

Applying to
Law School

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CONSIDERING THE FIELD OF LAW

What is a lawyer?

Lawyers interpret the law through actions and words for the protection of an individual, a business concern or an idea. They must be widely versed in a great many areas: the law, economics, history, human motivation and behavior, and the practicalities of day-to-day living. The education of lawyers never ends because they must constantly be abreast of information which may be of use to the client. Lawyers practice and specialize in different areas of the law, both in and out of the courtroom.

What are some different fields of law?

Admiralty Law

Business Law

- Antitrust
- Bankruptcy
- Contracts
- Corporate Law
- Ethics
- Mergers & Acquisitions
- Securities Law

Civil Rights

- Constitutional Law
- Education Law
- Labor & Employment Law

Criminal Law

Cyberlaw

Entertainment Law

Environmental Law

Family Law

Health Care Law

Intellectual Property

- Copyright Law
- Patent Law
- Trademark Law

International Law

Immigration

Municipal Government

Real Property Law

Tax Law

Torts

- Medical Malpractice
- Personal Injury
- Products Liability

What is a Legal Education?

- A legal education is designed to develop your analytical, creative, & logical reasoning abilities. Upon completion of an American Bar Association approved program, you are granted a JD, a Juris Doctor Degree.
- Law school will also strengthen your reading and debating skills.
- Lawyers must know how to analyze legal issues in light of the constantly changing state of the law and public policy.
- They must be able to advocate the views of individuals and diverse interest groups within the context of the legal system. They must be able to synthesize material that relates to multifaceted issues. They must give intelligent counsel on the law's requirements. Moreover, lawyers must write and speak clearly and be able to persuade and negotiate effectively.

What is involved in the law school curriculum?

- In nearly every state, graduation from an ABA-approved (American Bar Association) law school is required for admission to the Bar.
 - Each ABA-approved law school provides basic training in American law sufficient to qualify its graduates to take the bar examination in all states.
- Most law schools require three years of full-time attendance, or four years of part-time study, if offered.

- Many law schools utilize the “**Socratic Method**” of teaching.
 - This style requires students to come prepared to all lectures, as the professor will call on students at random to answer questions and hold in-depth conversations about the lecture and readings.
 - Law students learn to be prepared for each class and often spend most of their time outside of class preparing for their next lecture.
- Although law schools differ in the emphasis they give to certain subjects and in the degree to which they provide opportunities for independent study and clinical experience, nearly all law schools have certain basic similarities.
 - Most law schools rely on the “**case method**” approach to teaching.
 - Most law schools share a common approach to the task of training lawyers.
- First-year curricula usually include courses in civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and criminal procedure, legal methods, legal writing and research, property law, and torts.
- A number of schools have developed specialized programs of instruction combining law with other disciplines such as business, public administration, international relations, science, and technology.

What is the bar exam?

The bar exam is an extensive government-issued test that every law student in the US must pass before going on to practice law. The tests vary state by state, are geared towards the issuing state’s laws, and typically last two to three days. Though exams differ, in general, the bar exam consists of a series of essay questions regarding state law and general legal principles. Before one can practice law in a particular state, he or she must pass that state’s bar exam.

Who is applying to law school?

According to the Law School Admission Council, for Fall 2007, about 26 percent of all law school applicants were 22 years old or younger; about 38 percent were 23 to 25; and about 19 percent were between ages 26 and 29. Applicants who were 30 to 34 years old made up about 8 percent of the applicant pool, while 9 percent were over 34 years old.

A growing number of women began to apply to America’s law schools beginning in the early 1970s, when only 10 percent of all law students were women. Currently, nearly one-half of all applicants are women.

For Fall 2007, there were over 84,000 applicants of which almost 24,300 were minority applicants. The proportion of all applicants who identified themselves as being from a specific minority group has been relatively stable over the past 10 years at between 27 percent to 29 percent of the total applicant pool. And, the number of minority applicants has nearly tripled over the past 22 years.

How can I find out more about law schools?

- Look widely and inquire carefully. You really cannot spend too much time or effort gathering and studying information on law programs. Select the schools to which you will apply only after reviewing all admission materials available.
- Visit school websites or write to schools for their bulletins, catalogs, or other materials that include complete and current information.
- Consult your **college pre-law advisor**. Undergraduate institutions with pre-law advisors or career counselors encourage students and alumni to contact them for assistance—**even if you have been out of school for a number of years**.
- **Visit law schools**. You can learn a great deal by talking with students and faculty members, and by visiting classes. Talk to alumni of the schools, preferably a recent graduate or one who is active in alumni affairs.
- Attend a **free Law School Admissions Council law school forum**. Law school forums are excellent opportunities to talk with law school representatives from around the country in one central location.
- For law school contact information, visit the law school links area of: www.lsac.org.

How do I choose a law school?

- You should begin the process of choosing a law school with an honest appraisal of your **strengths and preferences**.
- You should consider the **size, composition, and background of the student body**; the location, size, and **nature of the surrounding community**; the particular strengths or interests of the faculty; the degree to which clinical experience or classroom learning is emphasized; the nature of any special programs offered; the number and type of student organizations; the range of library holdings; and whether a school is public or private.
- You may wish to consider a school with strong minority recruitment, retention, and mentoring program, or one with an active student organization for students of your particular ethnic background.
- At any rate, you should actually select more than one law school where you think you could succeed. Today, the **average applicant applies to four or more schools**.
- To become a practicing lawyer in the United States, you **MUST** attend an **ABA-approved institution**.

PLANNING FOR LAW SCHOOL

Criteria That May Be Considered by Law school Admission Committees

- 1) College attended and course of study/major
- 2) Undergraduate grade-point average (GPA)
- 3) Improvement in grades
- 4) Extracurricular activities
- 5) Ethnic/racial background
- 6) Individual character and personality
- 7) Graduate work
- 8) Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score
- 9) Letters of recommendation
- 10) Personal statement or essay
- 11) Reasons for studying law
- 12) Work experience
- 13) Past accomplishments and leadership experience
- 14) Community activities
- 15) Anything else that stands out in an application

1.) College attended and course of study/major

- While there are no standard pre-requisites for gaining admission to a law school, almost all law schools require the completion of a **bachelor's degree**. The **type** of institution one attends as an undergraduate is also a factor.
- The **difficulty and reputation** of the undergraduate college will be considered.
- Many law schools suggest that you take coursework in the following areas:
 - critical analysis
 - logical reasoning
 - written and oral expression
- There is a **wide range of undergraduate backgrounds** represented in law schools including:
 - psychology, art history, philosophy, political science, business, communications, liberal arts, and more

2.) Undergraduate grade-point average (GPA):

- Your undergraduate GPA will be used to calculate your standing as an applicant as it is one way to quantify the achievements of each student.
- Some schools do use a cutoff scoring method and others will take all factors into account when considering an applicant.
- Having a strong GPA can be a great asset to your law school application. However, if you are not an A+ student, do not worry; all the other areas of your application count as well!

3.) Improvement in grades

- Even if you weren't getting A's all along, law schools are most interested to see that your grades **changed for the better** during your time at The New School. Law schools will give the most attention to your **last two years** of coursework, as well as to your grades in specific areas pertinent to the study of law (i.e. philosophy, government, economics psychology, etc.)

4.) Extracurricular activities:

- Highlight your student activities, volunteer work, and leadership experiences.
- If possible, become involved in **law-related activities** such as Mock-Trial or Debate.

5.) Ethnic/Racial Background:

- Promoting **equal access to attending and attaining a law degree** is important to law schools. Therefore, students from under-represented backgrounds are of high interest to many institutions.
- If relevant, talk about your ethnic/racial background as it relates to your decision to pursue a degree/career in law.

6.) Individual character and personality:

- Let your **individual personality** become evident in your application, as diversity in student body is important.
- Consider the personal statement as an opportunity to reflect on yourself as an individual.
- Highlight areas of your personal character as they relate to the field of law, such as, morality, honesty, etc.

7.) Graduate work

- While graduate work is not a requirement for admission into law school, your coursework or graduation from a graduate program will also be evaluated.

8.) Law School Admission Test (LSAT Score):

- Plan in advance to give yourself enough time to adequately study for the LSAT exam.
- If you feel it will be helpful, sign up for a study class like Kaplan or Princeton Review, etc.
- It is best to study hard for the first test, but if needed you can re-take the test. Be sure you have given yourself enough time for application deadlines.
- Typically, schools will average the two scores when computing your LSAT results. Some law schools have been known to take the **higher score** and others have been known to take the **most recent score**.

9.) Letters of recommendation:

- Letters of recommendation enable the admissions committee to see you beyond your scores and personal statements.
- Be **confident** in those whom you ask to write letters of recommendation, as this is a great opportunity to pull ahead of other applicants.
- See the section on “Letters of Recommendation” on page 6 for more information.

10.) Personal Statement/Essay:

- The personal statement or essay is the chance for you to show who you are as an individual beyond your test scores and GPA.
- This should be one of your key areas of focus as you apply to law school.
- Begin drafting your ideas **very early** in the process to allow for editing and changes.
- Allow the essay to show who you are as an individual and why you want to pursue a degree in law.
- Some schools have specific instructions; be sure to adhere to these.
- See the section on “Personal Statement” on page 6 for more information.

11.) Reason for studying law:

- Be clear and concise about your reasoning for pursuing law in your personal statement.
- **Be positive**. It is important to be clear about your strong desire to be part of the field, but do not want the reason for this to come across as negative (i.e. “cannot stand the current law field and want to change it”) or too superficial (i.e. “I like the large salaries paid to the top NYC lawyers”).

12.) Work Experience:

- If you have work experience while in college that relates to your interest or experience in the field of law, this may help strengthen your case.
- Some take time between the undergraduate and professional studies to work as **legal assistants or other law related positions** in order to boost their applications.
- Choosing a job in law at an early stage will not only strengthen your interest in the field, but will show a **commitment to the lifestyle and knowledge** of the workings of the law.

13.) Past Accomplishments and Leadership Experience:

- Lawyers are often noted as being leaders in the workforce. Thus, law schools often look for students who have demonstrated leadership abilities. If you have the experience, emphasize it. If you do not, work towards gaining more experience in the activities you currently enjoy.

14.) Community Activities:

- While extra-curricular activities are important, volunteer and community experiences are also another area of your application which can help demonstrate your personal character and your **desire to be a valuable part of your community**.

15.) Writing Skills:

- Your writing style and ability will be evaluated, as strong writing skills are required for entrance to law school.
- If you think you may need to improve your writing skills, think about taking a writing class, utilizing the university Writing Center, or meeting with a tutor.

16.) Other Relevant Information

- In some circumstances additional information is needed to allow the admissions committee a chance to understand special circumstances or other information which is relevant for your consideration into a program.
- Be sure to strictly adhere to the requirements of each application and do not provide more information than requested. Many schools only look at the required materials due to the large number of applications they receive each year.

APPLICATION MATERIALS

Typically Required Application Materials

- Completed Application
- Application fee (varies per school)
- College Transcripts
- Resume
- Personal Statement/Essay
- Two (or Three) letters of recommendation

Completed Application

These vary by university. Pay close attention to the application be it online or a hard copy version. The application may include additional forms to submit. Be sure to read everything very thoroughly.

Application Fee (varies per school)

These fees vary by university and are processing fees similar to those you may have paid at an undergraduate or other graduate institution.

College Transcripts

Admissions offices will most likely require these from previous institutions. Be sure to allow time for other university registrar offices to process this information for you. This may take a few weeks. If you are applying for law school in the fall, its best if you secure these transcripts over the summer.

Resume

- Providing a resume allows the admissions selection committee to easily view your education, work, extra-curricular and volunteer experience as well as other important information such as honors, computer and language skills, and interests.
- Be sure to have a career counselor assist you in developing an updated resume that highlights your strengths.

Personal Statement/Essay

- School applications may request that you write on a specific topic, but many request you "Tell us something about yourself." The length of essays may vary from school to school.
- Your essay needs to be well thought-out, concise, and compelling. Remember, admissions officers read **hundreds** of personal essays. Keep in mind the following suggestions:
 1. Start your essay with something that will **grab the reader's attention**. Often personal anecdotes can help draw the reader into the essay and keep them reading.
 2. **Make the essay personal**. Try not to simply repeat the information that can be read on your application. Provide the reader with an inside view on your thoughts, interests, or motivation to become a Juris Doctor, J.D.
 3. **Keep it concise in order to make your motivation and drive clear** to the reader
 4. **Create a well-written document**. Your essay is a sample of your writing abilities. It is important that you convey your thoughts clearly, intelligently, and effectively in your essay.
 5. **Have your essay critiqued** by an advisor, writing center staff member, career counselor, or peer.

Recommendation Letters

- You will need at least two letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with your academic work.
 - It is preferable to have two academic letters. However, some schools will accept one letter to be a **non-academic** letter of recommendation.
- When requesting letters of your references, be sure to provide them with plenty of time—at least one **month**—to complete the letter. Remember, your professors will most likely have numerous letters to write for students.

- **Provide** your reference with as much information as possible:
 - resume
 - transcript
 - personal statement
 - writing sample
 - brief write up on the length and details of your relationship to the reference
 - list of your school(s) of interest
 - addressed and stamped envelope for each school
 - a brief synopsis of any other activities, research experience, community efforts, or volunteer work you have done
- Providing your recommenders detailed information about yourself will ensure your letters have accurate information regarding your experiences, such as dates and places you've worked.
- The more information one has about you, the more comprehensive his or her letter can be.
- Keep these tips in mind when **selecting references**:
 - The best letter will come from an individual who **knows you best**.
 - Be sure you have **spent enough time with each recommender** so that they fully understand your interest in going to law school.
- On the Letter of Recommendation Form, provided through the Law School Data Assembly Service (pg. 10), candidates have the choice to waive their rights to view their letter(s) of recommendation.
 - The **assumption** is that a waived letter of recommendation is bound to be more **candid**. However, please note that **law schools do not hold it against candidates** if they choose to retain their rights to view the letters.

About the LSAT:

- The Law school Admission Test (LSAT), administered by the Law School Admission Council, is a half-day standardized test required for admission to **all American Bar Association (ABA-approved)** law schools, most Canadian law schools, and many non-ABA-approved law schools.
- It provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law schools can use as one of several factors in assessing applicants.
- The test is administered **four times a year** at hundreds of locations around the world.
- Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken by December for admission the following fall. However, taking the test earlier—in June or October—is often advised.

Registration Fees:

- The registration fee for the LSAT in 2008 was \$127. Late registrants and/or different grading methods can increase test fee.
- If you meet certain criteria, you may qualify for an LSAC fee waiver (see www.lsac.org for details).
- Students can register via regular mail or on-line.

Registering with Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS):

- The LSDAS will translate your coursework and grades into a standardized format and compute GPAs for each academic year, for each undergraduate institution you've attended, and overall as a way of streamlining for schools.
- They will also send copies of all your undergraduate and graduate transcripts, along with these GPA summaries, your LSAT scores and your LSAT writing sample to the law schools to which you are applying.
- They also provide an optional letter of recommendation service.
- You can register for these services for a fee or with a fee waiver (U.S. citizens only) at www.lsac.org.
- **SOME SCHOOLS REQUIRE YOU USE THE LSDAS IN CONJUNCTION WITH YOUR APPLICATION**, and nearly all U.S. accredited law schools work with the LSDAS as a clearinghouse for individual transcripts from applicants.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL

JUNIOR YEAR

Fall Semester

- View different catalogs and directories on Law schools (in print and online), such as *The Official Guide to U.S. Law schools*, published by The Princeton Review.
- Start establishing strong relationships with faculty.
- Begin preparing for the June LSAT.
- Gain experience in the field.

March

- Register for the June LSAT.
- Discuss your plans with a pre-law advisor or career counselor.
- Create a list of faculty who you wish to write letters of reference for you and keep these on file.

June

- Take the LSAT exam.
- Prepare a draft of your personal statement and resume and have it reviewed by a pre-law advisor or career counselor.
- Create a list of schools to which you plan to apply.

July-August

- Register with the Law school Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) if necessary.
- Have your college transcripts sent to LSDAS.
- Request information packets from law schools.
- Visit law school campuses and attend open house events.
- If necessary, register and prepare for the October LSAT.

SENIOR YEAR

September

- Order the Law school Admission Council (LSAC) catalog and application or complete an electronic version.
- Finish writing your personal statement.
- Update your resume.
- Ask faculty for letters of recommendation.
- Ask a professional acquaintance or employer for a reference. Provide employers with a sample reference.
- Begin researching financial aid and scholarship options.
- Continue to visit law school campuses and open house events.

October

- If needed, take the October LSAT.
- Finalize your personal statement.
- Finalize your letters of recommendation.
- Complete the LSDAS report.
- Make sure all applications have been completed before mailed.

November

- Mail completed applications to Law schools.
- Obtain most current applications for financial aid (federal, institutional, private), e.g. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- December
- Contact law schools to confirm your application has been received.

January

- Have an updated transcript (which includes your most recent fall term) sent to schools and/or LSDAS.
- Submit completed financial aid forms.
- Prepare for interviews.

February—April

- Evaluate offers of acceptance.
- Evaluate financial aid offers.
- Submit an acceptance letter to the school of your choice.
- Notify other school that you have chosen not to attend.

IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN SELECTING A LAW SCHOOL

Part-Time vs. Full-Time

- Most professionals will say that you should attend law school full time, as this immerses you completely in your legal training.
- There are also many benefits of attending part-time such as saved resources and income and balanced lifestyle while attending school.
- If you are considering part-time study, be sure your school(s) of interest offer(s) this.

Geography

- Where do you want to practice law?
- Statistically speaking, most lawyers practice in fairly close proximity to their school after graduation.
- However, don't feel as though you have to choose a law school in terms of your future career location. You must also consider your personal preferences and which school is best for you.

School Reputation

- Use the annual rankings of law schools as a starting point to review law schools, but not as the final deciding factor.
- Research the reputation of a school by asking lawyers or law students for their impressions.
- Look through law school catalogs to see which schools the professors attended.
- Consider whether a local, national, or international reputation is most important to you.

Job Placement

- Spend some time familiarizing yourself with each school's placement rates, the location of job placements, the on-campus recruitment program, and the law school personnel devoted to helping you find the right job after graduation.
- Look to see where recent graduates are currently working—always keep in mind the alumni-student network involved at each law school can be extremely valuable.
 - Many jobs are attained through networking and connections!

Financial Aid

- Financing law school is a very different process than financing a college education, largely because of your access to loans and potential earning power after graduation.
- When evaluating offers, take into consideration the financial aid offered to you by each prospective school.
- Many law students are also successful in attaining well-paying summer jobs in between the spring and fall semesters. This income is often substantial and can help reduce the expenses of attending law school full-time.

School Size

- A smaller school may potentially have smaller classes and a more intimate environment
- A larger school usually has in its size a greater diversity of both its faculty and students.

Joint-Degree Programs

- Joint-degree programs are often offered within larger universities with a good selection of graduate and professional programs and usually allow you to earn two degrees in a shorter time than it would take to earn each degree separately. For example:
 - J.D. and Ph.D. in Political Science
 - J.D. and Ph.D. in Psychology
 - J.D. and M.B.A.

Student Body

- Law schools utilize a class ranking system of their student bodies, and your standing in this is very important. Consider how your classmates will determine the level of intellectual challenge you will face.

Class Size

- One faculty member to 30 full-time students is considered the limit of acceptability. Beyond this basic ratio, assess the following characteristics of a school's faculty: Educational background, professional experience beyond the classroom, accessibility, reputation, continued professional activity, and ethnic, academic, gender, and racial diversity.

Library and Facilities

- Spend some time assessing the research facilities and resources available at each of the schools you are considering.

Clinical Programs

- Clinics allow law students to try out their legal skills representing clients in a variety of settings. However, not all clinical programs are of the same quality. Find out whether a school's clinical experience is a **simulated or a real-world experience** and decide which you would prefer. Make sure the kinds of topics with which the clinics deal are of interest to you.

Student Services

- Administrative offices, such as registration and financial aid, can have a dramatic impact on your school experience. Talk to current students, read the literature, and call the offices yourself to judge how responsive you think the staff will be to your needs.

Student Organizations

- Much of your law school experience will be enhanced by your involvement in a number of extracurricular activities, and much can be learned about a school by the **nature of its student organizations**. Obtain a list of your potential school's organizations.

Academic Rigor

- Not only is the ranking of the school itself important, but **your success there** is equally, if not more, important.
- When choosing your law school, think about your personal potential for success: is it better to be at the bottom of a Top Ten school, or at the top of middle-ranked school?

USEFUL WEBSITES

- American Bar Association: www.aganet.org
- Association of American Law Schools: www.aals.org
- Brian Leiter's Law School Rankings: www.leiterrankings.com
- Corporate Counsel Women of Color: www.ccwomenofcolor.org
- Find Law for Legal Professionals: www.findlaw.com
- Internet Legal Research Group: www.ilrg.com
- Law School Admission Council: www.lsac.org
- The Law School Companion: www.lawschoolcompanion.com
- Law School Numbers: www.lawschoolnumbers.com
- Legal Study Abroad Programs: <http://www.ilrg.com/lsahq>
- LSAT Test Prep-Kaplan: www.kaptest.com
- National Association of Women Lawyers: www.nawl.org
- National Lawyers Guild: www.nlg.org
- National Lesbian and Gay Law Association: www.nlga.org
- New York Women's Bar Association www.nywba.org
- Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools: http://officialguide.lsac.org/ONLG_Default.aspx
- Pre-Law Social Networking Site: www.chiashu.com
- Princeton Review Law School Rankings: www.princetonreview.com
- The United People of Color Caucus of The National Lawyers Guild: <http://ttwww.nlg.org/TUPOCC>