that's inviting and that you enjoy-- where you enjoy being. So it's different for everyone. For me, I love nature. I love the outdoors. I love the look of the campus itself. I love the buildings. I want something that's open and welcoming. Different people want different things.

But go to the campus. I'd recommend taking a tour. Do anything you can to meet students.
Meet students at--

CORDEL FAULK: At random.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes, at random. Exactly.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Try to be-- exactly-- random. See what they say on the spot.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct. And faculty, the same.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Same thing.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: 100%. I mean, they're going to tell you the truth. They're going to tell you how their experience is. And I will say, when I was reaching out to alumni and stuff from different universities, UVA Law alumni were some of the few who were like, I love my experience. I love going and visiting. I love going back. And I was like, wow, this is really cool. This is kind of unique.

And so yeah, I think it's very important to meet as many students-- current and alumni-- as possible. Do research. See which professors you'd be interested in taking, what courses, what classes, and be ready to ask questions if you have the opportunity to meet with an admissions director or anyone in admissions, or a professor. But visiting campus is huge.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Visiting campus, getting to know the people there.

CORDEL FAULK: What one piece of advice do you have for future 1L's as they head into this adventure?

JOHN GHAZOUL: I mean, it's to be-- you anticipate the idea and the fact that it's going to be difficult.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But don't stress too much, guys. This is-- everyone goes through it.

CORDEL FAULK: That's a hard one.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's impossible not to and it sounds like it's easy to say, oh, don't stress. But it's very--

CORDEL FAULK: No, it's right, but it's difficult.

JOHN GHAZOUL: It's difficult. It's difficult not to stress out. But realize, again, that you're all in it together.

CORDEL FAULK: Right.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You're there for a reason. You say this a lot and you're right. Everyone who was admitted to the school that they were admitted to deserves to be there.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: GPA-wise, LSAT-wise, activities-wise--

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --you were meant to be there.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: So know that.

CORDEL FAULK: The Dean and I feel good in that everybody in this building we could stand behind. Everybody. There is not somebody in this building we can't stand behind.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And you will stand behind, which is so cool.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You will go out of your way to help people out.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And that means a lot. And I think that people don't realize that you really mean it when you say--

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely, absolutely.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah. So I think that be prepared to work. It's kind of easy to take a break initially and be like, oh, I've been admitted. All the hard work is done.

CORDEL FAULK: Oh, no. It's just begun. The admissions process is the easy part.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yes. Yeah, it is. And that's the thing. Once you've been admitted to somewhere like this, be fortunate, be appreciative, and then get to work.

CORDEL FAULK: Then get to work.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Get to work.

CORDEL FAULK: Then get to work.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And you'll be fine. You'll be fine. Everyone works hard.

CORDEL FAULK: It's true.

JOHN GHAZOUL: And if you're working hard and you stay on top of your readings and your notes and go to office hours, you'll be fine.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: You'll be fine. So yeah, I think that, overall, the experiences of 1L is difficult, but it's really enjoyable. And I'm not even done yet, but it's been really, really fun.

CORDEL FAULK: I didn't realize I wasn't enjoying 1L until I came back for 2L and I was like, oh, my gosh. This is so great. I thought last year was fun, but this is so great.

ASHLEY My hot take is always 1L was my favorite year.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Really? No, no, no, no. 3L was my favorite. But 2L, I came back--

ASHLEY Instantly comparing it.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: I was like, oh, my gosh. I walked in and I was like, this is so great.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Oh, my gosh, that's awesome.

CORDEL FAULK: They weren't cold calling.

ASHLEY I know. But everybody's just so excited 1L.

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah, that is very true.

ASHLEY Happy to be there.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: That is very true.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

ASHLEY Always down. You send out a text and everybody shows up for something.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. I will say the cold calling thing, that is something I--

ASHLEY Does that scare you?

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Really?

JOHN GHAZOUL: Not really.

CORDEL FAULK: I was about to say, John. What are you talking about?

JOHN GHAZOUL: Generally, I know people specifically who are really worried about cold calls.

CORDEL FAULK: Correct. Most people are.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But the thing is, I mean, it's just a conversation, you know?

CORDEL FAULK: Yes, exactly.

JOHN GHAZOUL: As long as you're like-- as long as you've taken notes--

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --as long as you've done the reading--

CORDEL FAULK: Correct.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --you've got nothing to worry about. No one's going to grill you for--

ASHLEY Right. As long as you're prepared, that's--

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Exactly. No one's going to grill you. Like, the professors here understand, too, sometimes-- even if you aren't prepared, the professors are understanding. Professor Doran in property.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: He literally told us about his worst cold call experience. Like guys, I want you to know something.

CORDEL FAULK: Yeah.

JOHN GHAZOUL: I had the worst cold call experience of any law student ever, OK?

CORDEL FAULK: I cannot imagine.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN GHAZOUL: He told us little bit of the story.

CORDEL FAULK: We'll save the story.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

Save the story so he can have it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah. But--

CORDEL FAULK: But I can't imagine.

JOHN GHAZOUL: But he told us--

ASHLEY Does it sound terrible though?

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: It wasn't good.

[LAUGHTER]

It wasn't good. But now he's one of the best property professors every.

CORDEL FAULK: Right. Yeah, absolutely.

ASHLEY Federal income tax expert.

MERRITT:

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

JOHN GHAZOUL: The man's a genius. Anyway, but no, that's the thing. Like, cold call experience, kind of difficult, kind of scary. But like I said, it's fine. People understand.

ASHLEY You'll get through it.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: You've taken notes, you're prepared. You'll be fine. It's literally just a conversation. The professor wants to know your opinion on the subject.

CORDEL FAULK: We'll end on this story. It was in August. I was talking to the Dean and I walk into her office and she said, oh, I met this incoming 1L yesterday and his whole family. I can't remember his last name, but his first name was John. He was really, really charming. And I was like, oh, that's John Ghazoul.

[LAUGHTER]

And she was like, that's it. That's it. And it, indeed, was you.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Yeah, yeah.

CORDEL FAULK: But that was all she had to say. He was very, very charming. And I was like, yeah, that's John Ghazoul.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Thank you, thank you. Thanks, I appreciate it. That was fun.

ASHLEY [INAUDIBLE]

MERRITT:

CORDEL FAULK: Yes.

ASHLEY Good first impression.

MERRITT:

JOHN GHAZOUL: Thank you, thank you.

CORDEL FAULK: Well John, thank you for joining us today. We really appreciate it.

JOHN GHAZOUL: Thank you for hosting this podcast. I really hope-- I know that people will get a lot out of--

CORDEL FAULK: Hopefully.

JOHN GHAZOUL: --out of it. So thank you, Ashley, thank you, Cordel.

CORDEL FAULK: Thank you, John.

ASHLEY Of course.

MERRITT:

[MUSIC PLAYING]