Senior Project Proposal

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I. **Title of Project:**
Life at a Law Firm: Exploring Different Aspects of the Legal Field

II. **Thesis:**

The field of law is versatile, where one interacts with various areas of the law, from criminal justice to bankruptcy to animal law. While many TV shows depict stereotypical lawyers, many people automatically think about those who go before a jury to defend someone. Many might not fully understand the full role of a lawyer and what it takes to become one. Through my project, I want to gain legal experience and understanding while exploring civil law, which addresses noncriminal disputes. Additionally, I want to look into different areas of legal practice. Whether through business law, trust and estate administration, or dependency law, these areas of practice combine law with other fields. The different facets make the legal world diverse.

Through shadowing and interning at law firms, I aim to gain firsthand experience of working in the legal field. By observing a lawyer's daily routine and the juvenile court, I will learn important legal concepts that will prepare me for law school. Additionally, through my project, I will answer a wide range of questions. Is AI going to be a problem for lawyers? What is most challenging in this practice? Is it better to work in a public or private firm? What is the process to become a lawyer? One of the most important questions I want to figure out through interviewing lawyers is why people choose to go through the extensive and expensive path of law. By asking and answering these questions, I will be able to compile information for my presentation and poster on the reality of practicing law, to inform others curious about the legal field. With my project, I will also be able to confirm my interest in knowing if working in the legal field is something I can see myself doing after graduating from high school.

III. **Background:**

Never would I have imagined that the pencil-shaped gavel I would profusely slam on my dinner table as a child was a symbol of my future career aspiration. I learned this action from seeing Dr. Polo wrap up heated cases on her tv show. I remember countless times watching Caso Cerrado, a Spanish show that demonstrated a family lawyer settling disputes on air. This show strengthened my ability to think outside the box and consider different sides to a story. When discussing different topics with my dad as a 9 year old, I would always bring out my gavel to try to end the discussion by

slamming the small gavel down and saying "Caso Cerrado," which means case closed like Dr. Polo would. Even though we would discuss simple subjects such as the actions of a movie character or which food was the superior one, I felt these conversations have shaped what direction in life I see myself taking.

In 10 years, I picture myself as a lawyer at Goldman Sachs. I wish to attend law school to become a business lawyer. My various passions in business, politics, and psychology align with the versatility the field of law has to offer. From my involvement in Girl Scouts from a young age, I realized that I would enjoy pursuing some form of business or finance after high school. Through my AP Comparative Government class, I learned the basics of political science, which opened my eyes to global situations. After taking AP Psychology, I'm compelled to continue learning about the field of psychology, which will further my understanding of human behaviors while strengthening my critical thinking skills for law school. Overall, a law degree is the perfect combination of pursuing my interests while achieving financial stability.

IV. ***Review of Literature:***

Before looking at different areas of practice in the legal field, it is important to consider the history of law, which points to the earliest form of a law code in the world. The oldest legal system dates back to 2100 BCE in Mesopotamia, called the Code of Ur-Nammu. Before the infamous code of Hammurabi was written, where an 'eye for an eye' was established, the king of Ur-Nammu or possibly his son wrote a set of 57 law codes. World History Encyclopedia's co-founder and content director Joshua Mark comments that Ur-Nammu issued the code with the understanding that his people knew how to treat each other with respect, and a fine for lapses would serve as a reminder. This oldest form of law paved the way for the idea of monetary consequences and used laws to keep order between his people. This form of penalty was less severe than the code of Hammurabi, yet it remained effective. Back then, a legal system was shaped and defined through religion and divine intervention, which was vastly different from today's approach to law in the United States.

Currently, lawyers rely on precedent and statutes, which are defined by the Legal Information Institute at Cornell Law School as laws enacted by legislation. Precedent, on the other hand, would typically be a legal ruling that has occurred in the past that lawyers use for reference in their current cases. Thanks to the checks and balances system in the United States, before anything becomes an actual law, it has to go through the different branches of the government. This system was set up to prevent the judicial, executive, or legislative branches from having more power than the other. Today, if people want to make a law, it would be necessary to start by lobbying first. In other words, individuals try to convince their local government officials of a certain law's importance. Statutes are fundamental to lawyers since they have to use their own

judgment to figure out what the actual writing means in their specific situation. In contrast to the past, where one would find laws inscribed in tablets, the public can find statutes online or in legal textbooks.

In addition to the historical development of written codes foreseeing what are now considered statutes, Rome and Ancient Greece also played a major role in shaping the legal system. This information is similarly reflected in how law is practiced and perceived today, regarding how "Roman law established the state's role in regulating marriage, inheritance, and legal guardianship today," and "while Athens contributed less to procedural law than Rome, it offered a transformative idea: isonomy, or equality before the law" (School of Law, Tulane University 2025). The law applies to everyone, no matter their wealth, status, or gender. These principles seen today are deeply rooted in earlier societies. Looking at the past and present, legal concepts are changing and evolving to this day. Beginning from oral law to the first written codes in Egypt to the branches of government written in the constitution that are still followed today, these have aided in creating today's nuanced field of law.

There are so many different paths someone can take in the field of law. Law can be split into two categories- common law and civil law. To provide historical context regarding the two types, firstly, "The common law tradition emerged in England during the Middle Ages and was applied within British colonies across continents," meanwhile, "The civil law tradition developed in continental Europe at the same time and was applied in the colonies of European imperial powers such as Spain and Portugal" ("The common law…"). Based on the article, it makes sense as to why, when specifically looking in the United States, common law is what is practiced. Historically, the United States began as a part of the British colonies, and people had to answer to the British monarch. Generally, common law focuses on using precedents, unlike civil law, which relies on codified laws that dictate its legal system. Common law systems generally include "judicial decisions that are binding" and "extensive freedom of contract". In other words, "everything is permitted that is not expressly prohibited by law" ("Key Features of Common…"). The uncodified aspect of common law gives lawyers more power over deciding and interpreting the law. Overall, the legal practice used today was constructed thousands of years ago and is still relevant to all lawyers in the vastly different legal practices.

V. ***Bibliography:***

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VI. ***Identity Central Issue or Question and Responsibilities:***

I believe the general consensus of the legal field is summed up by criminal law; therefore, I wish to learn about other facets of the law and share that knowledge with others through my final product. Throughout my senior project, I will seek to develop an understanding of at least four distinct areas of law to better determine which practice I wish to pursue. I will accomplish this goal through my own research and by gaining firsthand experience through interning and shadowing individuals in multiple areas of the law. Through my internship, I will be engaged in case preparation and administrative tasks, specifically assisting with the discovery process. Additionally, I will attend my on-site advisors' court hearings and client meetings to observe the role of a lawyer throughout each task. Through shadowing at the Juvenile Justice Center, my responsibilities include taking great notes and asking thoughtful questions to discuss with the judge. Some problems I may face include the risk of disclosing other individuals' personal cases. Working in the legal field involves being immersed in complex situations that involve confidential information between the lawyer and the client. A limiting factor would also be finding different types of lawyers to interview, given their availability and willingness.

VII. ***Performance factors and measures of success:***

I believe punctuality would be important in this project, as I wish to meet with other legal professionals and might therefore need to travel to separate locations. With this in mind, I need to account for any problems and arrive early, as it would not be acceptable to waste anybody's time. Communication will also be a major factor in the success of this project. I need to set up meetings with my off-site advisor at the law firm at certain times and dates.

Additionally, to compile information and correctly analyze what legal practice fits me, I will need to be attentive to detail and ask the right insightful questions. My notes need to be clear and organized so that I can present them to a larger audience. Furthermore, adaptability is another factor important to consider in understanding the differences in legal practices, as a law firm can be fast-paced while another legal environment might function completely differently. The final measure of success would be tied to the amount of skill acquisition and career clarity that is developed by the end of the project.

VIII. ***Internship ties:***

The experience I have retained from working at Musgrove Drutz Jack & Gautreaux, PC with Jefferey Gautreaux has deepened my knowledge of civil litigation, personal injury law, and business law. Through my internship, I have been engaged in case preparation, administrative tasks, and the observation of court hearings and client meetings. Additionally, through shadowing Judge Young at the Juvenile Justice Center, observing court hearings and case management conferences, I have learned about dependency law and juvenile delinquency law. This project is relevant to my future goals as I am interested in becoming a lawyer and wish to get exposed to different areas of practice. This experience has encouraged me to pursue a legal career, and I plan to

major in law at the University of Arizona starting in the fall. After four years of an undergraduate degree, I plan to continue pursuing a career as a lawyer out of state to practice transactional business law.