

**TRANSNATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL
LEGAL CAREERS: CALCULATING FOR
OPPORTUNITIES IN ACADEMIA, POLICY,
PRACTICE AND BEYOND**

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TRANSNATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL CAREERS: CALCULATING FOR OPPORTUNITIES IN ACADEMIA, POLICY, PRACTICE AND BEYOND

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ABSTRACT

Transnational and International Legal Career (TILC) opportunities will likely increase in the post-COVID 19 era. Being competitive for top TILC opportunities in academia, policy, practice and beyond requires some knowledge for conscious calculation. Although globalization and technology have made knowledge more accessible and could guide one's calculation, personal experiences offer a clearer pathway. Backed by personal stories, this article is a career autoethnography synthesizing and building on public lectures on TILC opportunities, including graduate and post-graduate work, delivered at the International Law Student Association workshops of University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University. The writer discusses how to navigate this career path. Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and Juris Doctorate (JD) students are the primary audience, while young lawyers (including graduate students) are the secondary audience, although non-law undergraduates and graduates could also benefit.

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I.0. GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE ON TERMINOLOGY

Let me start by clarifying my dimensions of career levels: the transnational and international. Like transnational education,¹ transnational careers may involve living in one country and working in another, often driven by globalization and technology. For instance, while living in Calgary in Canada, I worked as a research intern with Artis International based in the United States, chaired by two experienced policy researchers affiliated with the University of Oxford but also located at different countries: Dr. Richard Davis, a former Director of Prevention (terrorism) Policy at the White House who also worked as a Director at the United States Department of Homeland Security, and Dr. Scott Atran, a Research Director in Anthropology at Institut Jean Nicod-Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris France. Information technology made my work easy, as we mostly communicated using internet applications and tools. International careers involve working across countries. You may also think of it as working in a country different from where you are born or ordinarily domiciled. Adequate evidence points us to many impressive Nigerians that are leading legal professionals around the world, including lawyers and legal academics in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, the United States, and several other countries.

Academia, policy, practice and whatever is beyond are dimensions of career types. Although academic work takes place at primary and secondary schools,² my focus is on post-secondary levels. At the post-secondary level, working in academia means you are employed by academic institutions such as universities and colleges or initiatives within such institutions, including as graduate students carrying out research and teaching duties, but this does not necessarily mean that you are limited to just teaching and/or conducting research. As a lecturer at Memorial University some years ago, my job description

¹ C. Adick, "Transnational Education in Schools, Universities, and Beyond: Definitions and Research Areas" (2018) 8(2) *Transnational Social Review*, p. 124.

² See W. Doyle, "Academic Work" (1983) 53(2) *Review of Educational Research*, p. 159.

mainly required me to teach. Now at the Commonwealth Climate and Law Initiative (CCLI) at the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment, University of Oxford, and the Liu Institute Network for Africa (LINA) at the School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, UBC, my work has involved research, policy, and community engagement. As you can already tell, although you can do policy work as an academic, there is the option to devote more time working for governments (at the national and subnational levels), intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the African Union, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (especially think tanks), communities, and businesses (e.g. corporate social responsibility, risk management and sustainability compliance schemes). Policy work, focusing on making good decisions for public good,³ is incredibly rewarding because you make an immediate impact on people's lives, unlike academic research which may take some time to have real world impact or legal practice which can eventually amount to simply working towards the interests of whoever can afford to pay your fees (although there is pro bono practice, which I also did at the Women's Law Clinic at the University of Ibadan). I do not have great personal examples, but I can refer you to two of my closest friends: Ayoola Odeyemi who serves as the Senior Policy Advisor in the Indigenous Advanced Education and Skills Council, Canada, and has added real value to the education of indigenous peoples in Canada, and Yemi Adeyeye who works as the Director of Young Professionals for Agricultural Development, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations, has inspired young people's interest in agriculture around the world. You all know what legal practice means, including in-house practice in the corporate and financial sectors, so I would not say much about it. What I should draw your attention to are the attractive areas of legal practice that are emerging across geographical scales. Now is the time to build your expertise in those areas. My top three are climate law (especially low-carbon law), information technology law, and indigenous law — at least in North America where I have lived for some time. The actual “hot areas” may vary

³ S. Torjman, *What is Policy* (Ottawa: The Caledon Institute of Social Policy: 2005): available at <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/544ENG.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2020).

across jurisdictions. Some opportunities have come my way simply because I accidentally started working on renewable energy (a subset of low-carbon law) in Nigeria as a founding partner at a start-up law firm called Lex Luminaire LP, where I published my first scholarly article on environmental law,⁴ and have built an expertise in the area,⁵ but other emerging fields might do the same for you. As you might have noticed, I initially started with low-carbon law and then moved to low-carbon policy, suggesting there are other career routes beyond strictly staying in the legal field. For instance, my career trajectory would immediately tell you I have focused more on policy than law: I have taught Sustainable Resource Management and Environmental Science students at Memorial University, carried out projects with multidisciplinary colleagues for the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, co-hosted public affairs shows within multidisciplinary teams on Vancouver Cooperative Radio, led a group of multidisciplinary tutors at the workshops of the Community Sustainability Global, and collaborated within multidisciplinary teams at CCLI at University of Oxford and LINA at UBC. These are jobs beyond traditional legal academic, policy, and practice routes.

Five sections follow. Section 2 ranks and advises on how to decide on TILC routes. Section 3 advises on the four key criteria to meet as a student: academic excellence, research experience, work experience and leadership experience. Section 4 advises on how to go about taking steps to achieve these criteria, including reading career literature, studying career and role models, and engaging career mentors. Section 5 advises on how much energy to put into achieving each of the criteria. Section 6 concludes.

⁴ B.R. Akinbola and T.T. Onifade, “Legal and Administrative Remedies in Environmental Law in Nigeria: Reform Proposition”, (2013) 1(1) *Afe Babalola University Ado-Ekiti Law Journal*, p. 320.

⁵ See, for instance, T.T. Onifade, “Renewable Energy in Nigeria: A Peep into Science, a Conclusion on Policy”, (2015) 1(1) *International Journal for Innovations in Science, Business & Technology*, p. 49; T.T. Onifade, “Global Clues for Choosing Suitable Support Systems for Renewable Energy in the Power Sector”, (2015) 6(1) *Renewable Energy Law and Policy Review*, p. 25; T.T. Onifade, “Hybrid Renewable Energy Support Policy in the Power Sector: The Contracts for Difference and Capacity Market Case Study”, (2016) 95 *Energy Policy*, p. 390.

2.0. RANKING AND DECIDING ON TILC ROUTES

To give you a sense of the degree of preparation required for these career routes, I would like to rank them. My ranking is based on my experience working within and across the routes in the past 10 years (Post-Call to Bar in 2010), so other people may think differently. Legal practice is the easiest for obvious reasons. Without prejudice against other great things people may do, all you need to be a successful lawyer are: law degree,⁶ practicing license (e.g. Body of Benchers Certificate), rich lawyering skills and a good network of clients and colleagues. Getting excellent grades might give you an edge in many ways, for instance in getting your first job and building a solid network, but there is no guarantee that you would be more successful than other lawyers with terrible grades. Ironically, having excellent grades could also be a disadvantage — I know lawyers that became outstanding because they were forced to start their private practice due to their poor grades, which closed the doors to getting positions at elite law firms — but would likely enable you to launch your career and start earning a decent salary without any delay. But to become an outstanding lawyer, your grades have little to nothing to do with it. Policy work follows in the hierarchy. Unlike legal practice, you need more than grades, lawyering skills, and a network. You should have decent research and leadership skills and values. The ability to influence others, maturity in handling situations and empathy for vulnerable people would make you go far. Keep in mind that while you can learn research and develop values, they are not easily teachable.

Moving on, by far the toughest career route is academic work, including teaching and research. Many academic jobs require you to combine both research and teaching and may ask for some additional academic leadership work (called service). Having excellent grades, strong research experience and some values is often a minimum requirement to be successful, but you need much more to be outstanding. Counter-intuitively, depending on the country, an

⁶ For instance, Bachelor of Laws (LLB) or Juris Doctorate (JD), and professional diplomas (e.g. Nigerian Law School qualifying exams and American bar exams) in law. While academic programmes such as LLB and JD prepare students mainly in substantive law, professional diploma programmes often train them in procedural law.

academic job may not even attract mouth-watering remuneration when compared to legal practice and policy careers. While the pay is decent in Australia, most parts of Europe and North America, and, increasingly, some parts of Asia and the Middle East, I am not sure this is the case in most of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean. However, what seems to be consistent across jurisdictions is that you get a lot of freedom, both intellectual (you can largely decide how to teach and what to research) and physical (when not teaching, many institutions allow you to work from home in pajamas!).

Now, how do you decide which route? Think about your values: people who tend to be driven by ideas might find academic career more rewarding because of the intellectual freedom it gives; others that want to pursue certain values, for instance pursuing public good, may find policy careers rewarding; and yet some others who want to make substantial money may take interest in some types of legal practice (e.g. traditional corporate and financial law), while others who want to fight for the vulnerable may decide to ignore optimum pay and go the way of other types of legal practice (e.g. corporate governance, human rights law, environmental law). These are just examples, so things may be different depending on what drives you and where you work. If you are ambitious and have the time, for instance where you finish your LLB or JD studies at a young age, you can try a bit of everything. Doing so takes time in terms of your training and responsibilities. The desire to take such a path might partly explain why some people have many (sometimes embarrassing) degrees or spend many years trying different things out. That is the path I have taken.

3.0. WHAT SHOULD YOU DO AS A STUDENT?

Managers (used broadly to mean any official that manages employees across academic, policy, practice, and other routes) use four main things to evaluate people across these career routes, including graduate and post-graduate opportunities such as professional or research training and awards: academic excellence, research experience, work experience and leadership experience. Exactly what would carry weight depends on many variables, including the nature of the job, location, organization, the leadership at any point, and who

you know there, among other things, but we can draw some generalizations.

We can generalize the degree of difficulty for each of these variables. While academic excellence might sound daunting to many of you at this stage of your training, you will realize in hindsight that it is the easiest. For instance, grades and awards (scholarships, fellowships, prizes, etc.) require hard work but are straight forward at your level: you master what we already know (existing knowledge), and then get rewarded for doing so. Research experience is much tougher than academic excellence because research often requires you to build on what we already know especially if you publish refereed or peer-reviewed articles. There are other easy ways to get research experience, for instance supporting more established researchers, but your goal should be to mature intellectually. Leadership is the toughest because you must be able to influence others to follow you. If you force your decisions on others, that is not leadership.

3.1. Academic Excellence

Reflecting the sense that academic success⁷ means more than grades, academic excellence involves deep learning and understanding.⁸ However, academic excellence is still often interpreted as having very good or excellent grades at the time of graduation. Using the 5-point grading scale, a very good grade is anything 4 point and above (higher threshold of Second Class Upper, equal to A- in North American grading systems), while an excellent grade starts from 4.5 (First Class, equal to A or A+ in North American grading systems). First class is no longer for God as it used to be many years ago. You probably have it or must have met someone that got it. Therefore, achieve it if you can. Alternatively, try to maintain a higher threshold of Second Class Upper. Although you may not get some opportunities a First Class would give you immediately, there will be many others, and you may even end up with some better opportunities.

⁷ See M. Cachia, S. Lynam, and R. Stock, "Academic Success: Is It Just about Grades?" (2018) 3(2) *Higher Education Pedagogies*, p. 434.

⁸ B. Gereboff, "Taking Control: Defining Academic Excellence" (2015) *Hayidion: The Ravsak Journal*, p. 12.

Partly because many students worry and have asked me questions about their grades, let me illustrate with myself. Like many above-average students (although, as my classmates would tell you, I doubt that I qualify as a serious student during my studies at OAU), I had decent grades during the early stages of my LLB studies and was on my way to a First Class in a class of almost 300 students at OAU. At OAU, having a First Class was still rare back then (only one colleague, also my friend, was diligent enough to make it!), but that should not be anyone's excuse for missing it. Without a doubt, I had my "fault": I did not know the value of a First Class or plan for it (none of my family members even knew anything about that); took part in too many non-academic activities (especially dancing, singing, partying and politics); had laughable memory (and Nigeria's legal training system and teachers require one to ridiculously memorize, which, if moderate, would have its value, although there are teachers who take exception to blind "*la cram, la pour*"— my favourite teacher at OAU in that regard was Dr. Bode Ayorinde, Founder of Achievers University and now a member of the Nigerian House of Representatives); and was distracted by many other life issues outside school, among other things. Nonetheless, some of the skills I learnt doing other things have made my life better. Arguably more than I should have, I polished my research and leadership skills back then. So, the million-dollar question then is: has not having a First Class as an LLB student affected me? That is a likely yes: when I just graduated, I would probably have received some overly generous and prestigious scholarships right away. However, now reflecting on it, I cannot tell for sure that the negative impact is significant, having received those scholarships anyway (to be clear, I have also had First Class in other degrees, so that thwarts the full picture). Besides, grades are meaningless once you get to an advanced career stage. While grades may get you there, grades cannot keep you there—what you can do and your productivity are far more important.

In any event, more significant are other challenges that, in retrospect, appear to be much more troubling than my grades: ignorance and "poverty" (although, my interpretation of poverty now goes beyond having financial resources). Partly because I had no computer or ready access to the internet (which was just becoming popular, so I learnt

most things reading Microsoft Encarta on a laptop owned by my roommate and, later, partner at Lex Luminaire LP, Dapo Egunwale), I knew nothing about scholarships and other opportunities. Although I did internships and competitions (moot, essay, and debate), I did not apply for most things, especially awards, as an LLB student. Now looking back, I often feel I wasted my LLB grades because of my ignorance. At such, I consider ignorance to be a more fundamental problem. Also, the same goes for poverty. To be clear, I did not know or think I was poor, or think about poverty, as an LLB student (you do not know what you do not know, so I did not know I was poor because I did not really know what being poor meant), so my awareness was subsequent. My father retired before I started my LLB studies and my mother had health issues, but they still offered me everything they had, for instance food (yams were my favourite, because my mum left teaching to sell them and offered me in abundance) and tuition (fortunately, OAU was one of the cheapest at the time, so we paid just over ₦5,000, and I had some help from my siblings), but I largely thrived reading friends' books. At the height of poverty, there were times I begged people on the streets for transportation fare (just a couple of times, I swear!), and getting access to books was tough. I remember thinking of or trying to join some of my inspiring friends — Abayomi Ogayemi, Anwuli Ikem, Femi Iyiola, Lulu Onakpoya, Ogechi Oluigbo, Feyisayo Adegboye, Dunni Shodipo, Tosin Bolarinwa and Tomi Adewoye — at the pre-degree classrooms at Ipetumodu, OAU library and classrooms, or elsewhere, where I could use their books, but I was terrible at studying with others: I often slept off or wanted to talk to girls (you know, as a teenager, what can I say?). For instance, in our year 1, Abayomi Ogayemi would come to my room to get me so we could go study overnight, but I almost always slept off (and he did too!), except when talking to girls, so I eventually started hiding anytime he came. Someone I cannot forget and would be eternally grateful to is Titilayo Fadairo who eventually gave me her books, but I also borrowed other books owned by my kind-hearted friends, Abayomi Ogayemi and Adeola Owoade.

Amazingly, immediately after graduation, I got a half-tuition scholarship to pursue a master's degree in the United Kingdom. Studying or living outside Nigeria was not my thing (out of ignorance!), but, due to her

good heart, my sister, Toyin Adekanmbi, submitted the application without telling me. “Wow!” was my reaction upon receiving the offer, since I did not know that some people gave free money to kids as a reward for getting good grades. However, then comes the financial problem again. Where would I get the money to pay for the remaining half of my tuition? Reluctantly, my dad and I went to meet his friend, Archbishop Ayo Ladigbolu, to see if he could help us raise some funds from the Oyo State Government; although I got other scholarships from the Oyo State Government (for law school and another master’s), that admission did not pan out. Looking back, I wish I knew about Commonwealth Scholarship and a handful of other awards out there at the time.

Jumping out of my discussion is the key message I would like to pass that, while grades can make or break, having excellent or very good scores does not mean you are better or worse. Your grades often reflect the aggregate of your decisions, good or bad. Like me, you may just have more options to choose from with very good or excellent grades. I have enjoyed the freedom to try out the academic, policy and practice routes. Someone with bad grades may be confined in their career choices. Not that they cannot be an outstanding lawyer or policy official making more money or having better impact. However, it would be tough, if not impossible, to get scholarships and other awards based on academic merit. Working as an academic in a competitive setting would also almost be impossible. But then, what really matters are your values and what you want in life. What do you care about? You have time to decide on that and make suitable decisions.

Awards are another important component of academic excellence.⁹ Please feel free to be an Oliver Twist: the more you get, the better. During my LLB studies, we had limited access to information because the internet was new to Nigeria. While we got internal awards within

⁹ When you apply for graduate studies and awards, including scholarships and fellowships, reviewers often consider previous awards that you have received in their evaluation of your application. For instance, the most prestigious graduate awards in the world such as the Rhodes Scholarships (United Kingdom), Marshall Scholarships (United States) and Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarships (Canada) consider previous awards to judge academic excellence.

the university and through competitions, low internet access made learning about external awards difficult. Right now, you have too much access to information! Additionally, there were fewer award opportunities back then. Most of us only applied for things shared through our friends and networks. Again, globalization has now made it possible to easily apply for awards outside your geographical location.

How do you decide which awards to apply for? That is one of the questions I asked my first academic mentor in Canada, Prof. Gabriela Sabau at Memorial University. Her reply was to apply for everything: writing competitions, government scholarships and bursaries. These are channels to get you early awards. Also, organize seminars and share awards, albeit based on merit. Such awards would carry some weight for future opportunities.

Yet another component of academic excellence, specialized short courses outside your degree studies, would also give a positive impression and suggest that you are invested in your area of interest.¹⁰ You have likely seen one or two around or heard about them. I did too as an LLB student. Negotiation and Conflict Management Group brought its Pre-certification and Associate Mediator courses during my LLB studies. Because I was open to new opportunities, I took the courses. Many of such courses are now available online. Some organizations (universities, intergovernmental organizations, etc.) host their online learning platforms, for instance the World Intellectual Property Organization and the World Bank, but numerous others use online hosting platforms such as Coursera and edX. Many of the short courses are free, but some may require payment. Apparently, I imagine e-courses (and other online opportunities) will increase in the post-COVID-19 global society because we have learnt to do so much online.

¹⁰ For instance, in applications for awards, the specialized courses may help a candidate establish “the relevance of the proposed academic programme to his or her scholarly and career plans.” Marshall Scholarships, “Criteria: Academic Merit”, available at <https://www.marshallscholarship.org/apply/criteria-and-who-is-eligible/criteria-academic-merit> (accessed 3 June 2020).

Tutorial is my final component of academic excellence. Teaching others is one of the best ways to learn and test what you know, but you also get to help others, which is even more gratifying. You may already have existing platforms to teach others, but, if not, you can also create one. For instance, as the Principal Liaison Officer of the Law Students' Society at OAU, I created the Law Group Tutorial because none existed at the time. I recruited top students to teach freshmen. Numerous students enrolled and found it rewarding, and the tutors also strengthened their knowledge and ability to impart knowledge.

3.2. Research Experience

Everyone needs some research experience, but those interested in academic and policy careers might find it hard to succeed without it. Several opportunities for research experience are around you, but many students undervalue and/or misunderstand the idea of research. Truly ignorant students may think LLB research does not carry much weight, or that they do not need it because they want to practice. They would rather spend their time organizing conferences and bringing public figures. I did all of that too. However, having some research experience might give you more opportunities than interacting with big names. For instance, my research experience immediately after I left OAU got me job offers and other opportunities from Prof. Elisabeta Olarinde (Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Administration, and Provost, College of Law, Afe Babalola University) and Dr. Peter Obutte (Deputy Director-Academics, Centre for Petroleum Energy Economics and Law, and Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law, University of Ibadan), and subsequently in Canada, for instance as a Lecturer and later the opportunity to be an Assistant Professor through Prof. Gabriela Sabau at Memorial University, and more recently as a Research Associate at Commonwealth Climate and Law Initiative at University of Oxford through Prof. Janis Sarra at UBC. Knowing big names can only get you so far, but your research skills can open doors that even such people might not be able to enter. Of course, knowing big names and excelling at research could achieve the same thing, but just knowing big names might not. Some other students are not ignorant, meaning they are open to research, but may

not know how to get the experience. So many openings await you: carrying out research for debates and moot competitions, working on entries for essay competitions, helping out with your student journal or newspaper, volunteering as a research assistant for lecturers and more senior researchers such as doctoral students (locally and transnationally), and helping with research at legal clinics, among several others. Not many LLB students get to publish quality articles, especially in refereed journals, but actively seek that opportunity because it is probably the most significant evidence of research experience you would have at your level. However, avoid mediocre work or publishing too many articles, because you will eventually dislike the quality of your current publications when you know better.

Again, let me give you some examples from my time at OAU, while acknowledging there are more significant research opportunities now, including international moot competitions that were not available during my time. I was invited to present my first research paper at a Justice Chambers' Meeting in year 1. Eventually, I also did some research as counsel and coach for moot competitions, speaker and coach for debate competitions (although I was fortunate to win a debate award, I was better at the research part, not the speaking part, because I was bad at memorizing things), and lead author for competitive essay competitions (including one on behalf of my class, which earned us the Ife Law Research Awards, and the Obasanjo Presidential Library Essay Competition). Later, I started getting some recognition as a student research leader. I coordinated research as Lead Counsel and later Coach for the Justice Amina Adamu Augie (Justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria) Moot Competition, Chair of the Inaugural Wole Olanipekun (Senior Advocate of Nigeria) National Moot Competition, Deputy Editor-in-Chief of the 27th Volume of the "Advocate: International Journal of the Law Students' Society" (the Advocate) and research and programme consultant to Prima Strata Club for a national debate competition, among several other engagements.

3.3. Work Experience

Many of you already get work experience through internships and externships, so I would only draw your attention to some things you

might want to consider. First, you might want to do internships that suit your area of interest, not just at law firms. If you want to be a trial lawyer, then a litigation law firm is the way to go. But rather than litigation, you may want to practice within companies, in which case you should intern within the industry. Some of you are already considering joining the bench, so perhaps you should intern with courts and other judicial staff, including judges, magistrates and court clerks. For those interested in policy work, then intern with government departments or politicians at any level. If your goal is to join academia, why not volunteer as a research assistant for academics, doctoral students and other researchers, and research-oriented organizations? Altogether, also remember that, inspired by globalization and with the help of technology, you can now take up opportunities abroad. For instance, you could work as an intern or a research assistant to someone in another country.

Because I had inadequate knowledge of career routes, I did a bit of trial, judicial and academic internships. I interned with the Law Firm of Wahab Shittu in Lagos as an LLB student, and then externed with the Law Firm of Funmilayo A. Quadri in Ibadan as a law school student. While working with Ms. Quadri, she was gracious enough to also allow me to proofread the Nigerian Supreme Court Quarterly Law Report, which gave me additional professional editing experience that has been useful in my career. During Law School, I also externed with the Oyo State High Court, Federal High Court Division in Ibadan, and the Court of Appeal Division in Ibadan.

3.4. Leadership Experience

Leadership is tough! You need to do better than having academic excellence, research experience and work experience. You need to think beyond yourself and inspire other people. You see why it is tough? Leadership cannot be forced. Start small by trying to lead your juniors, then work your way up to lead colleagues and organizations, for instance by becoming chair of committees or head of chambers. Where there is no organization that would serve your cause, you could even start one: my favourite example for that is Wole Kunuji at OAU who started a few student organizations. Also, start thinking of

what you can do beyond the university, for instance community projects and causes within your local governments.

Most of my leadership work at OAU were within the university, specifically in the Law Students' Society and Justice Chambers (I did other non-academic leadership work, including serving as the head of a dance group and a music group, but these were not professional), but I also had the opportunity to connect with senior scholars and professionals across Nigeria through my leadership work. For instance, while serving as the Deputy Editor-In-Chief of the Advocate, my good friend and Editor-in-Chief, Feyisayo Adegboye, and I travelled to solicit articles from faculty members at the University of Ibadan (e.g. Professor J.O. Anifalaje and Professor Yinka Omorogbe), University of Lagos (e.g. Professor Oyelowo Oyewo, Professor Ayo Atsenuwa and Professor Abiola Sanni) and Lagos State University (e.g. Prof. Olusegun Yerokun and Professor B.A. Susu), among others. Also, my team and I travelled to meet Chief Wole Olanipekun (Senior Advocate of Nigeria) who hosted us when we decided to honour him with our volume of the journal (although we eventually handed the volume over to another team because our set left for law school).

4.0. HOW DO YOU GO ABOUT WHAT YOU SHOULD DO AS A STUDENT?

You should start considering now whether you would like to focus on a route from the get-go or do a bit of everything. That decision would determine the steps to take, for instance which of academic excellence, research experience, work experience and leadership experience should take most of your time.

Because you may not know enough variables to consider to be able to think adequately, start by reading career literature. While there is literature on transnational¹¹ and international¹² legal careers, including

¹¹ See, for example, D. Campbell (ed.), *Transnational Legal Practice: A Survey of Selected Countries* (Deventer: Kluwer Law and Taxation, 1982); L. S. Spedding, *Transnational Legal Practice in the EEC and United States* (Transnational Publishers Inc.: 1987).

¹² See, for example, J.W. Williams (ed.), *Career Preparation and Opportunities in International law* (American Bar Association Section of International Law and Practice and International Law Institute: Washington DC, 1984); M.W. Janis,

those looking at specific career levels such as those of Master of Laws (LLM) graduates,¹³ there is yet to be a systematic body of literature on TILC guiding students and young lawyers especially in Africa, so you could start by reading articles (such as this one) providing some insight. Good TILC articles are written by people that have quality experience or expertise in the transnational and international space. To know whether you should spend your time reading a TILC article, read about the writer.

Also, study those I call “career models,” for instance through career profiles and learn from role models. I distinguish career models and role models: like models in the fashion industry, career models are celebrities in your field, representing your picture of an ideal career personage at specific levels, while role models are people you could learn a variety of things from. Career models have lived out what you might be reading, so their trajectories mirror your aspiration, while role models exhibit aspects of a lifestyle that you would like to emulate, even if they have not lived out your aspiration. Then, talk to career mentors. Like role models but unlike career models, career mentors have relevant knowledge to guide you, even if they have not lived out their advice. Although their knowledge may come from personal experience, they might also have learnt more about your area of interest in other ways, for instance through networks and research.

Engage career literature, career and role models, and career mentors strategically. While reading career literature, it is better to compare diverse contributions. That way, you can find more nuances and bring out the most helpful lessons, for instance recurring views. Also, digest the journey of career models and get role models to guide you along your pathway, whether similar or different from that of your career mentor. Make efforts to get your best career models as mentors but realize this is an ideal scenario that might not come to be. For instance, you may not be able to contact them, or they may not have the time

Careers in International Law (American Bar Association Section of international Law and Practice: Washington DC, 1993); M. Bombau (ed.), *Careers in International Law*, 5th ed. (American Bar Association Section on International Law: Chicago, 2019).

¹³ C. Silver, “States Side Story: Career Paths of International LL.M. Students, or ‘I Like to be in America’” (2012) 80 *Fordham Law Review*, p. 2383.

to mentor you. Role models could fill that gap. Additionally, while learning about career models is extremely helpful, role models and career mentors are better suited to brainstorming your unique circumstances, which could then shape the advice you get to be tailor-made. For instance, if you have genuine family responsibilities, then you may want to get research, work and leadership opportunities that come with some remuneration rather than as a volunteer, so an experienced mentor or role model may be in the position to bring that consideration into perspective.

4.1. Career Literature

TILC literature is still in its infancy. For that reason, you may not have many options. Eventually, a body of literature would develop, so there will be more rigorous investigation of career trajectories and lessons. At that time, there would be more room to determine the value of TILC writings.

While at OAU, I did not have access to any TILC literature because none really existed. Even now, there are only a handful of articles, most of which use lived experience. However, there is no systematic body of work providing guidance on TILC.

4.2. Career and Role Models

Unlike career literature, career models are plentiful. Rarely, career models are close to you. For instance, you may have celebrity lecturers and professors. While at OAU, my career model was Prof. Ademola Popoola (former Dean of Law, OAU, among other notable positions). He represented what I wanted to be and partly influenced my desire not to study outside Nigeria. More often, career models are distant. For instance, just before graduating from OAU, I started reading about notable scholars, including Prof. Taslim Olawale Elias (former Dean of Faculty of Law, University of Lagos, former Attorney-General and Chief Justice of Nigeria, and former Justice and later President of the International Court of Justice, among other notable positions), Emeritus Prof. David Adedayo Ijalaye S.A.N (former Dean, Faculty of Law, and former Deputy Vice Chancellor and Chairman of Board of Postgraduate Studies, OAU, first Emeritus Professor of Law in Nigeria, and former Attorney-General and Commissioner for

Justice, Ondo State, among other notable positions), Prof. Itse Sagay S.A.N. (former Dean of Faculty of Law, OAU, among other notable positions), Prof. Okorodudu Fubara (also former Dean of Faculty of Law, OAU, and first Nigerian female Professor of Law, among other notable positions) and Prof. Akin Oyebo (former Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Lagos, and former Vice-Chancellor, University of Ado-Ekiti, among other notable positions), so they became distant career models. Combined, some of these scholars embody various aspects of what I would like to be in the future. Anyhow, also note that, as you mature in your training, your career models may change. Although mine have not changed significantly, I have added others to my list.

Reading about career models can be incredibly inspiring. As a sort of reality check or self-evaluation, you could measure your achievements against theirs along the way. For instance, you could verify what they did at undergraduate and graduate levels. However, be careful in the lessons you draw. Measure yourself against career models with serious caution. Put into perspective their achievements by trying to investigate or imagine their unique circumstances, for instance where they were at your stage, rather than giving yourself unnecessary hard time by comparing your current stage with theirs. Remember, you come from different backgrounds with distinct challenges and opportunities. For instance, up to the 1990s, it was still relatively rare for legal scholars to earn doctoral degrees,¹⁴ but doing so in the 2000s onward could significantly impact your career prospects in academia, and many Nigerian law students in those decades had access to domestic scholarships on merit, which is arguably no longer the case. Also, they have had more time and/or resources to do things! As such, do not measure their achievements in their 50s to yours in your 20s.

¹⁴ That remains the case in most parts of the United States and some parts of Australia and Canada where academics mainly require a Juris Doctorate (JD) to teach and carry out research in a university law programme. A JD is the equivalent of a Bachelor of Laws (LLB), although they have different methods of design and delivery. In most parts of the United States, mostly foreigners earn a doctorate in law. Called Doctor of Juridical Science (SJD or JSD), this doctorate is largely different from Doctor of Philosophy in Law (PhD) in terms of design and delivery.

A major challenge with regards to career models while I was at OAU was my limited access to information. I did not know much about the profiles or other details of people that had gone before me early enough. Until my final couple of years when I read about the likes of Prof. Taslim Olawale Elias, hardly do I remember reading the profile of any Nigerian leading in the transnational and international scenes, except Prof. Wole Soyinka (Emeritus Professor at OAU at the time, although he was rarely in his office), but he is not a lawyer. Although I knew Emeritus Prof. David Adedayo Ijalaye S.A.N and Prof. Okorodudu Fubara at OAU, I learnt more about their work in Nigeria during public presentations, so I did not know much about their TILC opportunities and contributions. Not knowing about people in the TILC space meant I did not know I could do more than I was doing. The Faculty of Law, the Law Student Society or other organizations could have remedied that problem by bringing eminent Nigerians in that space, but they focused more on Nigerian stars in Nigeria (which is also good, although a mix of local and TILC stars would be better). Commendably, the International Law Student Association is now filling that significant gap. The University of Ibadan and Obafemi Awolowo University chapters have invited me to interact with them, inspiring this article and an international TILC project that I coordinate.

Like career models, role models could inspire you. More importantly, they are also often readily available and approachable. I had numerous role models, many of them also good friends that were inspiring at OAU. My final year project supervisor and the Dean of Law at the time, Prof. Ademola Popoola, was an excellent role model. I remember we once travelled to Ibadan to get some book donations, and I found spending time with him enjoyable. He treated students equally regardless of their economic status or pedigree, so that earned him my respect. There were other faculty members I looked up to: Prof. J.O. Fabunmi and Prof. Okorodudu Fubara from a distance, and Dr. Akinwale Orifowomo, Dr. Femi Odunsi, Dr. A.O. Ogunfolu and Dr. Bode Ayorinde more closely. They either taught me or I read about their work, although my relationship with them was not a close mentor-mentee one (except for Dr. Orifowomo, who later became a good mentor). Additionally, I had several senior friends and/or role models that inspired me, so numerous that I cannot remember them

all or might have forgotten the proper way to spell their names: Ola Faro, Bisi Makanjuola, Iruoma Ejie, Chuks Okoye, Olalekan Idowu (a.k.a. Lakeside), Akinkunmi Akinrinade, Yinka Salau, Ige Asemudara, Tola Bela, Ekemeke Ojuju, Misbau Alamu Lateef, Temidayo Odulaja (a.k.a. T12), Kenny Ajetunmobi, Titi Fadairo, Ibiyemi Fashina, Funmilayo Akinosi, Bose Malomo, Francis-King Akinlotan, Tolani Adegbagbo, Agbalaya Abiodun (a.k.a Sagay), Akin Dada, Mobolaji Akintunde, Sola Kadiri, Seun Bakare, Anthony Aregbe, Joan Igezunya, Kemi Bonuola, Femi Okin, Joba Oloba, Wole Kunuji, Dayo Fagbemi, Debo Oladinni (a.k.a. Debo Labour), Tolu Omoleye, Bisayo Busari, Titi Owonikoko, Shina Balogun and Damilola Fatula. Like the academics, they were more of role models, although many of them were also friends.

4.3. Career Mentors

Often, senior students and junior lecturers are willing to guide junior students on career paths. Meanwhile, except senior lecturers and professors show deep interest in you, do not waste precious time pursuing them because they have too much on their plates. See what you could learn from the journey of such senior students and lecturers. Even better, ask if they might be interested in taking you under their wings, but be careful how you do this: offer to help them out one way or the other (e.g. ask them if you could help with anything, offer to help on small projects, promote their work), so it does not seem like you only want to keep getting without giving back.

My decisions as an LLB student were not as calculated as what I advise. Partly because of my ignorance, I was awkward with lecturers and did not discuss much of my academic issues with senior students, so I really had no career mentor. While getting close to graduation and subsequently, I developed solid relationships with academic mentors, starting with Prof. J.O. Anifalaje (I met him while working on the Advocate and he took me under his wings, including reluctantly recommending me for a position with the Oyo State Ministry of Education while discouraging me from taking it, claiming that the job would be a waste of my talent). Eventually, Dr. Bukola Akinbola, Prof. Elisabeta Olarinde (who offered me an academic job in the

classroom!), Comrade Femi Aborisade and Mr. Dare Adebayo became outstanding mentors at the University of Ibadan.

Not having a close career mentor was largely my own fault, and not because lecturers and senior students were not willing to be one. At a point, I was a professional dancer (I danced with Sola Jokotola, Jide Famuyiwa, Yinka Salau, Toba Kalejaiye, Ogayemi Abayomi, Bisola Olanipekun and many others, performing with or collaborating with dance groups such as Alpha Dancers, Shake'em Up, Law Dance Group and our OAU stars, for instance Temidayo Odulaja a.k.a. T12). I also did other “interesting” (in the Canadian parlance) things that the Nigerian culture frowned at, for instance making my hair and wearing earrings, somewhat making me a misfit in a typical Nigerian law department. I remember one of my lecturers, Dr. Taiwo Ogunleye, called me to order. He cautioned that a public figure in the Faculty of Law should not be doing those things.

4.4. Taking the Steps

You need academic excellence throughout your time as a student. As a starting point, that means you should try to get very good or excellent grades, at least a higher threshold of an Upper Second Class, but even a First Class if you can. Also, get as many awards as you can, lead tutorials and take specialized courses.

For people who are above and beyond in doing other things, for instance outstanding research and leadership work, it may be difficult to maintain a First Class and get academic awards because doing so requires conscious dedication and time. Therefore, you must decide what is more important to your future and whether you can afford the opportunity cost, for instance sacrificing an A for a B to lead a research project or moot competition. Remember that when you sacrifice grades and academic awards, you may be earning research and leadership awards, or other benefits that you get from your research or leadership engagement. Rarely, such awards or other engagement benefits may also earn you some credit to make up for the grades you lose. Nevertheless, I strongly encourage you to maintain very good grades irrespective of whatever else you do, such that awards, specialized courses and tutorials are an addition. Try not

to go below a 4 point on a 5-point grade scale, especially if interested in academic and policy career routes, and try to earn a few awards at the least, even if you do not get into specialized courses and tutorials.

After achieving academic excellence and learning how to maintain it, then comes the time for research, work, and leadership experience. Getting most of your research experience from year 2 or 3, after you have maintained strong grades and acclimatized to life as a student, would be wise. Rushing into research in year 1 like I did might not be a good idea, since you are new to the system and are untested. Subsequently, you can get research and/or work experience from year 3. If you are sure what career route you would like to take, then it is easier to decide how much research and/or work experience you would need. Leadership experience should come latest in year 4. You would already be a senior student and should have everything else covered.

5.0. HOW MUCH ENERGY SHOULD YOU PUT INTO YOUR PREPARATION?

Like I have hinted, what you prioritize should be based on what you want to do. I encourage you to achieve 100% of academic excellence, research and/or work experience, and leadership experience, if that is possible for you (what a superhuman!). If otherwise, then you could strategize to achieve specific percentages by your final year. For those interested in an academic career, aim at an overall of 50% academic excellence, 30% research experience, and 20% leadership experience. If you want a policy career, target 50% academic excellence, 20% research experience and 30% leadership experience. For those interested in legal practice, pursue 50% academic excellence, 25% research experience and 25% leadership experience. You would notice that academic excellence is the highest with a constant value, simply because it carries more weight for subsequent opportunities immediately after graduation (the weight reduces as you advance in your career, for instance in graduate school).

These suggestions are based on my experience, so do not take them hook, line, and sinker. Try your best to be the best, but do not do beyond your best. Remember things may not work out as planned,

which is just how life works. If you fail, then try again, and again. For instance, if you miss out on academic excellence, research and/or work experience, or leadership experience as an LLB student, attempt to fix that error as a Master of Laws student if you have enough motivation. Even if you did not miss out but had other circumstances, you could do something to enhance your opportunities. For instance, because I only got a master's scholarship that covered half tuition immediately after my LLB at OAU, I decided to go for a master's degree at the University of Ibadan, which eventually opened doors to full scholarships. Since then, I have only considered or accepted academic scholarships and other opportunities with adequate funding for not only me but also my parents, with some trickle to others (and, in different ways and to varying degrees, forfeited those with inadequate funding, including some from Harvard University, University of Ottawa, Columbia University and University of Oxford). Alternatively, you could also prove yourself in other non-academic ways. For instance, if you invent something significant or make a new idea work in a way we have never seen, no reasonable person will care about your academic merits. Invent or create a new or significant body of knowledge, social movement or business that becomes successful, then see if your grades would still carry much weight. Of course, your opportunities might not be broad (e.g. jumping from academia to policy), but even narrow opportunities have their worth (e.g. you can become an expert and a leader in your specific area of work, for instance in a business sector).

Nonetheless, avoid anything that would negatively affect other important things in your life, for instance your relationship with God, health, family, values, and humanity. Career only comes after these other invaluable areas of your life. Altogether, if you fail in one area, remember you are growing. You will have many opportunities to make it right. Also, many of your achievements at this level will not make it into your future public profile. For instance, when organizations ask for my biography, I am often unable to include the things I did as an LLB student. As such, think of your current achievements mainly as stepping stones, meaning they do not have much value in and of themselves. If anyone achieves so much as an undergraduate but does not build on it, then that does not mean much. Additionally, remember

that merit (e.g. brilliance, or indicators such as good grades, research productivity, leadership profile, etc.) only gets you so far. When you get to a stage, you would realize that you need people to take genuine interest in you, which often means they are ready to help. There would be people that are equally or nearly equally qualified, so decisions would be made based on other things beyond your merit. For instance, in choosing people for some of the projects I work on, when having to decide between multiple people that are equally or somewhat equally qualified, I look at their character and overall humanness (for me, character and humanness are even more important than merit). Thus, merit is only a part of the picture.

6.0. CONCLUSION

I have clarified TILC routes, and then discussed how to rank and decide on the career paths, what to do or not do, how to go about what to do and how much energy to put in. Yet, there are other important things to keep in mind, which I cannot fully cover, including your attitude to life and other people.

The first two points are general. Focusing on your attitude to life and other people, they are probably more important than academic, research, work, and leadership merits. First, understand God—or whatever name you call the solid foundation that keeps life together—is ultimate in everything. You get so much joy and mitigate trouble (depression and others) when you do. Also, there will be challenges in life, which only God can get you through. Second, consciously make efforts not only to develop yourself but also to exhibit sound character: among other things, love endlessly, be humble always (e.g. remember, many gifted people are in remote places without a chance to really explore their strengths, so opportunities make the difference; whatever you are doing, someone is doing better; and you may think you have “arrived” but might still be far away, so do not think too much of yourself), be patient (e.g. do not use people merely to achieve success; avoid using others’ success as a sole measure of yours; and remember, “...time and chance happen to them all!”), give willingly (give without thinking of getting back, except within professional relationships), and help others readily. Essentially, realize that life is not just about you but more about people around you. Even if you

achieve so much, your joy will come from sharing and caring, not merely having, or owning. Moreover, with God on your side, sound character will get you where merit or qualifications cannot. Therefore, take a break from your busy life, catch your breath, self-evaluate and rethink to fix your values from time to time.

The last two points are more specific. They revolve around your strategic career steps. First, build good relationships with some lecturers and colleagues. You cannot like everyone, and not everyone will like you, so do not waste your time trying to please all. Frankly, you do not need everyone! You only need a few good people that your values align, so having two or three lecturers to write you reference letters, and a few colleagues that you can grow together, is crucial. To be clear, you are likely to achieve little without those reference letters, and your colleagues might be your future network and referees. Second, actively search for opportunities. I did not do this at all as an LLB student, largely because I was ignorant, and partly because I had limited access to information. If I knew better, I should have looked for more opportunities even as an LLB student (conferences, scholarships, volunteering opportunities, etc.). Do not waste your grades and other qualifications like I often feel I did. You deserve to be rewarded for your talent and hard work.