

**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 School we talked to Ambrose Decilap from the class of 2021. Ambrose discusses moving east from California to pursue undergraduate and law degrees. He also talks about how he decided a public service career was the right path for him and the application process for the Law and Public Service Program. Admissions Director Ashley Merritt joins us too.

**ASHLEY** Welcome to this next episode of the podcast. I'm going to let our guest introduce himself.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Hi everyone. My name is Ambrose Decilap. I'm from Chula Vista, California, which is just south  
**DECILAP:** of San Diego. I'm 25 years old. I graduated from Dartmouth College in 2015. And then briefly worked as a substitute teacher back home in my old high school district.

**ASHLEY** Were you ever at your own high school?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Oh, most of the time.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Oh, really?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** What was that like?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** That was my favorite.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Were any of your old teachers still there?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Was that weird?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** I mean, I regularly worked with my old teachers. And they gave me the most leeway to actually follow lesson plans and do the most teaching out of anyone I worked for. So no that was a lot of fun. And plus I was always having flashbacks and feeling like I was serving my community of people, you the people who were going through a lot of the things that I went through. So it was really positive. I liked it.

**ASHLEY** Glad to hear it. That sounds pretty

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Thank.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** How did you make the decision that you wanted to go to law school in general?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Well, my mom's an attorney and she's my favorite person in the world.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Oh.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** She's my hero.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** You're going to save this for Mother's Day. No, This her Valentine's Day present. We have to give this up by Valentine's Day.

**AMBROSE** She knows. She's heard it all before. But she's my hero, my whole life, she's been telling me that I would make a good attorney. Because of my--

**ASHLEY** Logical organized mind?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** That and a lot of mostly, I think my emotional intelligence. And my mind listening ability and my

**DECILAP:** thoughtfulness.

**ASHLEY** Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait. This is how you can tell your mother's a lawyer. Most people who  
**MERRITT:** most people who are not lawyers say--

**AMBROSE** --argue--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Exactly. You know how to argue. You should go to law school. A lawyer is like, no, no, no, no,  
**MERRITT:** no. You have really high IQ and your mind is organized.

**AMBROSE** You're collaborative.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Exactly.

**MERRITT:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** You know how to connect to people.

**ASHLEY** Exactly. She knows what makes a good lawyer. She knows what makes it a good lawyer.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** For a long time, I feel like I wanted to blaze my own path and do something different than what  
**DECILAP:** either of my parents did. And I so I tried, in college, I tried various internships in other fields.

**ASHLEY** Oh, where?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** I like shadowed at a hospital. You know, I did some research, mostly like social science  
**DECILAP:** research on how to educate at risk populations regarding stroke health and things like that. So  
I was trying other things. And I graduated. And got rejected from the Peace Corps and kind of  
moved back home and didn't really have a plan. And was trying to figure stuff out.

**ASHLEY** Why did you want the Peace Corps?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** It just seems like a way of being helpful to communities that I wasn't that familiar with, and kind  
**DECILAP:** of just building-- I like the mission of the Peace Corps because I think it helps American  
citizens become more aware of cultures abroad and you know, like diversity of experiences.

But I also think it just, it helps the people abroad as well, communities that need an extra pair of hands. And so it just seemed like a win-win-win.

**ASHLEY** Have you ever watched BBC News?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Not much. So occasionally, I'll watch BBC News. And people around the world know so much  
**DECILAP:** more about the rest of the world than we do. I know. It's almost embarrassing. Like, I'm watching BBC News, like British feed.

And they're talking about what's going on in the Middle East. And they're talking about what's going on the continent. They're talking about what's going on in Africa. And we're talking about like missing people. But like in and like Florida.

**AMBROSE** Yeah. All of our news is American news. It's like the vast, vast majority of it.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** And it's, it's kind of vapid. It's like news, news overseas is like really meaty. It's not as meaty  
**MERRITT:** here. There's always somebody pretty who's missing. We get pretty missing people a lot. Is what we get on the news.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Which is interesting right? Like you would expect with a 24 hour news cycle, you would expect to cram that in with more news from other places versus just same story over and over again.

**ASHLEY** Echo chamber. And echo chamber. Yeah.

**MERRITT:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That's what sells.

**AMBROSE** Yeah abroad, they have a lot of news sources like BBC in England or like the Le Monde  
**DECILAP:** newspaper in France, where they like intentionally cover international news. And I feel like none of our major newspapers and magazines have a focus on, yeah.

**ASHLEY** Like they don't cover important American issues. And I say this as a former newspaper  
**MERRITT:** myself.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I was going to say. I know, right. I don't know. It's just it's so stark when you turn on foreign news, like oh, whoa, that's different. It's like, it's like a whole different sort of thing. It's like it's difficult to even compare it.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, no, I completely agree with you. So you know, I tried out some stuff. I moved back  
**DECILAP:** home. And for the first few months, I think I was mostly just helping out family. My grandparents live like 10 minutes walking from where my mom is. And--

**ASHLEY** So at this point, you still had not made the decision to go to law school.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** No.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** You're still on that path.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** I'm still-- yeah, I'm still trying to just feel things out. And so, I'm going over to my grandparents  
**DECILAP:** a lot, helping clean up, helping shave my grandpa. Like you know, looking online seeing you know, whether there are volunteer opportunities that are listed.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Looking through the classifieds.

**AMBROSE** The Indeed listings. And, you know, I'm picking up my sister from school and stuff, because  
**DECILAP:** she's in high school by now. Yeah, so my mom recommended just to diversify my days she recommended that I go to the courthouse where she works and just kind of sort of some of the docket every once in a while. And that's I think when you know, the idea--

**ASHLEY** She had a plan. That was not by mistake. That was not by mistake.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** The propaganda was at work.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Why you come to the courthouse?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah. And it was great. I mean, she knows me really well. She gives great advice. So I'm  
**DECILAP:** happy that I was at a place so I was receptive to that advice. And so I started going to the courthouse, and just seeing a lot of interesting things that occur there, a lot of ways that the law serves people and sometimes oppresses people.

But I think it definitely helps to have people who are intentional about leveraging that power in ways that are positive. So I started looking for volunteer opportunities in the legal field to try to fill that out a little bit more. And the first thing I applied to was a court appointed special advocate position Voices for Children in the San Diego County Area. But they're all over.

And yeah, and that just kind of emboldened me even more, and just start doing other stuff, started doing legal redress work with local NAACP Chapter and gradually I ended up volunteering in the criminal law office at that courthouse for like six months too.

**ASHLEY** I'm picturing your mom pretending like that wasn't her plan.

**MERRITT:**

[LAUGHING] Watching this like, Oh, my gosh, how is this happening? Oh, look at this.

**AMBROSE**

**DECILAP:**

Yeah she definitely masterminded it. But you know, like all of the, all of the periods in my life where I've had the most achievement and success was because there were people who kind of helped illuminate my path for me, you know. I think my superpower is just listening and taking advice from people who are older and wiser than I am, and kind of just really thinking about what they're suggesting.

**ASHLEY**

**MERRITT:**

Seriously, that's the core of being a good lawyer honestly.

**AMBROSE**

**DECILAP:**

So you know, it takes a village as they say.

**ASHLEY**

**MERRITT:**

Really, I mean it really does. Like, people are going to get tired of hearing this, but it really does take a village to be a lawyer. Lawyers don't work well as silos. Other lawyers make you better. So. So, so talk to us some about kind of the core question of this podcast. Why did you decide to come to Virginia Law? Talk us through your thought process.

**AMBROSE**

**DECILAP:**

Sure. So, I mean, I think the first, the very first association I have with the UVA is Charlottesville. And just--

**ASHLEY**

**MERRITT:**

We should talk that through. Like you are from California.

**AMBROSE**

OK. yeah, yeah, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** You're on the other side of the country. It's not like it's not like you were born in Virginia Beach  
**MERRITT:** like Ashley and me, just like staring at UVA throughout our entire upbringing. You're on the other side of the country. Basically, with UVA's mirror image, Berkeley. So this was this was a big difference. This was a big choice, to move across the country.

**AMBROSE** I knew that, after Dartmouth, I wanted a different kind of place. I didn't want a small private  
**DECILAP:** school again if I could avoid it. I wanted a larger public institution. And speaking of Berkeley, when I was in high school I was an Upward Bound Program where I spent two summers up at Berkeley. I spent a lot of time taking classes and spending time around the large, really diverse population in a public university. And it definitely has its appeal.

And so, I was kind of looking for that. And I thought back to I spent a weekend in Charlottesville during my college years, because I traveled quite a bit with my accapella group. And we had a really fun three day weekend in Charlottesville. I will spare you the details. But.

**ASHLEY** We want to keep our G rating.

**MERRITT:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Accapella rules. I've seen "Pitch Perfect."

**AMBROSE** Yeah, it's exactly like that. They based it on our experience, actually. But yeah, we had a really  
**DECILAP:** good time. And so that was my one really positive memory of Charlottesville. And so, you know, when I read up on the law school here, and you know the wonderful people working here right now, and the accomplished people who graduate from this institution, and I was kind of just like it seems like a great opportunity.

And so I kind of gave it a shot, even though I wasn't really that confident of my chances of getting in. But, you got shoot your shot, you know?

**ASHLEY** You do have to shoot your shot, yeah. I always tell people like, listen, make us tell you no.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Because you just don't know what's in your application that's going to make us excited and

**MERRITT:** make us feel like, oh, my gosh, we need this guy.

**AMBROSE** And that's everything, not just law school.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** Absolutely. Absolutely. That's absolutely right. That's absolutely right.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Because even since coming here, you know, like every thing I've had to apply to, now I'm  
**DECILAP:** applying against this brilliant law school students here.

**ASHLEY** So are you.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** I appreciate that. I just like, I think my mindset here is towards humility and modesty. So I just,  
**DECILAP:** but yeah, things have worked out well here too. I've gone into programs that I really enjoy. So every time, you just got to shoot your shot. It's the thing.

**ASHLEY** What are some of the things that you're involved with at the law school?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** So I'm Deputy Community Service Chair for BALSA.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** We've seen you work very hard at that. That's prepping me for next year and hopefully I take  
**MERRITT:** over the real thing.

**ASHLEY** That's in a couple of weeks, right? The elections coming up?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah. It's coming up in March. So excited about that. And the big role that the community  
**DECILAP:** service chair has is organizing the service trip. Yeah.

**ASHLEY** Which this year, talk to us about where the trip was this year.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** So this year was South Africa. And it's been the same place at Cape Town for the last couple  
**DECILAP:** of years with the same organization. So if I am fortunate enough to assume the position of service chair, I'm going to be looking to try somewhere new.



**ASHLEY** I love that. So Ashley and I got to see like, you doing a whole lot of work on this project this year. So we also hope that you wind up getting--

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** I mean, so far, I haven't heard of anyone who wants to run against me. But I welcome

**DECILAP:** democracy.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Welcome all challengers.

**ASHLEY** Yeah, that's right.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** And I'm also involved in the program in law and public service here, which has been very, very

**DECILAP:** fun, very fulfilling thus far. I recently spoke to my faculty mentor that I just got partnered with--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**ASHLEY** Very good.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah. And she's, I mean she's as kind and impressive as everyone says. you know.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** So, you've made the decision. It's public service career.

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY** So before coming to law school was that also what you had in mind?

**MERRITT:**

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I think, all the things that I observed and all the volunteer capacities that I was exposed

**DECILAP:** to, none of it was really firm stuff. And my mom works in public interest. She works for a local government. And so, when I imagined what it would be like to be in the profession, it was always through the public interest capacity.

When I was choosing which career to pursue I always was thinking under the lines of like, where would I be most helpful, where could I leverage my skills to help the most people? It was never, you know, what would I make or what kind of luxury can I bring into my own life?

Which is obviously, you know it's nice to be comfortable. It's nice to feel like you can support a family and meet your personal goals.

But the reason why I decided to come to law school and join the legal profession was because I wanted to serve vulnerable people and be helpful in that realm. So,

**ASHLEY** It's nice.

**MERRITT:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** It's-- yeah, there's no other way. You know, I think if I did other things, I wouldn't be as happy  
**DECILAP:** and I wouldn't be as useful to society. So it's kind of an easy decision.

But yeah, so I came here knowing-- one of the reasons I chose UVA Law was because of this program. I sat-- during Admitted Students Weekend, I sat in on a panel--

**ASHLEY:** Oh, good.

**AMBROSE** --led by Professor--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Shin.

**AMBROSE** Professor Shin and Bowers, I think.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**AMBROSE** He was there as well.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** He [INAUDIBLE] program.

**AMBROSE** Yeah. Yeah, and both of them are great. They're very warm people-- people that make you  
**DECILAP:** want to spend more time around them.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah. Would you-- so, we get this question a lot. Would you talk to us some about the process for applying to the Law and Public Service program?

**AMBROSE** Sure, so it's pretty easy. You have to submit a resume, which by that time-- so by the time I  
**DECILAP:** applied, I think it was early, mid-November. And I had already been in touch with my career counselor. So I already had a pretty nice resume lined up for that.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Because our career services is amazing.

**AMBROSE** It's the bomb.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It's amazing. So I'm dead serious about this-- there is nobody better in the country at what they do than our career services.

**AMBROSE** I mean--

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** People can aspire to tie them. But they will not ever exceed what they do. Because ours is so great.

**AMBROSE** I mean, the statistics kind of speak for themselves there. And check out the AV disclosures.

**DECILAP:** But also being here and interacting with people, it's, you know-- they're so supportive and so kind.

And the door's always open. And they're the kind of people where even if you're not in a place where you need career advice, you still want to stop by, and say hi, and ask them how they're doing, or like build a friendship.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That's on purpose. Like, they want you guys to come by, even when it's not a career question, on purpose. So you guys are connecting, not just as kind of their client, but as human beings.

**AMBROSE** Yeah. So I already had the resume done. And then there's a short personal statement-- I think

**DECILAP:** like 400 to 500 words--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, that is short.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Lawyers sneeze 500 words.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I mean, yeah-- I almost found myself wanting more words. But there was a cap

**DECILAP:** somewhere around 500. So I think I had more stuff to say, but obviously it ended up being enough, thank goodness.

And then there's a very short interview of 10 minutes.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Who does the interview? Who does the interviewing?

**AMBROSE** So professor Shin is always in the room. I think it's usually a panel of three professors. For me

**DECILAP:** it was Professor Coughlin.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** She's the best.

**AMBROSE** She's great.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** I adore her.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know, [INAUDIBLE].

**AMBROSE** Professor Shin and then Professor Jaffe?

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah. Yeah, my classmate.

**ASHLEY:** I didn't know that.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**ASHLEY:** I didn't know that.

**AMBROSE** I play pickup soccer with him once in awhile.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah. He's a man of many-- many a-skill, many a-talent.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, he's very good.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** We have a lot of soccer players around here. Like, soccer on the sneak is challenging softball. We've got a lot of soccer happening.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah. [INAUDIBLE]

**AMBROSE** Which is great because I--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** [INAUDIBLE] United still a thing?

**AMBROSE** [INAUDIBLE] United? I signed up [INAUDIBLE] this semester to play.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** [INAUDIBLE] Students United is the soccer team.

**AMBROSE** Yeah. I'm in the local adult league.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** So good, yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**INTERVIEWER 1:** You play-- you play, don't you? I can tell.

[LAUGHTER]

**AMBROSE** [INAUDIBLE] anytime you want to come out, we'll have a jersey for you. We'll have a kit for

**DECILAP:** you. You just let us know.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** How many people get into LPS-- Law and Public Service program every year?

**AMBROSE** So it's 25 1Ls and up to another five 2Ls.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Now, I'm glad I asked that question. Because I've always gotten that wrong. And I thought I was getting it wrong. I've always said 20 1Ls and five-- because I thought it was 25. But no, it's 25 plus five 2Ls.

**ASHLEY:** Or at least that's what it was this year.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** No, I think you're right. Because I always had this thing in the back of my mind, like I think I might be getting this wrong. Yeah, OK.

**ASHLEY:** You're close.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It was close, yeah. It was close. It was a logical answer because I knew 25 was somewhere in there. Right.

**ASHLEY:** There was some thought there.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** There was thought there.

**AMBROSE** Right ballpark.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, and every year there are more and more students who want to join the program.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** Applicant numbers are on the rise.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** So that's exciting. And I do want to clarify that even if you don't make it into LPS, there's a lot of support here--

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct.

**ASHLEY:** Correct.

**AMBROSE** --for people who want to go into public interest.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Even some of the classes--

**ASHLEY:** I was going to say, the classes are open to the student body.

**AMBROSE** Absolutely.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Not just LPS students.

**AMBROSE** So yeah, but that's my other second thing that I'm most involved in. I'm on a lot of email lists.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** You're also a spring semester 1L. You know what I mean? You're allowed to--

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I'm on a lot of email lists. I'm on the West Coast Wahoos email list.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Which is important.

**AMBROSE** Right. And I've gone to the-- like, one of those meetings and their social at Cardinal Hall.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yes.

**AMBROSE** So I consider myself minimally involved.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** You're a member.

**AMBROSE** And shout-out to my mentor, Zach in West Coast Wahoos. Very helpful.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So are you also involved in PILA?

**AMBROSE** No, not really.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Which is-- let's pause-- the Public Interest Law Association.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Thank you, Ashley. That's right.

**ASHLEY:** Acronyms.

**AMBROSE** I am not involved in the organization. I have gone to a lot of the events.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah. Did you go to Auction?

**AMBROSE** I did go to the auction. And I won--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Auction, which I-- background again-- is a large fundraiser for the 1L and 2L semester grants that we have for students who pursue public service for the summer.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I ended up betting on and winning the opportunity to pie Professor Sai Prakash.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, I didn't know who won that.

**ASHLEY:** Did you do it? You did?

**AMBROSE** That was me. yeah, that was fun. And I didn't have him last semester and I don't have him this

**DECILAP:** semester. So that was our one interaction.

**ASHLEY:** So there was no catch up, frustration? You just like--

**AMBROSE** I was very gentle. I introduced myself right before pieing him. I said nice to meet you,

**DECILAP:** Professor Prakash. My name is Ambrose. I'm a 1L. I'm going to be very gentle.

**ASHLEY:** Do you have him this semester for Con Law?

**AMBROSE** No, not at all.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** So there's no relationship.

**AMBROSE** No, I literally just bid on it because I was like, I've never pied anybody. And that looks like fun.

**DECILAP:** So I just went with my gut. I'm not a very impulsive person usually.

**ASHLEY:** Was it cathartic? Was it like--

**AMBROSE** It was nice. It was nice, yeah. I feel like we bonded. I should circle back with them and ask him

**DECILAP:** how he's doing. And be like--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** You should. You should, you should.



**ASHLEY:** I bet he would love that.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**AMBROSE** Yeah, so that's my PILA memory, that silent auction and then the formal, the dance party, also  
**DECILAP:** has nice memories-- mostly dancing memories.

**ASHLEY:** Good. Are you going to [? Bear ?] [? Stirs, ?] which is this weekend?

**AMBROSE** I am, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Good for you.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, Saturday, yep-- same hotel, Omni Hotel right on the [INAUDIBLE].

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Oh, they changed it. Oh, things have changed.

**AMBROSE** They let us come back.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Things have changed.

**AMBROSE** New SVA leadership--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Things have changed.

**AMBROSE** Changes, changes in the works, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Man, changed since my day.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** That's so funny. Good. It sounds like you're having fun.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I'm having a good time.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** You know, the balance between--

**AMBROSE** A lot of work, a lot of play.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So what has been your biggest surprise since you've started 1L? I'm sure you had a lot of preconceived notions about what it would be like. What's been the biggest surprise?

**AMBROSE** It's a lot more collaborative. I mean, I take it this may be a UVA-specific experience. But like it's

**DECILAP:** a lot more collaborative in terms of students sharing notes, outlines, and things like that than the movies and the books tend to speak to. You know, not *Paper Chase*, *Legally Blonde* experience here.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** OK, so I got this question this weekend. So I was doing a dinner in Atlanta with our admits and a few applicants. And they asked, what movie is most accurate?

**ASHLEY:** Did you say *Legally Blonde*?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So, like-- that I think the most--

**ASHLEY:** Most accurate to law school or UVA Law?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** To law school-- to law school in general.

**ASHLEY:** Distinction.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So they wanted to know what was the least accurate. And of course that's *How to Get Away with Murder*.

**ASHLEY:** *Paper Chase*.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** No, *How to Get Away with Murder*. It's like they never talked to anybody who's ever been to law school. So like everybody at the table was nodding, like oh, we knew you were going to say that. But then they ask--

**ASHLEY:** Oh, popular culture. So it's not just movies.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct, yes, popular culture. So then they asked the most accurate. And I don't really know

what the answer to that is. Kind of-- I mean, like, I don't know. There's parts of *Legally Blonde* that aren't inaccurate. Which is crazy.

**AMBROSE** That's true. I mean, so *Legally Blonde*-- I mean, the stuff, like the internships--  
**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh no, that's crazy.

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Although if you have a professor who's working on something--

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, that's true.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Often students will help you.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, that's true. That's true.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And our professors happen to be like resident faculty. But if they were like-- if we were in a big city and they were at a law firm and they were just coming in to teach, students might come help them.

**ASHLEY:** I think that's right. That's right.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, just don't do the pink paper, scented--  
**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** No, right?

**ASHLEY:** Do not send us a video as your personal statement.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Absolutely not, don't do that.

**ASHLEY:** I would find it entertaining.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It would be entertaining and we would tell the story forever. But like, nobody would like that. And you wouldn't wind up here as a student. You wouldn't wind up here as a student.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I will say that *Legally Blonde* does spend a lot of time at the actual law school--  
**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** --compared to other movies. And so--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** I think just in terms of what happens in lecture, *Legally Blonde*, in terms of cold-calling and

**DECILAP:** question answering.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah. It's not terrible.

**AMBROSE** I think it's pretty close, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So I couldn't come up with something better.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** I just think professors aren't that-- like, in the movie, they're like a little mean-spirited--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, yeah. They're not really--

**ASHLEY:** Socratic Method.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, I think just in general these days, most law schools, that the Socratic method is a lot more gentle an it used to be.

**ASHLEY:** Right-- I think that's right. But the general question--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct, question and answer--

**ASHLEY:** Of single students--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And you're like study groups.

**ASHLEY:** It is close,

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It's not terribly--

**ASHLEY:** That's an interesting question.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know. And I couldn't think of anything better. And I felt like an idiot. But I was like, actually, they're parts of *Legally Blonde* because it's--

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, I was getting ready to make fun of you. But now--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know. What's more accurate? I don't know. There's not that many law school movies.

**ASHLEY:** Lawyer movies-- but law school?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Right, right.

**AMBROSE** Or recently, the Ruth Bader Ginsburg movie, *On the Basis of Sex*.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That was so good.

**ASHLEY:** Oh, I haven't seen it yet.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Did you see it?

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, Ashley, you have to see it. it's great.

**AMBROSE** It only spent like maybe 15, 20 minutes on the law school part. And then it moves on, rightfully

**DECILAP:** so, to her right illustrious career. but--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** But I thought that movie did portray very well how difficult-- and it was quick-- but how difficult it was for her and her cohort of women to exist in law school at that time.

**ASHLEY:** At that time, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It was so difficult. I can't imagine how they did that.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I mean, it's very inspiring. But I probably [INAUDIBLE]. But going back to what I was

**DECILAP:** saying about law school-- I could talk about-- this could become a movie podcast [INAUDIBLE].

But going back to what I was saying about--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Wait, I need to point something out.

**AMBROSE** OK.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** For any legal employers who are listening to this, you'll notice Ambrose is very good with going back to the question. Ambrose doesn't get lost. Ambrose doesn't get lost. He always remembers what the question is, and goes back.

**ASHLEY:** That's true. That is true.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That is very impressive. That's a skill.

**AMBROSE** Thank you.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That is a skill.

**AMBROSE** Thank you for pointing that out. I appreciate that, that plug to the future employers. I was just going to say it's surprisingly collaborative here. Even when I would have to miss class kind of without warning, anybody-- my peers would reach out to me and ask me if I was OK and if I needed notes for the day or anything.

**DECILAP:**

And it's just not the conception I had coming in and all. And I also-- going back to cold calls-- I felt like the first few weeks, I was really tense because I imagining--

**ASHLEY:** You were so scared.

**AMBROSE** I was imagining it like the movies, like *Paper Chase*. Like oh, you don't have a good answer,

**DECILAP:** grab your stuff and get out of my life.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** No, that is not how it works.

**AMBROSE** That is not at all how it is here at least.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** As a matter of fact, like when you're done with a cold call, like everybody basically hugs you. Oh my gosh, that was so good.

**AMBROSE** Absolutely.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Somebody told me this once and I never forgot it. Like, someone told me this in the beginning of 1L. They're like, you may think you sound like-- you, of course, think you sound terrible, right?

Like, I didn't know any of the answers, I didn't-- he or she wanted this specific-- he or she wanted this specific thing, I didn't talk about that. Nobody else is listening. Like, nobody else thinks that your cold call was terrible. Everybody is just thankful that it wasn't them.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I got to talk about this at the Boston dinner this year and at the Atlanta dinner. Like what you need to realize is one, people probably aren't listening.

**ASHLEY:** Right.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And two, the ones who are listening, they were-- a few seconds ago-- afraid they were about to be called. And then as you're talking, they're like rooting for you because they're putting themselves in your position.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And they're thankful it wasn't me.

**ASHLEY:** That's a more student-friendly way to look at it. No one is listening to you is what I was told. And I was like, oh, this is great. I sound like an idiot and no one noticed.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, most of the time when someone else gets called out, I'm like wow, that was well-said,  
**DECILAP:** very articulate. Like, well done.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** The thing is, Ambrose, is people are saying the same thing when you talk.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I definitely get those compliments at the end of class too. People are like, you crushed

**DECILAP:** that, or whatever. And so we kind of all feel that way about one another.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct.

**AMBROSE** You know, we're just like--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Very supportive.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So I very often ask people when we're out doing these dinners, what are you most worried about with law school? And very often the answer is cold calls. And I'm like, that's not a thing.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And then I have to explain to them like, no, no, no, no. You don't need to be worried about cold calls. And then we talk through things that we just talk through. But that is not the thing that you should be most worried about.

**AMBROSE** No.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** I mean, I remember like the heart-pounding--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, yeah, yeah, oh, absolutely.

**ASHLEY:** --because you're nervous the first few weeks.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct.

**ASHLEY:** But it gets better. Then you just--



**AMBROSE** It's fine, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** You fumble the first couple, or at least you don't meet your expectations for the first couple.

**DECILAP:** And then you really come into your own.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah. I think that's right.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** [INAUDIBLE]

**ASHLEY:** Cracking jokes by 3L.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Exactly. That's [INAUDIBLE]

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**INTERVIEWER 1:** By 3L you don't care. You'll just say whatever.

**AMBROSE** Raising your hand to volunteer-- can I add to his cold call?

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I haven't done the reading, but then raising your hand because you have a point to make.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yep.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** In the spring semester I took an elective it because we get electives in spring, semester one for 1Ls, which is wonderful. And I remember I saw a 3L pass on a cold call. And I was like, can you do that? Is that an option?

**AMBROSE** That's a thing? Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** It's not really, but people do it. I know people do it.

**ASHLEY:** [INAUDIBLE] just the level of stress.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know, right?

**ASHLEY:** It makes it a lot less stressful when you're like, oh--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Correct, right, right.

**ASHLEY:** Like this is--

**AMBROSE** And that's part of his education here too, is like the confidence--

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yes.

**AMBROSE** --the confidence of speaking in a room of your peers, especially to a professor, a person of  
**DECILAP:** authority like you would speak to, and now a judge when you're litigating. It takes practice. And that's what you're building here. And so by the time you're 3L, you're kind of feeling yourself a little bit

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So Ambrose, as Ashley just pointed out, during second semester of your first year at Virginia Law, you get to choose two classes.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** What classes did you choose to take second semester this year?

**AMBROSE** So I'm in Professor Harmon Criminal Procedure course. I had Professor Harmon for criminal  
**DECILAP:** law last semester. And she's a superstar. She likes that early class. And she really brings the energy.

**ASHLEY:** I was gonna say, 8:30.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, yes.

**AMBROSE** She brings the energy.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, she brings the energy up.

**AMBROSE** So that's a great way-- I realized that's a great way to start off my day. Because it's like, I'm  
**DECILAP:** awake. You know, I'm learning starting at 8:30.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** And she was a prosecutor.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Like, your girl knows where she's talking about.

**AMBROSE** She really provides the context, which I appreciate.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah.

**ASHLEY:** She's a baller.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I love that class. That's great. The contacts-- like the way she talks about the drug war,  
**DECILAP:** and the way law enforcement doesn't function the same way for you know socioeconomically  
depressed and people of color--

**ASHLEY:** She also does a lot of the police--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I was totally about to shout-out law of the police.

**ASHLEY:** It's a great class with her.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Rachel Harmon's Law of the Police, y'all. If you come to UVA.

**AMBROSE** I'm going to be trying to take-- I'm going to be on the waitlist--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Every class.

**AMBROSE** Everyone's trying to take that. But I'm going to be on the waitlist for that for sure.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** You'll get it. Is that where she brings the dogs in? Or is that Coughlin?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Coughlin brings the dogs.

**ASHLEY:** Coughlin, that's what I was going to say.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** She brings the drug-sniffing dogs.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, excuse me. Thank you for correcting-- She just brings her dogs in.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Last year we did the-- was it last year?

**ASHLEY:** The puppies.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Yeah, we did the puppies.

**AMBROSE** The therapy dogs.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** The therapy dogs last year, yeah.

**AMBROSE** That was really nice. And then my other class--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** We're just so ridiculous.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know. Can you imagine somebody from 1962 listening to this? And they're like, puppies? Puppies in the law school?

**AMBROSE** Hey. Listen, it really relaxes you. Sometimes you need that all R&R.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know, right.

**ASHLEY:** Ambrose, you have seen my puppy. Sometimes not--

**AMBROSE** I love her energy though. She's bringing the love. She's bringing the love.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** It's very nice of you.

**AMBROSE** Very affectionate in her own way, you know?

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** She's great.

**AMBROSE** In her very energetic way.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** She's alpha. Though. She's alpha.

**ASHLEY:** Oh, yeah.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** She's alpha.

**ASHLEY:** She runs the house.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** What's your other class?

**AMBROSE** And my other class is--

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I should have let him get back.

**ASHLEY:** Bring it back.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Because he totally was going to. He totally was going to bring it back.

**AMBROSE** The Law and Public Service class.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Oh, that's right.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, shout-out, Crystal Shin, Law and Public Service class.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, yeah, it is--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** She's also a rock star.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** She's awesome. Yeah, she's a rock star. She's amazing.

**AMBROSE** She is-- yep, all of those things and more. She brings in attorneys from all kinds of different

**DECILAP:** public interest fields. And they're all brilliant. And they all provide a lot of inspiration and they

encourage us to reach out to them if we have any questions or if we're looking into working at a US attorney's office or at impact litigation down the road.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, yeah.

**AMBROSE**  
**DECILAP:** No, it's really encouraging. And everyone in the room is just so thoughtful and so patient with one another. And so the conversations that we have about defining what does it mean to have a career in public interest work or what is public interest lawyering is never heated.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE**  
**DECILAP:** It's always just a very informative, positive conversation. So two thumbs up-- two thumbs way up for both of my electives.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, that's a nice-- that's a good spring semester.

**AMBROSE**  
**DECILAP:** Yeah, I lucked out.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Well, as we're winding down, what is one piece of advice that you would have for somebody who is going through the application and decision process right now?

**AMBROSE**  
**DECILAP:** Yeah, that's a good question. I would say start preparing for the application season early.

Because something that's not talked about that much amongst communities of color or people who may not have professionals in their family is that applying earlier in the cycle because it's rolling admissions, and most law schools, applying early in the cycle really helps your chances.

So I think most applications go online in September. It doesn't hurt to start reaching out to recommenders and maybe outlining or starting to draft personal statement stuff, diversity statement stuff as early as August, in my opinion, and trying to--

**ASHLEY:** If not earlier.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I know, if not earlier. You're absolutely right about that. You're absolutely right about that.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, spend a summer [INAUDIBLE].

**AMBROSE**  
**DECILAP:** In terms of getting a jump on things. And then I just found it super helpful to reach out to attorneys-- especially attorneys who are doing what I want to do 10 years down the road-- and ask them about their law school experience and whether they would recommend me applying

to their school.

Even though I'm from California, I was only applying to California schools. I was applying all over. And so I was reaching out to people over email.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Did you find UVA lawyers to talk to?

**AMBROSE** Absolutely, yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** In California?

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I just needed to make sure we pointed that out. I know, we needed to make sure we point that out.

**AMBROSE** Actually, so the first UVA alumni that I spoke to was someone that you put me in contact with.

**DECILAP:** It was Frankie Jones. And he's a real estate attorney in North Carolina.

But it just so happened that the week that I had emailed him, he was going to be in San Diego for a real estate law conference.

**ASHLEY:** So you met up?

**AMBROSE** So we met up and grabbed coffee in person.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah.

**AMBROSE** And spoke for about an hour, maybe a little over an hour. And he was just really generous with

**DECILAP:** his time. And he had been president of [? BOLSA ?] when he was here. So he talked a lot about the black community here. And I found that really encouraging.

And then going back to when I was at Berkeley in high school, I had a resident advisor named Peter who was on his way to law school. Like right after that summer he was going to start law school in California at UC Hastings.

And he knew someone from when he was a kid in Utah who had gone to UVA law. And he put

me in touch with--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** That's awesome. That's so awesome.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, and he put me in touch with him. And so I spoke to him over the phone as well. And  
**DECILAP:** just-- you cannot-- like no matter how many UVA law school people you speak to, no one has a bad thing to say. Like it almost seems like a mirage. It's like OK, but what's the catch? When is the "but" going to land?

You know, and everyone speaks so highly of the academic opportunities here, the professors-- they can still remember all their professors by name-- the social life, the support systems, the administration, the town, and the great restaurants that are here, and if you're a sports fan, the sports life and still coming back, driving back for baseball and basketball games.

And it's just-- yeah, no one has a bad word to say. And so after speaking so long, and especially after coming to visit-- which is my other huge piece of advice.

**ASHLEY:** Yep.

**AMBROSE** You have to visit the place. Because, you know, I think a lot of your success as a student is  
**DECILAP:** going to feel-- is going to be dependent on you feeling like you're in your element, you're comfortable in your space.

And I saw the building from the curb where I got dropped off-- I got dropped off.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I remember, I ran into you right as you came in.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, we both [INAUDIBLE] yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I forgot we were together. Right, yeah.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, we were together when we saw him, yeah.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I got dropped off at the curb. And I looked up at Kaplan-- or Clay Hall, rather-- the  
**DECILAP:** outside, the facade of Clay. And I was just like, wow. This is an institution right here, you know?



Because I don't know-- I know I'm going over.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** No, no.

**AMBROSE** And you can edit it down. But like--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** You're good.

**AMBROSE** Like, you go to some of these law schools. And, you know, they're like concrete bricks. They

**DECILAP:** look like brutalist prisons.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I mean, yeah--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**AMBROSE** And the aesthetics are just like-- it doesn't motivate you.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So the original buildings, Withers Brown and Slaughter-- they were in a brutalist style. It was the renovation in the late 90s, early 2000s that kind of softened the brutality.

**AMBROSE** Well, shout-out to whoever did that. Shout-out to [INAUDIBLE].

**DECILAP:**

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**AMBROSE** Yeah, I appreciate all of that.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** So Bob Scott, actually.

**AMBROSE** Yeah, shout-out to Bob Scott. But--

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** We love you, Bob Scott.

**AMBROSE** Yeah-- yeah, and then I got inside. And I just wandered. And there's the art on the wall. I don't

**DECILAP:** know, I love museums--

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, oh, oh, the shout-out to John Jeffries.

**AMBROSE** Yeah.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** John Jeffries is the king of the art in the building.

**ASHLEY:** Oh, I didn't know that.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** He was chair of the art committee, yes.

**AMBROSE** The pink cows--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** The pink cows [INAUDIBLE].

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Shout-out.

**AMBROSE** Yes, Dean Jeffries, thank you for the pink cows. But yeah, so all the art in here and just the  
**DECILAP:** way it's decorated made me feel like I could-- you know, I could be really happy here just in terms of the space.

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, which I think people downplay.

**AMBROSE** Yes.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Oh, absolutely.

**ASHLEY:** Like, the feeling of a space. You're going to spend a of time--

**AMBROSE** A lot of time--

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** --in the building. And if it doesn't feel right?

**AMBROSE** Yeah, it's important.

**DECILAP:**

**ASHLEY:** Yeah, it is.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I remember doing the open house, watching you walk around, look. I could see you taking all of that in. I could take you taking all of that in.

**AMBROSE** It was a spiritual experience. Even before I even made friends, I was like, making friends in the environment, you know? So yeah, so all that-- just start early, reach out to alums, and make sure to visit the place in person and talk to as many people here.

Don't just talk to current students or faculty administrators. Talk to everyone-- you know, maintenance staff, people who work here in other capacities. And ask them how they're treated-- you know, are they happy here?

**INTERVIEWER 1:** I think that's a great idea.

**AMBROSE** And I did all of that. And, you know, I tried to find a single person who could tell me something negative. And not a single person-- everyone was like, this is the place to be. Come here, you'll never regret it.

And thus far, they've been 100% accurate. So thanks for having me. Thanks for speaking with me.

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Ambrose, thank you for joining us on the podcast today.

**AMBROSE** It was my pleasure.

**DECILAP:**

**INTERVIEWER 1:** Thank you.