

BREAKING THE ADMISSIONS MOLD: GRADUATES' PERSONAL STORIES AND THE ADMISSION TOOL THAT MADE IT POSSIBLE

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Professor Emeritus Catherine Carpenter has been a pivotal influence for both of us in finding our footing and voice as members of the Southwestern Law School faculty and change-makers at home and beyond. She has been a model for unrelenting rigorous expectations of ourselves and our students. She has also set an example for critical thinking and questioning, driving necessary change, and always acting with kindness and compassion.

Six years ago, having Catherine show interest in our emerging admissions idea gave us a boost. Our concept was bold, first-of-its-kind, and required significant time and resources. It embodied Catherine's rigorous standards while driving necessary change and implementing it with kindness and care.

The outcome? Several hundred—and counting—dedicated and aspiring individuals securing a seat in law school that otherwise may not have ever had that opportunity.

The story of our admissions idea is not a quick one, but we'll do a quick summary here. Despite the growing criticism over many years that merit for law school admissions is defined in a very limited way—driven primarily by the LSAT—the law school admissions process continues to be beholden to this approach for measuring an applicant's ability to succeed.¹

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1. Anahid Gharakhanian, Natalie Rodriguez & Elizabeth A. Anderson, *"More than the Numbers": Empirical Evidence of an Innovative Approach to Admissions*, 107 MINN. L. REV. 2431, 2437-41 (2023) (explaining the decades-long hyper-focus on the numbers in admissions

In addition, an overreliance on LSAT scores has been shown to have a negative impact on diversity.² A lack of diversity in law schools leads to a lack of diversity in the profession.

We resolved that law schools can and should do better. In collaboration with an expert, Dr. Elizabeth Anderson,³ we developed a first-of-its-kind empirically based admissions tool that defines merit broadly, using meaningful measures, and provides opportunities based on a spectrum of factors, beyond the usual numbers.⁴

Our approach employs an interview tool for applicants who are waitlisted—applicants whose application shows promise but also raises questions about law school readiness (generally, due to the LSAT performance). The interview assessment is based on a set of competencies that new attorneys need, given that the ultimate goal is entry into the profession. The competencies are selected from the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System’s national Foundations for Practice Study.⁵ The interviewers receive specific training, including on implicit bias. The interviewers conduct a structured interview, based on defined parameters and ratings, and complete an extensive rubric following the interview.⁶

We implemented the methodical interviews with the entering class of 2019 and continue to use and refine the tool. For the entering classes of 2019 to 2024, Southwestern has conducted over 750 waitlist admissions interviews, and a notable percentage of the entering class for that period have been waitlist interview matriculants—a number of whom would not otherwise have a seat. The project details, including the initial validity and reliability results, are detailed in a *Minnesota Law Review* article.⁷

practices, despite LSAC’s caution against over-reliance on the LSAT, and despite calls for change) [hereinafter Gharakhanian].

2. *Id.* at 2459-64.

3. Dr. Elizabeth Anderson, PhD, is the founder and lead research consultant of Embraced Wisdom Resource Group, LLC and worked as the educational consultant with the IAALS Foundations for Practice Learning Outcomes project; her PhD is in Research Methods and Statistics from the University of Denver, and she has specifically trained in psychometrics, measure development and non-traditional use of traditional measurement development techniques; she currently serves on the ABA Outcomes and Assessments Committee. *Elizabeth Anderson*, INST. FOR ADVANCEMENT AM. LEGAL SYS., <https://iaals.du.edu/profile/elizabeth-anderson> (last visited Mar. 16, 2025).

4. *See* Gharakhanian, *supra* note 1, at 2477-84.

5. Alli Gerkman & Logan Cornett, *Foundations for Practice: The Whole Lawyer and the Character Quotient*, INST. FOR ADVANCEMENT AM. LEGAL SYS., (July 26, 2016), https://iaals.du.edu/sites/default/files/documents/publications/foundations_for_practice_whole_lawyer_character_quotient.pdf [<https://perma.cc/SG4C-UKJ6>].

6. *See* Gharakhanian, *supra* note 1, at 2482-83, 2502-10.

7. Gharakhanian, *supra* note 1, at 2484-86.

Our data analysis shows promising results. But the ultimate measure of the tool's success, and what makes the effort so worthwhile, are the phenomenally inspiring, dedicated, and deserving individuals we've been fortunate to count among Southwestern students and alums.

We celebrate our waitlist interview matriculants by featuring here ten graduates who started their journey with a waitlist interview.⁸ It turns out that several were interviewed by Professor Catherine Carpenter. Statistically, this is not surprising. Catherine conducted 130 of the 600 waitlist interviews for the entering classes of 2019 to 2022.

I. INTRODUCTION

The interviews of the graduates were profoundly affirming. Each conversation reinforced the importance of what we do in legal education, particularly through our admissions practices. We change lives and communities. We change the profession. These are the themes that emerged from the conversations with the graduates whose path to the profession started with Southwestern's unique waitlist interview. The graduates spoke fervently about the impact of our waitlist interview tool—fulfillment of their long-standing dream, hardships overcome, immense gratitude for the opportunity and the sense of belonging the interview provided, and much more—previewed in this Introduction and narrated in this essay.

One of the interviewees, Laura Price '24, was on Southwestern billboards last admissions cycle. The larger-than-life photo showed her beaming in the Southwestern cap and gown while her inspired young daughter stood by her side. Thinking about the pride in her accomplishment and the inspiration to many who may think law school is not for them, Laura reflected: "I'm very thankful that Southwestern believed in me" and "now I'm able to pay it forward to others." Her hope is that others like her—she identifies as a Mexican and Black woman, who is a single mother and working, with a fifteen-year dream of going to law

8. The authors reached out to about twenty graduates who entered Southwestern following a waitlist interview. The invitation noted that the authors would like to feature the graduate in a Southwestern Law Review Symposium and related essay in the Southwestern Law Review, celebrating Professor Emeritus Catherine Carpenter. The invitation further explained that the symposium presentation and essay will celebrate several Southwestern alums who entered law school following a waitlist interview. Ten graduates accepted our invitation. Anahid Gharakhanian conducted the interviews on Zoom in November 2024 for about forty-five minutes each. The interviews were recorded. The recordings and the participants' consent forms are on file with the authors. Two of the participants asked to remain anonymous; the authors are calling one BTB and the other one JS. The information included about each graduate is current as of the November 2024 interviews.

school—will see the billboard and feel encouraged to apply. The billboard sparked conversations with friends about her law school journey and the challenges with the LSAT, where Laura was “unapologetic” and “not ashamed” to have been admitted through a waitlist interview. Laura received news of her law school admission and her fifteen-year dream coming true on Juneteenth. Her reaction: “The ancestors were like we got you Laura. Congratulations!”

Vianney Munoz '23, practicing with the San Diego Public Defender's Office, recalls the challenges of her road to law school, studying for and taking the bar in July 2023 while pregnant, but then the elation of her baby's birth in October 2023 followed by news of passing the bar the month after. It all started for her when she interviewed with Catherine Carpenter. Vianney shared: “Professor Carpenter saved my life and my career.”

Zara Mokhtar '24 described the interview as the “first step of me feeling like I belonged . . . [the interview] helped with my impostor syndrome, with me just feeling like I was capable of doing this.” She said, “I got to be the student of my dreams” (recounting her Federal Public Defender and ACLU externships, along with honors program participation and more) and “prove that I'm more than that LSAT number.” With firm conviction, she described how that confidence carried through with passing the bar on the first attempt and her dedication to pursuing civil rights work. Currently, she is a law clerk with Los Angeles Superior Court while raising her young child.

You've been introduced to Laura, Vianney, and Zara. You'll hear more about them and meet the other exceptional graduates featured through the narratives in this essay.

II. A LONG-STANDING DREAM

The alums shared their long-standing dreams and plans for attending law school, including several applying for a second time when faced with denial of their applications. For some the dreams and plans extended back to childhood.

For Elmer Flores '23, immigration was always at the forefront of his mind, given that his parents were immigrants. He was cautious, though, in exploring the pursuit of legal education due to law school expenses and demands, so he worked as a paralegal before confirming his commitment to applying to law school. Elmer is practicing immigration law in his second position since graduation. His first position was also in immigration law, where he transitioned from a law clerk to an associate after passing the bar in July 2023. He is proud to be an example to his two children.

Laura's dream was fifteen years in the making. In the early 2000s, she worked in the legal field by managing a legal aid clinic. She reflected on how often she heard herself saying, that's a great question, let me ask the attorney. Eventually, she thought "I should be able to answer that question." She went back to school at night for a paralegal certificate to see if she could balance work, school, and being a parent. Like Elmer, despite the dream to attend law school, she was cautious and delayed law school to be sure she should and could take on the expenses and the demands. She's now enjoying the fulfilling work of being a law clerk with Los Angeles Superior Court, in the juvenile dependency division.

Similar to Laura, the law school dream for Rachel Evans '24 was many years in the making. After years of working and raising her daughter, she decided to apply to Southwestern's evening program (the only school she applied to). This is how much Rachel wanted the legal education, though she says it jokingly: Having the "J.D. on [my] headstone is all I wanted." Rachel explained that her law school goal was more than anything for her personal satisfaction. She believes that the delay in starting law school was helpful as her vast work and life experience contributed to her learning and success in law school.

Vianney grew up in a community of predominantly people of color and explained that she wanted to be a lawyer since she was in middle school, but what cemented her commitment was the Black Lives Matter movement. She feels that her dream of serving the public and helping her community has been fulfilled through her graduation from Southwestern in 2023 and working with the San Diego Public Defender's Office.

For BTB⁹ '24, her "favorite thing ever to talk about" is her long-held dream to pursue law school. Due to a family medical situation, since a young age, BTB was interested in pursuing science. Through the years, she also developed an interest in law and decided to "mesh her two loves." BTB was giddy talking about passing the July 2024 bar, working in a defense law firm, with the plan of eventually practicing medical malpractice on the plaintiff's side—her goal of many years. But before that, she is planning to do a federal clerkship and has already set the wheels in motion to secure a clerkship.

Desiree Ruiz-Alfaro '23 was influenced by her mother, who had her at fifteen and always told her, "Don't be another statistic," and pushed Desiree to work hard and pursue medical school. Desiree internalized the hard work ethic but found her passion in law while working as a legal assistant

9. See *supra* note 8 and accompanying text (explaining two of the graduates requested to remain anonymous).

and became steadfast that her chosen career would be in the law. Desiree now feels privileged to work on the plaintiff's side on wage and hour matters. She started at the firm following graduation and before the July bar results. She was thrilled to get the bar results and jump into the attorney role. She credits Southwestern with her fulfilling path: "Academic institutions have so much power to determine the rest of someone's life. My life would be completely different if it wasn't for the [waitlist] interview."

For some, the spark was lit while in elementary school. Zara visited her family in Sudan when she was eight and was impacted by the kids and the suffering she saw in an orphanage. This sparked her interest in law and what she later identified as human rights work, which she started doing in high school and college.

The law school dream for JS¹⁰ '22 started in seventh-grade mock trial, where he took on the role of a prosecutor and "fell in love" with legal research and writing. JS recently moved to a medium-big firm, continuing to practice in specialized litigation. His first litigation associate position was through a relationship built with a Southwestern alum/adjunct, following passing the bar immediately after graduation. JS is an immigrant and recounted the struggle with learning English, specifically writing. He then proudly talked about his law school accomplishments (a top student, honors program membership, teaching assistant for Legal Analysis, Writing, and Skills). With a touching juxtaposition, he then recalled how he used to struggle to write a complete sentence and now writes complete summary judgment motions!

III. NOT AN EASY ROAD

Despite the long-standing dream and the resolve to pursue law school, doubt and worry prevailed.

BTB found the application process "daunting" and worried about the challenges she'd faced in her undergraduate years due to medical and other personal reasons and how they would affect her law school prospects. Despite a strong undergraduate finish, BTB was deeply concerned about how helpful her explanations about her life challenges would be in the law school application.

Zara shared how, coming from a low-income household, she felt that the odds were against her. Since age fifteen, she had always worked and worried about how her financial situation and the need to work had impacted her college grades and, therefore, her chances of law school

10. See *supra* note 8 and accompanying text.

admission. Vianney shared similar concerns as a first-generation college student coming from a lower-income background. At UCLA, where other freshmen were excited about participating in extra-curriculars and college life, the first thing Vianney did was to get a job so as not to bother her single mom, raising four kids. Vianney worried about making enough money, which affected her college studies and performance. She stressed about her GPA and law school prospects, given that the entire purpose of going to college was getting into law school.

Zara and Vianney also talked about the application and LSAT hurdle. Given her work obligations, Zara didn't have a lot of time to study for the LSAT. She did her best and took the LSAT several times. She felt "discouraged" and "knew that I'm more than this number." But she was "striking out" due to the LSAT. She also felt discouraged because what she'd read and heard was that the LSAT score is indicative of how she'd perform in law school. But she knew if given the chance, she'd do well due to being "hard-working, diligent, reliable." Vianney also faced the challenges of going through the application process, including the LSAT, given that she didn't know anyone who'd applied to law school. She "felt so lonely during the application process" and "couldn't come to terms" that she may not be admitted to a law school.

Limited time and resources to study for the LSAT were a common theme for others. Jennifer Rivera '23 was set on attending law school and educated herself about the importance of good grades, internships, extracurriculars, and work experience. But balancing it all was tough, especially keeping grades up and studying for the LSAT while working.

Elmer was in the same situation. He had a full-time job while studying for the LSAT. He could not take time off or stop working to focus on the LSAT. Although generally his undergraduate GPA was fine, Elmer worried about his grades during a challenging quarter and that his LSAT score wasn't what he hoped for.

Desiree echoed what others had shared: She "didn't have the luxury to not work." Though she knew in her heart that she could be an amazing attorney, it was "heartbreaking" for her to receive "rejection after rejection" she presumed due to her LSAT score. But she kept up her resolve, fueled by the belief that her life experiences were unique and she had to contribute to the legal community specifically given how it lacks Hispanic and Latina women.

And for some, the standardized testing was just a tough hurdle to overcome. For JS, beyond the challenge of the unfamiliarity of the application process and not having family guidance, he "felt horrible" about his LSAT score despite studying "day and night" but being unable to raise

his score. He powered through but described how overwhelming it was to see how much people were “suffering” due to the LSAT hurdle, including two people crying during the mock LSAT test. Knowing he wasn’t the only one facing the challenge was “comforting but terrifying.” Rachel shared a similar sentiment about how she has “trauma with the LSAT to this day.”

IV. THE INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY AND THE AFFIRMATION

The waitlist interview invitation was a deeply meaningful one for all, and the interviews made each person feel seen, validated, and empowered. Here’s a glimpse into each one’s indelible experience.

Mary Hellman ’24 looked forward to having the opportunity to speak to someone about her interest in law school and found the conversation flowed naturally. She recalls the feeling of “warmth and welcoming.” The experience affected her confidence and approach to law school, thinking that if conversations with professors were as “natural” as with the interviewer, that would serve her well.

Rachel felt “relieved and overjoyed” that the waitlist interview meant there was a possibility of admission. She feared that her LSAT score meant she might not do well in law school. The interview “calmed [her] nerves” and made her feel “really good” about attending law school, despite her LSAT performance.

Jennifer was very happy and excited to get the interview invitation. She viewed the interview as “just a little crack and I’m in there!” She mentally prepared herself: there’s “a little chance I can get in, so I’m going to make that chance into reality.” Jennifer told herself that she had to show her interviewer what she was about and would succeed in law school and pass the bar. Jennifer remembers focusing on how she always looks for a way to get things done by facing challenges: “I reevaluate and move forward.”

BTB was also “elated” to get the interview invitation. She felt she had “one foot in the door!” She thoroughly researched her interviewer and was nervous both because of how accomplished her interviewer was and also how much BTB wanted to be in law school. BTB recalls how the interviewer helped her “settle down” while still asking the “tough questions.” BTB thought to herself: “I’ll be the best decision you’ll ever make.”

Zara was “overjoyed” and thought to herself, “this is my ticket in.” She believed in herself and believed that, in an interview, she could truly convey her readiness for law school. She enjoyed the interview and found the interviewer to be “friendly.” She felt heard and seen. She also “felt encouraged,” thinking if she were to get in, she would have a supportive

community behind her, which would help her perform well. The interview experience helped Zara's confidence when starting school. She framed it as follows: "Not questioning me or making me feel less than or inadequate . . . Made me feel reassured and made me comfortable." The interview was the "first step of me feeling like I belonged . . . helped with my impostor syndrome, with me just feeling like I was capable of doing this." "I got to be the student of my dreams" and "prove that I'm more than that LSAT number" and that carried through to passing the bar the first time.

JS called his mom immediately following receipt of the interview invitation; he recalls stuttering because he was so overjoyed and emotional. He vividly remembers the faculty office where he interviewed. He found the interview "very welcoming" and greatly appreciated the chance to present himself in a way that was not possible in the application. He said he almost cried during the interview. Someone was truly hearing him. Until today, he talks to his family about the interviewer and being heard. He recalled coming into the interview nervous but leaving confident and that confidence carrying him through law school and beyond.

For Desiree, the call from Southwestern "was the last glimmer of hope." She distinctly recalls being in her backyard when she received the call for the interview, shaking, and immediately saying yes to the invitation. "That's when the best moments of my life started." She felt that through the in-person interaction with someone interested in her and her life experience, she could convince them "I'm more than just the numbers on a piece of paper." Though initially nervous at the interview, she found the questions insightful and the interviewer truly interested in her and hearing her.

Elmer quipped that, of course, most people would rather receive an acceptance, but he was happy that he wasn't receiving a denial. He was excited about the waitlist interview. He appreciated the opportunity for dialogue and that the interviewer "understood my story and what I was saying." He recalled the questions being "genuine" and that there was a sense of understanding about his qualifications and potential for law school.

Laura's reaction was similar to Elmer's. She'd been hoping for an acceptance letter but was grateful that she didn't receive a denial and grateful for the chance to interview and convey her story beyond the application and beyond the numbers. She enjoyed the interview and felt heard.

The interview invitation made Vianney feel hopeful as she viewed it as her "only shot at getting into a law school." Like others, she was initially

nervous at the interview. But she felt comforted by the interviewer's approach, recalling that the interviewer was smiling, patient, and kind.

V. PROMISE MADE, PROMISE KEPT

A tremendously moving and inspiring sentiment shared by the alums was how the interview motivated them to work even harder and do well in law school and beyond. They felt a strong connection with the interviewer and a commitment to prove that the interviewer and the school made the right decision to admit them.

Jennifer said, "I honored [my interviewer] because I kept my grades up and passed the bar the first time." She is deeply dedicated to her employment law practice.

Laura felt that the school really believed in her so she "can't drop the ball." The waitlist process "lit a fire" and motivated her to do well in law school.

JS was inspired by the interviewer's positive remarks about him, making him feel that he was a "grown adult" and no longer an undergraduate, which changed how he approached his law school studies.

Vianney viewed the waitlist interview as giving her a second chance, so she took her legal education "really seriously," studied "so hard," and "insane how much I applied myself," never taking any part of law school for granted.

Elmer recalls the interviewer asking about his undergraduate academic challenges and how he would handle his law school studies. Elmer responded that he was a completely different student, detailing how he'd approach his studies. Because of what he shared at the interview, Elmer felt beholden to keep his word and that's what he did throughout his time at Southwestern.

Desiree also shared that the interview "100%" impacted her law school experience. She told herself, "If I get into Southwestern, there's absolutely nothing that can stop me." She continued: "That interview was my guiding light all of law school." When she felt "defeated" some days, she kept pushing forward, appreciating the opportunity that the school had afforded her (and we would add that she had earned). Through deep emotion, she continued: "I love Southwestern so much. I brag about Southwestern to everyone It started with that interview." Desiree described how her hard work paid off for her in multiple ways (top class rankings, merit scholarships, honors program participation, and more).

BTB had a strong work ethic but also felt that she'd made a promise to the interviewer—if accepted, she'd make Southwestern proud. She lived up

to those words, graduating at the top of her class and passing the bar exam the first time.

VI. A TRANSFORMATIVE RETURN FOR THEMSELVES, THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE PROFESSION

The alums talked proudly and joyfully about completing law school and entering practice. They spoke with profound introspection about the personal significance of the accomplishment and the ripple impact on their families, communities, and the profession.

Elmer's goal is to be one of the top immigration attorneys, noting, "the bar is going to get the best from me." In his short time practicing, he feels that his immigration practice has had a significant impact on people and their livelihoods. From his family's perspective, he's in an "elite position." He's the only one in his family who has gotten this far in his education. He feels that he serves as a role model and can be a mentor to others who may not have a straight path to becoming an attorney.

Being a role model to family and beyond is a theme with Desiree too. The oldest of ten siblings and the first to graduate from college and have a profession, she "brings a lot of pride to [her] immigrant family. Their sacrifices were not in vain." Desiree is a role model to her siblings, who've seen her studying all the time and now committed to her practice late into the evening and on weekends. She motivates them to try hard in school and be curious about learning, and they talk to her about their future plans and goals.

BTB highlighted having a similar impact on her family, sharing that her aspirations have always been about positioning herself so she could take care of her family. Despite all the "I can't's" and doubts she felt through many years, she "refused to accept any reality of not going to law school" and her resolve has become a positive part of her siblings' lives.

Jennifer brought up the role model theme as well, being the first in her family to become a professional. She feels like the "pioneer in the family" and warmly talked about her nephew's questions about pursuing college and beyond. Prior co-workers are also reaching out and asking for her guidance in pursuing their law school interests and applications.

Jennifer also talked about the immense pride she feels in being an attorney while recognizing the tremendous responsibility. She loves her employment class action work and is proud to be part of a community that makes powerful moves and forces policy changes and improvements for employees. This is something that's near and dear to her, given that she's always worked since high school and witnessed the injustices that employees experience. Like others, Jennifer also talked about the economic

and personal security that her position affords her, being able to pay off student loans and being able to enjoy life too.

Mary also highlighted the pride in her work and the impact on her family. First, she framed the significance of being an attorney as a “privilege that I don’t take lightly” and “so tied to the origin of our country and the integrity of it.” She also shared that given her constant hard work during law school, while holding down two jobs as a single parent for much of the journey, she now finds herself secure and satisfied with her associate position doing real estate and business litigation. She is particularly excited about the career growth opportunity. She also shared the pride and excitement her daughter felt when Mary found out she passed the bar; it was her daughter who called family members to share the news!

The financial security theme was a common one, including with Zara, who shared that being an attorney feels “incredible.” She continued that a notable aspect of entering practice is to “make money if I’m being honest.” “I’m going to have financial stability,” sharing that it’s something she never had growing up. Zara also talked about how much it means to her family for her to be a lawyer, being first-generation from an immigrant low-income household. She highlighted that her accomplishment is the fulfillment of her immigrant parents’ dream to create a better future for their family. She formed her own family during law school and recalled competing in the Trial Advocacy Honors Program while she was pregnant: “it’s sweet that I get to tell my daughter [my law school] stories when she grows up” and be an inspiration to her. Zara also shared how she’s building a foundation in her law clerk position with the Superior Court and then wants to pursue her life-long interest of practicing civil rights law. Zara reflected on how her rich life experience is an advantage and benefits the bar, vowing “I’m going to be a fearless and zealous advocate for my clients.”

JS also reflected on his journey from a young immigrant, experiencing imposter syndrome even in elementary school, to getting to do what he loves daily—research and writing and being a litigator. “I’ve been chasing this goal for so long now, that it feels like I’m at home.” JS’s joy is shared by his family; he recounted that his parents were ecstatic when he passed the bar and recalled his father crying. JS’s heart is full, feeling that his immigrant parents’ hard work has paid off, seeing him achieve his dream. He is grateful to be in a position to assist them financially given his law firm income.

As Desiree had reflected on the importance of having Hispanic and Latina women in the profession, the theme also resonated with Laura. As a Black and Mexican woman, Laura talked about the importance of

diversifying the courtroom. She also talked about the significance to her neighborhood and community, where there's a lot of police activity. She explained that with her legal training, "it feels good I have the community's back"—to be a resource for her neighbors and help minimize the neighborhood being taken advantage of.

Vianney's insights touched on all the themes the others had shared. To Vianney, being an attorney "means the world." As a public defender, every single day she gets to help people. She recalled her first trial. Vianney was representing an undocumented woman whose partner had accused her of domestic violence and her children were taken away. Vianney deeply empathized with her client, especially given the language barrier the client faced and given that Vianney was pregnant and felt the client's pain of separation from her children. Vianney felt incredible satisfaction when the client was found not guilty and started pulling her life back together. They are still in touch.

The financial security profoundly resonated with Vianney too. She described growing up in a household that had a low income supporting a family of five. She juxtaposed that with her current salary and the excitement of being in the process of buying a home, especially because she grew up living in a trailer. Vianney also excitedly described how people she grew up with in a small California town have been reaching out to her and seem to be inspired by her becoming an attorney. Vianney is proud to now be doing what she aspired to do when living in that small town. She's proud to be a role model to her small-town community and that her daughter grows up to say that her mom is an attorney. Vianney also believes that being an attorney as a "first-generation Latina is huge; because we don't have very many, one makes a difference." She continued about the importance of "taking up space in spaces where we weren't previously either welcomed or just not able to get to."

VII. FINAL THOUGHTS

Rachel summed it up nicely. "Law school is a Master Card commercial. It's priceless." It's knowing your "why," which carries you through all the demands and tough times of law school. Rachel knew her "why" and expressed immense satisfaction in earning her J.D.

Each of the graduates was effusive about their appreciation for their interviewer and for Southwestern. They were thankful for the interviewer and for Southwestern caring about individual applicants and caring about each of them. They were thankful for the questions and for being heard. They recognized that but for the interview, they likely wouldn't be where they are in their personal and professional lives.

Those interviewed by Catherine Carpenter expressed earnest gratitude. The sentiment expressed by one reflects well what others shared:

Your genuine interest in learning more about me, beyond just my LSAT score, my GPA, had a profound impact on my journey. The conversation that we had gave me a renewed sense of confidence and direction. It helped shape the trajectory of my path to law school and my career. I am deeply grateful for the role that you played in that pivotal moment. From the bottom of my heart, I thank you. Thank you for seeing in me what, at the time, I could barely see within myself and what other law schools failed to see or recognize in my application. It really just takes one person to have confidence in you for the rest of your life to be completely impacted. I just feel forever indebted to [Professor Carpenter] I can't say thank you enough because I'm just so happy with my life and my career.

The notes of appreciation also focused on how Southwestern actually practiced what it talked about, noting that while most schools say that they look beyond the numbers, Southwestern actually does. The graduates were grateful for the interviewer allowing them to share their personal stories beyond the LSAT and humanize their applications. A common theme of gratitude was for the interviewer's kindness and empathetic approach.

The group also had a common message for other law schools. The theme was the missed opportunities for the school and that schools are "shortchanging themselves" by not actually assessing the whole applicant and hyper-focusing on the numbers. They noted that the numbers don't tell the whole story about the applicant and their law school potential; thus, other law schools miss out on applicants who have capacities critical to law school performance and success in practice but "just not the numbers."

We are grateful for each and every one of these phenomenal individuals and their contributions to make this essay possible, and we're proud to call them Southwestern alums. We are grateful for Southwestern's steadfast support of our project for over six years, and our collaboration with Dr. Elizabeth Anderson. And we are grateful to the following colleagues who have been instrumental in this project and, along with the two of us, are the interviewers that our graduates thanked over and over during the interviews for this essay: Lisa Gear, Dean of Admissions and Nancy Rojas Hill, Associate Director of Admissions; Professor Emeritus Catherine Carpenter; and Professors Christopher Cameron, Janet Nalbandyan, and Andrea Ramos.