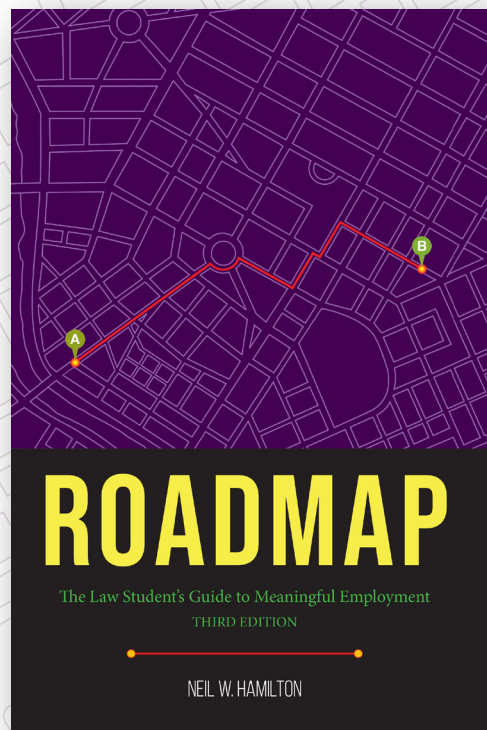


THERE ARE NO SHORTCUTS, BUT THE ROAD IS GETTING SHORTER

By James G. Leipold



Neil Hamilton continues to distill his roadmap for law students into ever more streamlined guidance on how to transform themselves from law students to fully fledged lawyers.

Hamilton's third edition of his *Roadmap: The Law Student's Guide to Meaningful Employment* (ABA Books, summer 2023), is a complete revision of the second edition, wherein he has wisely condensed the work from 224 pages to fewer than 50 pages to make it even more accessible to busy law students.

This new work is more akin to a workbook, with short sections of text followed by templates that law students can readily use and adapt for their own purposes, and frankly, templates that law school career services professionals can readily use and adapt for their own purposes.

The central mission of the workbook is to guide students through four essential developmental practices that are indispensable steps on the successful journey from student to professional.

1. The first is the sometimes uncomfortable but necessary exercise of deliberate self-reflection and discernment required for students to begin to understand their passions, interests, motivations, and strengths that, once understood, can lead them to a successful and fulfilling professional life as a lawyer or legal professional. This knowledge aligns with the growing understanding that they will have to make important decisions along the way about geography, community, practice area, practice setting, type of employer and type of client in order to find fulfilling careers.
2. The second is the all-powerful discovery that every successful lawyer must become a self-directed lifelong learner who takes complete responsibility for their own ongoing learning and professional development.
3. The third is the understanding that part of successfully navigating law school and the ensuing legal job market is the importance of building a portfolio of evidence

that demonstrates growing mastery of an increasing number of skills legal that employers value, and the ability to mount a successful and convincing argument that as a result of that mastery, the student brings real and demonstrable value to a particular employer.

4. The fourth is understanding the critical importance of networking and relationship building that all successful lawyers engage in, an uncomfortable discipline for many that is cleverly recast here under the metaphor of raising a tent under which one brings a constantly growing number of professional relationships, and that begins with relationships inside the law school building, including those with professors and career services and academic support professionals.

Without question, *Roadmap* is a book that every law student can benefit from. The hitch is that they cannot go it alone. Hamilton's elegant and streamlined sequence of template-guided activities assumes and requires a continuous and deliberate feedback loop from coaches, mentors, and supervisors throughout the process. Students are given a template for building and continually revising their own personalized professional development plan that takes them from their 1L year

through graduation and into initial employment, and arguably beyond. The process assumes continual observational one-on-one assessments from professors, career services and academic support professionals, and guiding supervisors in a variety of experiential learning experiences, both term-time and during 1L and 2L summers.

The question for school-side NALP members is, are we set up to support students using Hamilton's roadmap? There are dozens of law schools that are set up to provide the sort of mentoring, guidance, and support that this book anticipates, but there are many more schools that are simply not staffed or organized in a way to make that possible.

Which is not to say that every school can't eventually meet this important burden, and in fact with the ABA's recent revisions to Standard 303, I would venture to say that every law school is going to need to rethink how they provide professional identity support and experience to each of their students, and this book is as good a jumping off point for that conversation as any. (See the excellent three-part series in the *NALP Bulletin+*, [Revised ABA](#)

[Standards 303\(b\) and \(c\) and the Formation of a Lawyer's Professional Understanding](#) by Louis D. Billionis and Neil W. Hamilton, 2022.)

It is worth stepping back in time, to the 2007 publication of [Educating Lawyers: Preparation for the Profession of Law](#), the Carnegie Foundation's seminal study of legal education as part of its series of research reports on professional education. Their two-year study of legal education involved a comprehensive examination of teaching and learning in American and Canadian law schools and concluded, if you will allow me to grossly oversimplify a complex work, that graduate legal education in North America was among the very best in the world at teaching critical thinking skills, and among the very worst at leading students through professional identity formation. (The report held up medical education in North America as an example of graduate professional education that excelled at leading students through professional identity formation.)

Hamilton and many others in the legal academy took these findings to heart, and an enormous amount of good work has followed by countless leaders and academics both in terms of scholarship and in practical concrete changes to the law school curriculum and law school pedagogy. Arguably

the recent amendments to ABA Standard 303 are just one of the many indirect consequences to flow from the work done through Carnegie. Hamilton's *Roadmap* is another. Law schools continue, of necessity, to up their game on law student professional identity formation, all part of a necessary collapse of the distance between legal education and legal practice, a gap that arguably never existed between medical education and medical practice.

Roadmap is a generous contribution to both law students and the law student professional identity formation movement. Hamilton and his colleagues at the Holloran Center for Ethical Leadership in the Professions at the University of St. Thomas School of Law in Minnesota, namely Jerry Organ and Louis Billionis, have been generous in sharing their important work with the legal education community. They continue to run real time field research with their students at St. Thomas, report their findings, and build responsive student professional development resources to share with the community. Currently they are building [a "One File" coordinated coaching information system](#) where all of a student's coaches, mentors and supervisors can contribute assessments and feedback in one place — a resource they intend to make available to all law schools.

In Hamilton's own words, "the key first step in professional identity formation is for each student to take ownership of her own professional development." This third edition of *Roadmap* is as good and as straightforward and user-friendly a guide to that first step as exists. "It is tailored to foster each student's growth toward ownership over their professional development and progress toward the goals of bar passage and meaningful post-graduation employment," Hamilton writes. I agree with him, and I recommend the book for law students and law student professional identity and career services professionals alike. +

The book was published in August and is priced at less than \$20, a deliberate effort to make this useful tool as accessible as possible.



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