

## Law Admission Essay

I was seven years old when I had my first indirect encounter with the United States justice system. At this young age, children are taught that the judiciary system is founded on fairness, to protect the rights and safety of its citizens. Unfortunately, I had an entirely different perspective. (My uncle, my father figure, was deported because of negligence with the criminal justice system.) Although this hardship affected my mother and me, emotionally and financially, it turned out to be a real milestone in my life. At the age of seven, I knew I wanted to be an attorney so I could advocate for those who have no proper knowledge of the law. Seventeen years later, as a paralegal, I am walking in-and-out of courtrooms and federal prisons, assisting attorneys in trials, and ensuring that our clients receive a fair hearing.

Backtracking to 1999, my uncle was a grocery store manager, the owner's right-hand man. My uncle managed a few grocery stores but wasn't aware that the owner was running an illegal business in one of the establishments. During one of my uncle's shifts, undercover officers were scheduled to raid the grocery store. (They found a chock-full of drugs, and the one taken into custody was my uncle.) (The officers realized they had arrested the wrong person, but proceeded to book him.) At one point, I solely blamed the officers for this mishap and completely disregarded the individual who could have changed the outcome of this situation - his attorney. His lawyer told him to "plead guilty because that was the easiest way out of his situation." Because of this injustice, my uncle lost his residency and was deported. Seeing my uncle go through this ordeal not only infuriated me but, at the same time, gave me a sense of direction. Seven-year-old Paola knew she wanted to become an attorney: present day Paola is going to fulfill that dream.

People ask me how I can choose to defend "criminals" as a career choice. My response always has been that it is not about defending a "criminal;" it's about protecting the human right to a fair trial. My yearning to become an attorney has never been about personal interest, but to genuinely serve others. Some may see lawyers as simple advocates but, from my family's experience, an attorney holds the power of someone's life in their hands. It is a power that some may take for granted and others may not realize or understand. In our case, (the attorney's conflicting advice) bought my uncle a one-way ticket to the Dominican Republic, leaving my mother and me borderline homeless. Regardless of everything, I am thankful for all the roadblocks, detours, and obstacles in my life; they've set steppingstones and led me to where I am today.

I graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from the nations' second best criminal justice program at the University at Albany. Upon my early graduation, I decided to add a Paralegal Certificate to my list of merits. Immediately after the completion of the paralegal program, I established a corporation and launched myself as a freelance paralegal. Shortly after that, I was (referred to work) on three different federal criminal cases. My involvement in the legal field has assured me that I am on the right path.

Although I graduated Magna Cum Laude, my academic experience was not a smooth ride. Not only did I have to fit five classes into my schedule, but I made time for internships, volunteer projects, and work. Since I came from a financially disadvantaged home, I always had two jobs. There was one semester that I interned at the State Senate, worked two jobs, and took five classes. That was the first hectic semester I had in the few semesters in college and I still managed to get a 3.5 G.P.A. Although that was not a low average, a lot was put to the test during that period. That was the semester when I realized my strengths: working under pressure, prioritizing responsibilities, and managing my time effectively, to name a few. These are skills that do not only apply to academics but are transferable to everyday life. Later in my college years, I was placed in a similar situation, but that situation felt worse. I had four classes, two jobs, and a LSAT intensive course. I applied everything I learned from my past semesters and obtained a 3.9 G.P.A. I believe these are essential skills needed to thrive in any environment, but especially as a law student and a future attorney.

Conclusion(s):

CUNY Law is an institution that will prepare me well to embark on this journey to become an attorney. The Criminal Defense Clinic will give me the opportunity to work hand in hand with the criminal justice system. My background with paralegal work will certainly add a unique perspective to this program. Also, having the chance to be part of an institution that is known to be the best in the Public Service sector is my main reason for applying to CUNY Law. I want to work with local citizens who lack financial resources and need proper legal advice, as my family did. During my undergraduate studies, I developed the idea that, in the future, I want to launch a non-profit agency that helps deter ex-convicts from re-offending. I volunteered in two organizations (Exodus Transitional Community and the Center for Law and Justice) that helped ex-offenders transition back into society. These programs offered ex-offenders employment opportunities, resume critique, interview preparations, G.E.D help, and much more. This program is an idea that I would love to start in the CUNY Law community. If accepted, I know I will be a valuable addition to CUNY Law.

Brooklyn Law is an institution that will prepare me well to embark on this journey to become an attorney. Having the opportunity to learn from the Brooklyn District Attorney Clinic, Criminal Appeals Defense Clinic, and the Criminal Practice Externship will give me important experience working hand in hand with the criminal justice system. My background with paralegal work will certainly add a unique perspective to this program. Also, my main reason for applying to Brooklyn Law is to be part of an institution that houses the Public Interest-Public Service (PIpS) program. I want to work with local citizens who lack financial resources and need proper legal advice, as my family did. With the experience gained at Brooklyn Law, I plan to launch a Public Service program to help those who need (knowledgeable) legal representation but are financially disadvantaged. I believe the Center for Urban Business Entrepreneurship (C.U.B.E) and Business Boot Camp will help me achieve my goals. If accepted, I know I will be a valuable addition to Brooklyn Law.

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