By Jack Silverstein
Law Bulletin staff writer

No one told Chelsea Grubb about friendship.

Now entering her second year at Southern Illinois University School of Law, Grubb started school with one word in mind—grades.

But when she had questions about complex estate litigation during her internship at Londrigan, Potter, Randle P.C. in Springfield this summer, “grades” was replaced by another word—friends.

“You can’t be friends with your GPA,” Grubb said. “You can’t call your GPA when you get into practice to ask a question. You’re calling your classmates, the people you went through everything with. No one told me that.”

SIU started its school year Monday, as did Northern Illinois University College of Law and The John Marshall Law School.

Four other Illinois law schools begin next week with Northwestern University School of Law and University of Chicago Law School starting in September.

With that in mind, the Daily Law Bulletin asked Grubb and four other 2Ls for the most important lessons learned in the 1L year that no one ever told them.

Treat law school like a job

When Peter Cheun came to IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law last year, he was eight years removed from college. During that time, he developed work habits and job skills that influenced his approach to law school.

“Obviously (law school) can’t be a 9-to-5 job,” Cheun said. “It requires more hours than that. But I stayed pretty disciplined.”

With his classes starting around 9:30 or 10 a.m., Cheun woke each day no later than 6 or 6:30 a.m. He ran three to four miles and began his reading and other studies by 7 a.m.

Starting early also allowed Cheun to stop his law school work at 7 p.m. That way, he could still “have a life outside of law school,” he said.

It also enabled him to avoid all-nighters, thus keeping him rested for the next day.

Start networking early

Many prospective law students choose a school in part because of its alumni network. What Amica Jutla learned at John Marshall is that students can use that network as soon as they step onto campus.

“Everything you hear about law school in the 1L year about studying and long hours is all true,” she said. “Something that I think I did ... that I wish I would have done earlier was to start networking with alumni.”

Jutla saw the impact of networking while working with adjunct professor Colleen T. Scarola of McVey & Parsky LLC, who handles product-liability defense work. That interested Jutla, and when she asked how to get involved in that line of work, Scarola gave her contacts and told her to attend networking events.

“It turned out great,” Jutla said. “It’s how I got my summer job and how I met a lot of the people at the firms that I’m interviewing for next summer.”

Compete — with yourself

Law school is competitive. Everyone knows that.

What Krystle McNeely of NIU learned is that students should compete with themselves, not each other.

“I think the biggest hurdle was to understand who I was as a person and a student and an adult because the law school atmosphere is very competitive. And you’re always fighting to be at the top,” McNeely said.

“If you aren’t secure in (knowing) who you are and your strengths, your biggest obstacle won’t be the course load. It will be yourself.”

McNeely learned that lesson in class by overcoming her fear of asking questions.

“I found that the ones who do the best are the ones who ask the most questions,” she said. “That became my badge of honor. I would ask the professor to break it down.”

Along with adding to her knowledge, McNeely gained respect from her peers and professors.

“As a student leader, I began to see it as a responsibility to ensure that my colleagues were receiving the best product that my professors had to offer,” she said.
Study habits? Just ‘do you’
Dominic Loverde of Loyola University Chicago School of Law has something to add to McNeely’s thoughts on competition.
“It’s easy to get caught up and stressed out when you’re surrounded by other people doing the same things as you are,” Loverde said.
“It’s important to focus on your study habits and the things you need to do, because at the end of the day, everyone has their own personal way of doing things.”
When you focus on study methods of your classmates, Loverde said, “you lose focus of what you need to do personally.”
That lesson came in his study group, an experience that provided another important lesson: Study with people who can be both co-workers and friends.
“We studied a lot but also enjoyed ourselves,” he said. “It’s about having a balance between a work hard and play hard mentality.”
Sociability matters
On the question of friendship, Grubb agrees with Loverde.
She recalls talking to a classmate who spent most of his school time studying. He told Grubb that if he was in her position of needing classmates as sounding boards during a job or internship, he would have no one to call.
“He still did well,” Grubb said, “but I think the socialization aspect is important too, and you don’t hear that. You hear ‘grades, grades, grades.’ They didn’t say, ‘Go to law school and make friends.’”
That point became clear when she interviewed for her summer job.
“They never asked about my grades,” she said. “I interviewed there and that was it. I think social and personality skills are the thing that they don’t tell you are important.”