

ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-22

PRE-LAW HANDBOOK

CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

DR. JOSEPH DEVINE, PRE-LAW ADVISOR
CARNEGIE MELLON UNIVERSITY

Pre-Law Handbook¹: Introduction

This handbook is designed to take a “deeper dive” than our main pre-law web site into matters pertaining to pre-law interests and needs of current students and alumni/ae. It discusses in much greater detail the relevant information and issues about exploration of law school as a professional school option, preparation for law school, the law school application process, financing law school, and several resources for additional reference. This handbook is navigable by detailed bookmarks so that you can go straight to those sections that respond most directly to your questions and needs.

And, of course, you should use this in combination with CMU’s pre-law advisor, Dr. Joseph Devine (jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu). Both he and this handbook represent complimentary resources for you as you consider, and perhaps decide to apply to, law school.

Pre-Law Advising Program: An Overview

The Pre-Law Advising Program is an advising resource for Carnegie Mellon students and alumni/ae who are contemplating law school and a career in law or law-related fields. The program has three general foci, each of which corresponds roughly to the sequence of phases for those who develop an interest in, and ultimately apply to, law school:

1. **Exploration.** (*“I have a tentative interest in law, but have not definitely decided to apply to law school.”*) Questions common in this phase:
 - a. What do lawyers do?
 - b. What role(s) does law play in our society, economy and world?
 - c. How many subfields, or specialties, are there in law? What are career prospects like in each?
 - d. Which are in highest demand, and are there certain backgrounds that work best as preparation for them?
 - e. What skill sets are necessary for success in law?
 - f. For those who like their career in law, what do they find most satisfying and rewarding?
 - g. What are the down sides?
 - h. Is it something that I would enjoy, and at which I would be successful?
 - i. What is law school like? How is it different from college?
 - j. What is the range of law school options?

¹ Updated November 10, 2020

- k. What does law school cost, and how would I pay for it?
2. **Preparation.** (*“I have definitely decided to apply to law school, but I don’t know when I will apply.”; or “I am not yet at the point when I will be applying [e.g., I’m not yet a senior at CMU].”*)
- What could, or should, I be doing *now*, and in the time leading up to applying to law school?
 - What options and opportunities – in and out of school – are available to me to prepare for law school?
3. **Application.** (*“I have definitely decided to apply to law school, and now is the time when I intend to apply.”*)
- What does the application process entail?
 - What do I do, and when?
 - Where should I apply?
 - What are the components of a law school application, and how can I put together the best possible application?
 - How best to decide where to enroll in law school?
 - What are my prospects for scholarships or other forms of financial aid? How do I finance the rest of law school costs?

In one recent academic year, 26% of Carnegie Mellon law school applicants were undergraduate seniors when applying; 74% were alumni/ae. Of these alumni/ae applicants, 46% had been out of college for three years or less; 54% had been out of college for more than three years. This is relatively consistent with data about CMU law school applicants from recent years, and consistent with national trends.

The remainder of this handbook is organized around these three foci (exploration, preparation, and application). In the section that follows detailed discussions of these foci, a recommended time line for exploration, preparation and application is presented. Finally, an “additional resources” section is offered that is also organized around this three-part model (again, exploration, preparation and application).

Pre-Law Advisor

[Dr. Joseph Devine](#) is the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Studies in the Dietrich College of Humanities and Social Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University. He is also the university’s Pre-Law Advisor.

A message from Dr. Devine, University Pre-Law Advisor, to current pre-law students and alumni/ae:

If you are interested in exploring and preparing for law school and a career in law, let’s begin that conversation now so that you can have a framework, or structure, within which you can gather your thoughts and questions, and

organize yourself for further research and tasks to ultimately make a decision that's right for you regarding law school.

[Click here](#) to register with the Pre-Law Advising Program. You will be placed on the program's distribution list, which is the easiest way to stay informed about events, opportunities, and activities of the Carnegie Mellon Pre-Law Program. No matter where you are in time – a first-year undergraduate student or a graduate of the university, a few (or even several) years into a career – if law is an interest for you, it's never too early or too late to explore this option.

Note to Pre-Law Alumni/ae: You will soon notice that the wording of this web site and handbook implies a primary tilt toward current undergraduate students. This seemed unavoidable, in that their circumstances (age, calendars, student status, etc.) are more similar than not, while yours are so varied. I am hopeful, however, that you can adapt the student-focused language to your circumstances, and thereby find this web site and handbook useful to you as you consider and/or pursue law school.

To students and alumni/ae: Any and all comments and suggestions about this web site and handbook are welcome and appreciated!

Dr. Devine (jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu)

Schedule a meeting with the pre-law advisor

To schedule a meeting with Dr. Devine (to be either in-person or by phone), please call (412) 268-2831 or stop by the Dietrich College Dean's Office in Baker Hall 154. You can also send e-mail to Dr. Devine at jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu.

Thomas M. Kerr, Jr. Pre-Law Society

The [Thomas M. Kerr, Jr. Pre-Law Society](#) is a recognized CMU student organization for current students and alumni who are interested in law school and the legal profession, or just more generally interested in law-related issues, events and activities. It is named for the late **Thomas M. Kerr, Jr.**, a celebrated Pittsburgh attorney and CMU faculty member who also served as university pre-law advisor from the 1960s until the mid-1990s. [\[Read more about Thomas M. Kerr, Jr.\]](#)

Exploration

“What does it mean to be ‘pre-law’?”

Being “pre-law” can mean a variety of things depending on your degree of interest in law and law school, and proximity to that point in time if and when you decide to apply to law school.

It does *not* necessarily mean that you have made a firm commitment to go on to law school at some point after college. Some pre-law students will, and some will not. To the extent that these decisions have been informed to some degree by the information, advice, resources, activities and other facets of the Carnegie Mellon Pre-Law Program (including this handbook), the program will have successfully fulfilled its primary mission.

There are several options and opportunities to learn more about law school and the legal profession, and to learn more about yourself and whether law school and a career in law would be a good fit. Many of these options and opportunities stem from, or are promoted by, the Carnegie Mellon Pre-Law Program.

To be a “pre-law student” at Carnegie Mellon is perhaps best described as engaging in a process of exploration, investigation, preparation, and reflection about law school and the legal profession, simultaneous with the other facets of one’s undergraduate experience.

Some elements of this process include the following:

- Challenge yourself academically, both in your primary area(s) of study and in other areas outside of your “comfort zone.” At a place like Carnegie Mellon, that is so well-known for its multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to research and teaching, you may well discover several ways in which other fields have a bearing on your primary foci, including relevance (direct or indirect) for the law. In the process, you will also develop a strong interdisciplinary profile that can be showcased in a law school application by both you and those recommending you.
- As you maintain focus on your studies, step back and reflect on the skill sets that you are acquiring and refining. Career consultants in the university’s [Career and Professional Development Center](#) are particularly good at facilitating this kind

Are you a humanities major, looking ahead to law school, but somewhat wary of non-humanities fields like statistics? As it happens, several faculty members of Carnegie Mellon’s Statistics & Data Science Department have research and teaching interests in law and justice. This area includes not only issues arising in court cases, but also issues of human rights, criminal justice, forensic science, etc. See: [the Law and Justice page](#) on the Statistics and Data Science Department web site.

of reflective exercise, and how these well-articulated skill sets can be concisely captured in an updated resume or personal statement.

- Develop relationships with faculty and mentors (especially with faculty with whom you have taken multiple courses, or with whom you have worked closely in other capacities [e.g., research assistant, teaching assistant, etc.]). Take the time to share with them your thoughts and motivations about law school and a career in law. Ask for their insights and advice, and thereby draw them into your “journey” toward an eventual decision about law school. When that time comes, and if your decision is to apply to law school, these faculty and mentors could be in an ideal position to furnish strong letters of recommendation for you.
- Participate in student organizations, campus activities, and the programming of the Pre-Law Program and the [Career and Professional Development Center](#) to learn about opportunities to enhance your undergraduate experience, about the law school application process, law school programs, the legal profession, and alternative career pathways for lawyers. With regard to extracurricular activities, step back and reflect on the skill sets that you are acquiring and refining from these activities (e.g., teamwork, leadership, creative problem-solving, conflict resolution, etc.), just as was suggested earlier regarding your academic work. Here again, career consultants in the university’s [Career and Professional Development Center](#) are skilled at facilitating this kind of reflective thinking, and how these well-articulated skill sets can be concisely captured in an updated resume or personal statement.
- Engage in meaningful inquiry to gain a more accurate understanding of both the realities of the legal profession, and of law school. Talk to lawyers; get involved in law-related activities (such as the Student Pre-Law Society, the Mock Trial Association, or judicial roles in fraternities and sororities); explore the profession through an internship, informational interview, or shadowing experience; take a course or courses that touch on legal topics or that draw on skills that are important for success in law school and legal practice; follow stories about the profession in the media, and gauge the degree to which you feel drawn to them with genuine interest.
- Establish a relationship with the university pre-law advisor, as early as possible. This can begin as early as freshman year, and become an integral part of your unfolding undergraduate experience and your developing thoughts about law school and a career in law.

Law school and the practice of law can be exciting, challenging, and rewarding. But, like any profession or career, it's not for everyone. Take the time to investigate whether the study of law and the legal profession are a good fit for *you*.

Exploring the Legal Profession

The “Lawyering” Experience

The law can be an exciting, intellectually challenging, and rewarding profession. A legal education can lead to a wide range of career possibilities within the legal profession. It can also open doors to careers in business, government, education, communication, entrepreneurship and many other fields.

Typically, though, most law students do not know with certainty when starting law school what career path, or legal specialty, they will follow. Many of these decisions will stem from their experiences in law school, and what the job market has to offer as they approach graduation. However, it is important to understand the differences in career choices that lawyers make, from public interest law and government law, to private practice in a firm. Salaries and hours vary widely, and legal work can require spending considerable time on tedious, painstaking research. Learning as much as you can about these realities could affect your thinking about law school and a career in law.

Take an early and active role in your career planning so that you will be in a better position to decide whether law is for you. There are many ways for you to gather information about the legal profession, as well as many hands-on ways for you to explore the profession. A multitude of books and websites provide helpful information. Conduct research on legal careers using the resources available in the [Career and Professional Development Center](#) (“CPDC”), as well as the suggestions listed in the “[Additional Resources](#)” section of this handbook and the [Law School Admissions Council](#) web site. Meet regularly with your academic advisor, CPDC career consultant, and pre-law advisor to discuss your interests, and opportunities for exploration and preparation, as these continue to develop. These individuals and offices can provide you with advice and guidance throughout your undergraduate journey and help you connect with other university resources and opportunities that match your goals.

“*Is Law School Worth It?*” has become a key question for prospective law school candidates, especially as the cost of law school remains high, and the job market challenging. The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) offers a “[Pre-Law Portal](#)” for candidates thinking about law school, and wondering what might await them in the job market after law school. NALP is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. NALP — its staff, leaders, and members — collectively know a whole lot about the world of lawyer jobs. This portal was designed by NALP volunteers to help pre-law advisors and students in the US learn more about the legal employment market.

In a similar vein, the [AccessLex Institute](#) commissioned Gallup in 2018 to produce a national study of the long-term outcomes of a law degree (in both professional and personal terms) as perceived by law school graduates at various stages of their careers. This study (entitled “Examining Value, Measuring Engagement,” can be found [here](#).

What do Lawyers do and Where do they do it?

(Adapted from "What do Lawyers do and Where do they do it." Cawley Career Education Center, Georgetown University)

All lawyers are not alike. Contrary to the images we see in movies and on television they are not all running to trial every week to try a case. Lawyers work in many capacities and often specialize in particular areas. Here (below) are some traditional career paths and settings for lawyers.

Legal Specializations. Many lawyers eventually specialize in a particular area. Lawyers may specialize in trial law (civil or criminal), appellate law (helping clients who seek to reverse or to uphold lower court decisions), bankruptcy law, trusts and estates, tax law, corporate law, environmental law, intellectual property, communication law, elder law, employment and labor law, entertainment law, health care law, education law, international law, and more. What's more, the list of specializations is always changing in response to new laws and legal issues. Moreover, it is not uncommon to begin a career practicing one kind of law and wind up practicing a different kind.

Lawyers also work in a variety of work settings, some of the most common of which include.

Private Practice. The majority of lawyers work in private practice. Some work as solo practitioners, others in small or "boutique" law firms. Many work in firms that have several hundred lawyers in cities across the world. Lawyers usually join firms as associates and work toward becoming partners. The road to partnership is long and difficult. In recent years it has become increasingly common for associates to join a law firm with the expectation that they will gain experience for a number of years, but not stick around for a partnership decision. To retain more lawyers, some law firms now allow for non-equity partnerships or promote a few attorneys to non-partnership "of-counsel" or "special counsel" positions. Life at a law firm, especially a large law firm, is influenced by billable hours. Each lawyer has a billable rate that is used to charge clients for time spent on client matters. In order to bill clients and to get credit for work performed, firm lawyers keep track of the activities they perform each day. Sometimes lawyers record their activities in increments of time as short as six minutes.

In-House Attorneys. Other attorneys are employed by a single client and work "in-house" for that client, usually a large corporation (or, as it happens, a university). An in-house attorney advises their employer on legal activities related to the company's business. Large companies often have correspondingly large legal departments and a number of in-house attorneys who specialize in specific issues. For example, one might supervise litigation being handled by an outside firm, another might address the company's employment issues, and a third might work as a lobbyist who monitors and tries to influence legislation related to the company's business. Traditionally, many in-house attorneys obtain their positions when they are working in a law firm and are asked by a client to join the company. In-house lawyers often report that they enjoy greater control over their time than their law firm counterparts. Also, because in-house lawyers represent one client, they are not beholden to the billable hour.

Government Lawyers. Most government lawyers work at the local level, but state governments and the federal government also hire lawyers to perform a multitude of tasks. Government lawyers include prosecutors (district attorneys, state attorneys general, and federal prosecutors who work for the Department of Justice and at U.S. Attorney's offices around the country) and public defenders (who represent those who cannot afford an attorney). Government lawyers also work for such federal agencies the Environmental Protection Agency, the Office of Homeland Security, the Securities and Exchange Commission, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Patent and Trademark Office, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, and just about every other government agency there is. In addition, state legislative bodies and the United States Congress offer many opportunities for lawyers to develop and help pass legislation

Public Interest Law. Many public interest lawyers work for legal-aid societies, which are private, nonprofit agencies designed to serve disadvantaged people. These lawyers might seek medical benefits for AIDS patients, represent the poor in landlord-tenant disagreements, or negotiate child visitation rights for individuals who cannot afford private attorneys. Other public interest lawyers work for nonprofit organizations that seek to change the law. Lawyers might strive to strengthen environmental laws, to protect the rights of children in foster care, to promote civil rights of gays and lesbians, or to advocate for racial and religious tolerance. Public interest lawyers work on both sides of the political aisle. Some work to abolish abortion, while others work to strengthen abortion rights. Some promote victim's rights and advocate in favor of the death penalty, while others strive to abolish the death penalty. Nonprofit organizations often struggle for funding. As a result, many are willing to provide (non-paying) internships to interested college students. Even after law school, public interest legal positions do not pay well, but because they offer other rewards, these positions are often very competitive.

Academia. Lawyers also teach -- in law schools, colleges, and at other educational levels. Many lawyers who hope to become professors gain teaching experience by working as adjunct professors and teaching law-related course while working elsewhere full time. Practicing lawyers who want to teach also often look for publishing opportunities to establish a research portfolio, which can count for a lot in seeking academic positions.

Ways to Explore

Networking, job shadowing, informational interviews, internships and work prior to law school can provide excellent opportunities to get to know people who share your interests and who do the work that you aspire to pursue.

Some law school candidates intentionally take additional time after college to work before finalizing plans to pursue law school. Working for a period after college may help you to identify potential areas of practice well suited to your personality, interests, strengths, and values.

Princeton Review provides another useful discussion (called “Life as a Lawyer”) of various pathways in the legal profession. This can be found [here](#).

Networking

One of the best ways to learn about life in law is by talking directly to lawyers and law school professionals. Start by joining the [Carnegie Mellon Pre-Law Society](#) and attending its meetings, where many lawyers from different legal fields talk about their experiences:

Networking can help you learn:

- What lawyers do in a typical work day
- Personal attributes needed to be successful in a legal career
- Satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the field
- The impact of a legal career on personal lives

Outreaching efforts for networking can be directed at lawyers who are family members, family friends, or Carnegie Mellon alumni/ae. In addition, law schools, local bar associations, and other more specialized organizations of legal professionals will occasionally host networking events for pre-law and/or law students. Here in Pittsburgh, find the event calendars for the two local law schools ([University of Pittsburgh School of Law](#), and [Duguesne University School of Law](#)), as well as the [Allegheny County Bar Association](#), and check them regularly for news of such upcoming events.

Job Shadowing

Yet another form of networking and exploration of legal careers is job shadowing. Job shadowing is an opportunity to explore a career field of interest by spending quality time with one or more professionals in the field. Students who participate in a law-related job shadowing opportunity receive a first-hand look at one or another legal workplace and will be able to see

through limited observation and discussions with professionals at selected job sites what it's like actually working in that particular type of setting and legal specialty.

The benefits of job shadowing include:

- A first-hand look at what goes on behind the scenes when working in a specific law-related field and context
- A chance to make valuable networking connections
- Observing how classroom learning can be applied in actual professional settings
- An opportunity to learn more about various career options in law which will help you to be able to make more informed career decisions
- A chance to act and dress professionally while speaking with professionals in the field

Preparation and follow-through for a job shadowing experience will help you maximize its potential for you. Some suggested steps:

- Preparing a professional resume to share with your sponsor (reviewed in advance by your career counselor in the university's [Career and Professional Development Center](#))
- Researching the sponsor's firm, office or organization to learn about the type of legal work they do, who the other professional staff are (in terms of training and experience), etc.
- Contacting the sponsor, arranging a date & time to visit, and – perhaps in a subsequent e-mail message -- verify information regarding the visit
- Dressing professionally and arriving on time
- Prepare questions and perhaps conduct an informational interview with the sponsor about his/her chosen profession in law
- Reflect on what you learned and identified as to whether this particular path is a viable and appealing career option for you (why or why not?)
- *Afterward* → Sending a thank you note to sponsor expressing your appreciation for the sponsor's time and for sharing their expertise and experience.

Carnegie Mellon's [Career and Professional Development Center](#) Offers a [job shadowing program](#) of its own. In order to be approved to participate in this program, you must log in to the [CPDC Job Shadowing platform](#) to complete your profile, and then you must meet* with a member of the Experiential Learning Team. To sign up for a job shadowing meeting, enter your name on the Google Doc [here](#). Once you attend this meeting, you will be approved to start communicating with CMU alumni about job shadowing.

***If you completed a job shadowing appointment last semester or year, you will not need to come in for another meeting.**

Informational Interviews

An informational interview is one distinctive form of networking as a way of exploring the legal profession. By arranging a private interview with one or more lawyers, and asking seemingly simple questions such as what a normal day is like in the office, what they deal with daily and, most importantly, if and why they enjoy it, you can gather extremely valuable insights into the world of work in the law and come away with a better understanding of whether it is well-suited for you.

In addition to their value in helping you think in more informed ways about whether a career in law appeals to you, this and other forms of networking help you create and build a network in the field. When it comes time to apply for legal internships either as a summer undergraduate or a law school student, connections you have made can potentially tip the balance in your favor. In short, it is never too early to begin networking, even if it is exploratory in nature.

Benefits of Informational Interviews with Practicing Legal Professionals

- Get firsthand, relevant information about the realities of life in the profession, and how this varies by specialty and setting.
- Find out about opportunities and law-related career paths, some of which you may not have known existed.
- Initiate a relationship and expand your network of contacts.

Five Steps for Informational Interviewing

1. Identify people to interview
 - a. Pursue your own contacts (i.e., individuals who you are practicing attorneys, or who are pursuing an alternative career path that builds on their law degree. This could include family, friends, work-related acquaintances, and CMU alumni/ae, etc.
 - b. Re. CMU alumni/ae now (or recently) in law school → Utilize the [CMU Law Alumni LinkedIn](#) network to find them.
2. Prepare for the interview
 - a. Develop a brief introduction of yourself and your hopes for the meeting.
 - b. Plan open-ended questions to ask.
3. Initiate contact
 - a. Contact the person by phone or email.

- b. Mention how you got his or her name.
 - c. Ask whether it is a good time to talk for a few minutes.
 - d. Ask for a convenient time to have a 20-30-minute appointment.
 - e. Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says it is a good time for him/her and that s/he will not be readily available otherwise.
4. Conduct the informational interview
- a. Dress appropriately.
 - b. Arrive or (if not in person) connect on time, or even a few minutes early.
 - c. Restate that your objective is to get information, insights and advice.
 - d. Give a brief overview of yourself and your education and/or work background.
 - e. Be prepared to direct the interview, but also let the conversation flow naturally, and encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking.
 - f. Take notes if you would like.
 - g. Respect the person's time. Keep the meeting length within the agreed-upon timeframe.
 - h. Ask the person if you may contact them again in the future with other questions.
 - i. Ask your interviewee if there are other legal professionals who s/he would suggest that you meet to gain different perspectives. If so, ask if it would be alright to contact them and mention your interviewee's name as the source of the suggestion; or, alternatively, if your interviewee would prefer to reach out him- or herself to the person(s) they suggest and, if their contacts agree, then leave it to you to communicate with them directly.
5. Follow-up
- a. Keep records. Right after the interview write down what you learned, what more you'd like to know and your impressions of how a career in law would fit with your lifestyle, interests, skills and future plans.
 - b. Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given. E-mail suffices, though a hand-written note or card can make a better impression because of the greater time, care and attention it involves vs. the quick, convenient but less personal e-mail message.
 - c. Keep in touch with the person who you interviewed, especially if you had a particularly good (cordial and productive) interaction; let him or her know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result. This relationship could become an important part of your network.

Internships

Internships that have law-related connections and relevance can be extremely valuable for pre-law students in exploring a slice of the legal profession “from the inside out.” Finding meaningful pre-law internships, especially for undergraduate students, can be challenging, however. Because of the limited capacity of many organizations (e.g., legal aid programs) to manage interns, and because the most substantive internships and volunteer opportunities typically go first to law students, pre-law students will have to do considerable leg work to uncover law-related internship options.

That said, there are some relevant programs and useful resources that undergraduate students (and recent graduates) can investigate for possible leads, including those listed below. In addition to those listed below, several other opportunities are under development.

Paid vs. Unpaid Internships; Private vs. Public Sector

While internships are possible in private sector settings (e.g., law firms, in-house corporate legal offices, etc.), internships available for pre-law undergraduates are often more commonly found in low-budget, public sector or non-profit organizations that might welcome talented undergraduates. With a little research, these can be found in every community in the nation, large or small, and may yield excellent pre-law internship opportunities (especially in summer).

That said, one common feature of these public sector internships is that they are likely to be unpaid or modestly paid. To address this, Carnegie Mellon University offers a Pre-Law Summer Internship Grant Program to make it more possible for students to take advantage of less remunerative but worthwhile summer internship opportunities that are demonstrably law-related. The purpose of these grants is to provide financial support for students who accept professionally meaningful law-related summer internships that are unpaid or modestly paid. This support addresses expenses that arise directly or indirectly from the internship, including housing, transportation, meals and incidental expenses. The goal of the program is to minimize or eliminate any out-of-pocket costs to students who receive and accept an offer from such an internship sponsor, and particularly for students who would not otherwise be able to participate in such a summer internship. These internship grants are administered through the CMU Career and Professional Development Center’s [Summer Internship Experience Fund](#) (“SIEF”).

If you would like to participate in this internship development initiative, contact Dr. Devine, Pre-Law advisor at jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu.

Internship Programs, Prospects and Resources

- The [U.S. Department of Justice \(DOJ\) Pathways Programs](#) provide clear paths to Federal employment for students and recent graduates. The Pathways Programs consist of three major subprograms: the Internship Program, the Recent Graduates Program (RGP), and the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) Program. The [Internship Program](#) is designed to provide undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in a wide variety of educational institutions with opportunities to work in agencies and explore Federal careers while still in school and while being paid for the work performed. Students who successfully complete the program may be eligible for conversion to a permanent job in the civil service. This Program replaces the Student Career Experience Program (SCEP) and Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). The [Recent Graduates](#) Program affords developmental experiences in the Federal Government intended to promote possible careers in the civil service to individuals who have recently graduated from qualifying educational institutions or programs. To be eligible, applicants must apply within two years of degree or certificate completion (except for veterans precluded from doing so due to their military service obligation, who will have up to six years after degree completion to apply). Successful applicants are placed in a dynamic, developmental program with the potential to lead to a civil service career in the Federal Government. Justice Fellows Recent Graduates Pathways Program has the same eligibility requirements and offers the same development experiences as mentioned above for specific DOJ mission-critical occupations such as information technology specialists, financial management specialists, budget analysts, contract specialists, and human resource specialists. [The Presidential Management Fellows \(PMF\) Program](#) is a flagship leadership development program at the entry-level for advanced degree candidates. Created more than three decades ago, the Program attracts and selects from among the best candidates and is designed to develop a cadre of potential Federal Government leaders.

Interested candidates should visit the various bureau links below to learn more about the Department's divisions, and which might provide the best fit for your interests and skills.

- [Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives](#) (ATF)
- [Antitrust Division](#) (ATR)
- [Bureau of Prisons](#) (BOP)
- [Civil Division](#) (CIV)
- [Civil Rights Division](#) (CRT)
- [Criminal Division](#) (CRM)

- [Drug Enforcement Administration](#) (DEA)
 - [Environment and Natural Resources Division](#) (ENRD)
 - [Executive Office for United States Attorneys](#) (EOUSA)
 - [Executive Office of United States Trustees](#) (EOUST)
 - [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#) (FBI)
 - [Justice Management Division](#) (JMD)
 - [Office of Attorney Recruitment and Management](#) (OARM)
 - [Office of Inspector General](#) (OIG)
 - [Office of Justice Programs](#) (OJP)
 - [Tax Division](#) (TAX)
 - [United States Marshals Service](#) (USMS)
- The [American Bar Association](#) (ABA) has at least two sources that may yield some leads for law-related internships. While these sources are designed for other primary purposes and audiences (e.g., law students), undergraduates and recent graduates may uncover some internship opportunities worth pursuing:
 - The [ABA's Standing Committee on Pro Bono & Public Service and the Center for Pro Bono](#) is primarily a source of information and referrals for those seeking pro bono legal services. A search within this site for "internships" yields several leads. While these are intended primarily for law students, an occasional opportunity for undergraduates may be possible.
 - The ABA also has a more general site for [ABA-Sponsored Law Student Internships](#), Fellowships and Clerkships. Again, while intended primarily for law students, some persistent research and inquiries may yield an occasional opportunity for undergraduate pre-law students.
 - The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) (ACLU). Founded in 1920, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to defending and protecting individual rights and personal freedoms. Through advocacy, education and litigation, ACLU attorneys, advocates and volunteers work to preserve and promote civil liberties including the freedom of speech, the right to privacy, reproductive freedom, and equal treatment under the law. The ACLU stands in defense of the rights of women and minorities, workers, students, immigrants, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and others who have seen bias and bigotry threaten the rights afforded to all of us in this country by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. You can find the ACLU affiliate office closest to you through their web site (www.aclu.org).

- [Earthjustice](#) is a non-profit public interest law organization based in the United States dedicated to environmental issues. It is headquartered in San Francisco, has nine regional offices across the United States, an international department, a communications team, and a policy team in Washington, DC. In their own words: “As the nation’s original and largest nonprofit environmental law organization, we leverage our expertise and commitment to fight for justice and advance the promise of a healthy world for all. We represent every one of our clients free of charge.” For more information, contact pre-law advisor Dr. Joseph Devine at jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu.
- [INROADS](#) is a non-profit organization that trains and develops talented minority youth for professional careers in business, law and industry by placing students in summer internships across the United States. Acceptance into the program and intern selection begins in December and January.
- The [Legal Services Corporation Internship Program](#) is designed to provide practical, substantive, and hands-on work experience in a focused area. Student interns benefit from a variety of individual assignments and special departmental projects that will challenge and promote personal and professional development. Interns are invited to attend weekly meetings with senior staff and are encouraged to attend staff seminars, wellness events, and onsite training opportunities. The summer internship program runs from June to August. Current undergraduate and graduate students are eligible to participate. Ideal applicants will be dependable, self-motivated, professional, hardworking, disciplined, and demonstrate integrity. They must be able to work in a team environment and be a team player. Proficiency in Microsoft Office (Word, Excel and PowerPoint) is desired.
- [The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office](#) (USPTO) sponsors [internship and externship programs for college students](#) at their headquarters in Alexandria, Virginia, or at one of four regional offices in Dallas, Denver, Detroit, and San Jose. Their goal is to educate interns about the USPTO, their mission, and professional opportunities. Intern backgrounds range from electrical and mechanical engineering to finance, information technology and law. Interns assist in the work of USPTO patent examiners, accountants, help desk technicians, HR professionals, trademark examining attorneys and a variety of other roles. To review some of USPTO’s hiring materials, select one of the links below.

- [How to Use USAJobs to Apply for a Position](#): Do you have questions about how to complete the federal job application process? This brochure can help you navigate the federal application system.
- [Patent Examiner Brochure](#): Read about the qualifications to become a patent examiner, what the job entails and the benefits and compensation of the position.
- [Externship Brochure](#): Would you like to know what it is like to work at the USPTO over the summer? Read the stories of four college students who externed in different parts of the agency.

If you are interested in patents and sitting for the patent bar exam (which you can do before law school), you should read the rules of the USPTO on what's required to sit for the patent bar exam, especially the educational requirements. You can view it [here](#). Coursework requirements start on page 6."

For candidates thinking of **intellectual property** law: One strategy for finding internships or entry-level paid positions is to see if a locale of particular interest to you has an Intellectual Property Law Association. (There is, for example, a [Pittsburgh Intellectual Property Law Association](#) (PIPLA).) Modelled after the nation-wide [American Intellectual Property Law Association](#), local associations meet several times per year to foster collegial exchanges regarding the nuances and importance of intellectual property. Membership consists of intellectual property attorneys at law firms, companies, and organizations of all sizes, and often law students from neighboring law schools who are interested in careers in intellectual property. If you contact a local association, you could ask if you would be permitted to attend their meetings. If yes, this could be a good way to make opportunistic connections with local attorneys who, among other things, may work for firms that are willing to hire prospective patent agents as "technical assistants," which could in turn be a useful and productive prelude to law school and a very effective way to explore this particular specialty area.

For students of color:

- [Sponsors for Educational Opportunity](#) (SEO) describes itself as "the nation's premiere summer internship program for talented students of color (Black, Hispanic/Latino, Asian and Native American students) leading to full-time job offers with major corporations and firms." Internships are available in eight career areas, including corporate law. SEO interns receive a comprehensive internship experience. In addition to job placement, interns participate in a Summer Seminar Series, receive intensive training before and during the Internship as well as support by an extensive mentoring program, and post-internship access to an extensive alumni network. For more information, contact: SEO Career Program, 30 W. 21st Street, Suite 900, New York, NY 10010; (212) 979-2040; careerprogram@seo-usa.org; or visit <http://www.seo-usa.org> to learn more about the SEO Career Program.

In & Around Pittsburgh

- [American Civil Liberties Union \(Pittsburgh, PA Office\)](#). Founded in 1920, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) is a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to defending and protecting individual rights and personal freedoms. Through advocacy, education and litigation, ACLU attorneys, advocates and volunteers work to preserve and promote civil liberties including the freedom of speech, the right to privacy, reproductive freedom, and equal treatment under the law. The ACLU stands in defense of the rights of women and minorities, workers, students, immigrants, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people, and others who have seen bias and bigotry threaten the rights afforded to all of us in this country by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.
- The [Allegheny County Bar Association](#) has a “[Pro Bono Center](#)” web site that lists 34 projects and member organizations that provide direct legal services to low-income individuals. While intended mainly for law students who are seeking internships, persistent research and outreach may produce some good leads for undergraduate students. (Other city and county bar associations throughout the state and nation often have similar postings.) Here are a few Pittsburgh-based examples:
 - [Christian Legal Aid of Pittsburgh](#) (“CLA”) operates free legal clinics at local churches where volunteers provide legal counsel, guidance, and prayer regarding civil legal matters to those whose income is at or below 250% of the federal poverty guidelines.
 - The Pittsburgh [Education Law Center](#) is a legal advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring that all Pennsylvania children have access to a quality public education, including early childhood and early intervention services from birth through age 21. The Center offers legal support to community organizations seeking state and local policy reform to improve schools and provides technical assistance and support for pro bono attorneys working on matters of public education. Formal legal representation is also provided at no cost to students and families on cases involving public education reform.
 - [Jewish Family & Children’s Service of Pittsburgh](#) offers family and immigration law assistance to low-income refugees and immigrants in Pittsburgh.
 - [KidsVoice](#) represents abused, neglected and at-risk children in Juvenile Court dependency proceedings.

- The [Pennsylvania Community Justice Project](#) (CJP) is a non-profit, public interest law firm that is part of Pennsylvania's Legal Aid Network. Its mission is to protect and expand the civil rights of poor families and low-wage workers. The CJP has offices in the Pennsylvania cities of Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, Reading, and Hazleton.
- [Public Defender Service](#) / [Neighborhood Legal Services](#). Public Defender Offices, as well as offices of the Neighborhood Legal Services Association, exist in almost every city or county of every state in the nation, and may be able to offer internship opportunities. Interested students should inquire directly with individual offices that offer these services about internship opportunities.
- The "[Save Your Home](#)" [Mortgage Foreclosure Conciliation Project](#) provides limited representation at judicial conciliation conferences to low-income borrowers in residential mortgage foreclosure proceedings as part of the "Save Your Home" program of the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas.
- The Pennsylvania [Women's Law Project](#) (WLP) describes itself as "the only public interest law center in Pennsylvania devoted to the rights of women and girls." Founded in 1974, and with offices in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, the WLP advocates for such causes as equal access to reproductive healthcare and abortion, improving institutional response to all forms of violence against women, challenging sex & gender discrimination, and advocating for workplace equality and economic justice. In addition to legal advocacy, the WLP offers an in-house Telephone Counseling Service, which provides information and referrals for women and girls.

Summer Study Abroad Programs with Pre-Law Course Content and/or Pre-Law Internship

[Brussels Internship Program](#). Offered through Boston University, the Brussels Internship Program offers students the opportunity to spend eight weeks living, studying, and interning in the heart of Europe. Students are introduced to the city's important place in European and world politics through coursework that focuses on the current challenges facing the European Union (EU). Field trips to political, governmental, and non-governmental organizations complement the coursework. Internship areas include economics, international relations and international organizations, politics and comparative law.

[Dublin Internship Program](#). Offered through Boston University, the Dublin Summer Internship Program offers eight weeks of coursework and participation in a professional internship in or near Dublin, Ireland. Excursions to cultural and historical sites complement the coursework. Coursework is taught by local faculty at [Dublin City University \(DCU\)](#). Offerings include International Human Rights Law (CAS IR 306). Politics, International Relations, and Pre-Law internship possibilities include working with an NGO, the press, humanitarian organizations, a political party, or a local Dublin law firm specializing in civil, criminal, or corporate law. Past internship placements have included the Institute of European Affairs, Fine Gael, Amnesty International, The European Movement, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Fianna Fáil, Philip Lee & Associates, Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation (HSBC), Terence Lyons & Co Solicitors, and the Free Legal Advice Centre.

[Geneva \(Switzerland\): Global Governance, Economic Development, and Human Rights](#). Offered through Boston University, this program consists of one required course: CAS IR 421/GRS IR 621: *Global Governance, Economic Development, and Human Rights* (4 credits). This course examines contemporary global governance structures and efforts with a particular focus on achieving economic development that is environmentally sound and socially inclusive. Students gain an in-depth understanding of the many different roles that states, inter-governmental organizations, and non-governmental organizations play in global governance in the early parts of the 21st Century. The course is designed for upper-level undergraduate and graduate students who specialize in international relations, political science, public health, development and environmental studies, and other related fields.

[London Internship Program](#). Offered through Boston University, the London Internship Program offers 11 weeks of study and work in England's capital city. Optional foci include the study of the issues and institutions of British political culture and work in a political setting, including Parliament, party organizations, lobbying groups, or political public relations agencies; or, the study of the history and practice of the law in Great Britain, along with participation in the daily life of a British law firm or commercial legal department. Internship placements have included Labour and Conservative Party Headquarters, JD Spicer Zeb, Bark & Co, Powell Spencer & Partners Solicitors, Dow Jones & Company, MENCAP,² Information Handling Services Market (HIS)/Janes, Overseas Development Institute and Westminster Briefing.

The [University of Oxford-The Ohio State University Summer Pre-Law Program](#) offers students the opportunity to study with faculty from both the University of Oxford in England and The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law in the United States. Students learn about the

² This acronym is an abbreviated version of The Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults

British and American legal systems through a combination of class work, guest lectures, and excursions in Oxford and London.

Exploring Law School

If you are just beginning to think about law school, an excellent starting point is the web site of the [Law School Admission Council](#) (LSAC). Here you will find discussions of many of the questions about law school that you may already be asking, or *should be* asking, including:

- What is different about law school (vs. undergraduate school)? Is there a standard law school curriculum?
- What options are available in terms of the duration of a law school education (e.g., full-time, part-time, accelerated, etc.)?
- What is the cost of law school, and how will I pay for law school?
- How best to choose law schools for application?

College vs. Law School (“Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.”³)

The law school experience is very different from college in a variety of ways, and for a variety of reasons.

Program Length. The standard law school experience is three years in length. For part-time programs (with courses usually taught in the evening, or in some more recent instances, on weekends), four years is the standard length. Some schools are experimenting with two-year time frames by compressing the standard three-year curriculum into two years (for example, through use of summers between the first and second years), though the cost is typically the same as with a three-year program.

The web site [Insight Assessment](#) offers a diagnostic tool that purports to gauge one’s readiness for law school based on critical skills needed for law school success (e.g., accurately interpreting the fine distinctions of a judicial decision, explaining the applicability of precedent, drawing accurate inferences as to the most advantageous argument to defend a client and constructing that argument convincingly). You can find this tool [here](#).

³ Dorothy to her dog Toto, in *The Wizard of Oz*.

Professional Orientation. Although a law degree can lead to a variety of occupations, and one law student's experience can be quite different from another's, virtually all accredited law schools share the common and specialized objective of training aspiring lawyers.

The professional orientation of law school is reflected in the similarity of curricula at different law schools, as well as in the attitudes of most law students. At least during the first year of law school, most law students will take the same set of courses and work to master the same set of fundamental legal skills. Curricular diversification begins after the first year, and builds on the professional foundation formed by the first-year's course work.

Heightened Competition. While law school is not necessarily more intellectually difficult than college, the workload is usually greater, and the level of competence demanded by professors is uniformly higher than in college. Since more students are studying the same materials, and seeking to master the same skills, students often find in law school -- to a greater or lesser extent depending on the law school and the individual -- a heightened sense of competition.

For example, consider this discussion about the common law school practice of grading on a curve:

Many, or perhaps most, law schools in the United States grade on a curve. The process generally works within each class, where the instructor grades each exam, and then ranks the exams against each other, adding to and subtracting from the initial grades so that the overall grade distribution matches the school's specified curve (usually a bell curve). "The curve" is the permitted range of each letter grade that can be awarded, for example, 0-3% A+, 3-7% A, etc. Curves vary between different law schools, as do the rules for when the curve is mandatory versus suggestive. It is common for the curve to be mandatory for first year ("1L") courses, and for classes above a certain size.

Grading on a curve contributes to the notoriously competitive atmosphere within law schools. "The main source of this competition is the mandatory curve you will likely encounter once you enter law school. The curve affects the class rank, affects the chances of making law review, and affects the chances of scoring that big job/externship." Some law schools set their curve lower to retain school scholarship funding; others set their curve higher to make their students more competitive in the job market.

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_law_school_GPA_curves

Pedagogy. As stated earlier, most law schools offer very similar curricula for the first year. Since law schools seek to teach their students to "think like lawyers," the first year is usually devoted to a process of re-education. Students are challenged to think critically and precisely, and to articulate their ideas with clarity and conviction.

Although its dominance has receded somewhat in recent years, the "Socratic method" remains the traditional method for this re-education process. The Socratic method involves rapidly paced question-and-answer sessions in the classroom that are designed to teach students how to analyze and synthesize into a coherent framework the raw materials of the common law: namely, court cases.

Rarely will a law professor attempt to explain to first-year students precisely what "the law" is in a particular area, often because it is impossible to do so. Instead, students are expected to develop and organize their own understanding of the current shape and texture of the law as they digest the hundreds of cases that are assigned during the first year. Daily classes, as well as the inevitable examinations that come once or twice a year, require extensive reading and preparation. However, success depends far more on skills of *analysis* and *articulation* than of *memory*.

In addition to dealing with the traditional "casebook-based" courses that tend to typify the first year, most first-year law students participate in legal-writing courses and "Moot Court" programs. These provide introductions to the essential skills of legal research, preparation of legal memoranda, briefs and opinions, and oral advocacy.

In the second and third years, law students may choose from a variety of elective courses that will further strengthen these skills while providing substantive familiarity with various specialized areas of the law, such as taxation, evidence, criminal procedure, antitrust, corporations, family law and administrative law.

In addition to courses that are based on either a Socratic or lecture format, most schools offer seminars and "clinical" courses that enable students to pursue specialized interests or to perform legal tasks under supervision.

It is at these more advanced levels of course work and special programs where one law school can become notably distinguishable from others in terms of its curricular and programmatic offerings. Whereas the first year is generally quite standard for all law students, the second and third years can possess significant variety and can allow students to take advantage of a school's unique strengths in the form of joint programs within the parent university, special faculty expertise in one or another

In the 1973 movie *The Paper Chase* (which offered a portrayal of the 1L experience at Harvard Law School), actor John Houseman filled the role of Professor Charles Kingsfield, a superb but intimidating contract law professor who expertly [illustrates the Socratic method in action](#). (NOTE: Houseman won an Oscar for Best Supporting Actor for this role.)

For additional information about special opportunities at specific schools, consult the relevant school profiles in the [LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#), as well as [The NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists](#)

For a discussion of pro's and con's of joint degree programs involving a J.D. degree, see the FAQ section of this handbook on page 119.

area, or opportunities that stem from the community or region within which the school is located.

The need for patience (and an open mind) with law school course requirements. No matter what their motivation for attending law school, many law students do not realize that the long hours and hard work devoted to learning legal fundamentals may seem, and sometimes are, totally irrelevant to their long-term goals. A law student must learn every aspect of the law. If you are interested in migrant labor law and organization, for example, you must be willing to learn about contracts, torts, civil procedure, corporate law, taxation and riparian law.⁴ Only by following this long, arduous, and indirect route will you be able to acquire the legal tools you will need to effectively represent an organization, group or individual in need of legal aid.

Beyond the Classroom: Extracurriculars, Clinical Experience, Moot Court, and Law Review.

Experiences outside the classroom are as vital to legal education as formal course work, especially for second- and third-year students. Many law students claim to learn as much from their peers as from their professors, and many extracurricular activities in law school revolve around student-run projects in legal education and advocacy. On the academic side, most law schools have programs in moot court and trial practice, as well as a *law review* journal that publishes legal scholarship in periodical form, produced entirely by students. On a more practical level, many law students participate in organizations that provide legal assistance or research to individuals or groups such as the elderly, indigents, or prison inmates, and to other groups concerned with political and environmental issues. Most students supplement the practical skills gained through involvement in such extracurricular activities by summer employment, or "externship" placements during a part of the school year with a private or public interest law firm, a governmental agency, private business, or the legal staff of a non-profit organization.

The Bar Examination. One hurdle remains after graduation from law school before most students become licensed lawyers: passing the *bar examination*. Bar exams are administered in each state for persons who wish to qualify for practice in that state. In most U.S. states and territories, the bar examination is at least two days long (a few states have three-day exams) and usually consists of essay questions that test knowledge of general legal principles, and that may also test knowledge of the state's own law (usually subjects such as wills, trusts and community property, which always vary from one state to another).

Most law students now go directly from law school to a six- or eight-week "bar review" course given in the state in which they plan to practice, especially if that is a different state from the one in which they attended law school. One measure that several law schools use in

⁴ "Riparian law" refers to ownership of land on the bank of a natural watercourse or water body.

"marketing" themselves, and which some students might use in selecting law schools, is the first-time "bar passage rate" that schools boast for their graduates who take the bar exam in the state where the school is located.

Ways to Explore Law School

Think back to when you were a high school student, looking ahead to college. What strategies were recommended to you at that time regarding how to explore the wide range of college options available to you?

No doubt, these included visiting colleges, campus tours, spending time on college campuses "shadowing" current students, sitting in on classes, interviews with admissions representatives and alumni, attending college fairs, etc. While exploring law school occurs at a later stage of one's life and career, the exploratory strategies available to you are not markedly different from those that you likely used when exploring your college options.

Two questions should be "front and center" when exploring law school, and considered together:

1. Is law school right for me?
2. What law school features and factors matter most to me in choosing a law school, if I decide to apply?

Visiting Law Schools

Law schools welcome visits by prospective students, and typically offer a law school tour, class visits, meeting with an admissions counselor, and meeting a few current students (possibly, if enrolled and available, current law students who graduated from Carnegie Mellon).

Law school admission consultant Shawn O'Connor offers advice [here](#) about "How to Make the Most Out of a Law School Visit."

Here are some things to keep in mind and consider when planning your law school visits:

- Find out if the law school(s) that you plan to visit suggest, or require, registration in advance.
- Find out what the law school(s) have to say or recommend about when tours, class visits, and admission interviews are available, and plan accordingly. For example:

- Tours, class visits, and appointments with an admissions counselor are generally available on most weekdays during normal business office hours
- If you want to sit in on classes, some law schools will urge you to avoid Fridays because fewer classes are available on that particular day of the week.
- There may be some periods when options such as tours and class visits are not available. For example:
 - At the University of Michigan School of Law, “Classes are not available between terms and for at least the first two or three weeks of each term.”

Be sure to look into this before each of your law school visit.

- If you sit in on classes, pay special attention to class size in second- and third-year courses. While first-year classes will be around the same size at most schools, classes in the later years can range from intimate seminars to larger lectures, depending on the school.
- Your participation in an official tour and class visit is usually recorded by the law school admissions office, and signals to them an added degree of your interest in the school, which could make a positive difference if you apply.
- Look into the school's career services offerings, which can vary dramatically. How happy and satisfied with these services do current students seem to be?
- If you have the opportunity to schedule a voluntary or informational interview, seize it. Taking advantage of an interview opportunity can also reinforce your interest in the school. Take these interviews as seriously as you would any other interview; prepare extensively and do mock interviews to practice. Ensure that your interviewer will be left with a strong and positive impression of you by conveying your story in a compelling fashion. (See more on informational interviews below.)
- During your visit, try not to let the awe-inspiring (or underwhelming) facilities distract you; stay focused on what really matters. While a grandiose library may be impressive, pay closer attention to how happy and collaborative the students are and how involved

they are in the school and in extracurricular activities. Is there a strong and positive sense of community, both within the law school and within the broader university?

- Student-centered insights can follow from the opportunity to “shadow” a current law student (preferably 2nd- or 3rd-year) for a day. When scheduling your visit, ask the admissions office if this option is available for visiting prospective students and, again, if it is possible to connect with CMU alumni currently enrolled there.

Informational interviews

If you want to know what it’s like to be a law student, who best to consult than *a law student* through an informational interview? An **informational interview** is, in general, an informal conversation with someone working in an area that interests you who will give you information and advice. You may feel awkward making arrangements to talk with people you do not know (in this case, about their law school experience). However, most people actually enjoy taking a few moments out of their day to reflect on their experiences and to give advice to someone with an interest in their field.

A useful discussion of “steps and tips” for informational interviews can be found [here](#).

Benefits of Informational Interviews with Law Students

- Get first-hand, relevant information about the realities of law school. This kind of information is not always available online.
- Find out about opportunities and law-related career paths, some of which you may not have known existed.
- Get tips about how to prepare for and successfully begin law school, as well as a law-related career.
- Learn what it is like to work at a specific organization, based on law students’ experiences.
- Gain insider knowledge that can help you in writing your resume, interviewing, and more.
- Initiate a relationship and expand your network of contacts.

Five Steps for Informational Interviewing

1. Identify people to interview
 - a. Pursue your own contacts (i.e., individuals who you already know who are [or were recently] in law school). This could include family, friends, work-related acquaintances, etc.

- b. Identify names of CMU alumni now (or recently) in law school. These alums will often take a special interest in CMU students and alumni thinking about law school. Utilize the [CMU Law Alumni LinkedIn](#) network to find them.
2. Prepare for the interview
 - a. Develop a brief introduction of yourself and your hopes for the meeting.
 - b. Plan open-ended questions to ask.
3. Initiate contact
 - a. Contact the person by phone or email.
 - b. Mention how you got his or her name.
 - c. Ask whether it is a good time to talk for a few minutes.
 - d. Ask for a convenient time to have a 20-30-minute appointment.
 - e. Be ready to ask questions on the spot if the person says *now* is a good time for him/her and that s/he would not be readily available otherwise.
4. Conduct the informational interview
 - a. Dress appropriately.
 - b. Arrive or (if not in person) connect on time or a few minutes early.
 - c. Restate that your objective is to get information, insights and advice.
 - d. Give a brief overview of yourself and your education and/or work background.
 - e. Be prepared to direct the interview, but also let the conversation flow naturally, and encourage the interviewee to do most of the talking.
 - f. Take notes if you like.
 - g. Respect the person's time. Keep the meeting length within the agreed-upon timeframe.
 - h. Ask the person if you may contact them again in the future with other questions.
 - i. Ask for names of other law students to meet to gain different perspectives.
5. Follow-up
 - a. Keep records. Right after the interview write down what you learned, what more you would like to know and your impressions of how law school would fit with your lifestyle, interests, skills and future plans.
 - b. Send a thank-you note within 1-2 days to express your appreciation for the time and information given. E-mail suffices, though a hand-written note or card can make a better impression because of the greater time, care and attention it involves vs. the quick, convenient but less personal e-mail message.

- c. Keep in touch with the individuals who you interviewed, especially if you had a particularly good (cordial and productive) interaction; let him or her know that you followed up on their advice and how things are going as a result. This relationship could become an important part of your network.

Law school fairs and forums

Each Fall, from September through November, the [Law School Admission Council](#) (LSAC) hosts several free [Law School Forums](#) across the nation (and one in Canada), as well as one in Washington, DC in the summer. There are also several [regional law school recruitment events](#) during the Fall, including in recent years an annual law school fair at the University of Pittsburgh. In addition to the opportunity to meet and speak with law school admission representatives, these events frequently include seminars and workshops that can provide several useful insights into the law school experience, the state of and outlook for the legal profession, and the law school application process.

A useful discussion of “tips for getting the most out of a law school fair” can be found [here](#).

Summer programs

A number of summer programs are available that provide the kind of focused exploration of law school and the legal profession that can help insure an informed and confident decision about going to law school and pursuing a career in the law. Here is a sampling:

Diversity Pre-Law Preparation Summer Programs and Institutes

The [Ronald H. Brown Law School Prep Program for College Students](#) at St. John’s University School of Law in New York City focuses on underrepresented and disadvantaged college students, and prepares them for the challenges of law school and for the law school application process. Participants gain an edge in courses taught by Law School faculty; through internships with judges and lawyers; in a customized LSAT prep course; and with advising on all aspects of the admission process. The program furthers the [Ron Brown Center’s](#) mission of engaging in legal studies, research, and outreach on issues affecting the lives of disadvantaged and underrepresented people; increasing racial and socioeconomic diversity in the legal profession; and educating law students to be leaders on issues of racial, economic, and social justice.

[University of California Davis School of Law – King Hall Outreach Program](#) The King Hall Outreach Program (KHOP) helps college students from underrepresented communities prepare

for the law school admissions process. The program hosts eligible college juniors and seniors for a series of weekend summer sessions in which students gain valuable knowledge about the law school admission process, learn legal writing, analytical, and logical reasoning skills, develop study techniques for taking the Law School Admission Test (L.S.A.T.), and explore career paths available to law school graduates.

[Charles Hamilton Houston Law School Prelaw Institute](#). This seven-week summer program held at [Georgetown University Law Center](#) aims to prepare students of color with the skills necessary to succeed in law school. The curriculum introduces students to American jurisprudence, federal and state court systems, critical legal vocabulary, the civil litigation process, and case analysis methods. Students gain a preliminary understanding of legal research & writing and are taught by notable attorneys and leaders in the legal field.

[CLEO](#) (Council on Legal Education Opportunity) is a non-profit organization, founded in 1968, that has helped thousands of low-income and minority students become successful members of the legal profession. CLEO is committed to diversifying the legal profession by expanding legal education opportunities to minority, low-income and disadvantaged groups. CLEO provides training and workshops to college students who are interested in attending law school and pursuing a career in the legal profession. The [CLEO College Scholars Program](#) seeks to continue this standard of excellence through a collaborative effort between CLEO and colleges and universities throughout the United States. The program's goal is to identify, motivate and prepare students for a career in the legal profession. Students can learn how to successfully navigate the law school admission process and underwrite their success in law school by participating in the College Scholars program.

The CLEO College Scholars Program has options for college freshmen, sophomores, juniors, seniors, and post-baccalaureate candidates that include weekend, 4-week, and 6-week programs for students of different college years. Examples:

- For freshmen: A [The Road to Law School seminar](#) aims to provide freshmen an overview of the key components of the law school application process.
- For Sophomores: [The Sophomore Super Saturdays](#) seminar aims to help students further develop logical reasoning, reading comprehension and writing skills - the skills needed to become a competitive law school applicant.
- For Juniors, Seniors, & Post-Graduates: [Juniors Jumpstart the LSAT](#) seminar aims to help participants understand the importance of systematic and timely

preparation for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Accordingly, juniors will be granted priority enrollment for the seminar

[DiscoverLaw.org Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars \(PLUS\)](#) DiscoverLaw.org PLUS programs are targeted, but not restricted, to college students from racial and ethnic minority groups underrepresented in the legal profession. These four-week programs, offered each summer at selected law schools across the nation, provide an intense focus on the skills required to succeed in law school, the law school admission process, and legal career opportunities. The programs are designed for students in the first two years of college, and preference will be given to students who have [signed up for DiscoverLaw.org](#)

The [Drake University Law School](#) (in Des Moines, Iowa) offers the [Law Opportunity Leadership Program](#) for qualified students from underrepresented groups. The program offers mentorship, leadership training and two guaranteed, paid internships with Des Moines-based companies and law firms.

[Florida State College of Law Summer for Undergraduates Program](#) This Summer for Undergraduates Program brings to campus undergraduate students from throughout the country for a month-long immersion into legal study. The largest and oldest of its kind in the nation, the primary goal of the program is to acquaint students with the study of law and to assist them in acquiring skills that will benefit their undergraduate and future law school studies.

The [University of Houston Law Center \(UHLC\) Pre-Law Pipeline Program](#) A six-week residential program held at the University of Houston Law Center, with internship locations within the Houston metro area and environs. The program is specifically designed to provide resources to undergraduate students who are first generation, low income, or members of groups underrepresented in the legal profession who are interested in pursuing a career in law.

[Illinois Institute of Technology \(IIT\) Chicago-Kent College of Law Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars \(PLUS\) Program](#) The IIT Chicago-Kent Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars program (“PLUS”) is a three-week summer institute which: (1) introduces participants to law school and the legal profession; (2) provides participants with substantive skills to strengthen their preparation for law school; and (3) educates and prepares participants for the law school application and admission process. The program is primarily directed at undergraduate college students from disadvantaged groups that are underrepresented in the legal profession.

[LAWbound](#) An initiative of the LatinoJustice PRLDEF Education Division, *LAWbound* provides targeted services that address some of the most common barriers to admission to law school,

and helps students effectively navigate the law school admissions process. The program is offered in the summer (August) as well as in the winter (January).

The [New York Legal Education Opportunity Program](#) (NY LEO) is designed to ensure a diverse legal community by promoting academic success in law school for individuals historically underrepresented in the legal profession. Through an intense six-week summer program, the NY LEO Program assists minority, low income and economically or educationally disadvantaged college graduates in acquiring the fundamental and practical skills necessary to succeed in law school. The program is available to qualified candidates who will attend law school in New York.

[TRIALS \(Training and Recruitment Initiative for Admission to Leading Law Schools\)](#) is a five-week fully subsidized residential summer study program for students of modest means whose backgrounds are currently underrepresented at the nation's top law schools. The program is a partnership of NYU School of Law, Harvard Law School, and the Advantage Testing Foundation. The location alternates between Boston and New York City from year to year.

General Pre-Law Summer Programs – Open to All

The [University of Colorado Law School's Mini-Law School Program](#) is an eight-week series (offered in the Fall) that purports to provide participants "with a better understanding of important legal principles in key areas of the law." There are no required readings, tests, or homework assignments. Taught by members of the law school faculty, the program is open to all and, says the law school, "is a great chance to get a taste of what law school is like." There is a registration fee for the entire series of \$200. Participants who view at least six of the eight sessions receive a Mini Law School Certificate (no academic credit is received for participation).

[Cornell University Pre-Law Summer Program in New York City](#) This intensive, six-week program taught in New York City features a four-credit course, "[Introduction to the American Legal System](#)," taught using the Socratic method used at most U.S. law schools. The program also may include an internship placement at a law firm or in the legal department of a corporation, government agency, or nonprofit organization. The program is designed for undergraduates who have completed their sophomore year or higher by the summer of entry, and for college graduates who wish to gain an accurate, comprehensive understanding of America's legal system.

The [Duke University Law D.C. Summer Institute on Law and Policy](#) offers short (two-week) courses taught by Duke Law faculty on topics of broad interest to college and graduate students, as well as professionals working in D.C. Launched in 2013, the Institute is designed for

individuals considering law school or careers in the public sector and others interested in how the law shapes policy and regulation in the United States. Courses taught in the evening accommodate students and professionals as a complement to Capitol Hill and other D.C.-based positions and summer internships.

The [Fordham University Pre-Law Institute](#) is a 4 ½-week summer program offered at Fordham University Law School's Lincoln Center campus. Classes are taught by Fordham Law School faculty, who introduce the Socratic method of teaching that is common in legal education. Topics include Introduction to the U.S. Legal System, Constitutional Law, Legislation/Regulation, Foundations of Private Law, Criminal Law and Procedure, Civil Procedure and Litigation, Legal Ethics and Professional Responsibility, and Legal Research and Writing. In addition, optional sessions are offered as preparation for the law school admissions process, the first year of law school studies, and legal professional development. Participants may choose to receive three undergraduate credits or to take the course without credit at a reduced cost. This course is designed primarily for those contemplating law school but all are eligible and welcome. Certificates of completion will be awarded to all who meet the attendance requirement.

[Pace University's Elisabeth Haub School of Law](#) offers the [Pace Pre-Law Certificate Program](#) (PPCP), a three-week, New York City-based comprehensive certificate program for aspiring lawyers who would like to practice in the United States. This intensive program, situated just a few blocks away from all major New York County courthouses in Manhattan, includes approximately 60 hours of in-class lectures, visits to law firms and court rooms, law school application guidance, audits of actual law school classes, and guest speakers from various legal and business fields. Participants have an opportunity to live and network with other Pace University students, and law students from around the world, including international LLM (Master of Laws) students.

The [Paris Summer Institute](#) is a four-week academic program in international and comparative law. The Institute is co-sponsored by Cornell Law School and the Sorbonne Law School at the Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. The program emphasizes the study of international law and institutions, as well as U.S. and other legal systems in a comparative context.

Courses Offered:

- Business and Human Rights (Cornell) 1 credit
- Comparative Corporate Governance (Whitehead) 1 credit
- Comparative Legal Studies (Lasser) 1 credit
- Gender and International Human Rights (Babcock) 1 credit
- Globalizing Constitutional Law (Anker) 1 credit
- International Business Regulation (Gardner) 1 credit

- International Litigation and Arbitration (Clopton) 1 credit

In addition, the program provides optional non-credit French language lessons.

The [University of Texas at San Antonio Institute for Law and Public Affairs – Summer Law School Preparation Academy](#) (SLSPA) offers an enhanced pre-law curriculum, supplemented by guest speakers and practical experiences, in support of the Institute for Law and Public Affairs' goal of increasing the number of Texas students who gain admission to and excel in law school. The SLSPA is open to undergraduate students attending any accredited college or university.

Law school admission officers often list the following personal qualities (illustrated as questions) as essential for law school candidates, qualities that also help law students become good attorneys:

- Are you opinionated?
- Can you articulate problems verbally and in writing so that others can understand them?
- Do you enjoy writing? Do you write well?
- Do you enjoy being an advocate? Can you argue both sides of a question clearly, concisely, and enthusiastically?
- Do you enjoy working through complex problems?
- Can you take criticism?
- Do you enjoy speaking out in class?
- Is precision important to you? Are you the kind of person who wants to "get things right" and doesn't mind spending time on the details?
- Can you cope with ambiguity?
- Do you have a strong work ethic?
- Have you developed good research skills?
- Do you listen well?
- Do you enjoy working with people and educating them?

Source: "Academic Advising Pre-Law Resources," Stanford University

Preparation

In this section, we talk about ways to prepare for law school, which in key ways also serve as another form of exploration. If you choose options in your studies and/or activities that call into play the skills that law school demands, or the kinds of issues, problems, and “ways of thinking” that are similar to what one would face in law school and the profession, this will serve the dual purpose of further affirming for you whether or not you are genuinely attracted to and well-suited for the law, while also honing these skills and strategies in preparation for law school.

While most of what is presented here is geared toward current undergraduate students, this information and advice can be adapted and used by alumni/ae as well – perhaps through options available to them in their jobs, continuing education courses or master’s programs available to them, volunteer opportunities, etc.

Academics: Major and Curriculum

"If I think I want to go to law school, and therefore would call myself 'pre-law,' is there some particular major I should be pursuing, or (like pre-medical students) an undergraduate curriculum that I should be taking as preparation for law school?"

The answer to both of these questions is “no.” There is no single curricular or programmatic path that will best prepare you for law school. Unlike medical school, there are no specific courses required for entry into law school. Instead, law schools insist that they want candidates with a broad foundation and a rigorous major, and not those who have taken a particular set or series of courses. Hence, you should study fields that genuinely interest you rather than those that you think law schools would like to see.

In one recent academic year, Carnegie Mellon graduates enrolled in law school came from every CMU college, and 26 different primary majors.

However, there *are* core skills and values that provide a solid foundation for law school. These have been summarized in the American Bar Association’s [Statement on Pre-law Preparation](#).

Building on this ABA statement, here are some additional and more specific curricular recommendations that law schools frequently offer:

- Perfect skills in reading, writing, and oral communication. Words are the lawyer's tools, after all, and the student who can express him- or herself confidently and clearly will have an advantage. Seek out opportunities to engage in critical readings of texts, complex problem solving, task organization, and substantial research planning and management.

- Consider courses that will expose you to legal issues or materials, or that enable you to see what the law is and how it operates. Become familiar with the historical foundations and contemporary function of political, economic, and social institutions. Several Carnegie Mellon courses that are relevant in one or more of these ways are listed below.
- No matter what your major, expose yourself to other disciplines that might be useful in the study and practice of law. For example:
 - An understanding of basic economic principles is highly relevant and important in the study and practice of law.
 - If you plan to practice law in a bilingual or ethnically distinct community, or in another country, consider courses in relevant languages and cultural studies.
 - In anticipation of the great deal of time law students and lawyers spend doing legal research, consider courses or opportunities that stress, or provide diverse opportunities for, hands-on research training and involvement.

Carnegie Mellon undergraduate courses “relevant” for pre-law students

One way to think about the “relevance” of courses for pre-law students is to consider three categories of relevance:

- (1) relevant because the course content is directly law-related (e.g., “*Topics in Law: The Bill of Rights*”; “*Law of Computer Technology*”)
- (2) relevant because the course content is indirectly law-related (e.g., “*The History of American Public Policy*”; “*Ethics & Policy Issues in Computing*”; “*Introduction to Engineering & Public Policy*”)
- (3) relevant because the skills learned are relevant for law school and a career in the law (e.g., “*Introduction to Technical and Professional Writing*”; “*Logic and Proofs*”; “*Negotiation & Conflict Management*”)

Here (below) are some suggestions in these categories consisting of courses offered regularly (or in some instances “intermittently”) here at Carnegie Mellon. (NOTE: Watch for prerequisites for courses beyond 100-level). Of course, many courses are relevant in more than just one category. But to avoid duplication, any course mentioned below is listed just once, in that category where relevance seems strongest.

| College & Dept./Program ⁵ | Category 1 ("because the content is directly law-related") | Category 2 ("because the course content has indirect topical relevance") | Category 3 ("because the skills learned are relevant for law school.") |
|---|--|---|---|
| CFA/Drama | | | 54-277, Negotiation & Conflict Management |
| CIT/Chemical Engineering | | | |
| CIT/Civil & Environmental Engineering | | 12-421, Engineering Economics | |
| CIT/Electrical & Computer Engineering | | 18-482, Telecommunications Technology, Policy & Management | |
| CIT/Engineering & Public Policy | | 19-101, Introduction to Engineering & Public Policy 19-211, Ethics & Policy Issues in Computing 19-402, Telecommunications Technology, Policy & Management 19-403, Policies of Wireless Systems & the Internet 19-421, Emerging Energy Policies 19-424, Energy & the Environment 19-639, Policies of Internet Systems | 19-325, Technology & Policy Writing for Lay Audiences 19-351, Applied Methods for Technology-Policy Analysis |
| CIT/Mechanical Engineering | | 24-424, Energy & the Environment 24-425, Combustion & Air Pollution Control 24-680, Quantitative Entrepreneurship: Analysis for New Technology Commercialization 24-692, Engineering a Start-Up: How to Start & Grow a Hardware Company | |
| Dietrich/Interdisciplinary | 66-215, Innovation Trials 66-221, Legal Topics: Introduction to Intellectual Property Law | | |
| Dietrich/Tepper - Economics | 73-332, Political Economy 73-408, Law and Economics | 73-102, Principles of Microeconomics 73-103, Principles of Macroeconomics 73-160, Foundations of Microeconomics: Applications and Theory Any Economics course beyond 100-level. Of particular relevance: 73-230, Intermediate Microeconomics 73-240, Intermediate Macroeconomics 73-315, Market Design 73-328, Health Economics 73-338, Financial Crises and Risk 73-352, Public Economics | 73-265, Economics and Data Science 73-270, Writing for Economists 73-359, Benefit-Cost Analysis |

⁵ NOTE: The sources named in the first, far-left column are the college, department and/or program offering the courses listed in the 2nd, 3rd and 4th columns. The college/department/program names are hyperlinked to the units' course descriptions in the current undergraduate catalog, where you will be able to find the descriptions of the courses listed in the table.

| | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | 73-353, Economic Foundations of Regulation: Applications to Financial Markets 73-427, Sustainability, Energy, and Environmental Economics 73-476, American Economic History | |
| Dietrich/English | 76-450, Law, Culture and the Humanities 76-475, Law, Performance & Identity | English courses in argumentation and/or rhetorical theory. Examples: 76-319, Environmental Rhetoric 36-351, Rhetorical Invention 76-373, Argument 76-385, Introduction to Discourse Analysis 76-386, Language and Culture 76-389, Rhetorical Grammar 76-390, Style 76-393, Narrative and Argument 76-396, Non-Profit Message Creation 76-418, Rhetoric of the Body 76-480, Feminist Rhetorics 76-484, Discourse Analysis 76-485, New Public Sphere 76-486, Argument Theory 76-491, Rhetorical Analysis 76-492, Rhetoric of Public Policy 76-495, Research Methods in Rhetoric & Writing Studies <u>Other Topical Courses:</u> 76-241, Intro to Gender Studies 76-337, Intersectional Feminisms 76-384, Race, Nation, and the Enemy 76-404, Critical Race & Ethnicity Studies 76-415, Mediated Power & Propaganda 76-449, Race & Media 76-461, Immigrants, Migrants, and Refugees 76-468, Space and Mobilities | 76-101, Interpretation and Argument (the standard course for CMU undergraduate students to fulfill the University undergraduate writing requirement) 76-106, Writing About Literature, Art, and Culture 76-108, Writing About Public Problems Any subsequent expository writing course. Examples: 76-270, Writing in the Professions 76-271, Introduction to Professional and Technical Writing 76-275, Critical Writing Workshop 76-318, Communicating in the Global Marketplace 76-395, Science Writing <u>Other topical courses:</u> 76-348, Gender and Communication 76-355, Leadership, Dialogue, and Change 76-356, Oral Communication 76-371, Teamwork for Innovators |
| Dietrich/History | 79-248, U.S. Constitution & the Presidency 79-302, Drone Warfare: Ethics, Law, Politics, History and Strategy 79-308, Crime and Justice in American Film 79-339, Juvenile Delinquency and Film (1920 to "The Wire") 79-340 Juvenile Delinquency and Juvenile Justice | 79-104, Global Histories: The Best Worst Form of Government: Democracy through the Ages 79-204, American Environmental History 79-231, American Civil Rights Movement: From Garveyism to Black Power 79-236, Coming to America: Immigration History & Policy 79-245, Capitalism & Individualism in American Culture 79-249, 20 th /21 st -Century U.S. History 79-298, Guns in American History: Culture, Violence & Politics 79-300, History of American Public Policy | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|--|
| | | <p>79-301, History of Surveillance: From the Plantation to Edward Snowden</p> <p>79-315, The Politics of Water: Global Controversies, Past and Present</p> <p>79-318, Sustainable Social Change: History and Practice</p> <p>79-320, Women, Politics and Protest</p> <p>79-331, Body Politics: Women and Health in America</p> <p>79-335, Banned Substances: Drugs, Alcohol, and Tobacco in American History</p> <p>79-343, Education, Democracy, and Civil Rights</p> <p>79-346, American Political Humor</p> <p>79-355, Fake News: Truth in the History of American Journalism</p> <p>79-359, Truth, Propaganda, and "Alternative Facts": A Historical Inquiry</p> <p>79-372, Cities, Technology and the Environment (6-unit mini-course)</p> <p>Other policy-related courses in history (79-xxx)</p> | |
| <p>Dietrich/Institute for Politics & Strategy</p> | <p>84-313, International Organizations and Law</p> <p>84-346 Legal Issues in Public Administration (<i>available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program</i>)</p> <p>84-363, Comparative Legal Systems</p> <p>84-393, Legislative Decision Making: US Congress</p> <p>84-402, Judicial Politics & Behavior</p> | <p>84-104, Decision Processes in American Political Institutions</p> <p>84-250, Writing for Political Science and Policy</p> <p>84-275, Comparative Politics</p> <p>84-309, Political Behavior</p> <p>84-311, International Development: Theory and Praxis</p> <p>84-312, Gender and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa</p> <p>84-315, Contemporary Debates in Human Rights</p> <p>84-319, U.S. Foreign Policy and Interventions in World Affairs</p> <p>84-322, Nonviolent Conflict and Revolution</p> <p>84-325, Contemporary American Foreign Policy</p> <p>84-330, The Shading of Democracy: The Influence of Race on American Politics (<i>available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program</i>)</p> <p>84-331, Money, Media, and the Power of Data in Decision Making (<i>available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program</i>)</p> <p>84-333, Power and Levers for Change in Washington, DC (<i>available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program</i>)</p> | <p>84-265, Political Science Research Methods</p> <p>84-326, Theories of International Relations</p> <p>84-450, Policy Forum</p> |

| | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| | | <p>84-334, Presidential Power in a Constitutional System (available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program)</p> <p>84-336, Implementing Public Policy: From Good Idea to Reality (available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program)</p> <p>84-340, Making Change: How Organized Interests Work in Washington (available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program)</p> <p>84-348, Advocacy, Policy, and Practice (available only through the CMU Washington Semester Program)</p> <p>84-362, Diplomacy and Statecraft</p> <p>84-366, Presidential Politics: So, You Want to Be President of the United States</p> <p>84-370, Global Nuclear Politics</p> <p>84-372, Space and National Security</p> <p>84-380, Grand Strategy in the United States</p> <p>84-386, The Privatization of Force</p> <p>84-387, Technology and Policy of Cyber War</p> <p>84-388, Concepts of War and Cyber War</p> <p>84-389, Terrorism and Insurgency</p> <p>84-390, Social Media, Technology, and Conflict</p> <p>84-405, The Future of Warfare: Cyber, Violent Non-State Actors and Conflict in the Gray Zone</p> | |
| Dietrich/Philosophy | <p>80-321, Causation, Law and Social Policy</p> <p>80-336, Philosophy of Law</p> <p>80-447, Global Justice</p> | <p>80-100, Introduction to Philosophy</p> <p>80-130, Introduction to Ethics</p> <p>80-135, Introduction to Political Philosophy</p> <p>80-136, Social Structure, Public Policy and Ethics</p> <p>80-221, Philosophy of Social Science</p> <p>80-223, Causality & Probability</p> <p>80-230, Ethical Theory</p> <p>80-244, Environmental Ethics</p> <p>80-245, Medical Ethics</p> <p>80-248, Engineering Ethics</p> <p>80-249, AI, Society & Humanity</p> <p>80-250, Ancient Philosophy</p> <p>80-251, Modern Philosophy</p> <p>80-253, Continental Philosophy</p> <p>80-254, Analytic Philosophy</p> <p>80-255, Pragmatism</p> <p>80-256, Modern Moral Philosophy</p> <p>80-261, Experience, Reason & Truth</p> <p>80-324, Philosophy of Economics</p> <p>80-334, Social & Political Philosophy</p> <p>80-348, Health, Human Rights and International Development</p> <p>80-381, Meaning in Language</p> | <p>80-150, Nature of Reason</p> <p>80-208, Critical Thinking</p> <p>80-210, Logic and Proofs</p> <p>80-212, Arguments and Logical Analysis</p> <p>80-310, Formal Logic</p> |

| | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| Dietrich/Psychology | | 85-102, Into to Psychology 85-104, Abnormal Psychology 85-211, Cognitive Psychology 85-241, Social Psychology 85-251, Personality 85-350, Psychology of Prejudice 85-370, Perception 85-377, Attitudes and Persuasion 85-446, Psychology of Gender | |
| Dietrich/Social & Decision Sciences | 88-281, Topics in Law: The First Amendment 88-284, Topics in Law: The Bill of Rights | 88-221, Analytical Foundations of Public Policy 88-365, Behavioral Economics & Public Policy 88-366, Behavioral Economics of Poverty & Development 88-409, Behavioral Economics Perspectives on Ethical Issues 88-418, Domestic Negotiation 88-419, International Negotiation | 88-223, Decision Analysis |
| Dietrich/Statistics & Data Science | | | 36-200, Reasoning with Data 36-202, Methods for Statistics & Data Science |
| SCS/Computer Science | | 15-421, Information Security & Privacy | |
| SCS/Institute for Software Research | 08-532, Law of Computer Technology 08-553, Privacy, Policy, Law and Technology | 08-200, Ethics & Policy Issues in Computing | |
| Tepper/Business Administration | 70-364, Business Law 70-365, International Trade and International Law 70-366, Intellectual Property and E-Commerce | 70-122, Introduction to Accounting 70-321, Negotiation & Conflict Resolution 70-332, Business, Society and Ethics 70-353, Economic Foundations of Regulation: Applications to Financial Markets 70-427, Modern Banks: Strategy and Regulation | 70-340, Business Communications 70-341, Team Dynamics & Leadership 70-345, Business Presentations 70-350, Acting for Business |

The Case for Philosophy

Perhaps you noticed that in the course list just provided, the department from which the greatest number of courses appears is Philosophy. If it can fit your curriculum plans, you might want to consider (as a second major or minor, or even just as electives) options in Philosophy, which here at Carnegie Mellon include foci in logic, social/political philosophy, and ethics.

For example, in response to a question addressed to an internet-based network of pre-law advisors on best preparation for the Law School Admission Test, here is how one pre-law advisor (who also teaches Philosophy) replied:

Since I have my Ph.D. in Philosophy, I get to teach introductory level logic courses all the time. One Spring, I asked to have one of my logic sections designated “special” and to have it listed in the registration guide as a special class for L.S.A.T. preparation. This was only a single semester course.

I pre-tested the students on the first day of class. Yes, I walked in--told them my name, the name of the course, and then I gave them 70 minutes of L.S.A.T. Needless to say, there were a few -- OK, *more* than a few -- who dropped. But for those who stayed, I taught them the basics of logic, at least the basics that I thought they would be able to use on the logical reasoning section of the L.S.A.T. I taught them basic definitions like: argument, premise, conclusion, inductive, deductive, necessary and sufficient conditions, etc. I taught them about premise and conclusion indicator words and about how to translate English sentences into symbolic notation. They learned about modus ponens, modus tollens, and a few other valid argument forms. I taught them a bit about categorical reasoning -- including, to my surprise, a method for checking the validity of four category arguments. I did this while having them take sections of the L.S.A.T. as homework. (I had them buy one of the commercial study guides as a textbook for the course).

For the second half of the course, we spent a great deal of time practicing logic game problems. We would do them at home and discuss them in class. Together we became reasonably skilled at doing these kinds of problems.

For a final exam, I gave them another two sections of an L.S.A.T. exam. This served as a post-test. Overall, there was an average of 24 percent improvement. Two students showed almost no improvement and one improved 80 percent.

While this advisor concentrated on revamping a single logic course to achieve her goal, the connection she saw between the study of logic and skills needed for the L.S.A.T. and law school are certainly also relevant for a more ambitious academic program like a minor or additional major.

Majors or minors in Philosophy at Carnegie Mellon can also be fashioned with concentrations in ethics, or social/political philosophy, both of which are highly relevant for those contemplating law school and the legal profession. Ethics has long been central to the legal profession, which requires that its practitioners adhere to strict codes of ethical conduct. But sometimes the ethical issues embedded in judgments and actions that lawyers must make are not always clear, and require the ability to think things through in order to consistently adhere to the profession's ethical standards. This is especially true now, "at a time when technology, globalization, and the changing economics of lawyering are reshaping the profession of law in ways still hard to predict."⁶

The study of social/political philosophy is relevant insofar as the central principles of the American legal system (embodied in such documents as the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution) derive from modern Enlightenment philosophers, whose thoughts greatly influenced those late-18th century Americans who so carefully crafted these documents and the

⁶ Source: <https://www.amazon.com/Ethics-Legal-Profession-Elliot-Cohen/dp/1591026210>

constitutional system that they embody. Knowledge of these principles, and the historical contexts from which they derive, are very valuable for the broad education of future lawyers.

Miscellaneous Pre-Law Course Recommendations

From:

George W. Webb III

Formerly, Graduate Programs Director

The Princeton Review

“Before coming to work for Princeton Review in Houston as Graduate Programs Director, I earned my law degree at Tulane Law School in New Orleans. So I would like to share with everyone my course recommendations based on my personal experience and on the work I have done with pre-law students.

One course sequence I would strongly recommend before law school is the following:

- *Principles of Economics*. The reason is that a great many cases that students read in their first-year torts and contracts classes assume a pretty good understanding of economics. The first-year (and especially first-semester) law school courses will be a fair bit easier to understand with that background in economics.
- If your school has a course called "Law and Economics"⁷ or "Economics of the Law" or something like that, students should take it. Many undergraduate "law" courses are just surveys of legal history, which are nice but not really all that helpful as training for law school. But Economics of the Law is a course that engages in the kind of hard-core analysis of law and policy that law professors really emphasize. It also gives students great experience in the frustrating inexactitude of designing laws to produce the desired social results. I personally found the course to be extremely valuable.
- Finally, a course in formal logic (sometimes called "mathematical logic") is probably the one college course that is most directly helpful for the L.S.A.T. It is not truly necessary, but it is helpful.”

Other Academic Options and Opportunities

- Undergraduate law journals. If in one or more of your courses, senior thesis, etc. you’ve produced a paper of publishable quality, consider submitting it for publication to an undergraduate law journal. For example:

⁷ CMU’s Economics program has such a course: 73-408, *Law and Economics*.

- The *Columbia Undergraduate Law Review*, a journal of undergraduate legal scholarship based at Columbia University in the City of New York, welcomes submission of research articles, senior theses, and essays embracing a wide range of topics and viewpoints related to the field of law. Undergraduate students in any major, track, or class year should feel free to submit their work. Visit <https://www.culawreview.org> to view past journals or to read the journal's mission statement and submission criteria. Contact culreboard@columbia.edu with any questions or concerns.
- The [Penn Undergraduate Law Journal](#) (PULJ) is an undergraduate research publication funded by the University of Pennsylvania. PULJ looks for papers ranging from 15 to 100+ double-spaced pages in length. The journal is especially receptive to research papers, senior theses, and independent studies or final papers written for courses. Papers need not be on American law -- they can be on the laws or legal system of any country. They consider submissions on a rolling basis, so if your piece is not finished by the deadline, the Journal urges you to still submit it upon completion (to be considered for a later issue). Students in any field of study are encouraged to submit their work, so long as their piece relates to the law or legal system. Possible disciplinary perspectives include, but are not limited to history, criminology, economics, sociology, anthropology, English, biology, neuroscience, philosophy, linguistics, psychology, and political science. Work should be submitted [here](#). Please submit questions or concerns on the contact page of the PULJ website, which can be accessed [here](#). Submission deadlines are usually the last Friday in August, and mid-January. Check the PULJ web site for the most current submission deadline information.
- The [Washington University Law Review](#) (of the University of Washington) invites submission of articles and essays on legal topics from undergraduates in all majors. Students are encouraged to submit undergraduate theses or other academic papers 12 pages or longer. Submissions are selected for publication by the WULR's executive editors based upon quality of writing, research, and analysis. All submissions should be directed via e-mail to wulr@uw.edu. Find more information about submission requirements [here](#).
- The [Pre-Law Society at the University of California at Los Angeles](#) (UCLA) has an undergraduate law journal that accepts submissions from undergraduates at other institutions. The journal will begin accepting manuscripts starting in October for this year's volume. Questions may be directed to the UCLA Undergraduate Law Journal c/o ucla.lawjournal@gmail.com.

Student Organizations & Extracurricular Activities

Law schools are interested in well-rounded students who have not only excelled in the classroom, but who have also dedicated time and energy to other commitments. Activities in which a student has had a strong leadership role, and in which he or she has demonstrated the ability to work well with others, can also be positive factors in the law school admission process.

So → *Do* participate in activities that interest you. Be selective with these choices over time. Deep and sustained involvement over time in a select few activities in which you have had genuine interest and significant impact will serve you far better than minimal involvement in a long list of activities or organizations.

Maintain a balanced schedule of commitments. Balancing academics with extracurricular activities forces you to prioritize, set limits and goals, and manage your time well. Remember that academic performance comes first. Over-involvement in activities does not compensate for a weak academic record.

For information and leads about involvement and leadership opportunities in student organizations, Greek organizations, and residential communities, look to the CMU Office of [Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement](#) (SLICE).

Law-related activities and organizations

Meaningful involvement in law-related activities can be valuable in several ways when applying to law school. It could suggest to law schools that your desire to study law is genuine, longstanding, and carefully considered (i.e., you have “walked the walk” as well as “talked the talk.”). It also serves as an excellent way to discover the areas of law that might interest you.

At least three Carnegie Mellon student organizations have this kind of direct connection to law: [The Thomas Mr. Kerr, Jr. Student Pre-Law Society](#), the [CMU Mock Trial Association](#), and Carnegie Mellon Moot Court. In addition, law-related internships can also fill this role very effectively. The Carnegie Mellon Pre-Law Program is working to develop and expand law-related internship opportunities for pre-law students. Recent internship placements have included the Pittsburgh Office of the American Civil Liberties Union, the Pittsburgh City Attorney’s Office, and the Pittsburgh office of the Women’s Law Project. Pre-law students who have participated in the Carnegie Mellon University Washington Semester Program have secured law-related internships with the U.S. Department of Justice, the Vera Institute of Justice, the Polaris Project, and the Federal Judicial Center.

In a somewhat less direct but still-relevant way, students have the opportunity to participate in the governance of the Carnegie Mellon University community. For example, every year the

university's Division of Student Affairs seeks nominations of students to serve on the University Disciplinary Committee (UDC) and academic review board (ARB). Similarly, the Carnegie Mellon University All-Greek Community Standards Board (AGCSB) serves to enforce the standards, rules and regulations set forth in the Panhellenic Association (PHA), Interfraternity Council (IFC), and Multicultural Greek Council (MGC) communities. In addition, the AGCSB has limited ability to adjudicate violations of [Carnegie Mellon University Community Standards](#). These are excellent opportunities for pre-law students to involve themselves in the university's community standards processes system, and in that context to not only see these processes and policies "at work," but to also become instruments of that system.

But do not limit yourself to student organizations or activities that have an obvious and direct law connection. Be genuine in your choices (i.e., let your true interests be your guide), and rest assured that any student organization or activity will likely involve knowledge and skills that are arguably relevant for someone contemplating law school. A few (actual) CMU examples:

- A CMU pre-law student who was also an avid baseball fan went to "umpire school" early one summer, and worked for the rest of that summer as a Pony-League umpire (much to the chagrin of his father, who had pulled some strings to arrange for a summer's internship with a local law firm). That summer's experience (which he *loved*) led to an outstanding law school personal statement, drawing amusing but compelling parallels between the training and work of umpires, and lawyers and judges (learning an elaborate set of rules that must be invoked through rulings made when circumstances come together unpredictably; successes in the role that draw no notice or praise, but that frequently trigger anger and abuse from coaches, players and fans; self-deprecating humor ("*No child ever dresses up as an umpire or lawyer for Halloween*" [!]). More than one admissions director from law schools to which this student applied took the time to contact me to say how much they enjoyed this statement and candidate.
- Another CMU pre-law student who had a work-study job in the University's Residence Life Office had a classmate who was having difficulties with her off-campus landlord involving matters of both privacy and security. In that the Residence Life Office kept a database of off-campus rentals to assist students in finding off-campus housing, she had the idea of developing a "scoring" system for residences included in this database that might give students some leverage in avoiding or resolving such disputes in which landlords were not fulfilling their responsibilities. Her rationale was that renters would want to maintain a good reputation with the university so that their properties would be recommended to students, which in turn would give them a strong incentive to fulfill their responsibilities and avoid such disputes with their student renters. In this, she

displayed initiative, creative and effective problem-solving skills, and an orientation toward serving others – all important and appealing qualities to law schools.

- A recent CMU pre-law student who served as lead mechanic on his fraternity's buggy team used that experience as the subject of his law school personal statement. He confessed to initially knowing nothing about buggy mechanics, but could (and *did*) learn what he needed to know very quickly from his engineering teammates. But it also became clear that he had a natural talent for team-building, leadership, and quick and confident decision-making. As a result, this novice mechanic came to lead his buggy team's group of mechanics, each of whom surpassed him in technical skills, but who lacked his ability to manage, motivate, delegate, and lead. With him in this role (and several strong pushers, of course), his team won the men's buggy competition two years in a row. These qualities – problem solving, highly motivated, working well with and leading others from different backgrounds, motivating others toward a common goal, demonstrating good judgment in leadership positions – count for a great deal with law school admission committees, and can arise out of almost any experience, directly law-related or not.

Application

The process of applying to law school has become considerably easier and more streamlined in recent years. However, it is still time-consuming, and still in some ways complicated. But with careful planning and sustained effort, it can be mastered.

Being informed about the process and knowing what to expect will increase your chances of acceptance, as well as your peace of mind. The information presented here is intended to give you that background.

When to Apply to Law School: Right After College, or at Some Later Point?

There is no cardinal rule that answers this question for everyone. In other words, “It depends.”

For some there is no doubt about law school as their post-baccalaureate option, no desire to delay application and matriculation, and no barriers standing in the way. For others, there may be some doubt, competing opportunities that – unlike law school – will not still be there in a few years if not taken right after graduation, or other needs or obligations that must come first, before law school. Whatever your decision about this, you will not be alone, and hence should decide in a way that makes sense for you.

For example, in the most recent academic year for which data is available, of all Carnegie Mellon applicants to law school for the following fall:

- 20% were college seniors in college
- 80% were alumni

Of the 80% who were alumni:

- 50% had been out of undergraduate school for 1-3 years
- 50% had been out of undergraduate school for more than 3 years

This pattern is generally consistent year to year, and is indicative of national trends regarding the age of law school applicants and matriculants.

Fordham University’s long-time prelaw advisor [Hillary Mantis](#) cites “8 mistakes that applicants to law school make . . . and how to avoid them”:

1. Allow 6 months to prep for the LSAT
2. Don’t take the LSAT unprepared just to test the waters
3. Apply well before the law school deadlines
4. Leave at least a month for your recommenders to complete recommendations
5. Don’t apply to just one or two schools
6. Rely on official sources of information
7. Don’t count on expecting to transfer into a higher ranked law school
8. Wait to apply to law school in the next cycle if you are not ready

Timetable for Applying to Law School

Message from Dr. Devine, pre-law advisor:

There are several available time lines for applying to law school that various sources recommend. Of those that I have reviewed, I find that the [AdmissionsDean](#) web site is particularly detailed and useful. It begins roughly two years, or 24 months, before that point in time when a candidate intends to begin law school. By following this time line and its recommended steps, you can be reasonably certain that you will have met all deadlines; that you will have selected schools for application in wise and well-informed ways; that you will have given yourself sufficient time for application components such as the personal statement, resume, and letters of recommendation; and that you will have investigated and made good use of resources regarding financing the cost of law school.

Application Services & Law School Guides

[Law School Admission Council \(LSAC\)](#)

The Law school Admission Council (LSAC) is a nonprofit corporation that provides products and services for law schools and their applicants worldwide. LSAC is best known for administering the [Law School Admission Test](#) (LSAT). LSAC also processes academic credentials for an average of 60,000 law school applicants annually, provides essential software and information for admission offices and applicants, conducts educational conferences for law school professionals and pre-law advisors, publishes research, funds diversity and other outreach grant programs, and publishes LSAT preparation books and law school guides, among many other services.

[Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#)

CAS is a service provided by the LSAC to streamline the law school admissions process. Most American law schools require that applicants submit their application components through the Council's Credential Assembly Service.⁸ You subscribe to this service through your LSAC account. CAS assembles and summarizes data from academic transcripts, letters of recommendation and evaluations, and your LSAT score(s). The data is then transmitted as an

⁸ Individual law schools have different sets of requirements for different applications. (For example, application requirements for the fall term may differ from the spring term, or requirements for domestic applicants may differ from [internationally educated applications](#).) Once you select a school's application in your [LSAC.org account](#), the requirements and recommendations for that application term will be displayed. You can also [contact individual law schools](#) for details on their particular requirements.

Academic Summary Report to law schools to which you have applied. You are able to view your Academic Summary Report in your LSAC account and will be able to view the same materials that the law schools will see.

[Candidate Referral Service \(CRS\)](#)

Consider opting in to the Candidate Referral Service (CRS), a free optional service by the LSAC that makes information about law school candidates available to law schools. As part of this service, you will receive emails from schools that regard you as an appealing candidate, sometimes along with the offer of an application fee waiver.

[LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law School](#)

This is an on-line resource through which you can search for law schools that interest you using keywords, location, and the combination of your undergraduate QPA and LSAT score. Customize your searches and get the most up-to-date details and information provided by the law schools to the LSAC.

[LSAC Official Guide to Canadian Law Schools](#)

This is a helpful guide for students considering law school in Canada, offering a description of each school, with information about admission requirements, special programs, financial aid, and more.

[Ontario Law School Application Service \(OLSAS\)](#)

This is an application service required for candidates applying to law schools in Ontario, Canada.

The [NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists](#) is a resource book compiled and based on information provided by law schools' responses to an annual survey. The book includes sections on academic programs (e.g., schools with well-developed strengths in certain specialty areas), clinical programs, joint degrees, journals, scholarships, admission policies, study abroad options, and more.

[Standard 509 ABA Required Disclosures](#)

These reports provide the most current and comprehensive data from the American Bar Association including LSAT score and GPA ranges for each school. Included in the required disclosures are admissions data; tuition and fees, living costs, and financial aid; conditional scholarships; enrollment data, including academic, transfer, and other attrition; numbers of full-time and part-time faculty, professional librarians, and administrators; class sizes for first-year and upper-class courses, and number of seminar, clinical, and co-curricular offerings; employment outcomes; and bar passage data. The *Guide* also contains links to other legal education statistics and resources.

Data charts can be generated for each ABA-approved law school through the Standard 509 Information Reports and Employment Summary Reports drop-down menus. Links to all of the ABA-approved law schools allow users to access the ABA Required Disclosures posted by schools as required by Standard 509.

Choosing Law Schools: Where to Apply

Undergraduate QPA and LSAT Score. In selecting law schools for application, a good guideline is to:

- Select 3-4 "reach" schools (schools whose admission standards [based on QPA and LSAT averages] are slightly higher, or near the high end, of the range formed by your LSAT score and QPA; and with perhaps a 25% chance of admission.
- Select 3-4 "target" schools whose standards are at about the center of the range formed by your LSAT score and QPA; and with perhaps a 50% chance of admission.
- Select 1-2 "safety" schools whose standards are near the low end of the range formed by your LSAT score and QPA; and with perhaps a 75% chance of admission.
- But under no circumstances should you apply to a law school that you would not be pleased to attend.

For information and instructions about using your undergraduate QPA and LSAT score to predict the likelihood of admission to one or more law schools, see the "[LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#)" and "[Using Your UGPA and LSAT Score to Predict Likelihood of Admission to Law School](#)" links on the [LSAC](#) web site.

Rank and Rankings. Many people will tell you to enroll in the "best" law school that admits you, where "best" is defined as the "highest ranking" law school. Some who are considering law school have been known to proclaim, "It's only worth it for me to go to law school if I can enroll in one that is ranked in the 'top ten.'"

What is to be made of "rankings" when it comes to law school? Do rankings really deserve this much attention and influence?

Opinions vary here. Many argue “no,” that rankings do not deserve this much attention and influence, both because law school quality can be assessed in a variety of ways for individual candidates, and also because of purported flaws in the methodologies used in many popular law school ranking systems.

Others push back and argue “yes,” rank should absolutely matter in selecting law schools. “It is essential to think about postgraduate job opportunities,” insists Michelle Kim Hall, a law school admissions counselor writing for *U.S. News & World Report*. “(A) degree from a higher-ranked program may give you more career opportunities to repay loans. Ultimately, the goal is not simply to study the law, but to put your J.D. to work.”⁹

So, who is right? As with all such conundrums, “it depends” – in this case on how a variety of other factors combine to form the decision-making framework of individual candidates.

For example, according to the ABA:

Neither the American Bar Association nor its Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar endorses, cooperates with, or provides data to any law school ranking system. Several organizations rank or rate law schools; however, the ABA provides only a statement of accreditation status. No ranking or rating system of law schools is attempted or advocated by the ABA. Prospective law students should consider a variety of factors in making their choice among schools.¹⁰

Since (according to the ABA) there is no official ranking authority, law school candidates should exercise caution in using such rankings. The factors that comprise a law school’s reputation — strength of curriculum, faculty, career services, ability of students, quality of library facilities, and the like — don’t readily lend themselves to quantifiable measures. Moreover, any law school’s reputation is only one factor among many to consider.

Law Schools and Reputation: What’s in a Name? While going to a “name” school may mean that one will have an easier time finding a first job after law school (because hiring firms may *also* rely heavily on “rankings” in their recruiting), it does not necessarily mean that one will get a better legal education than if one had gone to a lesser-known law school. As the LSAC notes,

Some schools that were at their peaks years ago are still riding on the wave of that earlier reputation. Others have greatly improved their programs and have recruited talented faculty but have not yet made a name for themselves.

⁹ Source: <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/2016/03/16/negotiate-merit-based-law-school-financial-aid>

¹⁰ [The ABA Statement on Law School Rankings.](#)

Selectivity & Alternative “Ways” of Ranking. One of the most common methods of ranking law schools is by “selectivity”: namely, the ratio of the number of applicants to the number of offers of admission. For example, in one recent year, the U.S. News & World Report (“USNWR”) named Yale University’s law school as the nation’s top-ranked (i.e., most selective) law school. In that year, Yale Law School admitted 275 candidates out of an applicant pool of 3280, with an admission rate of only 8%. The law school that USNWR ranked at #10 in that same year (Duke University School of Law) admitted 1046 candidates out of an applicant pool of 7884, for an admit rate of 13%.

Looking to the next “tier,” USNWR ranked Boston College Law School as #26, and The George Washington University School of Law as #30. In that same year, the law school at the University of Richmond was ranked #57 by USNWR (“tied” at #57 with four other law schools), Loyola Law School (Marymount University) #65 (“tied” at #65 with six other law schools), and the University of Denver Sturm College of Law as the nation’s #76-ranked law school.

While not all law schools in this ranking scheme reflect a perfect relationship with selectivity (i.e., producing a straight slope that correlates USNWR ranking and law school admit rates), there is a clear pattern:

| Law School | USNWR rank in selected year | # of applicants | # of offers of admission | Admit rate |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------|------------|
| Yale Law School | 1 | 3280 | 275 | 8% |
| Duke University School of Law | 10 | 7884 | 1046 | 13% |
| Boston College Law School | 26 | 6884 | 1372 | 20% |
| The George Washington University School of Law | 30 | 9164 | 2040 | 22% |
| University of Richmond School of Law | 57 | 2092 | 554 | 26% |
| Loyola Law School (Marymount University) | 65 | 5537 | 1586 | 29% |
| University of Denver Sturm College of Law | 76 | 3162 | 1005 | 32% |

Does Selectivity = Quality?

Consider one phenomenon that, at least in part, undermines the notion that “selectivity” is an accurate reflection of “overall quality” of the law school and the education it offers: namely, that many candidates, lured by rankings, take a chance and submit applications to top-ranked law schools to which they have very little chance of being admitted. And indeed, most (if not

all) of these candidates will not be offered admission. But what this does is to inflate these schools' applicant pools, as well as the pool of applicants not accepted, which in turn drives down their admit rate and drives up their selectivity rating (which in turn will produce the same effect in subsequent years → more applicants, lower admission rates, higher selectivity ratings, and on and on . . .).

Princeton Review & “Ways” of Ranking

Princeton Review is one of many sources of law school rankings. But one feature that they pioneered is the notion that there are *several ways* to rank law schools, such that it is erroneous to claim that any law school can be assigned a specific numerical rank in any overall ranking system.

Message from Dr. Devine, pre-law advisor:

While I am not in a position to endorse Princeton Review's methodology in their ranking schemes, or the ranking lists that they produce, perhaps their most valuable contribution to debates over “rankings” is to suggest that if you ask different questions, and rank-order law schools along several different criteria that really matter to law students, you'd get very different rankings patterns.

Here (below) is an annotated list of the 12 categories that Princeton Review produces in its 2019 publication [The Best 165 Law Schools](#):

1. [Toughest to Get Into](#)

Based on school-reported data. Factors include median LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs of entering 1L students, the percent of applicants accepted, and the percent of accepted applicants who enroll.

2. [Best Classroom Experience](#)

Based on student answers to survey questions concerning their professors' teaching abilities and overall accessibility outside of the classroom, the balance of theory and practical skills in the curricula and the range of courses available, the level of tolerance for differing opinions in class discussion, and their assessments of research resources available.

3. [Best Professors](#)

Based on student answers to survey questions concerning how good their professors are as teachers and how accessible they are outside the classroom.

If you have a particular practice area in mind as you think about where to apply, U.S. News & World Report also offers "Specialty Rankings" in nine areas of legal practice: clinical training, dispute resolution, environmental law, health care law, intellectual property law, international law, legal writing, tax law, and trial advocacy. These rankings are based on peer assessments by law school faculty who teach in that specialty area. You can find USN&WR's latest specialty rankings [here](#).

4. [Most Competitive Students](#)

Based on student answers to survey questions on: the number of hours they study outside of class each day, the number of hours they think their fellow students study outside of class each day, and the perceived degree of competitiveness among students at their school.

5. [Best Career Prospects](#)

Based on school reported data and student surveys. School data include the median starting salaries of graduating students, the percent of students employed in a job that requires bar passage (and not employed by the school), and the percent of these students who pass the bar exam the first time they take it. Student answers to survey questions on: how much the law program encourages practical experience; the opportunities for externships, internships and clerkships, and how prepared the students feel they will be to practice the law after graduating.

6. [Most Conservative Students](#)

Based on student answers to a survey question concerning the political bent of the student body at large. The survey question was "If there is a prevailing political bent among students at your school, how would you characterize it?" Answer choices were "Very Liberal, Liberal, Middle of the Road, Somewhat Conservative, and Very Conservative."

7. [Most Liberal Students](#)

Based on student answers to a survey question concerning the political bent of the student body at large. The survey question was "If there is a prevailing political bent among students at your school, how would you characterize it?" Answer choices were "Very Liberal, Liberal, Middle of the Road, Somewhat Conservative, Very Conservative."

8. [Greatest Resources for Women](#)

Based on school reported data and student surveys. School data: the percent of the student body that are women. Student answers to a survey question on whether all students are afforded equal treatment by students and faculty regardless of their gender.

9. [Greatest Resources for Minority Students](#)

Based on school reported data and student surveys. School data: the percent of the student body that is from an underrepresented minority group. Student answers to a survey question on whether all students receive equal treatment by fellow students and the faculty, regardless of ethnicity.

10. [Most Diverse Faculty](#)

Based on school reported data and student surveys. School data: the percent of the law school faculty that is from an underrepresented minority group. Student answers to a survey question on whether the faculty comprises a broadly diverse group of individuals.

11. [Best Quality of Life](#)

Based on student answers to survey questions on: whether there is a strong sense of community at the school, whether differing opinions are tolerated in the classroom, the location of the school, the quality of social life at the school, and the school's research resources (library, computer and database resources).

12. [Most Chosen by Older Students](#)

Based on the average age of entry of law school students and student reports of how many years they spent out of college before enrolling in law school.

Only one of these lists ("[Toughest to Get Into](#)," which is really the same as "selectivity") is based entirely on institutional data, and tends to reflect the pattern noted in the previous table. Ten of the eleven lists are based entirely on student opinions that *Princeton Review* collected through their student survey.

So – what is important to you in connection with any law school that you would consider attending?

- If "best classroom experience" matters a lot to you, you will find that several of the top 10 most selective schools make this list as well. But several of the other most selective schools do *not* make this particular top-10 list, and three other law schools not in the top 10 most selective law schools do make the top-10 *Princeton Review* list for "best classroom experience" (Notre Dame, Georgetown, and the University of Texas/Austin).

- In two of the *Princeton Review* categories that could be very important to minority candidates (“Greatest Resources for Minority Students,” and “Most Diverse Faculty”), none of the top 10 most selective law schools make this top-10 *Princeton Review* list.
- The same is true in the *Princeton Review* category of law schools “Most Chosen by Older Students”: i.e., none of the top 10 most selective law schools make this top-10 *Princeton Review* list.
- If “Best Career Prospects” is a high priority for you → Several of the top 10 most selective law schools make this list, but in dramatically re-ordered sequence (NYU is #1), plus one (UC/Berkeley) that did not make the top-10 most selective list but *does* make the top-10 for “Best Career Prospects.”
- If “Quality of Life” in law school is a top priority for you → A few (but not all) of the top 10 most selective schools make this list, but are joined by (and in many cases *outranked* by) several other schools *not* in the 10 most selective group (e.g., Vanderbilt, University of Colorado School of Law, St. Thomas University School of Law [in Minneapolis, MN], University of San Francisco School of Law, University of Georgia School of Law, and Florida State University College of Law).

Other factors to consider. According to LSAC, the factors listed below are among those that students say influenced their choice of a law school — many of which are either excluded or seriously undervalued by the many law school numerical ranking systems.

In alphabetical order:

- Bar passage rates
- Breadth and support of alumni network
- Breadth of curriculum

Continued on the next page . . .

- Clinical programs
- Collaborative research opportunities with faculty
- Commitment to innovative technology
- Cost
- Diversity within the faculty and student body
- Educational orientation, or philosophy
- Externship options
- Faculty accessibility
- Financial aid availability
- Intensity of writing instruction
- Interdisciplinary programs
- International programming
- Job placement rates and resources
- Law library strengths and services
- Loan repayment assistance for low-income lawyers
- Location
- Parent university
- Part-time enrollment option
- Public-interest programs
- Quality of teaching
- Rank
- Religious affiliation
- Size of first-year classes
- Skills instruction
- Specialized areas of faculty expertise
- Study abroad¹¹ options

What makes a law school “unique”? One former president of the [Association of American Law Schools](#) (AALS), who went on to become dean of the Boston College Law School, offered the following thoughts on this subject, in general praise of “institutional pluralism” among American law schools:

“There is more variety in legal education than people usually suppose. Boston College, for example, is a Jesuit Catholic school, and this provenance influences our institutional culture in ways we members of the community can appreciate. Something like this might be said about many of the other religiously affiliated law schools in the country. But religious schools are not unique in their differences. Think about law schools at historically black colleges and universities (Howard). They have a special mission and serve a particular population, and their faculty and students bring a unique set of interests, principles, and points of view. Other schools may focus on a particular subject matter, like the environment (Lewis & Clark) or intellectual property (Franklin Pierce); or emphasize particular doctrines like law and economics (George Mason) or the public interest (CUNY). Finally, there are more than seventy state-supported law schools that give preference to state residents and focus on issues of special concern to the sponsoring state: horses and coal in Kentucky, marine law in Maine.

I think this kind of variety is good for legal education. It is first of all good for consumers of legal education, in the way that varieties of mustard are good for consumers of picnic goods. A range of choices lets more people get more of what they want. This is particularly important in trying financial times, when the discipline of the market may lead to greater competition in price as well as variety in services.”

--- Dean John Garvey, “What a Difference: An argument for institutional pluralism.” *Boston College Law Magazine* (Fall/Winter 2008), pages 3-4.

Consider just three of these factors in more detail: the parent university, location, and educational orientation, or philosophy:

The Parent University. According to the Law School Admissions Council, about 90% of ABA-approved law schools are part of a larger university. There may be some advantages to attending a law school that is part of a parent university. Such law schools may have more

¹¹ An article in the Winter 2018 issue of *The National Jurist* named what they felt were the “best study abroad programs” among U.S. law schools. You can find that article [here](#).

options for joint-degree programs or for taking courses from other academic units of the university. They also may have more academic and social activities, campus theatre groups, sports teams, and everything else that comes with university life. Perhaps most important, the university can act as a support system for the law school by providing a wealth of facilities, including student housing and support for career services.

Note → While part of a parent university, some law schools are located on separate campuses, which in some cases is a significant distance from the main campus of the parent university. For example, Georgetown's law school is located in the Capitol Hill section of Washington, DC, while the main campus is about 6 miles away in the Georgetown section of The District. Northwestern University's Pritzker School of Law is located in downtown Chicago, while the university's main campus is located 12 miles away in Evanston, Illinois. So be sure to confirm the actual proximity of the law school to its parent university's campus before drawing conclusions about the advantages to be had by attending a law school that is part of a larger ("parent") university.

Location: National, Regional, and Local Law Schools. A national school will generally have an applicant population and a student body that draws almost indistinguishably from the nation as a whole and will have many international students as well. A regional school is likely to have a population that is primarily from the geographic region of its location, though many regional schools also have students from all parts of the country; a number of regional schools draw heavily from a particular geographical area, yet graduates may find jobs all over the country. Generally speaking, a local school draws primarily on applicants who either come from or want to practice in the proximate area in which the school is located. Many local law schools have excellent reputations and compete with the national schools in faculty competence, in research-supporting activities, and in job placement in their particular locales and regions. Check the school's web site or speak with the admission and placement staff to get a clear breakdown on where their students come from and where they are finding jobs.

Another element of location is geography, and the combination of climate and weather. You will be living in the law school's location while a student there, and you should think about whether, and how, climate and weather will affect and matter to you while in school there. If you want to escape the cold weather, schools in Boston, New York or Chicago will probably not make your list; if you would find warm, sunny weather too distracting, this would have the opposite effect on your choices. In general, if these are important criteria for you, this will go a long way toward trimming your pool of potential law schools.

Educational Orientation, or Philosophy. One standard of comparison between law schools is the *educational orientation, or philosophy*, of each school. Some schools emphasize the teaching of law courses needed to pass the bar exam. Other schools may approach the study of law through analysis of legal theory, and may consequently relegate instruction in practical law to experience after law school and to on-the-job training. Additionally, the amount and nature of clinical legal experiences vary from school to school and can emphasize subtly different approaches to legal education.

Faculty: Full-Time vs. Part-time (Adjunct); Scholarly vs. Experienced in Legal Practice. Assume that you would very much like the opportunity to apprentice with a law school faculty member in connection with his or her research. In this case, you might assign a high priority to law schools that have a higher percentage of full-time tenured or tenure-track faculty than to those law schools with a higher percentage of part-time, adjunct faculty. Why? The former implies a more “scholarly” faculty, while the latter implies a less scholarly faculty vs. faculty who are practicing attorneys or judges and not full-time law school faculty and scholars. If on the other hand the practical experience of part-time adjunct faculty matters more to you than faculty scholarship, your preferred list of schools might look very different.

Be sure to include “admissibility” based on the combination of your QPA and LSAT score (projected, or actual).

Final Thoughts on Law School Rankings. So, *what’s to be made of all of this?* First, and once again, do not interpret this discussion as a blanket endorsement of any one ranking system (such as *Princeton Review*). It is offered here merely as an illustration of the fact that there are several ways to “rank” law schools and determine which are best for individual candidates, and that it is unwise to rely on just one or another ranking scheme that was not created with *you* in mind.

In addition, consider two other conclusions:

1. Any one-dimensional ranking of law schools (or of any category of schools, for that matter) offers very little value to candidates and only adds to the stress of applying to law school.
2. A far preferable strategy is to:
 - a. Carefully consider all of the categories, features, and characteristics that all law schools possess, and think very carefully about those that matter most to you. In other words, create *your own* “top 10” criteria for law schools that would make it to your personal “top 10” law school list.
 - b. Design and run a database search based on these criteria, using tools made available to you by such resources as the [LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#), the [NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists](#). This may yield a large pool of schools (25-30, or more), but you have a good start with this as your preliminary list.
 - c. Research each law school on this preliminary list by visiting each’s web site, fleshing out in more detail the facts and information about these schools in the “categories that matter” to you; visit their campuses if possible; ask the law

LSAC makes this easy for you by its [centralized collection of web site links](#) for all ABA-Approved Law schools.

schools to help you connect with current students and alumni (including – perhaps *especially* – CMU alumni who attend or recently graduated from these schools), law school career services office (to find out where and in what numbers graduates go for employment), etc. As you repeatedly work through this exercise, some schools will look more attractive and remain on your list, and some less so that will fall from your list.

- d. Repeat this process until you are left with 9-10 schools. This could be your top-10 pool of schools that have *earned* your application because of the personal standards you have developed for law schools that you would consider, and the extent to which each of them measures up well to those standards. Another likely subsidiary benefit of this strategy → You will have several tangible reasons why you are applying to each of these schools, which can show through in your application and thereby substantially strengthen your application.

* * * * *

Careful consideration of this list of factors to determine the most important criteria for you, followed by detailed research of schools that map well onto these criteria, will take time and sustained effort. But that effort is a worthwhile investment in your short-term and long-term future.

Law School Application Components

Typically, law school applications include all or most of the following:

- Application Forms and Fees
- LSAT (Law School Admission Test) score
- Official college transcript(s)
- Letters of recommendation
- Personal statements, other essays, and addenda
- Résumé
- Dean's letter of recommendation/dean's certification
- Financial Aid Forms

Forms and Fees

Every law school to which you apply will require an application. While each law school may have unique elements in their application, much of the information requested is generic, and

common to most or all applications you will submit. LSAC has streamlined the application process by creating the option to complete and submit your applications electronically through your [LSAC.org account](https://lsac.org). This feature saves you time during the application process, as many of the generic application sections — such as biographical information and education history — will be prefilled with information from your account. After this step, you will be asked to identify the law schools that interest you, and add them to your application list. Once on your list, click on the name of each school, when you will be prompted to click the “Start/Continue Application” button to access the school’s application and requirements.

This process involves several fees, some of which are one-time only, and some of which come with each application you submit:

- Registering for the LSAT involves its own fee (\$200.00 in 2019-2020 [per test administration])
- The Credential Assembly Service (CAS) charges a fee (\$195 in 2019-2020) to cover electronic application processing for all [LSAC-member law schools](#).
- Each law school to which you apply will charge an application fee. These fees vary from school to school, averaging about \$75.00 per school.
- In addition to each school’s application fee, LSAC charges a report fee (\$45.00 per application in 2019-2020) in order to send an applicant’s LSAT report, official LSDAS transcript, and letters of recommendation to the law schools to which you apply.
- There are additional fees if you request an LSAT test center change (\$125 in 2019-2020), a test date change (\$125 in 2019-2020), request hand scoring of your LSAT (\$100 in 2019-2020), etc.

Fee Waivers. Applying to law school can in and of itself be very expensive. When all fees are combined, an applicant can easily spend upwards of \$500 for just three or four applications.

Fortunately, LSAC and law schools have taken steps to lessen the cost of the law school application process through “fee waivers.” There are two different types of fee waivers: those issued by LSAC, and those issued by individual law schools.

- LSAC Fee Waiver Program. LSAC established its application fee waiver program in 1968 to ensure that no one is denied access to law school because of the inability to pay for the LSAT and other essential applicant services.

The LSAC process for granting fee waivers has been revised and streamlined over time. Today, a U.S. law school candidate can easily apply for a fee waiver online.

LSAC fee waivers are unique among testing organizations because fees are waived for all essential services, not just the test.

Are you eligible? The basic criterion for receiving a waiver is the absolute inability to pay for the LSAT and Credential Assembly Service (CAS). Because the cost of these services is only a fraction of the cost of a legal education, the need criterion is considerably more stringent than for other financial aid processes. Only those with extreme need should apply.

Previously, law schools themselves could grant LSAC fee waivers to any candidate who requested one — without regard to a candidate’s need or LSAC’s guidelines. Because there has been no limit on the number of waivers a school can grant, and there has been no requirement to have or follow any specific criteria for determining eligibility, the potential for unequal treatment existed. Therefore, in order to promote fairness, access, and consistency for all candidates, the application fee waiver process for U.S. law schools is now entirely online through www.LSAC.org.

For more information and application details, see the [“Fee Waivers for the LSAT & Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)” section](#) of the LSAC web site.

- Law School Application Fee Waivers. Candidates can also receive an “application fee waiver” from one or more of the law schools to which they are applying, which allows them to submit an application for free. Some candidates receive such fee waivers without requesting them, usually based on a strong LSAT score. Some law schools will automatically waive their application fee for candidates who have qualified for an LSAC fee waiver. Law schools’ motivations to grant these application fee waivers are a combination of enticing candidates to consider applying to schools to which they may not have otherwise given serious thought, and also to lessen the possibility that a qualified and capable candidate would choose not to apply for financial reasons.

Candidates can also contact law schools directly to request an application fee waiver.

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a half-day, standardized test administered at designated testing centers. In 2020-2021, the LSAT will be administered eight times, in a cycle

that begins in the summer of 2020, and ends in the late spring of 2021.¹² The most current lists of test dates can be found [here](#).

COVID-19 Updates: June 8 and July 13 LSATs and June 27-28 Int'l LSAT replaced by LSAT-Flex exams

For many years, the LSAT has been a requirement for admission to most ABA-approved law schools. The test is designed to provide law schools with a common measure of applicants' aptitude for legal study.

The LSAT consists of five 35-minute multiple choice sections and a 35-minute (unscored) writing sample section. Four of the multiple choice sections contribute to the test taker's score. The unscored (experimental) multiple choice section is used to pretest new test questions. The kind and placement of this section will vary. A 35-minute (unscored) writing sample section is given at the end of the test. Copies of the writing sample are distributed to the schools to which you apply. The score scale for the LSAT is 120 to 180, with a median score of roughly 150. Scores are typically released (electronically) 2.5-3 weeks after each test administration.

The LSAT is designed to measure skills that are considered essential for success in law school: the reading and comprehension of complex texts with accuracy and insight; the organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences from it; the ability to think critically; and the analysis and evaluation of the reasoning and arguments of others.

The three multiple-choice question types in the LSAT are:

1.) Reading Comprehension Questions

These questions measure your ability to read, with understanding and insight, examples of lengthy and complex materials similar to those commonly encountered in law schoolwork. The reading comprehension section contains four sets of reading questions, each consisting of a selection of reading material (either a single complex passage or two shorter related passages), followed by five to eight questions that test reading and reasoning abilities.

2.) Analytical Reasoning Questions

These questions are designed to measure your ability to understand a structure of relationships and to draw logical conclusions about that structure. You are asked to

¹² Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken **by December** for admission the following fall. However, taking the test earlier is often advised.

make deductions from a set of statements, rules, or conditions that describe relationships among entities such as persons, places, things, or events. They simulate the kinds of detailed analyses of relationships that a law student must perform in solving legal problems.

3.) *Logical Reasoning Questions*

These questions are designed to evaluate your ability to understand, analyze, criticize, and complete a variety of arguments. Each logical reasoning question requires you to read and comprehend a short passage, then answer a question about it. The questions test a variety of abilities involved in reasoning logically and thinking critically.

The Law School Admission Council web site offers a comprehensive set of [“frequently-asked questions”](#) about the LSAT.

When to take the LSAT. If possible, you should take the exam no later than mid-Fall of the year prior to the year in which you intend to enter law school, for reasons that include the following:

- You will have your score relatively early in the application/admission cycle. Knowing your LSAT score as well as your QPA enables you to make more well-informed choices about where to apply, given the availability of recent law school admission rates based on the combination of these two data points.
- Your applications will not be complete until your LSAT score is reported. Since most law schools use a rolling admissions process, your chances of admission increase if your applications are completed and submitted early vs. later.
- For law school applicants who are college seniors, the quality of the time to prepare for the LSAT is generally better in late Spring, summer or early- to mid-Fall. Eight weeks of daily preparation, for a few hours per day, is a very common preparation period in order to be as ready as possible for the LSAT. In the weeks leading up to the summer exam, you will have been out of school for over a month since the end of the Spring semester. If you can manage to combine this with daily preparation efforts in the first four weeks of this eight-week time frame, the June or July test dates could work well.

Some law schools (including Harvard Law School) have begun to accept scores from the **Graduate Record Examination (GRE)** as an alternative to the LSAT. In May of 2016, the *New York Times* featured [a story](#) that unveiled some of the dividing lines and positions of those on either side of the debate over using the GRE in place of then LSAT. You should check with each law school in which you are interested to see if they require the LSAT, or if they allow applicants to submit scores from the LSAT or GRE.

In summer 2018, author Mike Spivey interviewed several law school deans about the LSAT vs. the GRE. Spivey used these interviews to compile a report entitled “GRE vs. LSAT: Answers from the Deans.” You can find that piece [here](#).

Advice from LSAC on this subject:
“(C)andidates should take the LSAT unless they are applying only to a school or schools that will accept the GRE. The ABA, which accredits law schools in the US, has not finalized its policy regarding the use of GRE scores for law school admission. LSAC candidate service representatives are available to assist applicants in successfully applying to law school. Please contact us at 215.968.1001 or [LSAC](#).”

Similarly, the first four weeks of the eight-week periods leading up to the early-Fall LSAT overlap with the last weeks of summer vacation. If you can manage to combine this with daily preparation efforts in the last four weeks of this eight-week period (which is the start of Fall semester), the early-Fall test date could also work well.

The November test date shares some of these benefits and advantages, though it also overlaps with the competing demands of mid-semester exams and assignments.

- If for whatever reason you feel that you want to re-take the LSAT, taking it in the summer or Fall preserves this option for you.
- For candidates out of college, the early-vs-late advice still applies (i.e., plan to take the LSAT no later than November prior to the year of planned enrollment). As for which date: think carefully about the comparative quality of the weeks leading up to each test date as a way of determining which will give you the best chance for focused, sustained preparation, and decide (and register!) accordingly.

Kaplan has issued a free guide on “The Digital LSAT: What You Need to Know.” You can find it [here](#).

Transition to Digital Format. Prior to 2019, the LSAT had been administered in pencil-and-paper format. Starting in September 2019, the LSAT has been administered in digital format only. The Digital LSAT is the same multiple-choice exam as the paper-and-pencil LSAT, delivered on easy-to-use tablets instead of booklets. The tablets are provided to test takers at the test center. The content, as well as the structure of the test sections and the questions, are the same as the old LSAT. The tablets offer features such as a timer with a five-minute warning, highlighting, and flagging to keep track of questions that you may want to revisit in a section.

In previous years, when the LSAT was offered only four times a year (June, late September/early October, December and February), some law schools required that an LSAT be taken no later than December of the year prior to intended matriculation. Information about such deadlines should be checked carefully, school-by-school, now that the LSAT has moved to a nine-date time line.

Registering for the LSAT

Once you have decided on the date when you would like to take the LSAT, you should register well in advance of the deadline. Early registration will also give you a better chance of being able to take the test at the test center of your choice.

Detailed information—test dates, sites, fees, and registration deadlines—is available online through the Law School Admission Council website at www.lsac.org.

Preparing for the LSAT. Your [LSAT score](#) is an important (many say the *most* important) factor when being evaluated by law school admissions offices. It is important for you to get the best possible score you can. If you are serious about taking the LSAT, then the first thing to do is to determine how you want (and are best equipped) to prepare for the test. Many students will take an LSAT prep course, work with a private coach or tutor, study on their own, or do a combination of these.

The LSAC offers insight and advice [here](#) about the advantages and disadvantages of prep courses and self-study.

LSAT Preparation Options: Courses, Counselors & Self-Study Guides.

Message from Dr. Devine, Pre-Law Advisor: There is a plethora of LSAT test preparation options available, in several forms: courses, personal coaches, and self-study materials. The two key questions for each candidate: How shall I prepare, and which course or study guide(s) is best for me?

Unfortunately, there are no easy answers to either of these questions. Re. the question of which course or study guide(s) to choose → We all wish that there were reliable and objective reviews available to help us think these options through (imagine a complete issue of “Consumer Reports” on LSAT prep courses and guides. Wouldn’t that be great?!). But (as far as I know) there isn’t. We’re left to rely on each option’s claims to effectiveness, result guarantees, etc., and personal anecdotes from clients who fall somewhere on the “extremely satisfied”-to-“extremely dissatisfied” spectrum.

Here (below) I offer an annotated list of preparation options that I’ve become familiar with. Being included (or not included) on this list should not be interpreted as a commentary or endorsement one way or the other about any particular test prep option. I simply present them to you, and tell you what I have heard about them.

I do have one suggestion that might help re. courses: Don’t hesitate to contact any that interest you, and ask for references in the form of current or former CMU students who took their course within the last 2-3 years, and who are willing to be contacted about their experience. Mind you, even this is not a perfect or wholly reliable solution, in that a course representative is more likely than not to refer you to students who took their course and did very well on the LSAT. But if you take the feedback you get with a grain of salt, this could be helpful.

Good hunting!

For useful discussions among pre-law advisors of pro’s and con’s of LSAT test prep options, see the FAQ section of this handbook on page 140.

Courses and Counselors

- [Accepted](#) is a consulting and editing service that offers various packages (or “a la carte” options) for law school applicants. Services address such matters as personal statements, other application essays, letters of recommendation, interviews, wait lists, and general admissions consulting. Founded in 1994 by nationally-known consultant [Linda Abraham](#), Accepted employs a team of professional consultants that include former admission directors, published authors, and PhD’s. A consultant is assigned to each client, with further backing by the full Accepted team. Accepted’s web site also offers several free resources in the form of podcasts, videos and articles. You can find several of these [here](#).
- [Advantage Testing](#) is a tutoring and test preparation service with a wide range of standardized exam preparation options (e.g., MCAT, GMAT, GRE, LSAT, SSAT and ISEE). They claim to customize programs for each student’s strengths and weaknesses and, through weekly meetings and homework, present methods for identifying and understanding the specific question types encountered on the LSAT. Proctored, full-length practice tests provide opportunities for students to exercise techniques for solving problems on each section of the test. Courses are available in several U.S. locations. If there is no location in your immediate vicinity, Advantage Testing tutors in every location can provide distance tutoring through Skype or other online learning platforms.
- [Advise-In Solutions](#) offers a 10-week course as well as admission, application and financial aid consulting. Advise-In-Solutions was founded and is run by Dr. Kyle Pasewark, who has a J.D. from Yale Law School, and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago. Dr. Pasewark has been a college professor, and also practiced law for eight years with the New York City firm of Debevoise and Plimpton LLP. Advise-In Solutions claims that its distinction is in the fact that it “operates solely one-on-one with its clients: no classes, groups or generic advice. Advise-In Solutions accepts a limited number of clients,” with services provided by Dr. Pasewark himself, and with a focus

Excellent advice from one pre-law advising program about commercial LSAT prep courses:

“Commercial courses are expensive (ranging from \$900-1500) and offered by many test review companies (e.g. Kaplan, Princeton Review). When choosing a course, carefully examine the number of hours of course time (do not count practice test time as you can do that at home). Make sure that the practice tests offered are official tests from LSAC rather than “model” tests. Ask about refunds.

Courses do not guarantee success but they do provide structure. Think about your own learning style as you determine whether a course is right for you. Even if you do take a course, you MUST prepare and study outside of the class hours to be successful. You may find that you do well on practice tests on your own but one of the sections is difficult for you. In this case, you may be better off hiring a tutor or using a company.”

(Prelaw Advising Program, St. Joseph’s University)

exclusively on the LSAT (i.e., no preparation programs for other tests, such as the MCAT, GMAT, SAT, etc.).

- [Blueprint LSAT](#) is a Los Angeles-based test preparation service that preps for the LSAT exclusively. They require teachers to score above 170, which is 98th percentile. Like PowerScore, they are an offshoot of Testmasters. Classes are usually 30-40 students, though sometimes as low as 10. Blueprint also has an online video course, and offers private tutoring.
- [Cambridge LSAT](#) provides Official LSAT PrepTests for instant pdf download. They also group the test content in various ways to suit different study plans, such as by-section and by-question type. Finally, the site also features explanation sets, full-length prep books, and a number of other free resources, such as test tracking spreadsheets.
- [Examcrackers](#) offers a 9-week course in what they claim is a “unique format” or “lecture, test and review” (including five full-length and timed practice tests). Examcrackers also offers a full set of LSAT preparation manuals.
- [Griffon Prep](#) was founded in 2005 by two test-prep industry veterans. It touts its small classes and highly qualified instruction. Griffon Prep instructors are all required to score exceptionally high on an actual, officially administered LSAT exam, and demonstrate strong public speaking and explanatory skills. Griffon Prep courses also claim to have more hours than those of most other companies, delving into the concepts and skills behind the questions, and working on timing strategies to maximize one’s score.
- [jdMission](#) is a New York City-based consulting firm that specializes in working with applicants to law school (both JD and LLM programs). Their messaging stresses that they focus on candidates’ most distinctive characteristics (beyond one’s LSAT score and GPA) to help them stand out among other applicants. jdMission states that all of their consultants are graduates of top law schools as well as experienced writers and editors.
- [Kaplan Test Prep and Admissions](#) poses the question: “What makes the Kaplan LSAT course different?” Their answer: “A personalized curriculum.” “We don’t believe in the ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. Depending on your goals, a particular course of ours may not be the right fit for you – and we will tell you that. At Kaplan, we will help you select the course from our suite of LSAT options that best meets your individual needs. We’re convinced this personalized approach is the most effective way to increase your score.” Kaplan also offers the following guarantee (which they claim is the strongest in the industry): “If you don’t feel you’re ready to take the test, take the class again for free. If you take the test and are not satisfied with your score, no matter how many points you improve, study with us again for free. And if your score doesn’t increase, we’ll give you

your money back.” Kaplan also offers a full set of LSAT preparation manuals, as well as auxiliary services pertaining to the application process (e.g., choosing law schools, writing personal statements, etc.)

- [Khan Academy Official LSAT Prep](#). Khan Academy collaborated with the Law School Admission Council, the maker of the LSAT, to design the first free and official test prep program for the LSAT. In their own words, “Official LSAT Prep diagnoses each student’s strengths and weaknesses and creates a tailored practice plan. Each student sets a score goal. Then, the program guides students through lessons and practice questions at just the right level to help them work toward that score. Videos, articles, and explanations cover every concept on the LSAT. Through it all, we provide regular updates, so students can track their progress.”
- [LSAT Hacks](#) is the creation of Mr. Graeme Blake, an LSAT instructor in Montreal, Canada. Mr. Blake describes his goal as follows: “to make it easier and less expensive to apply to law school. The site is quite popular; about 10,000 students use it every month.” The site offers free explanations for dozens of LSAT prep tests.
- [LatinoJustice](#) offers a low cost LSAT prep course in conjunction with Nelson Test Prep (located in NYC); LatinoJustice is a human rights advocacy organization that works to create a more just society by using and challenging the rule of law to secure transformative, equitable and accessible justice, by empowering our community and by fostering leadership through advocacy and education.
- [Law School Expert](#) is a one-person (by Ann K. Levine) counseling service that specializes in working one-on-one with clients in all aspects, and every stage, of the law school application process (including LSAT prep). Ann Levine received her J.D. in 1999 from the University of Miami School of Law, served as Director of Student Services at University of Denver Sturm College of Law, and then as Director of Admissions for Loyola Law School in Los Angeles, CA, and California Western Law School in San Diego, CA. After two years in private legal practice as a litigation associate, she started Law School Expert in 2004. Since becoming a professional law school consultant, she has commented on law school admissions for several publications including [Above the Law](#), [US News and World Report](#), the [Buffalo Law Journal](#), [Hispanic Outlook](#), and [LawSchooli.com](#) and is a regular contributor at [Law School Podcaster](#). Ann operates out of her home in California. In her own words: “As a client, you will be working directly with me, not an employee or contractor. I always personally answer my clients’ phone calls, chats, and emails. I do admissions consulting full-time, and take on a manageable number of clients each year

to ensure that I can be fully dedicated to each client. . . . My ultimate goal is to help you get the best results while removing the stress and anxiety from the law school admissions process for you whenever possible.”

- [LSAT Sensei](#) is a Chicago-based LSAT preparation service, with exclusive focus on LSAT preparation. Founded in 2009 by University of Chicago Law School graduate David Yi, LSAT Sensei employs an expert staff of tutors each of whom scored 170 or above on the LSAT, and attended top law schools such as the University of Chicago, NYU, Columbia, Northwestern, Penn and Yale. *What differentiates LSAT Sensei from their competitors?* In their own words: “The biggest difference between LSAT Sensei and everyone else is that our LSAT experts coach you and care about you as though you are their siblings. We have already walked ahead on the path that you are traveling along. We have the knowledge and experience to raise you up high and above even our own level of success. A “sensei” (meaning “one who comes before,” or “teacher” in both Japanese and Chinese) has to have much more than simply knowledge and technique. There needs to be a huge element of respect and humility involved, as well as the uncanny ability to produce joy, confidence and focus from within the student. The prep industry tries to convince students that the test is hard, bordering on impossible, but the secret truth about the LSAT is that it’s actually *easy* and *fun*! . . . Our job is simply to demonstrate an expert approach to the test. Once they see us do a couple dozen logic games or logical reasoning questions on the board, they realize that it’s really just a series of baby steps, and that they’re plenty smart enough to master it. Students start out saying ‘wow, he/she makes it look easy.’ Soon, they say ‘oh, I see, the LSAT actually *is* easy.’”
- [Manhattan Prep](#) was founded in 2000 by a Teach for America alumnus, and claims to have “grown to be the world’s leading GMAT test prep company and one of the fastest growing GRE and LSAT prep providers with locations across the US and internationally.” Manhattan Prep also offers [THE BRIEF](#), which is a free LSAT prep email series created by a team of 99th percentile LSAT instructors at Manhattan Prep. This email series is a complete LSAT prep experience, with 60+ emails guiding candidates through key LSAT concepts with in-depth breakdowns and a study schedule. In their own words: “It’s a comprehensive, clear, and digestible way to prep for the LSAT on your own.”
- [NextStep Test Preparation](#) promotes itself as a service that provides “customized one-on-one LSAT tutoring, available in person in your area as well as on-line anywhere . . . for the price of a classroom prep course.” They also offer test prep services for [MCAT](#), [GMAT](#), [PCAT](#), and [GRE](#). NextStep offers the same one-on-one LSAT test prep

tutoring services delivered in two ways: one-on-one live face-to-face via video conference; or in-person in select cities (including Pittsburgh). Since NextStep's programs are customized, students can start any time. In their own words: "We will put together the right program to take you from your start date to the day of your test, making the best use of time available. For optimal results, students should plan to study for the LSAT for 2-4 months. However, we can design shorter or longer-term programs as well."

- [PowerScore Test Preparation](#) was founded in 1997 by renowned test preparation expert Dave Killoran. PowerScore is a comprehensive test preparation service for candidates preparing for the MCAT, LSAT, GMAT, GRE or SAT. For LSAT preparation, PowerScore offers courses, private tutoring, and several study guide materials. PowerScore's web site also offers free discussions and advice on LSAT basics, self-study strategies, and latest LSAT tips. On-site courses are available in several locations (including Pittsburgh), as well as on-line. Course options include full-length (7.5 weeks), accelerated, basic and advanced. Contact: Jill Kinkler, Marketing Coordinator (1-800-545-1750, x203)
- [PreProBono](#) offers low cost LSAT prep in conjunction with [7Sage](#) to students who are interested in careers in public interest, along with admissions consulting as well (also located in NYC).
- [Princeton Review](#) is a college, graduate and professional school admission services company offering test preparation services, tutoring and admissions resources, online courses, and books. Founded in 1981 and headquartered in New York City, the company offers courses worldwide through company-owned and third-party franchises. One option that Princeton Review offers is a free fully simulated (online) LSAT administration, which they will score and which will give candidates a baseline score. In addition, Princeton Review will furnish a full-length score report, broken down by test section, with suggestions and guidance on how to improve. For more information, contact: Natasha Bludgus, Princeton Review Business Development Director (Graduate Programs PA & NJ), at: Natasha.Bludgus@review.com
- [7Sage](#) advertises itself as "affordable Online LSAT Preparation, created and taught by Harvard Law School graduates. Free logic games explanations. Free trial LSAT prep course." One pre-law advisor notes: "My students . . . love it. It is an affordable self-prep option that is anchored in video lessons. Students must be motivated."

- The [Sidley PreLaw Scholars Program](#) aims to increase diversity in law schools and, eventually, in the legal profession by subsidizing the LSAT preparatory course and law school application expenses of diverse, high-performing college students who have difficulty paying the expenses associated with applying to law school. The program offers up to \$2500 reimbursement to pay for an LSAT course as well as application fees to apply to up to 7 law schools. Scholars will also receive an additional \$3500 scholarship upon completing the LSAT course, taking the LSAT, applying to school, and then finally committing to attend law school.
- [STEPS to the LSAT](#) is the creation of Jay Cutts, who has been teaching about the LSAT for 25 years and who is also the author of the Barron's LSAT prep book. To quote Cutts: “I feel that STEPS meets an important prep need. . . . My philosophy in developing these programs is that: (1) 85-90% of LSAT students prep on their own; (2) Students prepping on their own are typically missing a strong study schedule, advanced instruction, and peer support. (3) Students from underrepresented groups are particularly at risk for performing poorly if they study on their own. (4) Many students, including those from underrepresented groups, can barely afford the cost of a few prep books. . . . STEPS address all the above needs. It is a highly structured prep program with advanced instruction. It offers multiple opportunities for students to network with and support each other.” And because this program addresses “needs of students from underrepresented populations, these programs have been endorsed, and are co-sponsored, by (such organizations as the) National Black Law Students Association, National Native American Law Students Association, (and the) National Latina/o Law Students Association.” STEPS costs each student \$103 (2016 quote).

Do you have “LSAT anxiety”? This has become an increasingly common topic of discussion among prelaw advisors. Here are a few resources that prelaw advisors have shared with each other about managing LSAT anxiety:

- [Five Strategies For Combating LSAT Anxiety](#)
- [Test Anxiety](#)
- [Managing Test Anxiety](#)

STEPS also sponsors a summer version, called “SUMMER PRELAW INTENSIVE (SPI) FALL EXTENSION. Again, quoting the program’s founder, Jay Cutts: “The SPI program is a 10-week summer boot camp that covers the LSAT, the personal statement, admissions, career research, and special strategies for standing out from the crowd. SPI students are assigned a mentor who works with them weekly. . . . SPI-Fall is a fall semester version of the same program. SPI costs \$225 and includes enrollment in STEPS to the LSAT, which students can continue to use as long as they need.” Read more [here](#).

- [StrategyPrep](#) is an on-line LSAT preparation service based in Washington, DC. They offer at least two courses, one for 100 hours, and one for 40 hours. They also offer tutoring, live instruction hours, live practice exams, and access to recorded lessons. They claim that their instructors scored in the top 99% when taking the LSAT themselves. In addition, for students who are planning their applications, StrategyPrep offers a free resource: Application admissions help for strategy and support, for advice on the applications in general, or help with the process.
- [Stratus Admissions Counseling](#) is an admission counseling firm based in New York City for clients applying to college, business school, law school and graduate school. Stratus provides each candidate with a counselor who will act as his/her “coach” throughout the process, a team of admission experts to help support the process, and a client relationship manager. Stratus claims that their “team of expert counselors are graduates of . . . top schools,” that many “have direct admissions experience from . . . top rated schools,” and that all of their counselors “have at least two years of teaching experience.”
- [Testmasters](#) offers test preparation services for graduate and professional school exams, and college admission tests (SAT, ACT). For the LSAT, Testmasters offers a minimum “10 Point Score Improvement Guarantee” (if you come to every class and complete all the homework). If your score does not improve by at least 10 points from its baseline level, you can take their next available LSAT course for free. Courses are available in classroom settings,¹³ online, private 1-on-1, and custom group courses for the learning style that fits you best. Additional tutoring is available for areas that require extra focus.
- [TRIALS](#) is a partnership between NYU Law, Harvard Law, and Advantage Testing, which provides a fully-subsidized summer study program for the LSAT for candidates of modest financial means. The location switches between NYU and HLS each year.
- [Varsity Tutors](#) offers personally tailored lessons from Pittsburgh-based LSAT tutors in a 1-on-1 setting; flexible LSAT tutoring to meet client schedules; candidates matched to a selected LSAT tutor. In their own words: “We focus on online and in-home LSAT tutoring that offers flexible scheduling. Experience tutoring by highly credentialed LSAT tutors in Pittsburgh, PA.”

¹³ No longer available in Pittsburgh.

LSAT Self-Study Guides (in alphabetical order):

- [Blueprint](#)
- [Kaplan](#)
- [Law School Admissions Council \(LSAC\)](#)
- [The LSAT Trainer: A Remarkable Self-Study Guide For The Self-Driven Student](#) 2nd Edition (2017) Author: Mike Kim
- [PowerScore](#)
- [Testmasters](#)

A few pre-law advisors report that some law schools want to see a score that is no more than three years old, even though the score is officially good for five years. Bottom line to applicants: Check with each school to which you are applying regarding how old your LSAT score can be in order to be considered for admission.

LSAT Miscellaneous: How the LSAT is Scored, Re-Taking the LSAT, How Long a Score Remains Valid

[How the LSAT is Scored](#). Your scores for the LSAT is based on the number of questions you answer correctly. Since there is no deduction for wrong answers, you may guess if you are not sure about a question.

[Re-Taking the LSAT](#). If you take the LSAT more than once (which is not generally recommended but may be advisable in some cases), the three most recent scores will be sent to the law schools to which you apply. What the schools do with the scores will vary -- some may average them; others may use just the most recent score; others may consider scores from a second (or third) test only if your score improved enough (say, by at least 4 points) to indicate that the score improvement represents more than just increased familiarity with the exam.

LSAC has updated its **test-taking limit policy**. Starting with the September 2019 test administration, test takers will be permitted to take the LSAT:

- 3 times in a single testing year (the testing year goes from June 1 to May 31).
- 5 times within the current and five past testing years (the period in which LSAC reports scores to law schools).
- A total of 7 times over a lifetime.
- This policy is forward-looking, not retroactive. Tests taken prior to September 2019 will not count against these numerical limits.

In addition, test takers will not be permitted to retake the LSAT if they have already scored a 180 (perfect score) within the current and five past testing years, the period in which LSAC reports scores to law schools. This policy will be applied retroactively. An appeals process will be available for test takers who have special circumstances and want to request an exception to this policy. Contact LSAC for more details.

[How Long Does a Score Remain Valid?](#) Your LSAT scores will normally be kept on file at the Law School Admission Service for five years. LSDAS will send your scores only to the schools you

designate. You may also choose to release your scores to Carnegie Mellon (in care of the Pre-Law Advisor). Scores are kept in confidence, and not shared with anyone in a way that would identify the score as yours. Having a comprehensive collection of scores helps the prelaw advisor when working with other pre-law students and alumni.

Transcripts

You will need to have official transcripts sent to LSAC from all U.S. colleges and universities where you have studied and have an official academic record. Well before you have your transcripts sent to LSAC, you should examine each with great care, and determine if there are any inaccuracies, omissions, etc. (e.g., a grade that should have been submitted that is still missing; a grade that should have been changed but never was; a “Dean’s List” notation that should appear for a particular semester that is missing). If you find any errors or omissions, take steps immediately to have these corrected before your transcript is sent to LSAC.

In addition, find out if there are any outstanding issues that would prevent one or more of your schools from releasing an official transcript to LSAC (e.g., an unpaid tuition balance, library fine, etc.), and arrange as soon as possible to resolve these.

Transcripts and Reporting Grades from Study Abroad. A pre-law advisor recently posed the following question on a pre-law advisor listserv:

I have a pre-law advisee who studied abroad as an undergraduate. The courses and credits appear on his transcript from us as ‘transfer credit,’ though without grades and with no effect on his GPA.

In applying to law schools, would he be required to provide a transcript for this study abroad program, separate from the transcript he will have sent from us (his home institution)?

One very experienced pre-law advisor offered the following definitive and comprehensive reply:

1. For students who enrolled in a study abroad program sponsored by their home institution, and the courses along with the grades and credits using the home institution's grading system are recorded on the official academic transcript or a separate or parallel transcript maintained by the home institution, then the students do NOT need to send an additional transcript to the Law School Admission Council (LSAC).
2. For students who enrolled in a study abroad program sponsored by another US (including US territories) or Canadian college or university, then -- in addition to their home institution's transcript -- the students must have the college or university

sponsoring the study abroad program send a transcript directly to the Law School Admission Council. When the students register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), identify the US or Canadian institution sponsoring the study abroad program under "Other Institutions."

3. If students are applying to a law school that requires the use of the authentication and evaluation feature of the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), and they were directly enrolled in one or more international institutions, and the total amount of work they completed at all international institutions is the equivalent of more than one US or Canadian academic year, then -- in addition to their home institution's transcript -- they must have a transcript forwarded to Law School Admission Council from the international institution(s). When they register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), identify the international institution(s) under "International Institutions." Note: A transcript from a non-degree granting agency reflecting work completed through direct enrollment is not acceptable for LSAC purposes; they must have a transcript forwarded from the institution itself.
4. For students who were directly enrolled in one or more international institutions, but the total amount of work is the equivalent of one year or less, they should NOT list the international institution when they register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), and are not required to have a transcript forwarded to LSAC. International work that is the equivalent of one US or Canadian academic year or less is not required for Credential Assembly Service (CAS) purposes. However, they may be required to list their attendance at such institutions on some of their law school applications.

All required international transcripts must be sent directly to LSAC by the issuing institution, and will be processed through the authentication and evaluation feature of the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) as described on LSAC's website, www.LSAC.org.

Letters of Recommendation

Although a student's performance on the LSAT and QPA are the most important factors in admissions decisions, letters of recommendation may for some applicants effectively separate them from other applicants with comparable academic records, and nudge an admissions committee toward an offer of admission.

The primary concern of admissions committees is the applicant's potential for successful completion of the law school curriculum. Hence, good recommendations should contain factual information about (and that demonstrates) your academic abilities. Personal characteristics such as initiative, imagination, resourcefulness, etc. should also be mentioned, as these can inform law schools' interest in what you as a person will add to your law school cohort.

Here, for example, are some baseline questions that admissions committees want faculty recommenders to address:

- How well have you done in a particular course?
- How do you compare with all other students who have taken the course?
- How long has the course been taught, and how many students have taken it?

Specific details are needed in recommendations, not vague generalizations. Because of this, you should invest time in meeting (or in some other way communicating) with those who will be your recommenders, sharing with them:

- All of the factors that have led you to decide to apply to law school
- Why you think you would be successful in law school
- Why you have chosen each of the schools to which you have decided to apply
- Submission and deadline details for their letters
- Questions or qualities that any of the law schools on your list ask or require that recommenders address
- Qualities, skills and characteristics that, in general, law schools consider relevant for law school recommendation letters
- Why you have chosen to request a letter of recommendation from this particular person. Here is your opportunity to take some charge of this process, connecting your experiences with this recommender with the qualities that law schools look for in candidates, and how you manifested these – *specifically* – in the context of the work you did with this recommender (in course work, research [individually, or as part of a project team], or work on a job).

This approach is an invaluable aid to recommenders in collecting and marshalling their thoughts about you as a law school candidate that will in turn translate into an effective letter of recommendation.

How many letters? A common rule of thumb is to obtain at least two letters of recommendation. For some schools, this is a strict upper limit, and may come with explicit

instructions about who the recommenders should (and should *not*) be. For others, the numbers of source(s) of letters can be more flexible. Check carefully for what each of the law schools to which you are applying have to say about this, and follow their instructions or recommendations closely.

Choosing Recommenders: Fame or Familiarity? Ideally, one of your letters should be from a faculty member who knows you well, who has worked with you closely and over time (e.g., in more than one course), and who is familiar with your writing skills. Letters from employers can be helpful, especially if you have worked for substantial periods of time and in contexts in which you have demonstrated skills and characteristics that are relevant to law school admissions.

Whomever you choose, it is much more important that your recommenders know you well and have worked closely with you, rather than be well-known themselves. Law schools will not be more impressed or influenced by a vaguely positive letter about you from a Nobel laureate who clearly does not know you well than they would be by an enthusiastic and pointed letter, filled with relevant and richly anecdotal details, from a young, untenured assistant professor with whom you have worked closely and repeatedly over time, and who has thus come to know you very well.

Have you been asked by a prospective recommender to draft, in one form or another, a letter for him or her, that they would submit (perhaps with some editing) on your behalf? If so, see the FAQ section of this handbook (beginning on page 151), for some reactions and advice from pre-law advisors about this practice.

Qualities to Stress in Law School Letters of Recommendation. A few years ago, the Law School Admission Council collaborated with a subset of law school admission offices to develop a pointed list of qualities for recommenders to consider when writing law school letters of recommendation. Feel free to share these with your recommenders.

In addition, to the extent that this gives *you* added insight into what matters most to law school admission offices, consider how you too might use this list in calling attention to facets of your candidacy that illustrate one or more of these qualities (e.g., in your resume, personal statement, etc.).

Intellectual Skill

- Is a critical thinker and problem-solver
- Is an analytical thinker
- Can synthesize information
- Is intellectually curious
- Constructs logical, cogent arguments

Personal Qualities

- Is highly motivated
- Shows empathy/compassion
- Has surmounted difficulties and obstacles
- Possesses practical judgment
- Shows initiative
- Demonstrates professionalism

Integrity and Honesty

- Behaves in accord with high ethical standards
- Is reliable
- Is trustworthy
- Is honest

Communication Skills

- Communicates effectively in writing
- Writes persuasively
- Communicates well orally
- Is a thoughtful attentive listener
- Asks appropriate questions for information gathering

Task Management

- Prioritizes well
- Has realistic objectives
- Fulfills commitments
- Manages work and time efficiently

Working with Others

- Respects other points of view
- Works well with people from different backgrounds
- Motivates others toward a common goal
- Is able to lead groups of people from different backgrounds
- Organizes and manages others well
- Demonstrates good judgment in leadership decisions

Is there a particular story that should be told? Has your QPA fluctuated as an undergraduate? Is your otherwise solid academic record undermined by an outlier semester of weak grades? Have you had to take time off from school? Is there a disciplinary matter in your past (in or out of school) that concerns you as a law school applicant?

While these issues are sometimes addressed in a candidate's personal statement, or in an addendum to the personal statement, it can also be important that they be addressed and

substantiated in at least one letter of recommendation. This allows someone to speak to these issues from an objective 3rd-person point of view, confirming the circumstances surrounding the issue(s) in question, the effects on you, and how (as well as how *effectively*) you responded and eventually moved beyond these issues. Indeed, in its own way, if addressed effectively, these kinds of issues can be converted from potential liabilities into potential assets, demonstrating a capacity for dealing with and overcoming adversity amidst the challenges of college life and study.

Submitting letters of recommendation¹⁴. Access to LSAC's Letter of Recommendation (LOR) service is included in [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\) registration](#). This service allows you to track and manage your letters of recommendation through your [LSAC.org account](#).

If you use LSAC's LOR service, your references will only need to submit their letters of recommendation once to LSAC—even if you intend to include these letters in every one of your law school applications. LSAC will make copies of each reference's original letter to include in your [law school reports](#).

You get to assign which letters you want each law school to receive. If you change your mind early enough in the application process, you can reassign your letters through your LSAC.org account.

[How to Use LSAC's Letter of Recommendation \(LOR\) Service](#)

1. In your [LSAC.org account](#), provide the name and contact information for each of your recommenders.
2. Indicate the number of letters that each recommender will submit, and describe each letter's use (e.g., for All Law Schools).
3. You must assign the appropriate letters to each law school to which you are applying (or they will not be sent). You can find information about each school's requirements by clicking the "LOR Requirements" link beneath the school names on the Letters of Recommendation page of your LSAC.org account.
4. Submit your requests for letters by clicking the "Submit Request" buttons in your account. Your recommender will receive an email requesting that he or she complete and upload a letter for you. However, if your recommender prefers, LSAC also accepts paper letters of recommendation.

Please Note: If your recommender is submitting your letter of recommendation as hard copy, you must print the required LOR Form from your LSAC.org account and deliver it

¹⁴ Excerpted from the LSAC web site: <http://www.lsac.org/id/applying-to-law-school/cas/lor-evaluations>

to your recommender. This form must accompany your letter of recommendation. Hard-copy letters received at LSAC without an accompanying LOR Form or without the recommender's signature will be returned to the recommender.

If your recommender is sending more than one letter for you, be sure to emphasize the importance of attaching the correct LOR form to the corresponding letter.

Allow LSAC two weeks from the time of receipt to process hard-copy letters submitted on your behalf.

The status of each of your letters will be listed on the homepage of your [LSAC.org account](#).

[Do I need to use LSAC's LOR Service?](#) Almost all ABA-approved law schools accept LSAC's LOR service. However, unless a law school states that you *must* use this service, you may choose not to use it.

[Can my campus credential service submit letters to LSAC?](#) Yes, LSAC accepts copies of letters from undergraduate school credential services or career planning offices. However, the LSAC Letter of Recommendation form must still accompany each letter that is submitted in this way, even if the school's service uses its own preprinted forms in the collection process or issues a "packet" that includes several recommendations.

When identifying your recommenders in your LSAC.org account, enter the name and contact information for each individual recommender, NOT the name and contact information of your campus credential service. LSAC will use this contact information to send your recommender a confirmation of receipt of his or her letter.

In the event that a recommender's letter is on file in the university's credential service office, but the recommender is no longer associated with the institution, or has passed away, you should still enter the recommender's name on your LOR Form. However, enter the contact information associated with your credential service office. LSAC will send a confirmation of receipt to the campus credential service.

"Thank You," and a Few Other Courtesies to Recommenders. There are a few courtesies that you should extend to those who agree to write recommendations for you. One – mentioned and detailed earlier -- is to provide them with some written information about yourself -- perhaps a resume, a transcript, a copy of papers you may have written for their courses, a copy of your personal statement, and a list of the schools you are considering (and why you are considering each).

At least as important, thank your recommenders. Remember that these individuals are doing you a valuable favor. Certainly you will thank them in advance when you ask for the letter, but remember also to follow up with a note of thanks once the recommendation has been written and submitted.

Finally, let them know the results of your applications, and where you will be going to law school (or, if not law school, what your alternate plans are and whether you may call on them in the future for a letter of reference or recommendation).

The "Dean's Letter" / Dean's Certification

Some law schools still request a "Dean's Letter" for each applicant. Usually this request for a "Dean's letter" calls for a routine certification of the candidate's dates of enrollment, actual or expected graduation date, degree, confirmation of academic and disciplinary standing, and explanation of any instances when the student was not in good academic or disciplinary standing. In fact, this is now done through a "form" more than an actual letter, except when answers to certain questions on the form call for a letter to accompany the form with a more detailed explanation of the answer in question.

Whereas this letter or form – if required – had at one time been part of the application process, now it is more commonly part of the pre-enrollment process (i.e., after a candidate has been admitted and has accepted the offer of admission, and prior to final confirmation of approval to enroll).

[Dr. Devine](#) – CMU's pre-law advisor – is authorized to complete these forms, with a letter if needed, for you.

Personal Statement

The Law School Admission Council offers the following general statement about the personal statement as part of the law school application:

Law schools want to recruit people who are qualified for reasons beyond grades and scores. The essay or personal statement is your opportunity to tell the committee what sets you apart from others.

An essay on actual experiences and past accomplishments has more value to the committee than speculation about future accomplishments. Any noteworthy personal experience or

accomplishment may be an appropriate subject, but be sure to do more than just state it. Describe your experience briefly but concretely, and explain why it had value to you.¹⁵
(Emphases added)

The law school personal statement is an essay that should present in approximately two pages a clear and vibrant image or impression of you. Many law schools require it, while some invite or suggest it. Some law schools provide a very specific prompt (e.g., “Why law? Why law school? Why *this* law school?”), while others leave the topic or theme completely up to the candidate.

Whether required or not, developing a personal statement is a good idea, and arguably *essential*; and not just for the purpose of enhancing your application, but also to convincingly affirm to yourself that law school *is* the right choice at this juncture of your personal and professional growth. If you are genuinely convinced of this, it will show through both in your statement, and in your application more generally.

Letters of recommendation and your personal statement are the only non-standard elements of your application that, if done well, can effectively and positively distinguish you from other candidates whose standard credentials are similar to yours. Letters of recommendation are, of course, under your recommenders’ control. The personal statement is really the *only* element of the application that is completely under *your* control. So make the most of it.

For most law school admissions committees, the personal statement has two important functions: (1) It is a staple of the applicant’s writing style and ability; (2) It is a source of information about the applicant’s background and objectives. You should draft your statement with both goals in mind.

The impact and import of the personal statement can also vary among candidates. Relative to the LSAT and QPA ranges for individual schools, law schools are usually predisposed (absent any exceptionally adverse factors) to admit candidates at the very high end of these ranges, and (again, absent any exceptionally positive factors) to not admit candidates at the very low end of

In addition to “why law school,” other prompts and topics include:

1. A Personal Challenge You Overcame
2. Your Proudest Personal Achievement
3. A Project That Led to Personal Growth
4. Growth Experienced in College
5. An Experience That Changed Your Life
6. Introduce Yourself

You can see these nicely elaborated [here](#).

An example from the University of Chicago Law School:

“Write about something personal, relevant, and completely individual to you. This may include writing about a significant aspect of your background, a quality or trait you believe defines you, a transformative experience, the things that interest and motivate you.”

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.lsac.org/applying-law-school/jd-application-process/jd-application-requirements>

these ranges. For these two sets of candidates, the personal statement is not as likely to matter very much (though if it is exceptionally compelling [or weak], it might matter).

The candidates for whom the personal statement can matter most are those who are “above threshold” and within the LSAT/QPA range for the law school, but who are part of a large pool of candidates that the law school admissions offices must whittle down to the number they can safely admit. For these candidates, the personal statement is an opportunity to stand out in this pool in ways that would lead the school to lean toward admitting them, vs. not admitting or relegating them to a wait list.

Some basic rules and principles for the personal statement:

It is an essay. There should be structure, an introductory paragraph, topic sentences and a conclusion. This structure should be a help and not a burden in developing a dominant theme. The ideas (and the sentences) do not have to be complex. Write for clarity. Elaborate on the theme; present experiences that illustrate and develop your ideas and themes. Grades, tests and recommendations will be used to determine your intellectual ability. The personal statement will establish how effectively you can communicate, and how distinguishable you are as a candidate.

It should be clear and vibrant. Admissions officers offer a range of ideas on writing personal statements but they universally agree on one request, "Don't bore me." Style should be honest and concise. Obscure references, pretentious phrases and ostentatious vocabulary will not be mistaken for eloquence. The tone should be confident; a personal statement should be positive. Explain grades and test scores elsewhere (for example, in a separate addendum). Citing the example of someone you admire is appropriate if the focus stays on you.

The personal statement is an image of you. An essay that is a pro-forma exercise is a missed opportunity. For yourself, as well as the admissions committee, the personal statement is a chance to identify the significance of past experience, current purpose and future goals.

Organize your story around a clear theme. Personal statements usually have the most favorable impact on the reader if they are organized around a particular theme and are logically constructed to emphasize the applicant's strengths. Ideally, the reader is left with no alternative but to draw the conclusion that the applicant is truly outstanding and would be a valuable addition to the law school. It is better not to arrive at such a conclusion explicitly in your statement, but to make it modestly implicit in all that you say.

“Dos” and “Don'ts.” The personal statement is an opportunity to highlight your writing ability, your personality, and your experience. Think of it as a written interview during which you get to

choose the question. What one thing do you wish the admissions evaluators to know about you?

Some recommendations:

DO:

- Read the law school application carefully. Most law schools allow you to choose a topic, but some will require you to address a specific question. Follow whatever instructions are provided, and make sure you are answering the question being asked if the law school has a personal statement prompt.
- Discuss possible personal statement topics with your pre-law advisor (or someone else) before you invest a lot of time writing.
- Consider narrow, small topics. Offer details about a small topic rather than generalities about a broad topic. Focus on a concrete experience and the impact it has had upon you. In other words, let a “small (concrete) story” tell a “big story” in what it signifies and reveals more generally and distinctively about you.
- Experiment initially with more than one topic. Some think that what can “paralyze” candidates in their thinking about a topic is the notion that there is just “one best topic,” leading them to agonize over what that “one best topic” *is*. Pick 3-5 seemingly plausible topics, start each with a paragraph or two, and see if in very preliminary drafting one gains uniquely good “traction,” and unfolds in such a way that it even seems to be “writing itself.” Pause, and seek some reactions from trusted friends, faculty, or pre-law advisor to confirm that the one topic that seems to stand out would work well (and, at least as important, *why* it would work uniquely well).
- Make sure that the topic you choose is (or can be made to be) relevant – directly or indirectly – to the question at hand: namely, your decision to apply to law school and pursue a legal career; your prospects for success and fulfillment in law school and a legal career; etc. Even if it is a great story, if the law school admissions reader is left to wonder, “Why is s/he telling me this story?”, it will not have helped you very much in securing an admission offer.
- Be yourself. Speak in your own voice. Experienced statement readers are very good at noticing when an essay seems “forced,” or detached and impersonal, or contrived. Be genuine, and authentic. Do not tell law schools what you think they want to hear -- tell them what *you* want them to hear about *you*.

- Pay special attention to your first paragraph. It should immediately grab a reader's attention. Reviewers are pressed for time and may not read beyond an uninteresting opener. (See below for a few favorite [and actual] CMU examples.)
- Keep it interesting. Write with energy and use the active voice. You do not necessarily have to explain how your experience relates directly to your desire to attend law school. Tell a story. Paint a vivid picture. The most interesting personal statements create visuals for the reader, which make your personal statement more memorable. (But do not overdo it with that notoriously misused punctuation mark, used to denote added emphasis, energy, and excitement: namely, the dreaded "exclamation point" [!]).
- Keep it simple and brief. Big words do not denote big minds, just big egos. Choose your words with economy and clarity in mind, and remember that your reader has a tall stack of applications and statements to read. A personal statement generally should be two to three double-spaced pages.
- End your essay with a conclusion that refers back to the lead and restates your thesis.
- Proofread. Ask several people to proofread your essay. Grammatical or mechanical errors are inexcusable, and can instantly sink your statement in an experienced reader's eyes. Relatedly: Do not rely 100% on your document spell-checker to spot spelling errors, especially in those all-too-common instances when you have mistakenly used an actual word, spelled correctly, but that is not the word you meant. (No what I mean!?)
- Include information from your background that sets you apart. If your ethnicity, family, religion, socioeconomic background, or similar factors are motivating you to succeed in law school, be sure to highlight them. You can do this in the personal statement itself or in a separate diversity statement. If you are writing a personal statement *and* a diversity statement, make sure the two essays address different topics.

For a good laugh about this, compliments of the sitcom *Seinfeld*, see [this parody about "exclamation points."](#)

One pre-law advisor offers the following reflection on how she advises her students regarding diversity statements:

"I take my lead from the prompts on some applications, which ask students to provide a statement if they feel that they have something unique to contribute either to the culture of

the law school or the legal profession. And I encourage them to consider that broadly. This could certainly include racial/cultural/socioeconomic background, but it could also encompass personal experience or interest, course of study, sexuality and gender identity. The trick, I think, is to make sure that they do not repeat things already addressed in the personal statement. They should only write a diversity statement if they feel they have something material to add to their application.”

- Consider your audience. Most admissions evaluators are professors, third-year law students, or admissions professionals not long out of law school. Therefore, you want to come across as an attentive student, interesting classmate, and accomplished person. Again, consider what you most want them to know, beyond the information provided in the rest of your application.

DON'T:

- Do not play a role, especially that of a lawyer or judge. Stay away from legal concepts and jargon. You run the risk of misusing them, and even if you use them properly, legal language may make you appear pompous or pretentious.
- Do not tell your life story in chronological order (e.g., starting your essay with “I was born in...,” or “My parents came from...”) unless this provides a quick, clear and attention-grabbing entre, or segue, into the heart of your narrative.
- Relatedly, resist the urge to tie together all of your life experiences. The essays that try to say too much end up saying little or almost nothing at all.
- Avoid oversharing and/or inappropriate subjects or language.
- Do not have your essay be a prose version of your resume.
- Do not become a cliché. You may genuinely want to save the world. Maybe your study abroad experience *did* transform the way you look at the world. But these topics are overused. Before writing your essay, consider how your story is unique and highlights your individuality.
- Do not include information that does not relate to or support your thesis.
- Do not try to be a clown (but gentle humor is OK).

- Do not be afraid to start over if the essay just is not working or is not answering the essay prompt.
- Do not try to impress your reader with your vocabulary.
- Do not provide a collection of generic statements and platitudes.
- Do not make things up.
- Do not use a personal statement to explain discrepancies in your application. If your academic record is weak in comparison to your LSAT scores, or vice versa, address that issue in an addendum. Emphasize the positive in the personal statement.
- Do not offend your reader. Lawyers rarely shy away from controversial topics, but you should think twice before advocating a controversial view. You do not want to appear to be close-minded, or risk offending the reader.
- Avoid, or use with caution, personal statement guidebooks or on-line advice. These can be helpful, if used properly. But they can also pose a trap. There is danger in the temptation to create your statement in ways that mimics, or imitates, statements held up in guidebooks as “good,” or “excellent,” which can inadvertently undermine your own statement’s authenticity. Worse still, if you carry the temptation to imitate too far, you run the risk of having the law school reader pause and say, “*Wait. I’ve read this somewhere before . . .*” In which case your application is effectively dead in the water.

Challenge #1 (and, arguably, the #1 challenge): Finding a Topic. Perhaps the most significant hurdle that candidates face with the law school personal statement is finding a topic. Once the topic is chosen, and it is a good one, there is still much work to be done. But relative to choosing the topic, once you have a theme and focus, it is mostly “downhill” from there.

With this in mind, here is a more detailed discussion, with suggestions and illustrations, about brainstorming and deciding on a personal statement topic

At the risk of repetition → Law schools are interested in anything about you that is distinctive -- travel experience, tragedies in your life (loss of a father, mother or other close relative or friend), or triumphs (awards, medical success in overcoming disease or injury, recognition for outstanding achievement; key choices that you made that surprisingly revealed something else very significant about you). How did any of these things change you? How have you grown because of them?

Here are some questions to ask yourself that might generate some ideas:

- Who have been the most significant people in your life: parents? Grandparents? Siblings? Other relatives? Clergy? Friends? In what ways, and why?
- What was the most important thing to happen to you in college? Why? What course or teacher was most important to you? Why?
- How did college change your life? What was the most significant book you ever read? Why?
- Was there a summer job that held special significance for you?

Any combination of one or another of these things will probably do. It is better to concentrate in depth than to skim lightly over several things.

Here is a variant on this strategy: Do you find that on the rare occasions when you have time on your hands (e.g., riding a bus, waiting in line, brushing your teeth) certain memories come to mind, involuntarily and seemingly apropos of nothing? Start taking notice of these; as soon as you can, write down just enough to help you remember them, and at some later point (but soon) spend a little time fleshing out these memories, and ask: why do they keep coming back to you? Is it because they are somehow important to you? If so, *why* are they important to you? Might there be a topic or theme embedded in these that could form the basis for a revealing and compelling personal statement about you? Pick two or three of these, and try to expand them into paragraph-length descriptions. See if one gains more traction than the others do, focus on developing this one further into a complete rough draft, and step back to see if this is working. This would also be a good time to seek others' opinions, including your pre-law advisor.

Some (Actual) CMU Examples. Here (below) are three particularly memorable examples¹⁶ from former CMU students who successfully searched for and found topics that, in varied ways, held great significance for them in their lives, and that could be developed into compelling and relevant themes for their law school personal statements. Each includes an excerpt from the opening paragraph. Rather than include the rest of each statement in their entirety, a summary is offered describing how the topic and opening paragraph developed in each case into a relevant theme and overall statement.

Names are excluded to preserve anonymity.

¹⁶ Referenced and quoted with authors' permission.

Example One: A Summer Job Dilemma. A CMU pre-law student who was also an avid baseball fan went to “umpire school” early one summer, and worked for the rest of that summer as a Pony-League umpire (much to his father’s chagrin, who had pulled some strings to arrange a summer’s internship with a local law firm for his son).

His “umpire” decision did not come easily. He felt beholden to his father for arranging the law office job, which seemed like the “responsible” thing to do for someone who wanted to go to law school. But he *really wanted* to take the umpire option.

Finally, he had a “light bulb” moment. When reading a review of a book about professional baseball umpires, he started to see the roles of umpires (interpreting and upholding “baseball law”) and lawyers/judges running in parallel with each other. This not only solidified his resolve to take the umpire job, but also gave him the topic and theme for what turned out to be an outstanding law school personal statement.

Here is his opening paragraph:

Baseball has been a defining element of my life for as long as I can remember, as both a fan and player. For me, there is nothing so sweet as the smell of freshly-cut grass, as soothing as the early-afternoon sun on my back on a clear summer day, as graceful as the footwork and upper-body contortions in turning a double play, or as exhilarating as the sound of a wooden bat (far the aesthetic superior to aluminum!) connecting with a pitch and sending that ball on a long, long ride.

(Editorial note: A great job of creating a vivid scene where the reader can almost see, smell and hear the sights and sounds described, and cannot help but be drawn in to read on.)

He went on to talk about some highlights of his baseball playing experience, through high school and college, and even a walk-on tryout (unsuccessful, unfortunately) with the Washington Wild Things, an independent professional baseball team in Washington, PA.

Then he traced what he called “the other long-term constant in his life”: namely, the ambition to go to law school and enter a career in law. He described the impact that his father (also a lawyer) had had on him as a role model of the noble mission and functions of the profession, as well as an admirable exemplar of the habits of mind that make for success as a lawyer.

Then he deftly connected these two strands of his life and how they unexpectedly converged (seemingly in tension) late in his junior year of college, when he struggled with the decision that

You may recognize this example, in that it was discussed in another section of this handbook in the context of extracurricular activities, internship or summer jobs that could be relevant for illustrating (directly or – as in this instance – indirectly) one’s interest in or attraction to law and law school.

he had to make about two job options for the upcoming summer (his last college summer): follow his *head* and take the law firm option that his father had helped to arrange; or follow his *heart* and work as a Pony League summer season umpire. What to do, what to do . . .

Having resolved this dilemma in the wake of his “light bulb moment,” he went on in his statement to draw amusing but compelling parallels between the training and work of umpires on the one hand, and lawyers and judges on the other. Both go to “professional school,” and learn an elaborate set of rules/laws that must be invoked through rulings made when circumstances come together unpredictably; with successes that draw no notice or praise, but gaffes that draw relentless abuse; no child ever dresses up to be an umpire or lawyer for Halloween [!]; etc.). More than one admissions director from law schools to which this student applied took the time to contact me to say how much they enjoyed this statement and candidate.

Example 2: The Personal Legacy of a Family Tragedy. In this example, a CMU senior created a law school personal statement that took on the question of “why law school” for her that traced itself back about a decade to an unexpected family tragedy. Here is how she began her statement:

“USAir Flight 427 was a scheduled flight from Chicago's O'Hare International Airport to Pittsburgh International Airport, with a final destination of West Palm Beach, Florida. On Thursday, September 8, 1994, the Boeing 737 flying this route crashed while approaching runway 28R of Pittsburgh International Airport. . . . All 132 people on board the aircraft were killed.” (Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/USAir_Flight_427)

I was 12 years old, just starting 7th grade, and my father was one of those passengers. From that day to this, his tragic death has shaped my life and future in ways that I could never have imagined, but that keep him close to me every day.

She went on to talk about how grief-stricken she and her family were over this sudden and tragic loss, while at the same time having to deal with intrusive media coverage and – worse still – unsolicited contacts from lawyers anticipating a lucrative class action suit against the airline, and offering their services on a “contingency fee” basis (i.e., no legal fees unless they win money for the family; if they do win, they automatically get a percentage of the award [usually between 30-40%]). Finally, her mother turned to a trusted family friend (himself a lawyer), and asked him to recommend an attorney who could effectively represent them, shield them from further intrusions into their privacy, and who would also do so in a sensitive and empathic way.

Then in her statement she fast-forwards to college at CMU, where she studied and majored in chemistry because she was good at it and had always liked it, and recalling her late father's advice to "follow your heart" in deciding what *you* want to do, not what *others* want you to do.

Then, suddenly, it is spring of junior year in college, and time to think about life after college. While she had loved science in general, and chemistry in particular, she did not see it as a central pillar of her future (e.g., medical school, medical research, lab-based work for a pharmaceutical company, etc.). She wrote about how she stepped back and asked herself what she could do with her life that would have real "meaning" in what it would do for others and herself. Then she had *her* "light bulb" moment. She kept going back in her mind to the tragic loss of her father, and the "heroic" (her word) role that their lawyer had played in guiding them through it so skillfully and sensitively. "If I could only have as meaningful an impact as that," she wrote. Then she started to look into it (law) more seriously, and discovered that yes, one *could* go on to law school having majored in chemistry, and without having this narrow one's long-term career paths in law. She decided to take a mock LSAT to see if that indicated an aptitude for law, and lo and behold, she scored a 158 -- "cold," with no preparation.

That cinched it for her. That would be her path – as she said in her conclusion – "in memory of my father, and in gratitude for that lawyer."

A somber but extremely powerful statement.

Example 3: Evolution of a law school personal statement's opening paragraph. This CMU student decided that two prominent personal traits that she had exhibited for most of her life – assertiveness, and acting on principle – would be the centerpiece of her personal statement topic and theme. This example juxtaposes the opening paragraph in her personal statement first draft, with the paragraph that (with advice and repeated editing) opened her fifth and final draft.

Draft #1

In the words of my sixth grade science fair partner's mother, "xxxxx is a very bold young lady!" She used these words to describe me when to her dissatisfaction, I vehemently refused the perfectly stenciled construction paper letters that she had made for the title of our science fair poster board and opted for the sloppier ones that I had cut out myself and painted by hand. For better or worse, this trend of boldness continued through adolescence and into my early adulthood. It was definitely present when, to the dismay of my private preparatory school, I decided to publish a scathing editorial about the administration's bias regarding their expulsion policy. More recently, I challenged my landlord in a court case concerning his incessant, unauthorized, and intrusive entry into my living quarters without advanced notice. My conservative, Asian father

Later, after preparation, she scored a 166.

worries about this trend in my behavior and asks me why I find the need to go around "stirring up trouble." While engaging in this sort of bold, vocal behavior certainly increases levels of drama, I tend to believe that my experiences were all worth the trouble. In the end, it wasn't whether I won or lost my battles. Standing up for myself and for my beliefs always made me feel more alive. In short, I reveled in it.

Draft #5

"xxxxxx is a very bold young lady!" proclaimed the mother of my sixth grade science fair partner. She had chosen these words to describe her displeasure when I refused her exquisitely stenciled letters for our science fair poster board, and opted instead for the ones that I had cut out myself and painted by hand. Was I being obstinate for refusing her help? I prefer to believe that I was being a sixth grader of principle. It was *our* project, not hers, and I did not mind being "bold" to let her know it.

Again, the candidate has seized on personal qualities that have uniquely defined her from a very early age, that have continued to manifest themselves over time, and that in her mind comprise traits well suited for law school and the legal profession. The first draft, however, tries to pack in too much in the opening paragraph, and to essentially tell the statement's whole story. It misses the point of the role of an opening paragraph in a narrative like this: namely, to capture the reader's attention with economy of words, thematic focus, and concise story-telling, thereby enticing him or her to read on to learn more about this candidate, these traits, how they have surfaced over time, and how she has become so self-aware of them that they are now a source of confidence, pride and future direction.

In contrast, the fifth draft for the opening paragraph provides one pointed vignette that sets the stage for subsequent examples and a steady build-up to the conclusion of how and why the candidate feels that these traits are a strong asset for her in her choice of profession (law), despite how negatively some have criticized her about these traits during her life (including her own father, which itself implies strength of character and conviction on her part). This is a good example of allegory or metaphor – namely, letting one or a handful of small stories tell a "big" story – in this case, about a candidate's dominant traits that make a strong argument for law school.

Miscellaneous advice on length, line spacing, margins and font. Many pre-law advisors report having had students ask about preferences or recommendations for things like font, length and line spacing for law school personal statements. Perhaps not surprisingly, opinions are sometimes consistent, and sometimes not. For better or worse, here are some sample pre-law advisor opinions:

On length:

- I tell students that just because the school grants 3-4 pages does not mean that you should use all four pages. No matter what, be concise in your writing. Extra space is not an excuse for long-windedness. I find that when students go over the 2-page limit, they are usually just rambling. It is a rare case that a third page really adds something new.

On line spacing:

- Opinion 1: I always advise students to write their essays double-spaced, for a couple of reasons:
 - Put yourself in the shoes of a tired admissions committee member who has been reading files all day and it is now 10:00 at night. Would you want to be reading a single-spaced statement or a double-spaced one?
 - Double-spacing the essay keeps students cognizant of how much they are actually writing. In other words, it helps them to stay concise.
- Opinion 2: I suggest they use the variable spacing in that it can go from 1.2 up to 1.5. Double spacing can really diminish the volume of what is written on only those two pages. *Never* single spacing since that is truly compact and so hard to read.
- Opinion 3: At least 1.5-line spacing.

On font:

- Opinion 1: I recommend Arial font. It can adjust to 10-11 and still be legible.
- Opinion 2: I recommend that students use a serif font (Times New Roman) and avoid sans serif font (Arial). There has been research that indicates that sans serif fonts are much harder for folks who have corrected vision, particularly astigmatism, to read. In addition, you get more words per line with Times New Roman.
- Opinion 3: I remind students that some schools are very specific about the size of font and the margins. As in all applications – give them what they ask for!

On margins:

- One inch, since the default is often 1.25.

Supplementary Statements (a.k.a. an “Addendum”). Most law schools will invite or allow you to submit a statement, in addition to your personal statement, that offers important context to explain something in your application that might concern law school admission committees. This could include fluctuations in your academic record, time taken out of school, significant differences in multiple LSAT scores, etc.

For an addendum that addresses multiple LSAT scores → One pre-law advisor offers the following advice:

Typically, I recommend that a student write an addendum if there was something outside her/his control – illness, car accident on the way to the test, etc. A difference of less than, say, 4 points probably won’t change anything, and would be considered by the law schools to be statistically insignificant. An increase of more than 4 points is likely to be seen as significant, and arouse curiosity among law school admissions offices about what accounted for the increase. A *decrease* of more than 4 points poses a slightly different addendum challenge. If the candidate tries to say s/he’s better than the score s/he got the *first* time and can’t understand why s/he didn’t do better the second time, I’m not sure what the argument would be in the face of two scores where the 2nd is going in the wrong direction. If there were circumstances that undermined the performance on the 2nd LSAT, explain these in the hope that no negative conclusions are drawn by law schools from the decrease. If there are no real extenuating circumstances to cite, I think I would forego the addendum option.

“Diversity” Statements. Many applications now have a question, sometimes optional, geared to encouraging candidates with minority backgrounds or unusual educational or family histories to write about their background. A useful discussion of this option is available [here](#).

Resume

While not always required as part of one’s law school application, a resume that is customized to support and enhance the rest of your law school application could play a useful role in law schools’ review of your application. But how should a resume written for law school applications be different from resumes written for other audiences?

Resume Writing for Law School Applications. Author and law school admissions consultant Ann Levine addresses this question quite effectively in an essay written for *U.S. News and World Report* entitled [Résumé Writing for Law School Applications](#). In this essay, Levine pointedly addresses issues of content, style and format that should effectively guide you in re-crafting your current resume into a version that will serve you particularly well in your law school applications.

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Column 4 total / Column 3 total = QPA-in-major

How Law Schools Decide Who to Admit

The two most important criteria for admission to law school are the applicant's undergraduate grade point average ("GPA" -- or, in CMU terms, "Quality Point Average, or "QPA") and performance on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Of these two, greater weight is generally placed on the LSAT score by law schools.

Importance of the LSAT in Law School Admission Decisions

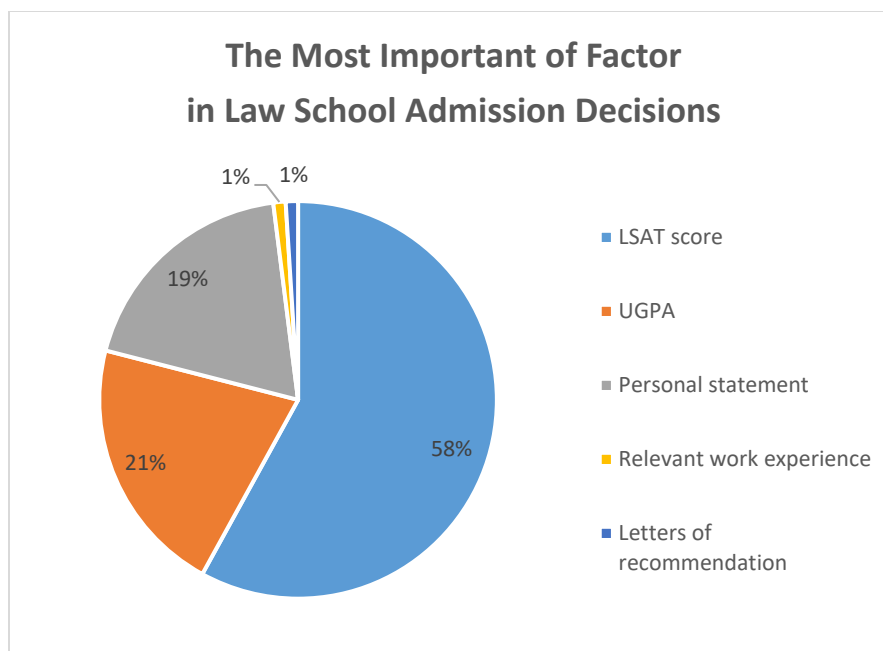
While law school admission professionals insist that they take a holistic approach to evaluating candidates, they generally agree that the LSAT score is the most influential factor. In a recent survey by Kaplan Test Prep, law school admission directors were asked the following question about the weight given to five key factors in law school admission decisions:

Of the following five factors, which is the most important in law school admission decisions?

1. LSAT score
2. Undergraduate GPA (UGPA)
3. Personal statement
4. Relevant work experience
5. Letters of recommendation

Their replies broke down as follows:

Again, a few law schools (including Harvard Law School) have begun to accept scores from the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) as alternative to the LSAT. It is not yet clear what impact this will have on the influence of the LSAT in law school admissions.



Why is the LSAT considered to be so important? For at least two reasons:

- The predictive value of undergraduate records can vary greatly in terms of schools and programs, or how long it has been since a candidate graduated.
- The LSAT score cannot be more than five years old, and is required for all applicants by law most schools.

Hence, the LSAT score is considered to be a more reliable tool for comparing very diverse candidates with each other.

The weight placed on the QPA and LSAT differs from school to school, and other factors can come into play. Generally, however, other factors are considered only if your QPA and LSAT score are within a school's acceptance range.

Other factors that can matter. Other factors that may matter to varying degrees include:

- Undergraduate course of study
- Graduate work, if any
- College attended
- Improvement in grades and grade distribution
- College curricular and extracurricular activities
- Ethnic/racial background
- Individual character and personality
- Letters of recommendation
- Writing skills

- Personal statement or essay
- Work experience or other postgraduate experiences
- Community activities
- Motivation to study and reasons for deciding to study law
- State of residency
- Obstacles that have been overcome
- Past accomplishments and leadership

The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) has an excellent page devoted to this topic ([“How Do Law Schools Make Admission Decisions?”](#))

Choosing a Law School: Comparing Admission Offers & Deciding Which One to Accept

Once you have a set of law school admission offers, how will you decide which one to accept? In many ways, this takes us back to the discussion of which law schools to apply to, though the stakes are now higher. It is not just where you will *apply*; it is now about which law school you will actually *attend*.

Start by going back to revisit the criteria that you used in selecting law schools for application, and consider whether these criteria stack up in the same way now that you are facing the decision about which law school to attend. Do strengths and options in a particular practice area, or factors like weather, distance from home, or setting (urban, rural, etc.), still matter as much to you?

Interviews

Some law schools will extend to you the opportunity to interview. This is more common after one has been accepted, but can also occur before an application has been submitted or, if after application submission, before a decision has been made about one’s application. Either way, remember that the goal in any interview is to communicate to the interviewer that you are ready for and excited about their law school.

Law school interviews can take various forms: one-on-one meeting, group interview, campus/faculty visits, panel interviews, and/or phone/Skype interviews. It might also involve an alumnus/na of the law school in place of a member of the school’s admission staff or faculty.

Most law schools host events for admitted students. These can be valuable for you as a way to actually visit the campus (if you haven’t done so already), and to gain first-hand impressions of current law students as well as fellow-admitted students. *Above the Law* published a useful article about getting the most out of such visits, which can be found [here](#).

While some law schools will actually help pay for your transportation to and from such visits, but most do not. For current students, the prelaw program may be able to help cover some of these costs. Contact [Dr. Devine](#) (prelaw advisor) for more details.

Here are some general guidelines to help you prepare before a law school interview:

- **Do your homework:** Know the school, the program, and the faculty, especially those that you want to work with while in the program. There was a reason why you applied to this school and chose this field -- recall why and convey that during the interview.
- **Know your goals:** Consider whether your goal is to teach, to do research, to go into industry, etc. Really think about what areas of law you are interested in or what stands out to you about the courses this particular school offers.
- **Review your transcript:** Be aware of "glitches" in your transcript and be prepared to explain them. In addition, remind yourself of commitments outside of academia that may have contributed to making you a strong candidate to succeed in law school.
- **Practice:** Schedule a mock interview with the CPDC or an appointment to discuss interview strategies so you are more prepared for the interview.
- **Prepare questions for the end of the interview:** Most likely you will be given a chance to ask your own questions. Ask meaningful questions that demonstrate you have researched the law school and field carefully, as well as ones that show you've been listening to the interviewer. It's also appropriate to ask when you can expect to hear from the admissions committee.
- **Be prepared to answer the following questions:**
 - *Tell me about yourself.*
 - *What do you know about our program and why did you choose to apply to our program?*
 - *What other law schools are you considering?*
 - *How has your previous experience and academic background prepared you for law school?*
 - *How will you make a contribution to this field?*
 - *What are your professional/ career goals? How will this program help you achieve those goals?*
 - *What areas of law do you think you might be interested in?*

Doing a Cost Comparison

Now that you have heard from the law schools to which you applied, you have or can compile the key pieces of information that you did *not* have before when applying: namely, what will the costs of attendance be, in terms of tuition, costs of living, and post-law school job prospects? In other words, how will financing your law school education affect your decision of where to enroll?

Confirm, Assess and Clarify Admission Aid Offers. Before making any enrollment decisions, it is important to confirm, assess and clarify all of your admission and financial aid offers so that you can make meaningful comparisons. Some important factors to consider:

- **Do not compare apples and oranges:** You cannot simply compare monetary award amounts. Consider how relative cost of tuition and living expenses will affect your finances and the actual costs of each law school option for you. Calculate these costs and determine what percentage each award covers, and what in the end each law school option would cost you.
- **Read the fine print:** If you are offered a scholarship, check carefully to see if it is automatically renewed for each year of law school. Many law schools have conditions to be met in order to maintain scholarship awards, such as maintaining a certain GPA and/or rank in your 1L class. Because students are graded on a curve and a school may predetermine the number or percentage of students who will earn a certain GPA, it may be impossible for all of the 1L scholarship recipients to meet the requirements that would enable them to keep their scholarship beyond the first year. Ask what the GPA requirement is for keeping a scholarship and how many people can realistically achieve that GPA. Also, ask whether scholarship students are placed in the same section, as competition for grades curved by section may put your scholarship at risk.
- **Career and life goals, cost and reputation:** What if you receive a full-scholarship offer from a fourth-tier law school and a partial award from a second-tier program? In addition to making sure you are comparing “apples to apples” when weighing these offers and projected costs, and carefully reading the fine print in each offer, think again about your career and life goals, and first ask if a law degree is really necessary, or sufficiently helpful, to achieve these goals. Speak with professionals in the field that you hope to enter as a way to make sure you will actually need law school to reach your goals.

Do a law school cost comparison. The [AccessLex Group](#) has a [calculator](#) that enables you to compare the real costs of attending each of a subset of law schools. The calculator pulls all the relevant information (tuition costs, cost of living etc.) from each law school’s website, and then factors in scholarship offers and the projected costs of other financial options (e.g., loans) so that you can more accurately know and compare the actual cost of each of your law school options.

If you conclude that a law degree will be necessary or sufficiently helpful in this regard, ask yourself how your personal and professional goals can be affected by the cost of law school to you, as well as by the school's reputation, or "brand." There is no single way to think this conundrum through. For example, think about what kind of job you want after law school, the salary you can expect, and if you have any priorities regarding where you want to live and work. If you aspire to be a public sector prosecutor, or to work for a non-profit organization, you cannot expect to be earning as high a salary right out of law school as someone who joins a high-profile private sector firm. In this case, you would want to avoid graduating from law school with a high debt level because of how difficult it will be to pay down that debt on a relatively modest salary. A high debt level for candidates like this could force them to seek out and take the highest-paid position they can find so that they can pay down that debt and keep enough to live on, while also forgoing the type of law they really wanted to practice and possibly being unhappy in the work that comes with the position they feel they must accept.

On the other hand, if your goal is to specialize in something like IP or patent law, or mergers and acquisitions, for a lucrative private sector law firm, you could actually expect to earn a high salary right out of law school. In such cases, your law school's reputation, or brand, could count for something in seeking out such jobs. In addition, because of the high salary you will likely be earning, you could afford to take on more debt and expect to be able to pay it down more quickly because of that salary. As one pre-law consultant puts it, "While graduating debt-free from law school is enticing, keep in mind that a degree from a higher-ranked program may give you more career opportunities to repay loans."¹⁷

Think also about whether you have a preference regarding where you want to live and work after law school, and what this can lead you to expect regarding both salary and costs of living. Says one pre-law consultant: "If you're going to be practicing in Kentucky, obviously the salary you're going to be earning is less but at the same time the amount of money you're going to have to spend to live is a lot less."¹⁸ In addition, of course, as mentioned earlier in this handbook, if one or another of your law school offers involves a school located in the location or region where you eventually want to live and practice, there can be added value in attending a law school that benefits from

¹⁷ Source: <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/2013/03/12/weigh-4-factors-along-with-the-best-law-schools-rankings>

¹⁸ Source: <https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2015/01/22/4-ways-to-pick-a-cost-efficient-law-school>

this location. You will have several opportunities to build a professional network in the local job market while in law school, making it easier to search successfully for jobs in that market as you approach graduation. This is especially true if the legal market in that region is heavily populated by graduates of a local law school.

Finally, think carefully about what you learned through “due diligence” about conditions associated with scholarships that you have been offered. If, for example, renewal of your scholarship from year to year is not guaranteed, you may save money in the first year because of the scholarship. However, if it is not renewed in year two because you are unable to meet the scholarship’s requirements, you face the prospect of paying full tuition and fees in years two and three. For that price, you may have been able to attend a higher-ranked school that had offered you little or no scholarship support.

With these factors in mind, and a good sense of which matter most to you, pose specific questions to the law schools whose offers you are seriously considering in order find out as much as you can about employment prospects after law school. You can even ask to be put in touch with one or more recent graduates who live in a certain location and work in a certain field as a way to gather first-hand narratives about these factors. In addition, use the employment data at the websites for [NALP](#) (National Association for Law Placement) and [Law School Transparency](#) in order to objectively verify what the law schools and/or recent graduates are telling you about job and salary prospects for their graduates.

Negotiating offers. Is it possible to negotiate with a law school that has accepted you in the hope of increasing their offer of financial support? Sometimes, yes, but *how* you do it matters a great deal.

Be thorough and systematic. Once you have evaluated your options, focus on your top school choices. Eliminate any school if you conclude that no increase in the award amount would lure you away from your other law school options. Instead of trying to increase funding awards from every school, target your top choices for negotiation.

To start the negotiation process, reach out to admissions committees through a letter of continued interest. On his blog, consultant Shawn O’Connor offers an [anatomy of the letter¹⁹](#) of continued interest. You can modify this structure for scholarship negotiations by sharing some

[Law School Transparency](#) is a non-profit that was founded in 2009 by two then-students at Vanderbilt University Law School. Its mission, in their own words, is “to make entry to the legal profession more transparent, affordable, and fair.” Their mission, they say, “rests on the three pillars of our [theory of action](#): reform, information, and accountability. We develop legal education policy ideas, shape the national debate of these ideas, and challenge law schools, state bar associations, and the American Bar Association to change business as usual.”

¹⁹ Source: <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/2015/04/20/anatomy-of-a-law-school-letter-of-continued-interest>

of your admissions results, along with general updates to your application. Remember, you do not need to discuss every admission offer or award. Focus on the schools that you are most seriously considering, particularly programs that are in competition with one another for enrollment (e.g., schools whose median LSAT/GPA scores for recent admits are roughly the same). For example, schools in the same region or city or similarly ranked programs are more likely to offer or increase scholarship awards to entice you to enroll.

You will disclose other programs you are considering, but do emphasize why the school you are attempting to negotiate with particularly appeals to you. You do not need to share the specific monetary amounts you have received from other schools in this initial letter. Right now, the goal is to simply inquire if you qualify for any additional funding. However, do be prepared to disclose award offers from other schools if asked. Do not exaggerate or manufacture admissions results or awards. Not only is this not negotiating in good faith, but it will also come to light if you are asked to furnish documentation to confirm the level of support in competing offers, which in all likelihood will end the negotiations (unsuccessfully for you).

If asked for details about other offers, be sure that you have done your homework and that the offer(s) you are comparing are, as described earlier, “apples to apples.” Once you have determined what the financial costs to you will be from each offer (e.g., taking into account such things as the location’s cost of living), show that you have examined each offer through this lens. If you do not do this, you can expect that the law school you are negotiating with will, which in turn will greatly weaken your negotiating leverage.

Admissions committees are more likely to negotiate if they think you will ultimately enroll. If you can honestly say that you would commit to enrolling if your financial award is increased by a certain approximate amount, say so. However, be sure you mean it, and that you are not saying this to more than one law school! They do talk to each other, you know.

Finally, usually starting April 1, law schools can ask applicants to secure an admissions offer with a seat deposit. If you are still in the process of negotiating merit-based aid, multiple seat deposits are an option. However, keep in mind that the Law School Admission Council will disclose where you have made deposits, so do not over-commit.

Wait Lists

Have you been waitlisted at some of your top schools? Have a few actually invited you to visit for informational meetings with admissions representatives, while the schools say these meetings are not “evaluative interviews”?

How to prepare for such meetings? What kinds of questions to ask? Wait-list advice in general?

General advice from pre-law advisors:

- “Others may disagree, but in my opinion, being placed on a waitlist is closer to a ‘no’ than a ‘yes.’ Waitlists are for the benefit of the schools, not the applicants. That’s not to say schools are doing anything wrong, but just to put things into perspective for overly optimistic students.”
- “If as a waitlist candidate you are invited to attend an informational or group ‘interviews,’ the main thing is to not be memorably bad. The old saw applies: ‘You only get one chance to make a first impression.’ Treat it like a job interview, dress appropriately (usually business casual), know something about the school other than its ranking, and if it is a group session, show them that you can get along well with others.”

A very useful article by Jessica Tomer on the subject of law school wait lists (“Guide to Surviving Wait Lists”) appeared in the December 2018 issue of the *preLaw Magazine*. You can find that article [here](#).

Additional tips²⁰ for wait-listed students:

Tips for Waitlisted Applicants

For the student who has always wanted to go to law school, in some ways, there has never been a better time to apply. With declining application and enrollment numbers being experienced by many law schools, the market is more open to prospective law students than it has been in years past. Waitlisted students have become even more important in this era of declining applications.

So, what should a waitlisted student do?

First, do not panic! While the admissions process can still be a long and tedious one (some things never change), students have a better chance of not only getting into a school of their choice off the waitlist, but also into schools they may have previously considered a “reach.”

Second, plan a visit! Although many schools do not conduct formal interviews as part of their admissions processes, it does not hurt to put a face with the name. This strategy is especially helpful for students who feel that they do not present as well on paper as they do in person.

Third, send an email! If students cannot visit, they can still send a couple of well-timed emails of continuing interest—before deposits, for example. Bonus points if a student can *sincerely* say that a particular school is his or her top choice.

Financing Law School

²⁰ Source: University of Illinois College of Law Admission Office.

Law School Finances & Financial Aid: An Overview. The cost of law school is an investment in your future and is a serious financial investment as well. As with any investment, it is important to consider the pros and cons of entering into such a large expenditure of effort, time, and money. Particularly in uncertain financial times, a realistic assessment of why you are seeking a legal education and how you will pay for it is critical.

Law school is expensive, particularly at private vs. public institutions. Most students finance much of their legal education through loans. The cost of a three-year law school education can easily exceed \$150,000. Currently, the average debt for law school graduates who borrowed both federal and privately guaranteed student loans is about \$80,000. Loans from government and private sources at low-to-moderate interest rates are available to qualified students. Nevertheless, you should assume that you will graduate from law school with some level of debt, and should likewise think now about the level of debt that you think you can reasonably afford and how it will affect your life after law school.

The “[Financing Law School](#)” section of the LSAC web site offers helpful information on financial planning and financing for law school, including several helpful web sites. In addition to these resources and the web sites of individual law schools, the following web sites may prove to be useful:

- [AccessLex Institute](#)
- [American Bar Association Legal Opportunity Scholarship Fund](#)
- [American Bar Association — Student Loan Repayment and Forgiveness](#)
- [Association of American Law Schools](#)
- [Council on Legal Education Opportunity](#)
- [Equal Justice Works](#) (information about public interest law)
- [Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information](#)
- [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#)
- [The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid](#)
- [US Department of Education—Federal Student Aid \(loan forgiveness\)](#)

10 Golden Rules of Financing Your Legal Education²¹. Remember these “10 Golden Rules of Financing Your Legal Education”:

²¹ Adapted from: <http://www.bu.edu/prelaw/files/2015/06/Financial-Aid-Tipsheet.pdf>

- 1) Live like a student in law school (and as an undergraduate) or you will live like a student later.
- 2) Not all loans are alike. Know the differences and borrow wisely.
- 3) Limit your use of credit cards. Save them for emergencies.
- 4) Pay your credit card and other consumer debt off before entering law school (or even better, do not accumulate any!)
- 5) Pay all consumer credit on time. Bad credit may prevent you from attending school.
- 6) Do not pay tuition with credit cards. There may be payment plans available from your school.
- 7) Maintain complete records of your loans. Keep track of your total debt, your lenders, and the terms of each loan.
- 8) Beware of “buy now, pay later” options. How much will something *really* cost in the end?
- 9) You are making an investment in your future. Make sure the benefits of the investment exceed the costs.
- 10) Use your law school financial aid office as a resource in your financing decisions.

Buyer’s Remorse: A First-Hand Account of Law School “Debt Regret.” In this two-part article,²² the author first confesses and faces her “paralyzing fear” of her law school loan debt, wishes in retrospect she had handled this differently, and uses these insights to advise her students in her current role as a law school faculty member. In the second part of the article, she addresses her fellow law school graduates who are carrying heavy debt loads, and shares how she has overcome her fears of her debt.

For pre-law candidates about to embark on their law school journey, part one of this article is well worth reading and digesting as they consider their law school choices, and weigh the issue of cost and future debt and how these should factor into their personal situations and decision-making. Here is “part one”:

I have \$219,778.08 in law school student loan debt. Some days it feels like each of those dollars weighs a pound and they are all stacked neatly on top of my chest. Saying, writing, or thinking about that number actually takes my breath away. I graduated from law school four years ago. Since then, this number has done nothing but increase. For the first two years after law school, I made so little income that my loans were in deferral. For the last two years, I have been on a rollercoaster of income-based repayments and have barely made a drop in the bucket.

²² *How I Overcame My Paralyzing Fear Of My Law School Loans*, By Kerriann Stout (abovethelaw.com; June 27, 2017)

The debt follows me everywhere. It is a giant rain cloud hanging over my future. It impacts my life every day. This is not what I thought my life after law school would look like. I imagined myself rolling around in gobs of money. Okay, not really. I wanted to work in public interest and I am not that delusional, yet. But, I definitely didn't picture it looking like this.

When I took out these loans, I didn't think about all the ways they would hold me back in the future. I didn't think about being 30 and wanting to buy a house and start a family. I didn't think about the burden they would place on my marriage. In many ways, the "millennial part" of my personality got the best of me. I saw something, I wanted it, and I was going to get it no matter what. Now, having drive, motivation, and passion are not bad things! What hurt me was my failure to evaluate the potential consequences or to explore alternative options.

I know I am not alone in this. Many of my friends and colleagues are in the same situation. I also see my students taking this path. I recognize the same hasty decision-making skills in them that I now see were present in my younger self. I talk with them about this as much as I can. I want them to know that ***it doesn't have to be this way***. I had options that I was unaware of or too naive or too lazy to take advantage of. I didn't heed wise advice (because what does my mom know anyway...) and I certainly did not exhibit patience. I worry about my students, and I hope they take a different path than I did.

After Deciding, Before Enrolling: Pre-1L Programs

A number of programs and publications have emerged in recent years that focus on candidates who are about to enter law school, and helping them to prepare for the law school experience and enhance their chances for success in their first year of law school. Proponents of such programs argue that ranking in the top half of one's 1L class has become increasingly important for things like summer opportunities between the first and second years of law school, and also as a condition of retaining certain scholarships.

A few of them are listed and described here. NOTE: Being listed or not listed here should not be interpreted as a judgment, positive or negative, on these or other such programs or publications.

- [Law Preview](#), LLC is a company that offers a 5- or 6-day law school prep course called Law Preview, designed to prepare entering law students for law school. The course introduces the six core [law school](#) courses that most students encounter in their first year - [torts](#), [civil procedure](#), [contracts](#), [property](#), [criminal law](#) and [legal research and writing](#). Each day of the course is devoted to one first-year subject and prominent professors are brought in from law schools across the country. Law Preview has also

teamed up with some leading BigLaw firms (and top law schools) to offer scholarships for diverse students matriculating at select law schools.

- The [Law School Toolbox](#) offers a [Start Law School Right](#) course (for a fee) to help students feel confident walking into law school for the first time. They also offer a [free workshop](#) that gives students the opportunity to get some guidance on starting law school and to make a more informed decision about the course. They have also gathered their blog posts and podcasts into [Law School 101](#), organizing tips that students can review throughout their time in law school. They also offer [one-on-one tutoring](#) for any law student who feels that they need a more individualized assist. Finally, they offer the opportunity to subscribe to a [free weekly mailing list](#) to get regular updates from them.
- [“How To Slay Your First Semester Of Law School,”](#) by Kerriann Stout (abovethelaw.com, July 10, 2017)
- From *The Princeton Review*:
 - [What to Expect in Your First Year of Law School](#). Curious about law school? Read an overview of the first year curriculum.
 - [The Law School Case Method](#). Learn everything you need to know about the case method so you are prepared for your first year of law school classes.
 - [What to Expect from the Socratic Method](#). The Socratic Method is a common instructional style in many law schools. Learn how it works and what to expect in your law school classroom.
 - [4 Strategies to Succeed in Law School](#). Because law students with top grades earn top salaries in their first year out of school. Learn the strategies you need to succeed in your law school classes.

Transferring Law Schools

Deciding whether to transfer law schools or to remain at the school where you are currently matriculated can be difficult. Some students have little or no choice but to transfer for personal or hardship reasons, including finances, job relocation of a spouse or partner, proximity to family, or the closing of their law school. Others seek to transfer to another law school that they perceive as having a higher status or ranking. If you are considering transfer for this reason, be advised that the transfer may do you more harm than good.

Consequences of Transferring. There can be several negative aspects of law school transfers:

- Loss of Community and Close Friendships: The relationships you make during the first year of law school are often the strongest and can last throughout your career. Transfer students often comment on the loss of community and close friendships they made during their first year.
- Ineligibility for Scholarships: Transfer students are often ineligible for scholarships at their new law schools. This factor may be significant if transferring would cause you to forgo a scholarship award at your current school.
- Ineligibility for Law Reviews and Moot Court Programs: Often law reviews, journals, and moot court programs will not consider you for membership until you have completed your first year at the new school. This may preclude you from being considered for law review at all or from being selected for either the law review's editorial board or the school's moot court team.
- Limited Course Selection: At many schools, course selection for the fall will already be complete by the time your transfer application is accepted. As a result, you may not have access to the courses you desire or need as prerequisites for later advanced offerings.
- Altered Class Rank and Lack of Graduation Honors: Class ranking systems at many law schools will not include the grades you earned at your previous law school. At some schools, transfer students are ineligible for GPA-based graduation honors such as [Order of the Coif](#).

If you are considering transferring law schools, gather as much information as possible concerning the ramifications of the transfer. This will help you determine whether transferring is actually the best choice for you.

Time Line(s) for Law School Exploration, Preparation & Application

Freshmen & Sophomores

- Discuss your interest with an academic advisor
- [Register](#) with the Pre-Law Program, and meet with the Pre-Law Advisor
- Join the [Student Pre-Law Society](#)

There are several available time lines for applying to law school. Of those that I have reviewed, I find that the [AdmissionsDean](#) web site is particularly detailed and useful. It begins roughly two years, or 24 months, before that point in time when a candidate intends to begin law school.

- Work with your academic advisor to find and consider courses that stress critical thinking and persuasive communication (oral and written), that will enhance analytical skills, that will develop your logical reasoning ability and increase your awareness of human institutions, social values, and the world at large.
- In your courses, make concerted efforts to actively participate in class and attend professors' office hours, so that professors come to know you and your work. You will need academic letters of recommendation for your law school applications, and these are ways for faculty to later be able to write strong and detailed letters on your behalf if and when that time comes.
- Learn about CMU's student clubs and organizations at the Activities Fair in September, and from the roster of student organizations listed through the Office [Student Leadership, Involvement, and Civic Engagement \(SLICE\)](#). In addition to the Student Pre-Law Society, look into other law-related or policy-related student organizations (e.g., [Mock Trial](#), [Pugwash](#), [CMU College Democrats](#), [College Republicans Club](#), [Student Government](#), etc.).
- Participate in extra-curricular activities in which you are genuinely interested, and about which you are truly passionate.
- Find and maintain a proper balance between academic coursework and extracurricular activities. Pursue your interests outside of class, but not at the expense of your academic performance.
- Check out the [Law School Admissions Council](#) web site.
- Familiarize yourself with the recently introduced option of taking the Graduate Record Exam (GRE) instead of the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). Ask yourself: Would one more likely be beneficial for you than the other?
- Relatedly, generally acquaint yourself with the LSAT and GRE, including a review of LSAT and GRE questions.
- Develop a tentative plan for when you would like to take the LSAT and how you will prepare. Discuss your plan with a pre-law advisor. Allow yourself six months to a year to come to know and prepare for the LSAT.

- Develop a realistic view of legal careers. Look for opportunities to obtain law-related experience. Talk with lawyers about their work.
- Explore possible summer programs and internships (summer and/or academic-year) that are directly law-related, or that relate indirectly because of the skill sets you would develop.
- Choose a major in a field that both intrigues and motivates you to thrive and excel.
- If you happen to be in Washington, DC for the summer, consider attending the LSAC Law School Forum in Washington in July.

You will likely find that some of the most meaningful internships are either unpaid, or offer modest pay. To make these internships more affordable, the CMU Prelaw Program makes summer internship grants available for law-related summer internships. These grants are administered through the University's Career and Professional Development Center's [Summer Internship Experience Fund](#) (SIEF) program.

Juniors

- Meet with the pre-law advisor to begin law school research and develop a customized application time line.
- Continue to search for and consider relevant law-related courses.
- Continue to cultivate strong faculty relationships.
- Continue to look for law-related internships and externships (taking note of the CMU Summer Pre-Law Internship Grant Program for meaningful but unpaid/low-paid internship opportunities).
- Search for law school conferences, forums or fairs in order to meet with law school representatives. The Fall LSAC Law School Forum schedule is available on the [LSAC](#) web site. In addition, the University of Pittsburgh sponsors an annual law school fair in the Fall that draws law school representatives from across the nation. At these forums or fairs, be sure to pick up information from schools to which you definitely plan to apply. These events tend to be busy and crowded, so arriving with a prepared list of schools will help to keep you on track. Gather as much information and talk to as many admissions representatives as you can. See "[Tips for Getting the Most Out of Law School Fairs and Forums](#)" in the [Additional Resources](#) section of this web site.
- Attend information sessions and panels co-sponsored by Pre-Law Advising Program and the Student Pre-Law Society. Hear first-hand from law school admissions

representatives about their schools' programs and what they seek in law school candidates.

- Think about your decision regarding whether (and/or when) to go to law school and research other options if you are not sure. Most law students do not go on to law school right after college. Consider whether working for a few years before going would make more sense for you.
- Start thinking seriously and carefully about how you would pay for law school. Talk with your family. Obtain a free credit report at www.annualcreditreport.com, and take steps to correct any errors that you find.
- Research programmatic, lifestyle, and financial aid issues of law schools you are interested in attending.
- Take a full-length practice LSAT (with no formal preparation), or GRE. Some of the major test prep companies will work with you to sit for a fully simulated and strictly timed practice test that they will score for you (and, of course, tell you how they think their services can help you). Be sure that by taking this practice test that you are under no obligation afterward to register for their services. This should be an *option* for you, not a *requirement*. The most valuable takeaway for you is a baseline score from which you can gauge your progress and improvement when you begin formal preparation. The Pre-Law Program sponsors a number of these practice tests on campus during the academic year.
- Work with two LSAT or GRE prep books and released official tests. If you feel that you are self-disciplined with your study plan and making progress to your satisfaction, continue with this method. If you are struggling with the material (or with motivating yourself to study), you may benefit from a commercial prep course. Test prep courses can be quite expensive. Be sure that you do some research before you sign up for one. The Pre-Law Program holds events to help you learn about the test prep programs operating in and around Pittsburgh (as well as on-line). Also, ask friends or acquaintances who have taken prep courses before for their opinions on how effective the course was and whether it really helped them improve their scores. Relatedly, ask test prep companies whose courses you are considering for references in the form of former clients (especially from CMU) who have recently taken their course who you could contact.

- Register with the LSAC and LSAC’s Credential Assembly Service (CAS).
- Finalize plans for the LSAT in the summer (if this is when you plan to take the test), including a study schedule that you will stick to. If you feel ready, take it in the summer. If not, consider the September or November test dates. Remember that, ideally, you will only take the LSAT once.
- Learn about the law school application process.
- Begin to draft a personal statement and resume for law school.
- Plan to visit law schools of interest (during the academic year, while they are in session).
- If possible, arrange to visit one or both of Pittsburgh’s law schools (at the University of Pittsburgh and Duquesne University) and sit in on classes, shadow a law student for a day, arrange for informational interviews with law students in different years, as well as with faculty, admission representatives, and career placement staff.
- If you happen to be in Washington, DC for the summer after sophomore year, and you have not attended a law school forum or fair, consider attending the LSAC Law School Forum in Washington in July.

Two additional resources to suggest: “[Getting the Most Out of Law School Fairs and Forums](#)” and “[Sample Questions to Ask at Law Fairs.](#)”

Seniors

September/October

- If you have not already done so, register with the [LSAC](#) and their Credential Assembly Service.
- If you have not already taken the LSAT (or GRE), register for and take the test in the Fall, and prepare accordingly.
- Attend a Fall LSAC Law School Forum, or the law school fair sponsored in the Fall by the law school at the University of Pittsburgh. Go prepared with a list of schools with which

you want to connect and with a set of questions. Go with an open mind; you may leave the forum with an interest in schools you had not previously considered.

- Meet with your pre-law advisor to discuss application process to law schools.
- If you have not already done so, meet with faculty and others (e.g., employers, academic advisor, etc.) who know you well to request letters of recommendation. Prepare your resume, transcript, personal statement, and other materials for your recommenders that will help them organize their thoughts about the letter that each will write for you.
- Verify the accuracy of your transcripts at all undergraduate institutions attended. Arrange for corrections/updates as needed.
- Send transcript requests to the Registrar's Office of all colleges/universities attended, and have your record(s) sent to LSAC's Credential Assembly Service (CAS).
- Monitor your LSAC.org account regarding the status of your recommendations. Gently and politely remind recommenders who have not yet submitted their letter for you about relevant deadlines.
- Work to refine and finalize your personal statement. The [Global Communication Center \(GCC\)](#) and pre-law advisor can be helpful here.
- Double-check your Credential Assembly Service report for accuracy and completeness.
- If applying for early decision/early notification, your application should be ready for submission.
- Continue to work on and submit applications, including the personal statement, résumé, supplementary essays, and miscellaneous forms.

November

- Aim to have all applications complete, if possible, by November 1st. Many law schools now prefer electronic applications; application software is now free for the LSAC Credential Assembly Service.

- Monitor your online LSAC account. Double-check everything to make sure that your files are ready for review.

December

- All law school applications should be complete. Check your online account for application status.

January

- Complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form and send financial aid information to law schools as soon as possible after January 1st for best chances of receiving financial aid. Request financial aid information from the law schools. In addition to the FAFSA, many schools will have applications for institutional aid and awards. Pay close attention to all requirements and deadlines. Develop a plan to finance your law school education.

January-August

- Most decision letters arrive in the spring. As your decisions come in, meet with the pre-law advisor to discuss your options. If possible, schedule visits to law schools you are considering attending. Make timely decisions on acceptances, wait-lists, financial aid, and deposits.
- Pay the deposit to the school of your choice and notify other schools of your decision.
- Send a final transcript to the law school you have decided to attend.
- Develop a plan for the summer prior to enrolling at law school that will prepare you to be successful in your first-year law school experience. This could include relevant reading, or one of several pre-1L programs. Information about pre-1L programs is included in the “Additional Resources” section of this handbook.

Frequently-Asked Questions (FAQs)

Exploration: The Legal Profession

Exploration: Law School

Preparation for Law School

Question: What types of extracurricular activities, involvement, etc. should students have in preparation for law school?

One pre-law advisor's opinion (that many pre-law advisors share):

None, in my opinion, where the motive is just to impress law schools. I cannot imagine any involvement to which one is genuinely drawn that would not call on skills that would be relevant for law schools. Just be genuine and passionate in your choices, and not "strategic" (i.e., just to impress law schools) and you should be fine.

One pre-law advisor posed the following question (regarding the option of taking an undergraduate course pass/fail, or pass/no credit) to other pre-law advisors:

Question: "I have a student who wants to take a Pass grade instead of the B he is likely to earn in a class. My Dean believes that a "P" grades might be calculated as a "C" by some law schools and asked me to check on this. Can anyone clarify this for me?"

One colleague responded as follows:

Answer: "'Passing' grades from systems of one of two passing grades (e.g., Pass/Fail, Satisfactory/Unsatisfactory, Credit/No Credit, or Honors/Pass/Fail, High Pass/Pass/Fail), and those for which conversion rules cannot be formulated, are excluded from the grade conversion. Bottom line: A passing grade taken on a pass/fail basis does not affect the student's GPA. You can find more details [here](#)."

Another responded with an added caution:

Answer: "Med school application service does not calculate a P grade either, but many med schools do their own calculations and the P grade is always an issue for them as they see it as

an attempt to avoid a bad grade. To me a B is a good grade and the risk of having schools think he was under performing in a class seems silly.”

Application to Law School

Question: When should students begin the law school application process?

Answer: When taking into account all that is involved in a law school application effort – researching law schools; planning and executing an LSAT (or GRE) preparation and test-taking strategy; drafting a personal statement and securing the best possible letters of recommendation – a 2-year time frame is wise and recommended. It can be done in less, but could feel rushed. In addition, students should cultivate multiple options along with law school (e.g., job opportunities, post-baccalaureate fellowships, etc.), which can be helpful in gauging one’s attraction to law school alongside other options as these come together. But to take on the challenge of development of multiple options simultaneously, a 2-year window is almost essential.

Question: What about students who want to take a “gap period” of a year or more after college and before law school?

Answer: A gap period can be very useful, especially if one has another attractive option to choose that might not come around again if not taken, and which might be distinctive enough that law schools to which you have been admitted might offer a deferral. For example, this is not uncommon for students who have been admitted to law school who also receive a prestigious post-baccalaureate fellowship (e.g., Fulbright), or an offer to join a selective public service organization such as Teach for America, AmeriCorps, or the Peace Corps. In other ways, work experience can help round out your profile and portfolio for law school, and allow you to become more experienced and mature in their eyes, as well as allow you – if relevant for you – to begin to pay down some of your college debt.

In this context, “deferral” means to postpone enrollment until an agreed-upon later date (most commonly 1-2 years), without requiring that the candidate re-apply for admission.

Question: How should students decide where to apply to law school?

Answer: Identify the criteria that matter most to you, and do a database search of law schools that conform well to these criteria. When done well, this is a way of developing your own customized criteria for what would constitute your “Top Ten” list of law schools, vs. relying on

someone else's rankings (like *US News and World Report*). A good place to start is the LSAC Guide to Law Schools, where each law school profile begins with a description of key metrics associated with that school. This template of metrics is common across all law school profiles, allowing you to consider each one and decide how important (or unimportant) each is to you in development of the criteria that will enable one of these schools to "make it" onto *your* top-ten list.

One pre-law advisor recently posed the following question about joint degree programs to other pre-law advisors:

Question: I met with a student yesterday who was asking my opinion on combined programs? For example, she is considering MPH (Master's Public Health)/JD programs. Feedback from those she has spoken with in the field has been mixed: Some say they are worthwhile, others say focusing on law is enough.

Answers: One pre-law advisor responded thus:

"I'm a product of a joint program (JD/MPP). I think the value of the program very much depends on what the student plans to do with the degree(s). I didn't so much have a plan (I started law school, then learned about public policy and decided I liked it better).

What I learned on the market was that public policy didn't help me with law jobs *at all* -- at least in terms of getting hired -- and my law degree actually cost me at least one policy-related gig (I had a friend on the inside who said the state agency was convinced I would move on to more lucrative pastures).

On the other hand, I appreciated seeing the connection between law and a broader intellectual community, and there were times after I did get my law-related job (clerking) that my stats and policy background were quite helpful. What's more, the extra year was paid for, as grad school often is. There were opportunity costs, but no additional debt.

Moreover, other joint degrees are undoubtedly more useful. JD/MBA, for example. Or an advanced technical degree for a potential patent attorney. Etc."

From another:

"These programs can be helpful and not so helpful. I have two degrees—but not via a joint program. They were earned at different points as a result of a desire for a career change.

When my students ask me about these programs, I try to get a sense of the following issues/considerations:

- 1) To what extent is the desire to do the joint program simply a way for the student to just ‘hedge’ their bets on a future career (in one or the other of the fields represented by the two degrees)? The more of a hedge, the more I try to encourage the student to truly consider where their interests lie. If a student can really discern where his/her interests lie, then perhaps they save themselves a ton of time/money by only pursuing one of the two degree options.
- 2) To what extent is the desire to do the joint program simply a (potentially bad) ‘assumption’ by the student that both degrees are required for them to achieve their career goals? If the student hasn’t done their homework, then they need to do so. What do professionals in the field possess in terms of degrees? What kinds of jobs do students from that law school/dual degree programs obtain? Is the joint degree ‘helpful’ or ‘necessary’? Caveat: While it is helpful to see if other professionals in this career path have dual degrees, be wary of concluding that both degrees are necessary, and not just a function of a mid-life career change (as is the case for my own two degrees).
- 3) Conversely, to what extent is the desire to do the joint program aimed at achieving a particular career path? If the student can provide a clear explanation, the more I’m willing to believe this might be a good option for the student.

In my experience, the most common of these questions occurs via the JD/MBA joint degree. Having once been a corporate lawyer with very little business background (and finding that a challenge), I do believe that a business background is helpful for students interested in corporate/transactional law. However, that doesn’t mean one needs an MBA (unless maybe aiming for mega-firm, mega-deal world such as one would find in Wall Street firms). For most corporate lawyers (and I practiced at a large firm in a major city), an undergraduate degree in accounting or finance is likely more than enough. The MBA’s crunch the numbers; the corporate lawyers dot the I’s and cross the T’s—the two intersect some, but not as much as might be imagined.

From another:

Based on my experience and research I would share with students that:

- Whether dual degrees will pay off is highly dependent on the kind of jobs they are seeking;
- They should know exactly down to the penny what they will be investing in both degrees and how much their student loan payments will cost over what period of time;
- They should make sure that the additional degree will provide opportunities they seek that the other degree alone cannot provide;
- They should weigh the additional time and opportunity cost of staying in school longer; and
- They should be prepared for the reality that having both degrees will help them for some jobs and hurt them for others.

Generally, this talk can be a real eye opener for students who tend to think that more education is always better. Many of them (and *us!*) have heard this so often, so it's often a surprise to find that *more is not always better*.

Question: For international students interested in either practicing law outside the U.S., or in practicing international law in the United States or overseas: Are they better off attending an American law school, or law school in another country?

Answer: International students should speak with the career development advisors at the law schools they are considering. These offices can provide a realistic view of how the international students at that particular law school do in the job market and what types of firms hire international applicants.

International students have some additional potential challenges -- or even barriers -- to employment. One's country of origin can also play a large role in what the job market looks like in general or in specific sectors of law. International students should consider where they want to practice and live when they finish law school because U.S. law schools train attorneys for U.S. law.

A recent exchange among prelaw advisors addressed various facets of this issue:

I have worked with several international students. The one big issue is that they are not eligible for any financial aid. So unless they can get scholarships from the law schools they have to finance their education.

International students need to think realistically about their prospects for even short-term employment in the U.S. For years, the federal government has allowed students with F-1 visas to remain here after graduation to get Optional Practical Training (OPT) for up to 12 months. Students with these visas generally know about OPT and are nearly universally interested in staying to get it. However, being eligible is one thing -- actually *obtaining* that employment in the legal industry is another.

Although not completely out of the question, very few legal employers are interested in hiring someone who can only work for them for a year and then must leave the country. The timing is problematic as well, as the 12-month OPT clock starts running within 60 days of graduation. While international students with JDs from U.S. law schools are allowed to sit for the bar exam in most (if not all) states, bar exams are given in late July, and the time between graduation and the bar exam is usually (and should be) devoted to full-time bar study. After the exam, bar results in most states are not available until late October or early November. In New York, character and fitness checks do not begin until after bar results come out, and bar licensure could take another month or two. For any graduate with an F-1 visa who wants a

job that requires bar passage and licensure, the timetable is, therefore, pretty much incompatible with OPT rules. If a student/graduate does not intend to take and pass a bar exam, getting a “JD-Advantage” job that starts within 60 days of graduation is possible, but employers are still less interested in hiring a person who must leave in a year.

One more thing: As with any set of regulations, the current rules regarding OPT are subject to change.

Question (posed by a pre-law advisor to a pre-law advisor listserv): What should candidates know about attending law school in the U.S., but who aspire to practice abroad?

Answer: Here is the response he received from one colleague:

I think the typical track is go to a good school and do well. Then get hired by a firm with a strong international presence – typically a large firm. Do corporate/transactional work for a few years and get to know and work with the folks in the offices overseas. Then get lucky when the firm asks you to go over to one of the foreign offices for a while.

I think there are some other varied paths. I know my old firm had a strong estate planning practice for ex-patriots in our London office. We also shipped a bunch of litigators to Kuwait when we represented them in an action for damages against Iraqi after the invasion in 1990. I also remember in the 90s when Czechoslovakia opened up and many big firms wanted to open an office in Prague and were looking for anyone who spoke Czech.

My experience is that many students interested in international work are not interested in the corporate work path I have described. Many are interested in more international public interest work. I think that path is much tougher and much more idiosyncratic. I would advise them in the same way I advise most students: namely, find people who are doing what you think you want to do, and then talk to them to learn about what their work is really like, what was their path and what would be their advice for someone wanting to follow a similar path.

While I think English is the language of most international business, learning a second language can certainly help. Personally, I recommend less common languages, in that demand for lawyers who are fluent in such languages can more easily exceed the supply than in languages that are more common.

Question (posed by a prelaw advisor to a pre-law advisor listserv): I have recently had two separate students inquire about attending law school in a foreign country – one mentioned

the U.K and the other mentioned Switzerland. Does anyone have any experience with this? Is the European system for the practice of law similar to the U.S., i.e. additional years of schooling above and beyond a Bachelor's degree?

Answer (from one pre-law advisor):

In the U.K., your undergraduate studies leads to your law degree. You don't have to get a bachelor's first and then go to law school like in the U.S. You can study another topic and then add a year to convert to law, but there aren't law schools as we think of them.

Your student should investigate different universities in Europe under their law programs. I was at the [University of Cambridge](#) after college so offer this as a starting point.

There are also different types of attorneys in the U.K. There are barristers and solicitors. Each has different academic and post-graduation training requirements. There isn't one path for education and terminology like in the U.S. - everyone gets a J.D. in law school, passes the Bar and is then a lawyer. You can read about this in more detail [here](#).

Question: How do you register with the LSAC?

Answer: Visit the [LSAC web site](#), where this process is self-explanatory.

Question (from a pre-law advisor, to a pre-law advisor listserv): I am advising a pre-law student who suffered from a psychiatric disorder during his first two years at the university, and consequently did not do well academically. The student has since received treatment, and has greatly increased his GPA in the last two years. He would like to write an addendum explaining the grade discrepancy. My question is: What do you think of students disclosing such a psychiatric disorder in an addendum? I am concerned about the considerable bias that still exists for individuals diagnosed with such conditions.

Answers (two responses, representative of responses from several pre-law advisors):

RESPONSE 1: "I would say if ANYONE was going to understand such a situation, discrimination, and the bias, it would be law schools. I think I would advise the student to write the addendum (unless the GPA is still solid enough for the schools desired). They just need to make sure they adequately portray what they learned from this experience - so as to dispel any thoughts that they may stop medicating and return to issues from the pressure of law school."

RESPONSE 2: "I would suggest disclosing in it a short addendum if it is (a) relevant and (b) necessary. Relevant in that it was indeed the cause of the setback; and necessary in

that the GPA is truly on the low side for the target school(s). If the grades are borderline and the upward trajectory coincided with a change in majors (e.g., premed to political science), there may not be a need for an addendum. I find that sometimes my students want to explain grades that are not necessarily that low and only draw more attention to RELATIVE weaknesses on a record. Finally, if it is addressed in an addendum (perhaps framed as overcoming adversity), don't address or reference it in the personal or diversity statement as well."

Question (posed by a pre-law advisor to a pre-law advisor listserv): Any advice to an applicant to law school who is around 30, has been out in the workforce for a few years, but who had poor grades as an undergrad (a GPA somewhere around 2.8)?

Additional background: "She had a decent LSAT score, a 158. She has been wait-listed at her first-choice law school, and the committee has asked her to send in a statement explaining her undergraduate performance. Since graduating from college about 10 years ago, she has worked for several different charitable institutions, including one major one, as a fundraiser. She is also very active in community politics, having been elected to a position within a political party. She has letters of recommendations from well-connected alums of her first-choice law school who have worked with her in both capacities, but because she has been out of school for a decade, I do not think she got letters from any undergraduate professors. Her personal statement (I thought) effectively focused on her commitment to her work and her future goals. Should her supplemental statement to the committee focus exclusively on trying to explain her poor grades as an undergrad because of personal problems she had at the time? Or should she simply state that she did not take college very seriously then, but she has since matured and knows what she wants in life? Or should she do some combination of both? Also, any clue how long a statement the committee is looking for?"

Answer(s):

Response #1: "If her choices of law schools are limited by geography to only two or three schools, she might consider talking to the admissions offices at those law schools before she applies. I have seen candidates with GPA's much lower than a 2.8 get into decent law schools, especially coupled with a solid LSAT and great work history. I would guess that your advisee has a great chance of getting in, depending on where she applies.

I would think that an addendum/supplemental statement should be two pages or less. I recommend that folks put honest, factual information in that statement and not write a long essay when four sentences might do. Some schools have restrictions on the length of addenda."

Response #2: “I would say that whatever the truth is, she should tell it. If she just did not take college seriously at the time, then she should be honest about that. However, the goal with any addendum is to focus the committee's attention on the positive. So rather than giving a long, detailed history of what went wrong in college, I would suggest writing something that gives the basic facts of the situation, but then brings the focus back to the other more positive attributes of her application.

With that being said, I am not suggesting that she skirt the issue entirely. The committee's probable concern is her ability to handle the academic rigors of law school, since they have no other indication of her academic capabilities other than her undergraduate transcript, and she should be careful to provide them with what they are looking for in her addendum. Otherwise, she has not answered the question and, therefore, has not been helpful to the committee.

The bottom line is that her GPA is set in stone and she cannot change it. I would suggest a format where she does a few things:

- Explain the grades! Whatever happened, happened and she should be forthright, be it personal problems, immaturity, lack of readiness for college, etc. No need to bog the committee down with details, though. A sob story is not necessary.
- Move on! What lessons did she learn/gain from going through her undergraduate experience? How has it influenced her work today? Is she a better person/worker because of it?
- Be relevant! Since the committee is likely concerned about her ability to handle the intellectual demands of law school, some discussion about her skill sets that are particularly relevant to law school and a legal career would be helpful. This refers to things like analytical reasoning skills, critical and creative thinking and problem solving, strong writing abilities, and logical reasoning skills. She could provide examples from her work life in which she demonstrated these traits. Generally, I think the assumption is that doing well in college indicates that you have indeed mastered these skills. However, since her college record does not very well support her contention that she is prepared for the rigors of law school, she will want to convince the committee that she garnered the skills more so in the field than in the classroom. But the point is, she has the skills.”

Response #3: “The one caveat I would add is that a non-traditional student brings a level of maturity gained from life and work experiences that can be a real asset to the law school community, and the legal profession. From my conversations with numerous law school admissions personnel, they really value that maturity factor. It not only pays off in the classroom, but also in student bar activities, internships, and even social events.

So, emphasize that strength, and it helps to minimize the downside of a poor undergraduate record of some years past.”

Question: How many law schools should students apply to?

Answer: If you have thought carefully about what’s important to you in a law school, and are being reasonably realistic about admissibility, 6-7 law schools should be sufficient. 8-10 would not be unreasonable.

Question: What is a good timeline for applying to law schools - when to apply, when to study for and take the LSAT, when to visit schools, etc.?

Answer: There are several available time lines for applying to law school. The time line featured on the [AdmissionsDean](#) web site is particularly detailed and useful. It begins roughly two years, or 24 months, before that point in time when a candidate intends to begin law school. By following this time line and its recommended steps, you can be reasonably certain that you will have met all deadlines; selected schools for application in wise and well-informed ways; given yourself sufficient time for application elements such as the personal statement, resume, and letters of recommendation; investigated and used resources regarding the financing the cost of law school, etc.

Question: If students are not admitted to law school, should they consider re-applying?

Answer: Perhaps, but after careful examination of why – if they were conscientious in their research and selection of law schools to which to apply – they were not admitted. Some serious strategic re-calibration might be in order before taking another run at it.

Question: Some law schools offer “conditional acceptance” decisions to applicants. What are these, and which law schools use them?

Answer: Some law schools offer “conditional acceptance” programs for which admission is contingent upon the successful completion of a pre-enrollment program. Interested students should contact the law school for individual program eligibility and requirements.

The LSAC web site offers [a list of law schools with such programs](#).

The [NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists](#) also includes a listing of schools with conditional acceptance programs. This may not be all-inclusive and entirely accurate, as it only includes the

information provided by schools who respond to an annual survey, but it should be a good starting point.

Question: What should candidates know about “early decision” (“ED”) application options for applying to law school?

Answer: There are two basic types of ED options:

- **Binding.** This option requires the candidate, if admitted, to commit to enroll at the law school in question, to cancel applications to all other law schools to which s/he has applied, and to not submit applications to any other law schools subsequently.
- **Non-binding.** This option has none of the requirements noted above for “binding” ED options. While there may be different decision-making requirements re. whether to accept the offer, candidates are not required to:
 - Commit to attending the law school, if admitted
 - Cancel applications to other law schools
 - Refrain from applying to any additional law schools

As you might expect, there are varying opinions about the comparative advantages and disadvantages of these ED options. Generally, they urge caution regarding binding ED options, unless the applicant has very clear-headed and compelling reasons for singling out one school in this way, with little if any likelihood that that they would change their mind about this later.

A sampling of opinions from U.S. pre-law advisors appears below:

Pre-law advisor #1:

“The one positive (albeit minor, in my opinion) is that EDs prevent the angst that students deal with in waiting to hear from institutions in the spring, particularly with more and more institutions keeping students on WLs and deferred action now well until mid-August.”

Pre-law advisor #2:

“I think that the binding ED option is a huge mistake for most students. . . . If admitted, the law school knows that they have a firm commitment from the applicant that s/he will enroll. If you believe that law school admission offices develop strategies for enrolling admitted students based on their commitment to enroll (with clear implications for financial aid), ED students who have been admitted have essentially surrendered all of their bargaining leverage in this regard. Unless the school is guaranteeing a full-tuition scholarship to ED students who are bound by their

application status (thereby preventing any financial loss from a commitment to enroll), I urge students to be extremely cautious about binding ED options.”

Pre-law advisor #3:

“In my opinion, the binding ED option gives the law school all of the power and the applicant none. I find that SO many applicants change their mind about their ‘#1 choice law school after they receive all of their admissions decisions and they have a chance to think them through, consider scholarships offered (if any), and visit the schools, but who find that their option are closed off because of the binding agreement they entered when they decided to apply ‘early decision/binding’ to one particular school.”

Pre-law advisor #4:

“I warn all my students to be cautious about ‘binding’ ED options. Non-Binding is fine.”

Question: How much to report in a law school application regarding “character and fitness”?

Here is how this issue was posed by one pre-law advisor about one of her students:

“I am new to pre-law advising and need some help advising an alum on the Character & Fitness section. I know the rule of thumb is “when in doubt, disclose.” But what if the infraction is not on their record?”

Here is the scenario: The student received an alcohol violation citation in his senior year for a party at his apartment where some minors received alcohol. He paid a \$20 fine. At the time, he was told it would not be on his record. He contacted the Dean of Students about it this week, and they said ‘You have nothing but an alcohol violation which we do not report so when you are asked whether you have any disciplinary charge, say no.’

I would appreciate any advice you may have!”

Answer: Response from an experienced pre-law advisor:

“The general feeling among many is to disclose everything – you never know how information may surface, whether online, in conversation, as part of a recommendation letter/reference, etc. Moreover, you quoted the Dean of Students as saying ‘you have nothing but an alcohol violation’ - whether officially or unofficially, it is clearly on his (albeit, *internal*) record. That the Dean (or I am guessing someone in the Dean's office) advised him to say ‘no’ if asked about disciplinary charges is a concern. Whether internal or not, official or not, it is clearly recorded. On this basis, I question the wisdom of this Dean’s advice.

Something as minor as the violation and fine probably will not affect his chances of being admitted to law school or, later, to a state bar for professional practice. However, if he does

not say anything and the law school finds out, it could appear that he was trying to hide it. As is so often the case, the perception of a cover-up can be far worse than the crime.”

Another agrees completely:

“Full Disclosure. The real import of the question is not ‘Is there a record of,’ but ‘Have you ever.’ The student should report this because it is the right thing to do and because there is always the possibility—slim though it be—of the ‘poison pen letter.’”

Question: Some law schools ask in their application a question much like the following:

“Are you applying, or have you applied, to other law schools? If so, please list them.”

Why are they asking? In addition, what implications does one’s answer have for one’s application? Relatedly, if the question is voluntary, what are the implications if one chooses to not answer?

One pre-law student (not at CMU) expressed her concern about this to her pre-law advisor:

“It seems to me that listing ‘better’/higher ranked schools might leave the impression that I’m using that particular school as a safety, or that listing lower ranked schools might give the impression that I’m not as qualified to get into that school.”

Does it really matter what schools students list, or if they list anything?

Answer: When this question was posed to a network of pre-law advisors, one very experienced advisor responded as follows:

“From my talks with law school representatives, it seems that schools are using the information more as a gauge of their own competition rather than as any sort of indicative factor about the applicant. I have not yet seen an instance where the question was required by a school, so I am inclined to agree with that assessment. I think it can be helpful to schools to know where else applicants may be applying as a way to try to predict what schools they may be ‘competing’ with for the same pool of applicants.”

However, another pre-law advisor remained concerned:

“I just looked at one school’s online application and it DOES NOT say that this question is optional, even in the instructions. (It simply does not say that it is required, which is not quite the same thing.) Conscientious applicants feel compelled to provide this information due to the obligation to disclose, and I am concerned that some schools may use it to ‘guesstimate’ where else this applicant will be accepted and what kind of aid they can expect to be competing with at other schools. It seems like it would be difficult information for an admissions office to ignore when making offers. I personally

wish that the application could make clear that NOT answering this question will in no way impact admission or aid offers ... assuming that is the case.”

From one very experienced law school admissions director:

“We ask the question which is voluntary for the applicant. The reason: cross-application information. The question has no relevance to assessment of the candidate.”

From another trusted law school admissions colleague:

“I have been asked this question by many applicants, and we ask it simply for information gathering. The question on our application is not mandatory -- so some of our applicants choose to report this information, others choose not to. The answer an applicant gives regarding what other law schools they have applied to has no effect on the assessment of the candidate. We are not using it as part of our evaluation.”

Question (posed by a pre-law advisor to colleagues on a pre-law advisor listserv): I would appreciate hearing what you advise students about wait-listed schools, especially when they've been accepted at a couple of other schools, though the one for which they are wait-listed is their #1 choice. How do you help them weigh the odds against submitting the deposit for another school that's accepted them? Is there a common practice among law schools regarding wait-listed students in terms of average percent accepted from the wait list?

Answer (from a fellow [and very experienced] prelaw advisor):

It's important to remember that waitlists are for the benefit of the schools, not the applicants. This is nothing nefarious, but schools don't want empty seats, so they over-accept and then put other students on a waitlist to guard against a lower-than-expected yield. Students should also be aware that, unless their yield from the first deposit period was low, most schools are not going to offer any waitlist admissions until after the second deposit is due. If students don't deposit at the school that admitted them, they are locked out for the year. Also, some years, a law school may admit no one off its waitlist, if its projections were accurate. Furthermore, waitlist offers can come very late in the game. My advice to students is always to deposit at the school they would go to if they didn't get into the waitlisted school. In the worst case, they lose their deposit. They should also be aware that the waitlist schools are unlikely to offer any financial aid --- they are doing the student a favor, not vice versa.

Question: What should candidates know about “Letters of Continued Interest” for wait-listed students? One new pre-law advisor posed the following question to her advisor colleagues on a national pre-law advisor ListServ:

“One of my students has been waitlisted and asked to send the admissions office a letter of continued interest (“LOCI”). This is a first go around for me with waitlists as I am a newer advisor.

Should the letter be specific to the school or broader?

Is it better to put the letter as an attachment or directly in the body of the email?”

Answer: One pre-law advisor replied:

“I think that a letter of continued interest is best handled as an attachment to an email communication. In addition, I offer the following advice to students:

When writing your letter of continued interest (LOCI), I would encourage you to highlight your interest in particular programs or opportunities at _____ **School of Law**, and make the connection where possible to things you have already done/demonstrated as interests/experiences. Make the argument of why you and the school are a great fit for each other; essentially, show why this would be a mutually beneficial match. This is also an opportunity to share any recent accomplishments since you filed your application. You might also further flesh out something already mentioned but not explored in detail in your original application. Further, if _____ **School of Law** is your top choice at this point, it may be appropriate, perhaps even helpful, to communicate that you are ready to commit to the school if admitted. The caveat here, however, is that you should only say this to a school you are truly committed to attending. Carefully consider whether you are comfortable doing this. Understand that the law school admissions world is a relatively small community. Schools talk to each other! Be professional.”

In addition to sending the LOCI, if you have not yet visited _____ **School of Law**, and it is possible for you to do so, now would be the time. If a candidate is admitted off from a wait list, it is expected the candidate will be given a relatively short window in which to make a decision as to whether or not to take the seat. Visiting the school will help you to get a better feel for the place and help you in your decision-making process should an offer come through (or help you decide further down the road whether you wish to stay on the wait list). You may also be afforded the opportunity to meet with someone from admissions. Finally, the law school may take note of the visit as added evidence of your interest in and seriousness about that particular school.”

Question: How should you balance “rank” vs. “cost” in deciding which law school offer to accept?

Answer: A recent college graduate wrote to her pre-law advisor about the following dilemma she faced in deciding which of two law school offers to accept:

"I have an alum who sent me an email asking for my 2 cents on choosing a school. She has been offered a full scholarship at one school, and a 1/3 scholarship plus loans at another. As luck would have it, the school she really wants to go to (and which is more highly ranked) is the one that offered her less money. She intends to pursue a career in a position of public interest, working for a government agency. She wrote to me:

'My concern is with collecting even more loans. Yes, there are different payment options available and even a Loan Forgiveness Program for my line of work, but I have also been told that such plans and programs are subject to change or to be non-viable as they are federal laws... What are your experiences and what have you observed from your students/co-workers/friends from law school that could shed a light to this situation?'

Pre-law advisor opinions varied here. One wrote:

"I think an important consideration for the student would be the schools involved. I am not sure how anyone can give advice without knowing that. I do not agree that 'a JD is a JD', implying that it does not matter from what school a student graduates. It is well-known that there is a glut of law school graduates, and a graduate's ability to get a job upon graduation can be very dependent upon the school of graduation. If the student attends a school on a free ride and does not have to pay a penny, but is unable to get a job upon graduation, I am not sure that the degree would do much good.

Doing 'due diligence' here should include researching the respective schools' job placement rates (both after graduation and, say, five years out), especially in the field she's targeting, to see if there is a difference to such a degree that would justify foregoing the full scholarship, paying the higher price and thereby taking on more debt."

From another (who agrees with the preceding respondent regarding the absence of enough information in this instance, and who offers an additional suggestion about doing "due diligence" in researching and comparing multiple law school offers):

"I agree that there is not enough information here to be able to offer an informed opinion. For example, when candidates have multiple admission and aid offers in hand, they need to thoroughly research the net cost of each school and offer in order to get a truer cost comparison.

To help you gather much of this information, the [AccessLex Institute web site](#) has a [student law school loan calculator](#) that pulls all of the information (tuition costs, cost of living etc.) from the school's website for the student.

This exercise should help students to compare law school costs with greater precision, and lead to more informed decisions. As one very seasoned law school admissions director noted, in response to a request for an opinion about this cost comparison tool, 'I have had far too many students in recent years reach out to me about negotiating scholarships without looking closely at their data. They often will tell me that another school has offered them a larger award, without taking into consideration tuition and cost of living. Ultimately, it is often the case that our school remains more affordable even though their scholarship award is slightly less than another institution.'

While this is not the only way to compare schools and conclude which is the best fit for you, it's one very important way that should be carefully considered."

From another pre-law advisor:

"Why is she so set on the school that she has to pay for? She will end up with a J.D. from either school. Is the scholarship school a lesser known, smaller school in a region where she doesn't want to live or practice? Is it not accredited? Will the school she has to pay for give her the brand recognition she might need for the job she seeks and in any area of the country she wants to go to?"

Students who have never had debt cannot fathom the heavy chain it becomes when trying to pursue other life goals like own a house, buy a car, even have a dog -- whatever their chosen goals are. What is the difference between the scholarship amount and how much she is getting from the other school? I don't know if she already has debt, but if she does, she can't ignore that fact either."

One additional data point you will want to take into account as you develop your projected expenses and budgets: namely, student loan balances from college, and projected payment schedules during and/or after law school. The [AccessLex student loan calculator](#) has a feature that incorporates this factor in a school-by-school analysis of law schools you are considering.

Another:

"The issue of law school debt triggers the questions of 'return on investment' in law school choice. A strong candidate may find him- or herself with admissions offers from, say, 2 schools, one of which is a top-10 school but that is offering little to any aid, while the other is a very good school, perhaps 'tier 2' according to notoriously unreliable rankings, but offering a very generous aid package. The latter offers the very desirable promise of low (perhaps NO) debt when graduating, probably with a high rank in class, and much greater degrees of freedom when job-hunting (e.g., feeling less pressured to compete for a smaller number of high salaries in order to begin paying down debt). A 2018 issue of *The National Jurist* addresses this, entitled '[The Best Value Law Schools](#),' which should give you good food for thought."

Question: What should candidates know about withdrawing other law school applications and acceptances after accepting an admission offer?

Answer: Here a pre-law advisor poses and seeks advice from colleagues about law schools requiring, or requesting, candidates to decline all other acceptances, and cancel any other open applications, when accepting an offer of admission.

"I have an advisee who just got into his number three law school choice, with good money. They are giving him 48 hours to decide. The catch is that if he makes the seat deposit, he has to withdraw ALL his other applications -- not just where he was wait-listed, but even those schools from which he has not heard anything yet. And, of course, the two schools from which he has not heard anything yet are his top two.

He called the #3 school to ask for some flexibility but they said no. He also called the top two to see about expediting decisions about his applications, but they said there was no way they could do it that fast.

Any advice here? I've dealt with the softer requirement (pull one's applications from all law schools to which one has been admitted) but not this harder one (pull one's applications from all schools to which one has applied)."

One pre-law advising colleague responded as follows:

*"I just had this same situation a couple of weeks ago with an applicant who was concerned that the school was 'requiring' him to withdraw all other applications, including schools from which he had not yet heard, when he put down his first seat deposit. However, there was NO such timeframe as '48 hours' given to the student. That is an exploding offer, and it is outrageous, in my opinion! In the reality that now exists in the legal world, applicants should have the time needed to review their offers and make the best individual decision for them. *In addition*, this violates the LSAC's 'Best Practices' statement for law school admissions offices.*

With that being said, please make sure that the student's understanding is correct. With regard to my student above, I was very concerned when he told me that, and as soon as he walked out of my office, I immediately picked up the phone and called the Dean of Admissions at the law school in question to clarify. As it turns out, there was no requirement to withdraw at all. The statement given to my student was a request, NOT a requirement, and the Dean assured me that there would be NO retaliatory action of any kind against applicants who put down deposits without withdrawing other applications. She even went so far as to give me permission to give the student her direct line to call her with any questions.

There seems to have been a lot of confusion around this issue during this cycle, and the Dean I spoke with acknowledged that the war of words on various blogs had contributed to said confusion. So, with that in mind, I would encourage all of my advising colleagues to make sure that you have both sides of the story before forming an opinion and offering advice. Talk to the schools! If I had just operated out of my student's perception, I would have been off-base."

Another chimed in as follows:

"I do believe that many student applicants are likely to feel coerced/confused/anxious by law schools even if their statement about withdrawing other applications is in the form of a request."

Question: What are the ethics of renegeing on a deferment contract? In other words, is it unethical for the student to renege on a deferment contract made with Law School A and attend Law School B?

Answer(s):

A pre-law advisor posed these questions to a pre-law advisor ListServ. One advising colleague offered the following (rather "blunt") reply:

"Doesn't the word 'renege' answer your question?"

Additionally, I am concerned about whether this could cause problems for the student when he/she seeks admission to the state bar.

That is a different question, and primarily up to the school for which he broke a contract. LSAC Good Admissions Practices state [emphasis added] EXCEPT UNDER A BINDING AGREEMENT, an applicant should be free, etc.

If he signed a binding contract to buy *anything* -- a car, a house, an education -- and breaches the contract, he can be reported and the state can take action. Given recent trends toward denying Bar admission to people who default on student loans, I'd warn the student to proceed at his own risk."

About the Law School Admissions Test

Question: What does the LSAT test?

Answer: The LSAT assesses the kinds of verbal reasoning skills that have been shown to be critical for success in law school. The current makeup of the test (comprised of Reading Comprehension, Logical Reasoning, and Analytical Reasoning question types) was arrived at through continual refinements to the test conducted over its long history with early input from law faculty. The first LSAT was administered in 1948.

Question: What is tested in each question type?

Reading Comprehension. Reading Comprehension questions assess the ability to read, with understanding and insight, examples of lengthy and complex materials similar to those commonly encountered in law school. Law school and the practice of law revolve around extensive reading of densely written and argumentative texts. This reading must be careful, distinguishing precisely what is said from what is not said. It involves comparison, analysis, synthesis, and application. It involves drawing appropriate inferences, and applying ideas and arguments to new contexts. Law school reading also requires the ability to grasp unfamiliar subject matter and the ability to process challenging material.

Logical Reasoning. Logical Reasoning questions assess the ability to analyze, critically evaluate, and complete arguments as they occur in ordinary language. Arguments are a fundamental part of the law and analyzing arguments is a key element of legal analysis. Training in the law builds on a foundation of basic reasoning skills. Law students must draw on these skills in analyzing, evaluating, constructing, and refuting arguments. They need to be able to identify what information is relevant to an issue or argument and what impact further evidence has on it. They need to be able to reconcile opposing positions and use arguments to persuade others.

Analytical Reasoning. Analytical Reasoning questions assess the ability to consider a group of facts and rules, and—using those facts and rules—determine what could or must be true. These questions require the test taker to organize given information and draw logically certain inferences (or deductive inferences) from that information. These skills are key components of the ability to think critically.

The reasoning skills assessed in Analytical Reasoning parallel those involved in the kind of legal reasoning that is used in law school and the practice of law in understanding and organizing a set of conditions, rules, or regulations and initial conditions, and then proceeding to determine what could or must be the case given that information.

Question: If a student takes the LSAT more than once, do the law schools to which the student applies see all the scores or only the highest score?

Answer: All scores an applicant received within the previous five years are reported to the law school. Many schools rely on the highest score for their admission decisions. Applicants should check with the law schools they are interested in to learn what their policies are with respect to multiple LSAT scores.

Question: Are some LSAT administrations harder than others?

Answer: No. All LSATs are constructed to be equal in difficulty regardless of when they are administered. Scores on the LSAT are reported on a scale of 120 to 180 and can be compared across testing administrations and testing years. Test scores have the same meaning from one test administration to the next and from one year to the next because of a process called “equating.” When scores are equated, a given scaled score represents comparable ability regardless of when the student takes the test.

Question: Is the LSAT unfair or biased?

Answer: LSAC claims that there is no evidence that the LSAT is biased against any subgroup. The test development process is designed to ensure that the LSAT is valid, fair, and unbiased. LSAC adheres to the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, which defines test bias as skill-irrelevant components of test scores that differentially affect the performance of different groups of test takers.

Question: Is the Analytical Reasoning section the hardest of the four multiple-choice sections on the LSAT?

Answer: Some test-takers find Analytical Reasoning to be harder than Logical Reasoning or Reading Comprehension. This may be because its format is unfamiliar to them. The sections on the LSAT are constructed to be the same in difficulty. LSAC research and test development staff work to ensure that the sections are parallel in this way, and they claim that their research shows that the average percent correct in each section is about the same.

Question: Analytical Reasoning (AR) questions are unusual. Are they fair?

Answer: The LSAC insists that the LSAT’s Analytical Reasoning questions are fair. Even though they may seem unfamiliar at first, Analytical Reasoning questions are formatted to give the test taker an everyday situation and then ask the test taker to process the given information to

determine what can or must be true in the situation. The test taker does not need to have any training in formal logic or any specialized background knowledge to do well on this section.

Because the format of AR can be unfamiliar, it is particularly important to practice these questions prior to test day to become familiar with this type of question. LSAC advises and emphasizes to all prospective test takers the importance of practice prior to the day of the test. LSAC gives extensive guidance on how to approach all LSAT question types, including approaches to solving Analytical Reasoning questions, on LSAC.org and in the publications, *The Official LSAT SuperPrep*, *The Official LSAT SuperPrep II*, and *The Official LSAT Handbook*. These publications are available for purchase at low cost or can be found in libraries. The *Official LSAC SuperPrep II* is provided without charge to test takers who are granted a fee waiver by LSAC.

Question: Is it true that the LSAT is a measure of socioeconomic status?

Answer: No, the LSAT is not a measure of status. The test-development process includes requirements that the test content be fair to all test takers (gender, race and ethnicity, regions of the country, US/Canada), including test takers of all economic backgrounds. These fairness requirements are built into the writing of the test questions and the process by which the test questions are reviewed and approved. The review process also includes both internal and external reviewers. Questions deemed unfair are not used on the test. In addition to the question review, questions used on the LSAT are pretested as a further check on question fairness. The LSAT is designed to measure specific skills in reading and critical reasoning. The LSAC points to correlation studies conducted over many years that they feel demonstrate that LSAT scores predict first-year GPAs more accurately than any other factor, including undergraduate GPA. The predictive validity of the test also supports the success of the test at measuring the skills required to perform well in the first year of law school.

Question: Does doing well on the LSAT have anything to do with actual law schoolwork?

Answer: According to LSAC, the LSAT is the single best predictor of first-year law school grades, even better than undergraduate GPA. (The best overall prediction comes from combining LSAT score with undergraduate GPA.) Admission professionals use a combination of the LSAT and undergraduate GPA in admission decisions. The LSAT successfully predicts law school performance because the skills it tests are essential to success in law school. There is broad agreement in the legal education community that the skills assessed by the LSAT are directly relevant to law school and the practice of law.

Question: How far in advance should a test taker start to prepare for the LSAT?

Answer: There is no single right answer to this question. Much depends on how much time the student has to prepare each week. A full-time student, who is also working full-time, or some combination of both, should allow ample time to fit LSAT preparation sessions into their schedule. Test-takers without many other demands on their time can start closer to the test date. Candidates should prepare for the LSAT until they feel they have satisfied the following guidelines:

- none of the question types that you see in your practice seem new to you;
- you feel you can manage your time well;
- working through a test section becomes “second nature”

Question (posed by a prelaw advisor to colleagues on a prelaw advisor listserv): How do you suggest studying for the LSAT?

Answer(s):

From one pre-law advisor:

I realize there is no cookie cutter answer (studying this amount of time + using this study format = the best LSAT score of all time). I suggest to students to think about what prep method suits their learning and studying styles, that prep courses work for some but not all, that some prefer online while others need the in person course (or 1:1 tutor). The key is practice, practice, practice and pacing yourself. Take actual practice exams before the real one.

From another:

I am a bit (ok, more than a bit) of a running fanatic and I use a running analogy with my students. Distance running requires a blend of speed, stamina, and endurance. Every runner has natural strengths in some areas and natural weaknesses in others. Race preparation involves significant training to minimize your weaknesses followed by some last minute sharpening of your strengths. Once a student has worked through a couple of practice exams, they should have a good idea about which sections they are strong on and which sections they struggle with. My advice is to spend the bulk of their preparation time focusing on improving their weaknesses and then, as the test approaches, sharpening their strengths.

Let's assume a student has six weeks between the time they have taken their second practice test and the exam. Perhaps they discover they are strong in reading comprehension, fairly good with logical reasoning, and weak in analytical reasoning. I would encourage them to spend the first four weeks splitting their study time with 50% focused on analytical reasoning, 25% on logical reasoning, and 25% on reading

comprehension. In the last two weeks, shift focus. Week 1 would be 50% logical reasoning, 25% reading comprehension, and 25% analytical reasoning. Week 2 would be 50% reading comprehension, 25% logical reasoning, and 25% analytical reasoning.

Question: Do I have to take an expensive test-prep course to do well on the LSAT?

Answer: Some people think that test takers need to enroll in expensive test-prep classes to do well on the LSAT. Although it is important to be familiar with the test format and to practice on actual LSAT questions prior to the day of the test, there are many ways for students to access actual LSAT questions for practice at little or no cost. To help test-takers prepare, LSAC publishes thousands of test questions (with answer keys) that have appeared on previously administered LSATs. LSAC publishes thorough explanations of how to solve all the questions on several of these tests. These explanations are developed by the same LSAC test developers who write the test questions. Some of these materials are available free on LSAC.org, while others are available for purchase at low cost.

In addition, LSAC has recently collaborated with Khan Academy to offer a free on-line LSAT prep program. In their own words, “Official LSAT Prep diagnoses each student’s strengths and weaknesses and creates a tailored practice plan. Each student sets a score goal. Then, the program guides students through lessons and practice questions at just the right level to help them work toward that score. Videos, articles, and explanations cover every concept on the LSAT. Through it all, we provide regular updates, so students can track their progress.”

The best source of evidence about methods of preparation, including commercial test preparation courses, may be the results of a survey that appears on the back of the answer sheets used at each test administration. LSAC publishes descriptive summary statistics on the responses to the survey every three years, as well as the average LSAT scores of test takers who utilize each of the various test preparation strategies. Note that this data is self-reported by the test takers, so it is important to be cautious in drawing conclusions from these surveys.

Question: Do LSAT Prep courses work? And how can they be compared?

Answer: One pre-law advisor and veteran LSAT test prep instructor responded to these questions as follows:

I spent the last six years working for one of the major test prep companies. I not only worked as a teacher, but eventually hit the point where I was running the faculty, marketing, and service for the entire LSAT business for this company. I also contributed to a number of nationwide initiatives in all three of these areas, as well as the training of faculty and writing of curriculum. Over the course of the

years I have had students of mine reach an LSAT score of 180, and have also seen students reach score increases of over 30 points.

Throughout all of this experience, a number of the themes have held true. The first is that the students will only get out of the class what they put into it. I have watched students with similar abilities and the same starting scores have greatly differing end points, not because of ability, but rather because of effort. And not only during the course they took, but afterward and right up to the LSAT date when they take the test.

However, another very important factor to consider in this discussion is the ability and effort of the teacher. When running my faculty, it was very clear that the quality of the teacher was second only to the efforts of the student in the score increase that would be attained. To the point about teaching the critical thinking skills of the test as opposed to only test strategies → the best teachers are those who are going to address both sides of the discussion. They will stress how the methods and strategies work by using critical thinking and logic to demonstrate why the correct answers are correct and why the incorrect answers are incorrect in order to bring students to a point of understanding rather than just recognition and repetition. The other commonality in the best teachers is that they are excellent motivators, acting more as coaches than teachers so that their students were inspired to put in the work to see the best increases.

Taking this skills-based approach will show the greatest increases, but it is also what sets students up to drop back down (sometimes to a score BELOW their starting point) if they stop practicing for a while. Just as we lose skills such as speaking another language, learning an instrument, playing a sport, etc. when we stop using them, the skills we adopt for tackling this test will rust even more quickly because we have only been using them for a couple of months to begin with. This also goes to the point made about cram courses → The students do not have the time to develop the requisite skills to attack the test correctly and therefore will never see the gains they should in their scores.

If you look at the different test prep companies and the different published resources out there, most of them are going to show students very similar strategies and methods for attacking the test. You need to look at the needs of the individual student and pair that with the resources and abilities of the companies out there to determine which one is designed to help him or her reach their potential.

For instance, smaller companies can offer much greater customer service and personal attention than the big companies will. However, the big companies have technologies and analytical resources that make the small companies very jealous. Some students would be better off going with someone who is with a very small company where the only service offered is tutoring and students get individualized attention; but some students would be best in a class setting where they have the opportunity to hear the questions of other students and gain an even greater insight to some of the ways people think about or approach the test. My recommendation is to look to the quality of the programs offered in your local area, including teachers, class sizes, etc., and have students make an effort to match themselves to courses that will best suit their needs.

When it comes to published material, the one real big issue is that students should be using publications that use real, previously released LSAT questions rather than questions made up by the publisher. The LSAC questions have a completely different feel than the generics, and as such, students who use artificial questions are at a severe disadvantage.

Students can absolutely get there on their own without a class by using these resources. It takes a great deal of discipline, structure, and tenacity, but it can definitely be done.

Question (posed by one pre-law advisor to a pre-law advisor listserv): With all the hype surrounding the LSAT and test prep courses, I maintain that my office is strictly neutral regarding LSAT prep. I want students to trust that I can give them impartial information. So we talk about general approaches to studying, weighing self-study against a class or individual tutor. But when students want to know the merits of one program or the other, or when they are seeking a recommendation, I have to say that I cannot answer those questions. Are there better ways to approach these kinds of conversations? How do other pre-law advisors handle the issue of LSAT prep?

Answer(s):

From a former longtime test prep company employee turned Pre-Law Advisor:

I have a few insights about how to talk about LSAT prep without advocating for a particular test prep company over another.

- **Test prep companies offer free sample classes**, practice tests, and other free events that will allow the student to try these companies out. I suggest that students who are considering paying for a class attend these events and ask themselves things like:
 - Do their teaching styles seem helpful?
 - How helpful are their written explanations to the exam?
 - What types of courses (online, in person, hybrid) are available in my area?
 - How many hours per week of structured study is built into this plan?
 - Will I have time to complete all the recommended work in between sessions?
- **Look into financial aid if you do decide to go the test prep class route.** Some test prep companies may have financial aid available to reduce the cost of taking a course based on financial need. For example, Kaplan's Tuition Assistance program can be found [here](#):

- **Students must think critically about the study plans they are using, and adjust as appropriate for their own needs.** There are courses and self-study plans out there that may prescribe spending too much time on the wrong content for the student. For example, a student who struggles with all areas of the exam should not spend as much time on logic games and she does on logical reasoning, because logical reasoning will account for more than double the points on the exam.
- **Khan Academy has great teaching content, but the recommendations for study time seem severely lacking to me.** The video explanations and personalized areas of focus that Khan provides are great. However, when I tested out the Khan study plan, it told me to spend “at least 2 hours a week” on prep for the exam to go from a 120 to a 165 in 8 weeks. Even given the benefit of the doubt that this meant 1 practice test a week plus an extra 2 hours, 48 hours of study would not be a good recommendation for a 45-point score increase in my opinion. That is a shockingly low expectation to set for a student who would have a HUGE endeavor ahead of them. Whenever I talk about Khan with a student, I set very clear expectations about a minimum number of hours per week to study, regardless of what Khan suggests.

From another pre-law advisor:

Commercial courses are expensive (ranging from \$900-1500) and offered by many test review companies (e.g. Kaplan, Princeton Review). When choosing a course, carefully examine the number of hours of course time (do not count practice test time as you can do that at home). Make sure that the practice tests offered are official tests from LSAC rather than “model” tests. And ask about refunds.

Courses do not guarantee success but they do provide structure. Think about your own learning style as you determine whether a course is right for you. Even if you do take a course, you **MUST** prepare and study outside of the class hours to be successful. You may find that you do well on practice tests on your own but one of the sections is difficult for you. In this case, you may be better off hiring a tutor or using a company.

From an experienced LSAT test prep consultant/tutor:

I suggest that “good signs when choosing an LSAT prep course” include the following:

- The company focusses mainly on the LSAT.
- The instructor (not just the company) has good reviews
- The company has published strategy guides that have good reviews
- The company uses real LSAT questions both for homework and in class.

- The company only hires instructors who score in the 99th or 98th percentile, *and* pays them well. *
- The company pays its instructors well (they get the best that way).

* **Note:** Many test prep companies and consultants boast that their instructors scored very well themselves on the LSAT. But a high score by instructors does not guarantee that an instructor is a good teacher. It is a necessary but, by itself, insufficient condition. High instructor salaries, on the other hand, are a good sign because they attract instructors who are good at the LSAT *and* teaching.

Question: For undergraduate seniors, what are the pros and cons of the early-Fall vs. late-Fall (November) LSAT test dates?

Answer: A pre-law advisor shared this e-mail exchange between him and one of his undergraduate pre-law seniors:

I am a senior, applying for admission for next Fall. I am thinking of taking the LSAT either early this fall (September), or in November. I am a little worried that I will not be fully prepared for the earlier date, though. Which date would you recommend?

The pre-law advisor's reply:

I see three comparative advantages for the early-Fall LSAT date for you as a 1st-semester senior, if you are applying for next Fall:

1. It is very useful to know your LSAT score when making final decisions about where to apply, so that you can more reliably gauge admissibility by the combination of LSAT and GPA. If you have to wait until the November score is available for this, you will be waiting to submit applications later than is optimal (I usually recommend having applications in by December 1 if possible). You COULD apply earlier, but your applications will not be complete until the LSAT is reported, and in terms of admissibility, you would be applying a bit blindly by not knowing the LSAT score.
2. Point #2 is related to #1. By applying later vs. sooner, and because law schools generally use a rolling admissions model (i.e., acting on applications as soon as they're complete), applying later means that the schools will have fewer spaces left to offer to applicants than for those applying sooner.

3. For you, as an applicant still in undergraduate school, the November LSAT inconveniently occurs later in the Fall semester when significant papers or projects may also be due, and competing for your time and attention.

HOWEVER, more important than any of the above is doing as well as you can on the LSAT, because of the weight that it carries in law school admissions decision-making. So if you feel genuinely unprepared for the LSAT in early Fall, waiting until November could make sense.

If you feel that you can be *reasonably* well prepared for the early-Fall LSAT, you might consider taking it, see how it goes, and make plans for November LSAT depending on the results. If you worry that this strategy would be less beneficial to you for law schools that average multiple scores (vs. taking the higher score), there is some useful information about this in the [NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists](#). The Book's editors issue an annual survey to all ABA-approved law schools that includes a question about how they interpret multiple LSAT scores, and in each edition they update responses received from law schools. These are listed in alphabetical order by law school name.

Question: What is an optimal LSAT score?

Answer: The obvious answer is the highest possible score: 180. But, more realistically, what is an “optimal” score depends on the schools one is targeting. One is in the best position for competitive admission if one’s score (combined with undergraduate grade point average) would allow for a significantly better than even chance for admission, based on recent school admission data.

This data can be found in the [LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law School](#), which provides data on most law schools recent admission decisions in the context of their applicant pools.

Princeton Review offers a useful discussion of “Good LSAT Scores for Law School,” which can be found [here](#).

Question: How do law schools handle an application from a candidate who submits a completed application, but plans to re-take the LSAT and asks that a decision be deferred until the subsequent LSAT score is reported?

Answer: Although schools may only consider one score but see them all, some law schools use the application completion date to determine where in the review list the student goes. This means, for example, that if a candidate submits a complete application in November with a September LSAT, but indicates in an addendum that they wish their application to be held for

review after the results of a later LSAT administration, a decision will be delayed until the later LSAT score is reported. However, when the candidate's second LSAT score is reported, these law schools use the original application completion date in November to determine where in the review line of later LSAT test scores the candidate's application is scheduled for review. Essentially, the applicant is closer to the top of review list for applicants using the November LSAT score as their first LSAT attempt. Given the rolling review process of many law schools, the applicant gets an earlier chance for consideration and when there are likely to be more spots available.

More generally, law schools have different ways to indicate that you want the school to hold your application for review. Some require an addendum; others have a check box as part of the application. Candidates should contact each law school to which they are applying to find out what their policies are in this regard.

Question: Once a student takes the LSAT, how long is that score valid?

Answer: A pre-law advisor recently posed the following question to her peers on a pre-law advisor listserv regarding the "shelf life" for an LSAT score before it expires:

"I met with a pre-law student who plans to take one or more years after earning her undergraduate degree to get involved with a long term volunteer project (Teach for America, Peace Corps, etc.). But she wants to take the LSAT prior to that – between her junior and senior year, or shortly after graduating.

Can you tell me how long the LSAT score remains valid? My research tells me 5 years, but I am wondering how law school admissions professionals view a score that is 5 years old. "

One colleague's response:

"It's shown on the law school report for 5 years, but in my experience, most schools will accept it for only three. I saw one school that said 4 years on this year's application, and one used to say two.

Bottom line: Students should check with each law school to which they are applying.

Another colleague offers a similar (and more expanded) response:

"I've been told by many law schools that they will want to see a score that is within the three-year mark, even though the score is officially good for five years. If your student takes the exam before graduation, she is essentially losing some of the three-year

window. Even if she thinks she will apply right away after the program, you never know what will happen in life. I would advise that she give herself as much time as possible.

Whenever I have a student who knows that they are planning to take gap time between undergraduate school and law school, I encourage them to take the LSAT immediately after graduation, in summer or early Fall (September). November is pushing it a bit. The study habit discipline can fade quickly, so I don't encourage students to wait beyond that."

Another reply, with a bit of a contrarian opinion on a time frame for taking the LSAT after college:

"I encourage students to take the exam when they have the time to prepare for it in advance, whether that's in school or while they are working. Getting into good study habits is part of being in law school. They will need to do it for the LSAT as well as law school if they are taking time off.

Question: How many times can you take the LSAT?

Answer: Starting with the September 2019 test administration, test takers will be permitted to take the LSAT:

- Three times in a single testing year (the testing year goes from June 1 to May 31).
- Five times within the current and five past testing years (the period in which LSAC reports scores to law schools).
- A total of seven times over a lifetime.
- This policy is forward-looking, not retroactive. Tests taken prior to September 2019 will not count against these numerical limits.

In addition, test takers will not be permitted to retake the LSAT if they have already scored a 180 (perfect score) within the current and five past testing years, the period in which LSAC reports scores to law schools. This aspect of the policy will be applied retroactively.

There is an appeals process for test takers who have special circumstances and want to request an exception to this policy. Contact [LSAC](#) for more details.

Question (posed by a pre-law advisor to a pre-law advisor listserv): Would it have negative consequences to receive extra time in taking the LSAT for a candidate who has a learning disability? Do law schools frown upon that?

Answer (from one pre-law advisor):

“Each year, I have two or three students test under accommodated conditions for non-physical reasons. I have never witnessed any negative consequences, particularly if the score disparity between accommodated and standard would be large. Applicants and their health care providers must be very explicit and reasonable in requesting their accommodation. I have one student who has ADD and requested a separate room with the regular amount of time, so time is not the only possible accommodation.

Question: Some law schools now accept Graduate Record Exam (GRE scores) instead of the LSAT. Does this signal a larger shift in the law school admissions landscape?

Answer: Harvard Law School announced in the Summer of 2017 that they would accept J.D. applicants' GRE scores in lieu of LSAT scores. Since Harvard's announcement, several other law schools have followed suit and announced that they too will accept GRE scores from applicants in lieu of the LSAT.

These schools have cited studies showing that GRE performance is a reliable indicator of their students' first-year law school grades. Administrators at each school say that accepting GRE scores will make legal education accessible to students with a wider variety of academic, geographic, and financial backgrounds.

Will more law schools accept the GRE? That depends on the American Bar Association, which governs [law school accreditation](#). The current admission [standards](#) for ABA-accredited law schools state that no more than 10% of an entering class may be admitted without [LSAT scores](#), and those students must meet specific academic requirements, be undergraduates at same institution as the law school, and/or be pursuing a dual degree in another discipline. Law schools may apply for a variance from these standards by demonstrating that another test (in this case, the GRE) is a valid predictor of law students' performance at that institution. The ABA, however, is currently considering changes to the LSAT score admission standard.

Quick Facts about Law School Admission & GRE Scores

- One law school that has announced that it will accept GRE scores (the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law) has adopted a policy stating that if an applicant has taken the LSAT, the score must be submitted. Therefore, you cannot take the LSAT and the GRE and then choose which score to submit.
- Current ABA rules state that for a law school applicant to be admitted without LSAT scores, they will need a GRE score in the 85th percentile or above (along with meeting other criteria).

- Even if more law schools begin accepting GRE scores, applicants will not have competitive GRE score benchmarks until at least one admission cycle is complete and schools begin reporting the score ranges of their admitted students.

| | LSAT | GRE |
|----------------------|---|--|
| Format | Digital | Computer-adaptive |
| Time | 2 hours, 55 minutes (excluding breaks) | 3 hours, 45 minutes |
| Topics/skills tested | Reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, logical reasoning, and (unscored) writing | Scored sections: Analytical writing, verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning |
| Date | Eight times (in 2020-2021) | Almost any day of the year |
| Fee(s) | \$200 (plus a \$195 subscription to the Credential Assembly Service, which is required for application to most law schools) | \$205 (plus you may still need a CAS subscription) |
| Accepted by | The vast majority of U.S. law schools | A list of law schools that (as of July 2019) accept the GRE in place of the LSAT can be found here . |

Question (posed to a prelaw advisor listserv by another prelaw advisor): I am seeking advice for a prelaw student who plans to take the GRE instead of the LSAT. I am less familiar with resources for this test than I am with the LSAT and I would welcome your insights.

Specifically:

- **Do you know of any free or low cost GRE resources beyond those on the ETS website (such as the free practice exam and some Khan Academy videos)?**
- **Do you know of any need-based scholarships for GRE prep programs or tutors?**
- **In terms of the GRE Fee Reduction Program, I see that ETS offers a “limited number” of need-based fee reduction vouchers on a “first-come, first-served” basis. Can you share any of your experience or tips about how to successfully obtain the GRE fee reduction?**

Answer (from one pre-law advisor colleague): Here are some free resources from Manhattan Prep that may be a helpful place to start: <https://www.manhattanprep.com/gre/resources/>. From time to time, I've also seen them offer scholarships to attend their courses for underserved/underrepresented students.

Personal Statement

Question: What should students know about the law school personal statement?

Answer: Not unlike personal statements written for undergraduate school, the law school personal statement is meant to allow law schools to get to know you on a level probably not possible through transcripts, LSAT score, or even recommendations. It should have something to do – directly or indirectly -- with your motivation to want to attend law school and enter the law in one form or another. And, of course, it should be well written – focused, concise, engaging, and without spelling or grammatical errors.

Personal statements affect different candidates differently. They are particularly important in the case of candidates who are “above threshold” for a law school, but who are also part of a very large pool of such candidates. In such cases, the personal statement can be a critical tool in helping a candidate stand out from this large pack. While the statement can still matter for students on the high or low end of applicant pools, they tend to matter less for these candidates whose credentials – one way or the other – speak more loudly for themselves and are somewhat less likely to be greatly influenced – one way or another – by a personal statement.

Letters of Recommendation

Question: Whom should students get letters of recommendation from?

Answer: Assume the need for at least two letters – which is also a strict maximum for some schools. One should definitely be from a faculty member who has had you in class, and ideally from a faculty member who has had you in more than one course, who knows you well, and who can comment at length and at a high level of anecdotal detail about your work habits, character, quality of work, dependability, etc. The second can be from another faculty member, or someone who has known and worked with you in another context – as long as the context (in terms of either substance or demonstrable skills) is useful and relevant for the decision that the law schools must make about you.

One pre-law advisor recently posed the following scenario to her pre-law advisor colleagues regarding prospective recommenders who asked students who approached them about writing law school recommendations to draft a letter for them that they would edit and submit on the students' behalf:

Question: I have had two students tell me in the last week that their letter writers have asked them to either write their own letters or draft them with blanks to fill in. One of these students has already submitted the application. I learned about it ex-post-facto. What are others' thoughts about this practice and, if you've also encountered it, how do you advise students?

Answers: This prompted several responses from pre-law advisors, all fairly uniform in their opinions and advice, and some quite heated.

One began simply by citing the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) on this subject:

"Applicants are not allowed to write any portion of their own letters of recommendation. LSAC includes the 'submission of an altered, unauthentic, or unauthorized letter of recommendation' among its examples of misconduct and irregularities. [Here](#) you can read the complete 'LSAC Rules Governing Misconduct and Irregularities in the Admission Process, including as these relate to letters of recommendation.

Another:

"The students have been put in an ethical bind. I would emphasize to them that their names, not the professor's, are on the application and that if law schools (or LSAC) realizes that they have submitted these letters knowing they have (1) had access to them and (2) wrote them, that they jeopardize their possible acceptances.

They need the letters, and I feel that the professors are more at fault than the students because the students know internally and deep down it's not right, but they also don't know how to tell the professor 'No, you write it yourself.' The professor has the power. The best solution is to find a professor that cares enough about the student to actually write the letter."

Another:

"A letter written by a student and presented as a letter written by the signer of the letter, is in itself unauthentic. The signature at the bottom represents that author of the entire letter, not the 'approver' of the letter. There is not a notice at the bottom of the letter stating that 'this letter was actually written by the applicant.' If schools are looking for true opinions about a candidate from those who have worked with the candidate, they expect those letters to be from that perspective. If they wanted the applicant's opinion of themselves, wouldn't they just ask that? The signer of the letter isn't applying to law school, and if the applicant is called into question, the signer of the letter is not held

responsible. That's my interpretation of what LSAC is stating. I know from conference sessions that law schools don't really appreciate it when letters are not authentically written by the signer of the letter.

I know letter writers will give students letters after they (the writers) have submitted them. I'm not even 100% OK with that because once a student sees it, the analysis starts and so does the spiral of concern if the student doesn't think it's strong and positive enough or if there are errors, etc. I am OK with a professor asking an applicant to provide a bulleted list of things of highlights (projects, achievements, etc.), but the letter writing itself has to come from the signer of the letter.

My overarching concern is that the students I'm working with are being asked to write their entire letter from start to finish, which the professor is submitting as if their own. I don't think the professor is doing the student a favor in any way but is instead putting the student in an ethical bind. Students don't always have the confidence to say 'you need to write it for me.'"

Another:

"I have always told students that if a professor suggests the student writes the letter to say 'no thanks,' shake their hand, and ask someone else. I tell them that writing their own letter is academic dishonesty, just as it would be if they submitted someone else's work for a class. It often happens when students feel they have to get a letter from the 'top' professor on campus. The truth is most law schools will neither know nor care about the status or prestige of the letter writer."

Another:

"Sadly, this is something that happens. When a law admissions rep came to do a workshop on LORs and I raised this as question ('what should a student do if a professor suggests that the student write the letter?'). The rep was just shocked.

I do, however, suggest to students that they could propose to the prospective recommender that they prepare and share some bullet points that they hope the professor would discuss (essentially, the reason why the student asked the professor in the first place). But if the professor insists on a written letter from the student, then inform the professor that this are not allowed by LSAC."

Another was somewhat less critical:

"There is one individual on my campus that asks students to do this -- but the form is somewhat different.

He asks students to pen a first draft to help him understand what might be important to the student so that he can reflect that in his own letter. He uses the student letter as an outline or starting point and then shapes the letter in his own language. I never felt that this was improper -- especially since this person submits the letter himself."

Question: (From a pre-law advisor about an alum advisee who has been out of college for several years): “I am wondering how to advise an alum who graduated many, many years ago. She tells me that she is not able to contact any of her professors because they are either dead or no longer teaching. Any ideas on how she can obtain letters from academic references?”

Answer(s) from two pre-law advisor colleagues:

Response #1: I have had this situation come up before. In that case, I think the law schools would be fine with professional references as long as they discuss writing ability, analytical ability, and other things that most professors address in their letters of recommendation. At various NAPLA and other meetings over the years, I believe I have heard law school admissions people say that letters from professors are less useful for someone who graduated over 10 years ago, but I would defer to the law school folks on exactly when they no longer need letters from professors.

Response #2: When someone is several years out, an academic reference is oftentimes not practical, which is something I believe law schools understand. I would recommend that your alum submit LOR from professional sources.

Financing Law School

Question: What should candidates know about negotiating with law schools over financial aid (especially scholarships)?

Answer: Once students have law admission offers and financial aid/scholarship information, they typically compare aid packages and find that they are being offered less by their top choices, and more by their lower-ranked choices. A common set of question from candidates is when and how these can be negotiated, and what is a recommended way of doing so?

By way of a pre-law advisor listserv, one pre-law advisor sought reactions to the following suggested strategy:

“I’d be very interested if anyone has thoughts on whether the following is something like an appropriate outline for a student’s first email to request that a school consider increasing the scholarship offer (where the school is the student’s first choice but the student has received substantially larger scholarships from somewhat lower ranked schools):

- *noting how grateful the student is for the admittance and scholarship offer;*
- *noting that the school is the student's first choice;*
- *explaining that the student is concerned about the large amount of debt with which she would graduate given the current scholarship offer;*
- *noting a couple of the specific (larger) offers that the student has received from other schools;*
- *requesting that the school consider increasing the scholarship offer.*

I'd be grateful for any thoughts or information on what is appropriate to include in such an email. I'm especially interested in whether it is advisable for a student to identify the specific schools that have offered larger scholarships (and the amount of the offers) in the initial email requesting a scholarship increase (as opposed to writing a much shorter initial note and waiting to see if the school requests more specific information in reply)."

One colleague's reply:

"Others may feel differently, but in my opinion what you have outlined is a very good approach. In addition, most schools also require that students who are asking for scholarship reconsideration submit copies of those other scholarship offers so your student may wish to either submit them with their initial request (saves law school admissions people from having to reply and ask for them) OR at least offer to forward the letters along if the school requires them. "

Another (in considerably more detail):

"In my experience with schools that will negotiate or have the ability to negotiate, the other schools have to be comparable. By 'comparable,' I mean that the school has to be in the same region, the same type of school (public vs. private), and be within the same ranking range. If your student is receiving money from schools that are significantly lower ranked, the much higher ranked school won't consider it a comparable school. School #10, for example, isn't really going to be competing with school #110, if that makes sense.

As others have said, the student will also have to produce copies of the other offers.

Schools that negotiate also take on the risk of losing the student in the second year due to transferring, although in this case, the #1 choice and lower offer is from a higher-ranking school.

It never hurts to ask (politely of course), but the student should also offer to come back for a second visit (or even a first time visit if there wasn't one) to meet with the admissions office. This will show s/he is serious. I don't know what schools are on the table and therefore don't know if this is financially or geographically feasible for her. The

student can also inquire about research assistant positions in 2L and 3L. I helped an alum negotiate more money this way. She didn't get tuition money but instead an offer for a position that waived tuition as part of her salary.

The larger question that I always return to is why does the student want to go to the higher ranked school? Is it worth the debt s/he might incur to go to that school because the job prospects will be light years beyond what might be available if graduating from the lower ranking school? Is it a widely known institutional name (brand recognition) as opposed to a good, far lesser known school? Both result in a J.D. Is it worth incurring an educational mortgage that could saddle him/her financially for years after simply for the sake of the name of the school?"

A very seasoned law school admissions director offers a different kind of advice, focused on demonstrating to a law school with which one is negotiating the fact that the financial issues have been carefully researched to reflect a "true" cost comparison of multiple admission and aid offers:

"I have had far too many students in recent years reach out to me about negotiating scholarships without looking closely at their data. They often will tell me that another school has offered them a larger award, without taking into consideration tuition, cost of living, etc. Without this data, research, and analysis, I tend to not seriously consider requests for aid/scholarship negotiation. If, on the other hand, the candidate has done his or her homework and presents detailed cost comparisons, and the schools in question are reasonably comparable, I am more open to negotiating."

Miscellaneous

Question(s): What should candidates know or consider when thinking of taking additional undergraduate courses, after qualifying to graduate, in order to boost their GPA? Is it possible to boost one's undergraduate GPA by taking additional undergraduate courses after graduating?

A pre-law advisor poses two related questions to his advisor colleagues about candidates who are thinking of taking additional undergraduate courses (one after he graduates, and the other after he *qualifies* to graduate) in order to boost their undergraduate GPA's before applying to law school.

"I have a student who has already earned a bachelor's degree at my institution, but has returned to take additional undergraduate courses in the hope of improving his GPA in anticipation of applying to law school. The institution's policy is that his previously earned GPA for the degree will remain unchanged if he takes additional undergraduate courses. Is this the general rule elsewhere?"

I have another student who will qualify to graduate after this semester, but who proposes to postpone his graduation, stay on for the summer (and perhaps also fall semester), and take additional undergraduate courses – also in the hope of improving his undergraduate GPA before applying to law school. How do other pre-law advisors feel about this strategy?

And how will LSAC consider post-degree coursework at the same institution?"

One pre-law advisor replied:

"It's my understanding that any graduate or other post-baccalaureate coursework will not impact the applicant's undergraduate GPA for law school admission. The GPA is locked in once the bachelor's degree is conferred. Law schools rely on the GPA as of the time of graduation, since that is the one that is reported to them by the undergraduate institution."

Another agreed, and expanded a bit:

"I don't see the benefit of taking more undergraduate courses when a student has already achieved a degree. The classes won't change the GPA. And even though a law school would potentially see that a student has taken the courses, wouldn't we all expect someone who has earned a bachelor's degree to do well in undergraduate courses anyway? So in that sense I do not think undergraduate classes are challenging enough for a college grad to demonstrate academic skill to a law school.

And for the candidate who proposes to postpone graduation to take more undergraduate courses to boost his GPA: I think the costs far outweigh the potential benefits here. In the context of an undergraduate program typically consisting of about 40 courses, the effect on GPA of a handful of additional courses is likely to be marginal at best. Further, I imagine that law school admissions pros would quickly spot what the candidate is trying to do (especially if the additional courses were low-level and minimally challenging).

Both of these strategies seem like an expensive way for these candidates to spin their wheels when a more productive path would be to get some meaningful work experience and focus on prepping for the LSAT to achieve a very strong score."

Question: Should I re-take undergraduate courses to get a better grade and improve my GPA?

Answer(s): Some students thinking about law school look back with a combination of regret and consternation at some of their undergraduate grades, and think about re-taking some courses in which they had not done well in the hope that better grades could benefit them in their law school applications.

Is this a sensible strategy?

One pre-law advisor poses this question in the following context:

“Dear colleagues: A junior recently contacted me about two D grades she received in chemistry and calculus back in her first semester (when she was pre-med). She is wondering if she should retake them in her senior year as she has some space.

Knowing that LSAC will utilize both of those grades in the GPA calculation, would you recommend that she retake these two courses? It's tempting for her, because our university will utilize the second grade in each course for her GPA.

I usually hate to recommend retaking introductory courses like this, but . . .

Advice welcome!”

One pre-law advisor’s reply:

“I usually tell students to take a good look at themselves. If they really think they can nail these classes, then retake them. They may want to write an addendum to explain the two low grades, and when they do, they can say “Hey, I had the good character to retake them and succeed.” In addition, if the student ends up doing something else – not going to law school – and gets to use their adjusted GPA, having the higher grades on the transcript will be lovely.

But if it’s a crapshoot, if that material was really a struggle for them, then don’t. Because getting two MORE bad grades isn’t going to help them.”

Another shared this rather personal perspective:

“I failed Chemistry and Calculus II in college in my first two years (while winning 3rd place in a pool tournament - *priorities, people!*). I had the lowest undergrad GPA of my entering law school class but I used my personal statement to explain my lack of maturity at the beginning of my college career (I was 16 when I entered college in a math and science program) and to highlight my growth throughout my academic career, since I finished pretty strong with a BS in Business Administration (and a good GPA in my business classes). I think if the grades have nothing to do with the ultimate degree, and won't make that much of a difference in the final GPA (especially as calculated by LSAC), I'm not sure they should waste their time and money unless it is just really important to them. But then, if it was really that important to them, they also wouldn't be asking for the advice. They'd just do it.”

Another pre-law advisor offers the following perspective and advice:

“My university just began offering grade replacement a few years ago, and the Registrar’s office did some research afterward to see what effect the grade replacement policy had on students’ records. They found that the average re-taker’s grade improved by one-third the second time around—in other words, from a C- to a C, or from a D+ to a C-. I share this with students to illustrate the point: Realistically, how much better will you perform a second time? (Everyone thinks that with a second exposure to the material they will get an A. They don’t.) I can’t tell you how many students I have seen whose records demonstrate that they would have been better off taking another class rather than taking TWO hits to their GPA from the same class.

Given the importance of GPA for law school admission and aid purposes, for most students I personally do not feel that it is in their best interest to retake a class that they clearly struggled with and are likely to only slightly improve upon. If we translated that optional second class (and subsequent second low grade) into a loss of financial aid I suspect the monetary impact would be significant. Not to mention that it prevents them from learning something else they could have enjoyed and done well in, so in that sense it creates an opportunity cost as well.

For all of these reasons I typically advise students not to retake unless they need the class to graduate or unless they need to master the material to successfully progress to the next level in their coursework.”

Another advisor adds:

“One factor that minimizes the beneficial effect to one’s GPA, even if re-taking a course results in a significantly higher grade, is the fact that LSAC re-calculates students’ GPAs for their reports to law school in a way that takes into account *all* grades that students received as undergraduates. So even if an undergraduate school has a policy of allowing a second (higher) grade to count in the GPA, as a replacement for the lower grade, this effect is lost by the LSAC re-calculation formula.”

Question: Should candidates be concerned about “W” (withdrawal) grades on their transcripts?

Answer: One pre-law advisor posed this question to his advisor colleagues through a pre-law advisor ListServ:

“Can anyone share thoughts on how a “Withdraw” grade on a transcript is interpreted by law schools?”

One colleague offered the following “common-sense” response:

“My answer to students on this subject is that if they'd look at something and think it looks fishy, schools probably will too. That being said, no one is going to care about one W. But if it's a pattern, and particularly if it involves the same course(s) being re-taken, then there's a greater chance that law schools would see that as playing the system a little too much, and would hope to see some kind of explanation (e.g., in a statement addendum from the student, or somehow addressed in a letter of recommendation). Ultimately, though, if the GPA and LSAT score are good enough, all sorts of things are forgiven. Meaning, if students have 90-100% chance of being admitted based upon their numbers, they're probably going to be admitted in any case. Excess W's, or anything, will hurt at schools where the chances for admission are 50% or less.”

Question: How does LSAC re-calculate a candidate's undergraduate GPA?

Answer: The Law School Admission Council presents and explains its transcript conversion protocol on their web site. You can find it [here](#).

Question: Is it in any way helpful or advisable for a candidate to consider graduate school before law school?

A pre-law candidate, a year out of college, posed the following question to his pre-law advisor:

“I graduated last Spring with a B.S in Biology. Since graduating, I have been working as a chemist at a pharmaceutical company, and plan on taking the LSAT this coming Fall.

A few summers ago, I had interned at a law firm where the lawyers told me that it was very important for me to go to a top 14 school in order for me to have reasonable job prospects in the field of intellectual property/patent law. If this is the case, my GPA (3.3) concerns me. While I can compensate for it by a strong LSAT score, I am also willing to do my M.S in Biology or Chemistry if that will increase my chances of getting into a better school. Will law schools consider my master's GPA if I do?”

The pre-law advisor's reply:

“You ask if a graduate degree would enhance your chances for law school admissions. The answer that I hear most often from law school admissions professionals (and which is an opinion that I share) is that you can and should pursue a graduate degree *if it's something that you sincerely and genuinely want to do*, and **not** mainly because you think it will enhance your law school admissions prospects.

Graduate school grades will not enhance your undergraduate GPA, though a separate transcript reflecting graduate grades would be sent to LSAC. But I also suspect that in

your case, the same kind of value-added to your candidacy would follow from a well-chosen recommender from your company, who knows you and your work well, and who could comment in detail about your advanced mastery of scientific content and methodology, creativity, ability to work independently but also as a valued collaborator, etc. These qualities would matter a great deal to law schools.

The other topic in your message worthy of comment is one that is commonplace: namely, what are my prospects in fields like IP and patent law if I do not go to a top-ranked law school? Even in the current difficult job market, IP and patent law job prospects are still healthy and relatively robust compared to other specialties. So I do not think it is the case that graduating from a top-ranked law school is the only way you'll penetrate that market. There is some truth to the notion that higher-profile law schools command greater attention across national markets and large mega-firms, but this is less true on a local level. In several cities, for example, it remains true that graduating from one of the local law schools is an asset if one's goal is to practice in that geographic area.

It has also become something of a truism that it is more important for a student to attend a law school and be highly ranked in his or her class than it is to attend a law school that is itself highly ranked. Student law school class rankings have greater meaning and validity than law school rankings. At a recent pre-law advisor conference, I attended a panel session and heard the following from a member of a panel (the panelist is a member of her law firm's hiring committee; this is close to a direct quote):

'A student's law school can command some degree of attention, initially, but the bottom line is that we are hiring a candidate, not a law school. So, if a candidate attends Harvard, Yale or Stanford but is ranked in the bottom half of his or her class, their candidacy is dead in the water.'

In addition, there is the issue of debt, and questions of 'return on investment' in law school choice. A strong candidate may find him- or herself with admissions offers from, say, 2 schools, one of which is a top-10 school but that is offering little to any aid, while the other is a very good school, perhaps 'tier 2' according to notoriously unreliable rankings, but offering a very generous aid package. The latter offers the very desirable promise of low (perhaps NO) debt when graduating, probably with a high rank in class, and much greater degrees of freedom when job-hunting (e.g., feeling less pressured to compete for a smaller number of high salaries in order to begin paying down debt). A 2018 issue of *The National Jurist* (entitled '[The Best Value Law Schools](#)') addresses this subject.

Finally, the metric that will carry the greater weight (vs. QPA) is your LSAT score. This, after all, allows law schools far more meaningfully than QPA to compare candidates who otherwise are hard to compare because they come from such different schools, from different major programs, some of whom (like you) have worked after graduation

(which in general law schools value, by the way) while some have not, or because they are very different ages. So do your best to prepare for the LSAT.”

Question: Is a law school enrollment deferral possible? What should candidates know or consider, in general, about requesting an enrollment deferral from a law school that has accepted them? What about requesting a deferral from a law school that has admitted a candidate from their waitlist?

Answer: These questions were recently posed to a pre-law advisor ListServ about a female candidate. Here are some advisors’ replies:

“Asking for a deferment means, or at least implies, that you intend to go to that particular law school after a one-year stint doing something else. Some schools even ask you to sign a statement saying that you will not apply to other law schools in the interim and that you will indeed attend that school, assuming your career plans don't change in that intervening year. Thus, don't ask for a deferment from a school unless you truly want to attend that school after a year off. In other words, asking for a deferment from one school shouldn't be construed as an opportunity to have one ‘ace in hand’ while spending a year trying to get into a ‘better’ school.

If your student knows now that she doesn't want to attend law school this coming fall but indeed wants to attend ONE of the two schools which has placed her on the waitlist, she should respond to the school that she prefers with a YES (i.e., an affirmative statement of continued interest). If she comes off the waitlist and gets an offer, then she can ask for a deferment. It is my understanding, however, that most schools are reluctant to grant deferments for candidates who come off the waitlist, since at that point they really want to fill the class for that fall. However, I have certainly had advisees who came off waitlists during the summer, asked for deferments, and get them.

Generally speaking, I discourage advisees from applying to law school for the subsequent Fall if they are certain that they want to take a year off. So much can happen during that year off to change one's mind about so many things. Why lock yourself into a prearranged commitment? Of course, there are exceptions. If you are going to be in the African bush country or Australian outback or other remote place where it would truly be difficult to apply from abroad, then go ahead and apply now. I do, however, encourage students to get their recommendations lined up and the test taken while seniors.”

Question: What are the pros and cons of going to law school part-time?²³

Answer: Part-time students may be able to work full time, which lets them earn a salary while also attending classes (typically at night and/or on weekends). But this route might not always be the cheapest. A number of law students who begin law school part-time later switch to full-time because of difficulties in keeping up with the demands of law school while also maintaining a job. And working part-time might limit a student's options for summer internships if, for example, an employer is unwilling to give the student time off to work elsewhere during the summer. On the other hand, going to school part-time can lead to more scholarship money. For example, if a school's part-time program does not have an incoming class that is as strong as the full-time program, it may offer students accepted into the full-time program money to go part-time.

That said, one potential benefit that some part-time law students cite is the fact that their classmates comprise a more diverse cohort in terms of age and professional experience, which in their own ways can add value to their law school experience and professional network.

Question: What are the benefits of something like working as a legal assistant or paralegal after college, as a possible prelude to law school?

Answer: Some pre-law advisors sense that some of their students would benefit from an interim period after college to experience the legal profession in some way(s), and use this experience as an additional basis for making a decision about law school.

Here is how one pre-law advisor posed this notion to his pre-law advisor colleagues, as well as to law school admissions professionals:

“For some of my advisees, it makes sense to seek employment as a lawyer's assistant or paralegal upon graduation. I have recently had an inquiry from an employer who is interested in hiring our liberal arts graduates with the understanding that they would pursue paralegal training after beginning employment.

What experience or insights can other pre-law advisors and law school admissions professionals offer here?”

Another pre-law advisor chimed in:

“I'd be curious to know if some are finding this path a useful interim experience for students after receiving their bachelor's degree, who are not quite ready or certain

²³ Adapted from: <https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/2014/03/24/how-to-decide-if-you-should-work-during-law-school>

about law school, and who later decide (based in part on this experience) about whether to pursue law school.”

Response from a university career center director, and former law school dean of students:

“We have seen a number of students follow this path and when I was Dean of Students at our law school, I saw a lot of students from various schools taking this path. I always tell students that working at a firm won’t help them get into law school nor will it help once they are at law school, but it *can* help them decide if the law is the right choice for them. The one limitation is that each grad only gets to see one type of practice. Some big firms and a few government agencies have specialized programs for college grads who are looking at law school down the line but are willing to commit two years. Applications to those programs typically are due in the fall of senior year. There are lots of other types of openings – case assistant, legal assistant, etc. – that will open in the spring and summer. My experience is that most firms do not require specialized training for these types of positions.

I think an equally beneficial route is just to do lots of informational interviews with lawyers and then work wherever the student wants.”

One very experienced law school admissions director wrote:

“I haven’t seen many applicants follow this path -- especially straight out of undergraduate school. More often, I see nontraditional students who initially wanted to make a career as a paralegal, but who then decide the full JD is what they want to pursue. I think for some it might be valuable (in terms of learning what it means to be a practicing attorney on a day-to-day basis) but I also think you can get that experience from internships, informational interviews, shadowing etc.”

* * * * *

Do you have a question that is not addressed here? If so, feel free to forward it to me and I will research the answer for you and, perhaps, add it to the FAQ section of this handbook.

Dr. Devine (jd0x@andrew.cmu.edu)

Pre-Law Advisor

Carnegie Mellon University

Additional Resources

In this section you will find several suggested readings and resources that compliment earlier sections of this web site. Suggested readings and other additional resources are presented here in categories around which this handbook is organized:

- Exploration
 - Of law school
 - Of the legal profession
- Preparation
- Application (including financing law school)

Finally, you will find personal recommendations from CMU law alumni (including, not surprisingly, several of the recommendations listed earlier in this section).

* * * * *

General

- Bell, Susan. *Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want to Be a Lawyer?* (Petersons; Subsequent edition [June 1, 1992]). In this book, the author offers would-be lawyers her account of what law school and law practice are really like.
- LSAC. [Law:Fully](#) is a blog created by the Law School Admission Council that explores all aspects of legal education and the legal profession, including access to justice, diversity and inclusion, law and technology, the new digital LSAT, and more. It also features student stories, profiling students who discovered that law school was within their reach and are working hard to make a difference in the world.
- [Stress, health and well-being in the legal profession \(and law school\)](#). Like many professions, law can be a stressful career. Concerns have grown in the legal profession about the “health” and “well-being” of attorneys. Lawrence Krieger (a member of the faculty at the Florida State University College of Law) has written extensively on well-being in the legal profession as well as the well-being of law students. Examples of his work on this subject can be found [here](#). Another very useful discussion of this topic, and several suggestions in the form of advice and resources, can be found [here](#) (the web

site of Diane Curtis, who is the pre-law advisor at the University of Massachusetts/Amherst).

- Roberti, Derek S. *Should I Go to Law School? The \$100,000 Gamble* (Book and DCs) (January, 2011). “Why,” Roberti asks, “do 60% of practicing attorneys feel dissatisfied with their careers?” Law school is a great decision for many people. But there's a reason the American Bar Association Journal reports that only 35% of attorneys who have practiced law for 6 to 9 years would recommend a legal career to a young person. Roberti argues it's important that you know the reason, and offers his book as a path to knowing why. Book includes 2 Bonus CDs featuring invaluable interviews with lawyers and career coaches guiding you through the law school decision.

Exploration: The Legal Profession

Books

- Bachman, Walt. *Law V. Life: What Lawyers Are Afraid to Say about the Legal Profession*. Walt Bachman discusses the role of the lawyer in society and what it means to play this role. He also gives tips on succeeding after law school that will not be found in any traditional law school course material. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Bailey, F. Lee. *To Be a Trial Lawyer*. (John Wiley & Sons Inc; Subsequent edition [October 1, 1994]). F. Lee Bailey is considered by some to be one of (if not *the*) best trial lawyer of his generation. In this book (which a few critics characterize as excessively self-serving), Bailey talks about trial not in ways that will teach you the criminal law, procedures or anything else that is taught at law school, but rather (as positive reviews argued) the importance of *attitude* and the skill set (including, for example, being “quick on your feet”) needed to be a successful trial attorney. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Blakely, Susan Smith. *Best Friends at the Bar: What Women Need to Know About a Career in the Law*, and *Best Friends at the Bar: The New Balance for Today's Woman Lawyer*, by Susan Smith Blakely. The first of these two books by Susan Smith Blakely is based on research, the author's experience, and interviews with women attorneys who have successfully made the transition from one practice setting to another. These women, many with national reputations, tell their stories in their own compelling words. The second is a companion publication that addresses the problems unique to

women in the practice of law and provides practical, helpful advice and solutions. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)

- Blakely, Susan Smith. *What Millennial Lawyers Want: A Bridge from the Past to the Future of Law Practice* (Wolters Kluwer/Aspen Publishers, 2018). In this book, Susan Blakely expands her audience beyond young women lawyers and law firm leaders (the focus of her book *Best Friends at the Bar*) and shifts her focus here to Millennial lawyers - those born between 1980 and 2000 - who are positioned to be the future of the law profession. Through extensive research utilizing the voices of Millennial lawyers about Millennial lawyers and stories of lawyers from a generation past, the author makes a case that demonstrates a healthier path forward for a profession in transition - a path enriched by recapture of the values and beliefs, which successfully guided lawyers of the Greatest Generation in the post-World War Two years.
- Brown, Heidi K. *The Introverted Lawyer: A Seven-Step Journey Toward Authentically Empowered Advocacy* (American Bar Association [August 1, 2017]). While naturally loquacious law professors, law students, lawyers, and judges thrive in a world dominated by the Socratic question-and-answer method and rapid-fire oral discourse, quiet thinkers and writers can be sidelined. This book attempts to illuminate the valuable gifts that introverted, shy, and socially anxious individuals bring to the legal profession - including active listening, deep thinking, empathy, impactful legal writing, creative problem-solving, and thoughtful communication.
- Campos, Paul. *Don't Go to Law School (Unless): A Law Professor's Inside Guide to Maximizing Opportunity and Minimizing Risk*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform [October 26, 2012]). Acknowledging that law school has become a very expensive and, given challenging job markets, an increasingly risky gamble (especially in the wake of the post-2009 economic recession), this book asks and addresses the question "Is it still worth it?" The author offers prospective law students, their families, and current law students the tools to help make a smart decision about applying to, enrolling in, and remaining in law school. The book offers data and analysis to identify which law schools are, arguably, still worth attending, at what price, and what sorts of legal careers it makes sense to pursue. It outlines the various economic and psychological traps law students and new lawyers fall into, and how to avoid them. One reviewer comments: "This book is a must-read if you or someone you care about is considering law school, or wondering whether to stay enrolled in one now."

- Cardozo, Benjamin N. *The Nature of the Judicial Process*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform). Cardozo was one “of the 20th Century's most influential jurists. Describing the elements that a judge uses to decide a case, Cardozo looks at everything ranging from stare decisis and precedent to subconscious bias and discusses the challenges faced by the judge in balancing the elements to arrive at both a judicially robust and just outcome.” (Amazon review by Edward J. Barton) (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Dworkin, Ronald. *Law's Empire*. Belknap Press of Harvard University Press; 1st edition (January 1, 1986). In this book, the author (1931-2013; at the time of his death, the Frank Henry Sommer Professor of Law and Philosophy at New York University and Professor of Jurisprudence at University College London) offers a detailed explanation of how the Anglo-American legal system works and on what principles it is grounded. He presents his theory of law by beginning with the question that is at the heart of the whole legal system: in difficult cases how do (and how should) judges decide what the law is? He shows that judges must decide hard cases by interpreting rather than simply applying past legal decisions, and he produces a general theory of what interpretation is, and of when one interpretation is better than others. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Effross, Walter A. *Before, Beside, and Beyond Casebooks: Reading Recommendations re. Careers in Law* (2019). In this [video](#), Professor Walter Effross (of the Washington College of Law at American University) offers recommendations of reading material for pre-law students (as well as law students and lawyers) about careers in law.
- Feinman, Jay M. *Law 101: Everything You Need to Know About the American Legal System*. Using real and often infamous cases, Jay Feinman takes the reader through the American Legal system, teaching vocabulary and analysis along the way.
- Franzese, Paula A. *Throw Your Fears Out the Window*. This book is described as “A book of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for law students and for lawyers.” It describes very practical concerns and how to survive them, as well as more personal crises and how to live through them.
- Greenberg, Hindi. *The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook: More Than 300 Things You Can Do with a Law Degree*. (HarperCollins; Updated and revised edition [December 1, 2002]). A surprising number of lawyers in this country have discovered that a law degree is not

necessarily a ticket to wealth, success and happiness, and now they want out. In this book, the author (herself an experienced litigator when, in 1985, she launched [Lawyers in Transition](#), a consulting firm specializing in counseling lawyers about alternative career paths) offers a guidebook for those in the position of wanting (or considering) a change. With advice, exercises, listings of resources and real-life stories, it tries to provide tools to help lawyers who are either considering a new career or actively pursuing one that would better suit their abilities, background, personality and interests, as well as to explore other areas of the law that they may not have previously considered. For aspiring attorneys, this book is also useful as a source of insights into the many options (traditional and not) that law school graduates have. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)

- Hart, H.L.A. *Punishment and Responsibility: Essays in the Philosophy of Law*. Oxford University Press, USA; 2nd edition (May 16, 2008). This classic collection of essays, first published in 1968, has had an enduring impact on academic and public debates about criminal responsibility and criminal punishment. Its author (the late H.L.A. Hart, Professor of Jurisprudence in the University of Oxford from 1952 to 1968, and later Principal of Brasenose College, Oxford) offers an alternative to retributive thinking about criminal punishment that nevertheless preserves the central distinction between guilt and innocence. He also provides an account of criminal responsibility that links the distinction between guilt and innocence closely to the ideal of the rule of law, and thereby attempts to by-pass unnerving debates about free will and determinism. Always engaged with live issues of law and public policy, Hart makes difficult philosophical puzzles accessible and immediate to a wide range of readers. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Horwitz, Martin. *The Transformation of American Law, 1780–1860 (Studies in Legal History)* (Harvard University Press, 1979) and *The Transformation of American Law 1870-1960: The Crisis of Legal Orthodoxy* (Oxford Paperbacks, 1992). In this two-volume study, based on prodigious research, Morton J. Horwitz offers a sweeping overview of the emergence of a national (and modern) legal system from English and colonial antecedents. He treats the evolution of the common law as intellectual history and also demonstrates how the shifting views of private law became a dynamic element in the economic growth of the United States. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Ippolito, Richard A. *Economics for Lawyers*. This book explains the economic basis of law and its uses in solving real-life law-related problems. Some of the questions that it tries to answer are questions that range from the simple precise examples to more

complex but general questions such as “What is the patent system’s role in the market for intellectual property rights?” and “Is the free market, a regulated solution, or tort law the best way to deliver the ‘efficient amount of harm’ in the workplace?”

Economics for Lawyers provides a good introduction to those who have no economic background, but is readable and uses examples specific enough to interest those with more extensive knowledge in the field.

- Irons, Peter. *The Courage of Their Convictions: Sixteen Americans Who Fought Their Way to the Supreme Court*. Penguin Books; Reprint edition (March 1, 1990). In this book, the author (a professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego) focuses on sixteen individual Americans whose real-life cases made their way to the U.S. Supreme Court, and in so doing re-write American constitutional law.
- Kairys, David (editor). *The Politics of Law: A Progressive Critique*. Basic Books; 3rd edition (May 9, 1998). In this book, the author (Professor of Law at Temple University Beasley School of Law) assembles several essays that serve as a critique of the nature and role of the law in American society. Essays focus on the major subjects and fields of law, along with essays on then-emerging fields and latest trends and cases. Essay authors comprise a unique assortment of leading scholars and practitioners in law and related disciplines—political science, economics, sociology, criminology, history, and literature—who raise basic questions about law, challenging long-held ideals like the separation of law from politics, economics, religion, and culture. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Kelly, Michael J. *Lives of Lawyers Revisited: Transformation and Resilience in the Organizations of Practice*. University of Michigan Press (2007). This is an updated version of the author’s original edition, published in 1994. The author (former Dean of the University of Maryland School of Law) describes profound changes in the legal profession over the preceding decades, with insights into the nature of these changes examined through stories of five extraordinarily varied law practices. By placing the spotlight on organizations as phenomena that generate their own logic and tensions, *Lives of Lawyers Revisited* speaks to the experience of many lawyers and anticipates important issues on the professional horizon. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Kilwein, John C. and Brisbin, Richard. *Real Law Stories: Inside the American Judicial Process (Paperback)*. Oxford University Press (December 31, 2010). In this book, the authors (both members of the Political Science faculty at west Virginia University) offer

a compilation of interviews with attorneys and other practitioners all across the legal profession.

- Llewellyn, Karl N. *The Bramble Bush: The Classic Lectures on the Law and Law School*. (Oxford University Press, 2008). First published in 1930, *The Bramble Bush* remains one of the most popular and relevant introductions to the law and its study. Llewellyn (who went on to distinguished careers as members of the law school faculties at Columbia University and the University of Chicago) introduces students to what the law is, how to read cases, how to prepare for class, and how justice in the real world relates to the law. Although laws change every year, disputes between people haven't altered all that much since Llewellyn first penned *The Bramble Bush*, and the process of moving from private dispute to legal conflict still follows the patterns he described. Moreover, the steps of a legal dispute, from arguments to verdict, to opinion, to review, to appeal, to opinion have changed little in their significance or their substance. Cases are still the best tools for exploring the interaction of the law with individual questions, and the essence of what law students must learn to do has persisted.
- Moll, Richard W. *The Lure of the Law*. Richard Moll tries to get away from stereotypical portrayals of lawyers and the law and interviews some lawyers and ex-lawyers to look at what motivated them to become lawyers, and what they have become while working in their chosen profession.
- Munneke, Gary A. *Careers in Law*. This book provides statistics about the legal profession, and gives summaries about each specialty. This is a good introduction to different areas of law, and to law in general as a profession. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)*
- Munneke, Gary A, Henslee, William D, and Wayne, Ellen. *Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers*. Why would one choose a nonlegal career as a lawyer? What kind of careers would these be? These questions and more are answered in this guide to nonlegal professions for lawyers. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)*
- Munneke, Gary A. and Wayne, Ellen. *The Legal Career Guide from Law Student to Lawyer*. This book is designed as a hands-on manual to assist law students or young lawyers in making important decisions by helping them identify specific goals and evaluate opportunities as they arise, reflect on changes in personal situations that affect their aspirations, and assess new trends within the profession that will impact their

chosen practice. (Also on the LSAC suggested reading list, and recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])

- National Association for Law Placement (NALP) and Abrams, Lisa L. *The Official Guide to Legal Specialties: An Insider's Guide to Every Major Practice Area*. This reference book provides descriptions of each area of law, as well as advice for lawyers who want to get involved. This includes career suggestions as well as law school course suggestions. Interviews with lawyers in the field provide insight into the daily lives of lawyers in each field of law, including how satisfied they are with their job. (Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)
- Princeton Review. *Alternative Careers for Lawyers*. What if a law career was not the correct choice? Hillary Mantis explores alternative careers through statistics and offers advice to those trying to set out in a different field from legal work.
- Sherwin, Richard K. *When Law Goes Pop*. Richard Sherwin examines the connections between law and popular culture, how that has changed throughout the years, and how the lines between these two areas have become more and more blurred. What will be the outcome of this change? In what direction is this relationship heading, and what will the results of this be?
- Strickland, Rennard and Read, Frank T. *The Lawyer Myth: A Defense of the American Legal Profession*. (Swallow Press; 1 edition [March 11, 2008]). Lawyers and the legal profession have become scapegoats for many of the problems of our age. In this book, the authors (from the law schools at the University of Oregon and University of Florida, respectively) look behind anti-lawyer media images to explore the historical role of lawyers as a balancing force in times of social, economic, and political change. One source of this disjunction of perception and reality, they find, is that American society has lost touch with the need for the lawyer's skill and has come to blame unrelated social problems on the legal profession. There is a very personal and impassioned defense of lawyers and the rule of law in the United States, and that the legal profession is essential to American democracy. (Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)
- Susskind, Richard. *Tomorrow's Lawyers: An Introduction to Your Future*. (Oxford University Press, 2013). In this book the author attempts to simplify this highly complex topic by focusing on the main issues, analyzing them in the context of predictions he made 20+ years ago, and expresses views on the future delivery of legal services (of all

types) and the nature and economic structure of the legal profession which will provide them.

- Wydick, Richard C. *Plain English for Lawyers*. “...all female rabbits and hamsters over 6 weeks old...” What does this phrase mean? There are 4 different interpretations of this sentence depending upon whether the modifiers “female” and “over 6 weeks old” apply to both hamsters and rabbits or just to one or the other. This is one of the many examples the author uses to explain the importance of clarity and conciseness in legal writing. (Also on the LSAC suggested reading list, and recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])

Other Resources

- [Above the Law](#) is a free web site that, in its own words, “takes a behind-the-scenes look at the world of law.” The site provides news and insights about the profession’s most colorful personalities and powerful institutions, as well as original commentary on breaking legal developments.
- The Carnegie Mellon Law Alumni Network group on LinkedIn (accessible [here](#)) enables you to reach out to law alumni with questions, networking inquiries, advice requests, etc.
- [Best Friends at the Bar](#) is a blog site for Susan Smith Blakely, author of *Best Friends at the Bar: What Women Need to Know About a Career in the Law*, and *Best Friends at the Bar: The New Balance for Today's Woman Lawyer*, where the author continues to offer information and advice about the unique challenges and opportunities for women in the legal profession.
- Morella, Michael. “[Make an Informed Decision When Considering Law School](#).” *U.S. News & World Report* (March 19, 2013). This article is a review and discussion of the book *Don't Go to Law School (Unless): A Law Professor's Inside Guide to Maximizing Opportunity and Minimizing Risk*, by Paul Campos.
- National Association for Law Placement (NALP). “[What Do Lawyers Do?](#)” NALP also offers a “[Pre-Law Portal](#)” for candidates thinking about law school, and wondering what might await them in the job market after law school. NALP is an association of over 2,500 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law

schools in North America and beyond. NALP — its staff, leaders, and members — collectively know a whole lot about the world of lawyer jobs. This portal was designed by NALP volunteers to help pre-law advisors and students in the US learn more about the legal employment market.

- Roberts, Tyler. “[Is Law School Worth It? Law Grads Answer](#)” *The National Jurist* (January 26, 2018). “According to a recent study released by AccessLex Institute,” writes author Tyler Roberts, “law graduates who were able to graduate with a good job and low debt are more likely to rate their J.D. as highly valuable than their debt-ridden, underemployed counterparts. . . . But AccessLex dug deeper into the J.D.’s postgraduate experience to understand how the value of a law degree is perceived, looking at financial payouts as well as wellbeing and professional engagement. The study shows that the perceived value of a law degree varies between law grads who graduated before the Great Recession and those who graduated during or after the recession.”
- Schneider, Deborah and Belsky, Gary. *Should You Really Be a Lawyer? The Guide to Smarter Career Choices Before, During and After Law School*. An Amazon summary: “Are you making the right decision to get into--or remain--in law? Whether you're a prospective law student, a current law student, or even a practicing lawyer, the decision to enter--or remain--in law ranks among the biggest career decisions you'll ever make. From research on decision-making, authors Deborah Schneider and Gary Belsky have written a unique career-building guide that will help you evaluate and answer the most basic question facing you now: Should you really be a lawyer?” (*Pre-law advisor listserv recommendation*)
- For insights into intellectual property as a practice area:
 - AIPLA (American Intellectual Property Law Association) – <https://www.aipla.org/>
 - IPO (Intellectual Property Owners Association) - <https://www.ipso.org/>
 - Federal Circuit Bar Association - <http://fedcirbar.org/>

Exploration: Law School

Books

- American Bar Association. *Law Schools and Professional Education: Report and Recommendations for the Special Committee for a Study of Legal Education of the American Bar Association*. This study contains research about and analysis of law school education in general, with some emphasis on the core curricula at law schools

and the effectiveness of these programs, and that proposes a continuous study of legal education.

- Decision Books. *Should You Really Be a Lawyer? The Guide to Smart Career Choices Before, During, and After Law School*. This book uses decision-making techniques and exercises to help the reader perform self-analysis and evaluate whether or not the career choices they have contemplated/have made are correct.
- Falcon, Atticus. *Planet Law School*. This book claims to include “everything that you should know when making your decision whether or not to go to law school and how to succeed once you get there.” It is quite lengthy, but as the author states, “(I)f you think this book is too long to read, then law school is not for you!”
- Farnsworth, Ward. *The Legal Analyst: A Toolkit for Thinking About the Law*. (University of Chicago Press; New Ed edition [June 15, 2007]) In this book, the author (who is Professor and Dean of the University of Texas School of Law) offers his insights into how to think like a lawyer. Topics include ideas to help you analyze legal questions of all kinds (illustrated with many examples from 1L courses) and descriptions of the kinds of insights that law professors like to see in exam answers. It will also (say some of its fans) “make law school, and the practice of law, more interesting.”
- George, Tracey and Sherry, Suzanna. *What Every Law Student Really Needs to Know: An Introduction to the Study of Law*. (Wolters Kluwer; 2nd edition [May 6, 2016]). In this book, the authors (both on the law school faculty at Vanderbilt University) offer information, advice and insights to entering law students to help prepare them for their first year of law school, in the hope of decreasing their anxiety and increasing their chances of achieving academic success. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Gillers, Stephen. *Looking at Law School: A Student Guide from the Society of American Law Teachers*. In preparing for law school, any student should try to get a little extra information to help him or her make the transition to law school and succeed. Many books offer tips and tricks for taking notes, making outlines, and networking. This book, however, offers a bit more background on the course of study. The book contains individual essays from different teachers explaining not what you should do, but why should do it. For instance, one essay discusses gays and lesbians going to law school. The essay mentions joining a society or group to help deal with the stress. Being in law school already has its intense stress, so joining a club will allow some relaxation with others who share your background. This and the other essays reveal the kinds of issues

that law students may experience. (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)

- Kahlenberg, Richard D. *Broken Contract: A Memoir of Harvard Law School*. This autobiographical tale describes the author's negative experience at Harvard Law School, and his struggle between idealism and the ideas and mentalities he encountered there. (Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)
- Kimes, Martha. *Ivy Briefs: True Tales of a Neurotic Law Student*. Although these tales are about the author's own experiences at Columbia, some details are fictionalized. This is an entertaining yet true-to-life tale about the One-L experience. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Lisnek, Paul M.; Friedland, Steven I., and Salamone, Chris M. *The Princeton Review Law School Companion: The Ultimate Guide to Excelling in Law school and Launching Your Career*. (random House, Inc., 1995). What are the courses like in law school? What kind of work will I be doing? The answers to these questions and more can be found within this book. The answers are provided by people who have done this before, and/or are helping students to go through this process.
- McClurg, Andrew J. *1L of a Ride: A Well-Travelled Professor's Road-Map to Success in the First Year of Law School*. In this book, the author (who is the Herff Chair of Excellence in Law at the University of Memphis School of Law) begins with the proposition that the majority of law students will not be going to a top 15 school. He forecasts that in this book he offers practical advice for this majority of law students, including how to anticipate and address the typical fears that incoming students have, and the real impact law school has on your day to day life. McClurg also includes a chapter on non-traditional students because a significant number of law students are not matriculating immediately after college, some of whom will have had families and jobs/careers before law school, and may well be working while in law school part-time. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Miller, Robert H. *Law School Confidential: A Complete Guide to the Law School Experience; by Students, for Students*. This book gives a comprehensive description of the law school experience, from deciding to go, to the LSAT, to the end of third year. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)

- Schneider, Deborah. *Should You Really be a Lawyer? The Guide to Smart Career Choices Before, During & After Law School 2nd Edition* (LawyerAvenue Press; 2nd edition [June 30, 2010]) From an Amazon Review: “The author . . . lays out a(n) overview of the pros and cons of going to law school and being a lawyer, including the risks associated with taking on student debt, a realistic view of what day-to-day life as a lawyer is like, ideas for alternate careers to pursue with a law degree, etc. It points out which reasons are legitimate reasons to go into law (e.g., you really think you'd like practicing law and you get into a school that would give you a good chance of getting a decent legal job) and which are not (e.g., you majored in liberal arts and don't know what else to do, you've heard that it ‘opens doors’ to unspecified other things, you want to do a specific legal job but don't have a good sense of your chances of actually getting that job). It's an easy read, with lots of helpful anecdotes, decision checklists, etc.”
- Sedberry, Steven R. *The Law School Labyrinth: A Guide to Making the Most of Your Legal Education*. (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform; 3rd edition [July 18, 2015]). This is the third edition of this law school preparation book, and includes forms, sample outlines, checklists, bar prep suggestions, tips on finding employment in a tough economy, as well as new suggestions for succeeding on law school exams. The book also includes the “Pyramid Outline” method, which the author (an attorney based in Nashville, TN) claims will “teach you to outline to maximum effectiveness.” (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Shapo, Helene, and Shapo, Marshall. *Law School Without Fear: Strategies for Success*. Written by two professors at Northwestern for their son, this book provides a personal and philosophical overview of the law and the concepts involved. It takes a simple and practical approach, and provides short sections with concise but precise explanations. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)
- Tamanaha, Brian Z. *Failing Law Schools*. (University of Chicago Press, 2012). This book made quite a splash when published in 2012 – a few years into the recession that began in, roughly, 2008-2009 – the worst since the Great Depression of the 1930s. “On the surface,” noted the inside cover of the hardcover edition’s dustjacket, “law schools today are thriving. Enrollments are on the rise, and their resources are often the envy of every other university department. Law professors are among the highest paid and play key roles as public intellectuals, advisers, and government officials. Yet behind the flourishing facade, law schools are failing abjectly. Recent front-page stories have detailed widespread dubious practices, including false reporting of LSAT and GPA scores, misleading placement reports, and the fundamental failure to prepare graduates to

enter the profession.” In his book-length critique of U.S. law schools at the time, the author (legal scholar Brian Tamanaha, who is the William Gardiner Hammond Professor of Law at the Washington University School of Law [St. Louis, MO]) offers his analysis of how and why the crisis took shape, and the likely consequences if the then-current trend continued. With out-of-pocket cost of obtaining a law degree at many schools then approaching \$200,000, the average law school graduate’s debt around \$100,000 (the highest it had ever been), the legal job market the worst in decades, and the scarce jobs offering starting salaries well below what was needed to handle such a debt load, the situation for law students (both current and aspiring) was a virtual “perfect storm” of adverse developments. At the heart of the problem, Tamanaha argued, were the economic demands and competitive pressures on law schools (driven by competition over rankings), plus a lack of regulatory oversight, the work environment of professors, the limited information available to prospective students, and loan-based tuition financing, all of which reflected a system that the author argued was fundamentally unsustainable. Tamanaha’s book helped to trigger increased scrutiny by the general public, the press, and Congress on law schools and their practices. Now, seven years after its publication, Tamanaha’s book is as relevant as ever as a benchmark against how law schools have responded to this scrutiny, and the trajectory for the foreseeable future.

- Turow, Scott. *One L*. This famous autobiography describes the often-difficult life of a first year student at Harvard Law School. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- Wendell, Peter T. *Deconstructing Legal Analysis: A 1L Primer*. (Aspen Publishers, 2009). In this book, the author focuses on such essential topics as studying habits, outlining skills, and legal writing. It also addresses the interplay between reading cases for class, properly briefing cases, the classroom discussion, blackletter law, law school outlines, and, ultimately, the essays. (*Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)

Other Resources

- Anonymous. [“Getting the most out of a law school fair or forum”](#)
- Anonymous, [“Questions to Ask at a Law School Fair”](#)
- Dalton, Brian. “Cognifying Legal Education.” *Above the Law* (May 2018). As artificial intelligence becomes both more commonplace and increasingly powerful, the legal

profession and the law itself must learn to interact with and adapt to these technologies: autonomous vehicles, smart contracts, the internet of things, robot policing and warfare, the list is seemingly endless. The proliferation of AI demands updated and new regulations as well as new modes of legal practice. With the explosion of artificial intelligence and related cutting-edge technologies, the author (an attorney and Director of Research and Consulting at [Vault.com](https://www.vault.com)) argues that law schools face huge opportunities to create graduates who efficiently and confidently rely on technology to better serve their clients and run more efficient practices. Law schools are looking for innovators to help draw the path forward to implementing these technologies and AI capabilities into curriculum to create practice-ready graduates and to improve access to justice.

- D.J. Duff and Ishan Puri. [“Should I Go to Law School?”](#) *Huffington Post* (December 6, 2017). “Today,” the authors note, “choosing to go to law school is often a \$200,000-plus decision. Thus, it comes as no surprise that when talking about law school, usually the first question . . . from potential law school applicants is, *Should I go to law school?* This is a question that every aspiring law applicant should ask themselves. There is no decision-tree or all-encompassing diagram that will be able to answer this question for everyone.” They argue that it’s far more important to ask and reflect on the question *“Why do I want to go to law school?”* *“What is my motivation for going to law school?”* Having posed these questions to several potential applicants, the authors point out and describe several patterns that most answers reflect
- Law School Admission Council. The Law school Admission Council has a link called [“Discover Law,”](#) and offers a short multiple-choice quiz “as an exercise to help you pursue your *own* research about choosing a law career.” It asks questions about what is on your smartphone, what your t-shirts usually feature, your favorite website, etc. They add the caveat: “The quiz is *not* a foolproof diagnostic scientific tool. It’s just for fun!” You can find the Discover Law quiz [here](#)
- [Law School Podcaster - Your Guide to Law School](#) is an online source for information, insight and advice for law school applicants. Topics include a behind-the-scenes view of the admission process to post-law school job opportunities and current market trends. Guests include law school deans, alumni, LSAT test preparation companies, law school admissions authors, law school admissions consultants, and recruiters.
- The [Law School Toolbox](#) describes its mission as one to “demystify the law school experience for prospective law students, current law students, and even bar exam

takers.” They offer a blog and podcast, as well as courses and private law school tutoring. Most of the resources at the Law School Toolbox are free. Their blog includes many posts geared toward helping pre-law students. They also have a regular podcast, and make a point to address pre-law students there as well. They also talk about everything from deciding whether to go to law school to finding scholarships to preparing for that first semester of law school. Finally, they offer the opportunity to subscribe to a free weekly mailing list to get regular updates from them.

- [Law School Transparency](#) is a non-profit that was founded in 2009 by two then-students at Vanderbilt University Law School. Its mission, in their own words, is “to make entry to the legal profession more transparent, affordable, and fair.” Their mission, they say, “rests on the three pillars of our [theory of action](#): reform, information, and accountability. We develop legal education policy ideas, shape the national debate of these ideas, and challenge law schools, state bar associations, and the American Bar Association to change business as usual.”

As part of their web site, Law School Transparency offers [LST Reports](#), with reports addressing topics such as “What schools should you apply to?”; “detailed employment, admissions, salary, bar exam, and financial data for 200ish ABA-approved law schools”; national reports to “See what law schools stand out from the crowd”; a “Comparison tool” that allows you to compare up to three law schools at once”; and additional analytics for LST Reports.

- [The National Jurist](#) (calling itself “the magazine for law students”, offering the “latest in law school news, trends, rankings and study advice”), and its related publication for pre-law students [PreLaw Insider](#). On-line subscriptions to both are available.
- The Princeton Review. “[Life as a Lawyer](#).” This article begins by noting that the field of law has numerous subdivisions, and that you can take a JD degree down a variety of avenues. It offers descriptions of four common types of practice: bankruptcy law, corporate law, public defender, and plaintiffs' counsel. In each category, it delves into the most common roles, responsibilities, issues and tasks that come with each, such as litigation, commercial financing, mergers and acquisitions, mastery of uniform commercial code (for bankruptcy law); “due diligence,” research and writing memos, contract drafting and review, formation and “housekeeping” of corporate entities, and preparing filings for state and federal agencies (corporate law); representing the underdog, focus on smaller cases, sink or swim training, and holding the client's hand (public defenders and plaintiff’s counsel).

- The Princeton Review, "[QUIZ: Should I Go to Law School?](#)" Is law school worth it? The Princeton review invites you to take this quiz "to find out if law school is the right choice for you."
- Rubino, Kathryn. "[Going To Law School Is A Good Idea In Theory — Just Not In Reality.](#)" (*Above The Law* [January 17, 2018]).

Preparation

- Kowarski, Ilana. "[Choose the Right College Major for Law School.](#)" *U.S. News & World Report* (December 14, 2017). An excerpt: "Experts say law school hopefuls should focus on rigorous undergraduate majors they find fascinating and where they have a strong academic aptitude."

Application

General

Books

- Cooper, Cynthia L. *The Insider's Guide to the Top Fifteen Law Schools*. Cynthia Cooper explores the top 15 law school through extensive student interviews and analysis. This book takes an in-depth look at aspects of these law schools such as social environment, academic environment, extracurricular involvement, admissions, and placement.
- Curl, Joyce. *The Best Law Schools' Admission Secrets: The Essential Guide from Harvard's Former Admissions Dean*. (Sourcebooks [July 1, 2008]). In this book, the author (who served for 18 years as Dean of Admissions at Harvard Law School) offers a narrative on the process of admission to law school, and advice on how to choose a law school that's "right" for you. Chapters and topics include how to prepare for law school while still in college, as well as the process for those who are starting out later in life. In one of the early chapters she tackles the question of whether law school is the right choice for you by asking many useful questions connected with the career. As a former law school admissions dean, she writes with authority about such other topics as suggestions for positive interview results, helpful work experiences before making a decision about law school, how to finance law school, and some of the possibilities a law school graduate might consider after graduation, including clerkships, internships, and summer employment opportunities.

- Curry, Boykin. *Essays that Worked for Law Schools*. Boykin Curry presents an analysis of the importance of the law school admissions essay, and gives 35 examples of essays from successful applications. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)
- D.J. Duff and Ishan Puri. "[Getting Accepted To A Top Law School: What Really Matters.](#)" *Huffington Post* (December 6, 2017). Stressing, as most do, the key importance of LSAT score and GPA (and why these matter so much to law schools, not least being their impact on law school rankings), the authors comment on other components of the law school application and a candidate's history (e.g., choice of undergraduate courses, and extracurricular activities and internships, etc.), how law schools view them, and how undergraduates should go about making decisions about them.
- Franzese, Paula. *A Short & Happy Guide to Being a Law Student*. (West Academic Publishing [February 19, 2016]). *An Amazon review*: "This book is indeed 'short' - much shorter than any other student guide. The reason is that other student guides are written to help you understand your business associations/organizations course, to get you through 42 or 56 class hours. This student guide is different. It is written to help you understand your prof's final exam questions – to get you through a 3- or 4-hour exam. Rather than teaching you how cases and concepts are applied in the real world, this book teaches you how cases and concepts need to be applied in the 'unreal' world of law school exams. This is the book to read after you have spent the semester working on law review (Or was it clinic? Or client counseling competitions? Or Kundalini yoga? Or shape note singing?) instead of Business Associations. As Camus (and Noreen Vanderslice) might counsel, 'Don't be Sisyphus. Buy and read this book'." One pre-law advisor's opinion: "This book stands out among the many 'How-to' books for law school, because she not only covers the nuts & bolts of class preparation, but delves into deeper matters of personal and professional development. Imagine having a wise mom or dad, whom you respect, giving you advice, not just about law school, but about life."
- Ivey, Anna. *The Ivey Guide to Law School Admission: Straight Advice on Essays, Resumes, Interviews and More*. In this book, the author (formerly dean of admissions at the University of Chicago Law School), draws on her expertise to cover topics from the application and the essay to the interview and the recommendations, touching on hot-button issues like how much the LSAT, ethnicity, and age really matter. Offering an insider's advice on how to produce the very best application (with

examples and anecdotes about real admissions decisions), this guide addresses such questions as:

- What kind of essay should I write to set me apart from the rest of the pack?
- Should I explain my low LSAT score, my D in chemistry, my attention deficit disorder, my time in rehab?
- Is law school worth the debt I'll face when I graduate?

(Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)

- Kaplan. *Law School Admissions Adviser*. This book is a non-school-specific guide detailing strategies for deciding where and how to apply to law school, and how to get in. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*
- Lammert-Reeves, Ruth. *Getting into Law School: A Strategic Approach*. A Kaplan publication, this guide goes through the school selection process, the admissions process, and tips and strategies to being accepted. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*
- Law School Admissions Council. *Out and In: Information for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Law School Applicants*. This booklet provides specific information and statistics about law schools and their LGBT faculty and organizations.
- Law School Admissions Council. *Thinking About Law School: A Minority Guide*. This guide focuses on minority students, and provides additional statistics related to minority students in particular.
- Levine, Ann K. *The Law School Admission Game: Play Like An Expert, 3rd Ed.* Ann Levine is a law school admission consultant and the owner of LawSchoolExpert.com, which she started in 2004 after serving as director of admissions for two ABA-approved law schools. *The Law School Admission Game*, first published in 2009, re-released in 2013, has been re-written and updated as a third edition to reflect, in the author's words, "current trends in law school applications." *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*
- Montauk, Richard. *How to Get into the Top Law Schools*. This extremely comprehensive guide gives a full evaluation of each separate part of the admissions and decision-making process. It provides insight into every part of the admissions process. *(Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation)*

Other Resources

- Abraham, Linda. “[What to do about a Low GPA](#)” (Podcast, February 2016). Not proud of your undergrad GPA? Concerned it will hamper your chances of graduate acceptance? Consultant Linda Abraham offers advice for what to do about it.
- AccessLex. [MAX Pre-Law by AccessLex®](#) is an online suite of resources created expressly for aspiring law students—and available **free** from AccessLex Institute. MAX Pre-Law dives deep into the financial aspects of legal education, while also giving aspiring law students an overview of the application process with topics that include: *Your Law School Investment, Paying for Law School, Getting into Law School* and *Understanding Law School Admissions and Financial Aid*.

Access Lex also offers [XploreJD by AccessLex®](#), a resource that gives aspiring law students an educational journey through law school selection – and highlights schools that best fit what they want and need in their law school experience. By answering questions related to six primary factors in the law school decision-making process and prioritizing the attributes that are most important to them, students can get a list of potential law school options that meet their individual criteria.

- [AdmissionsDean.com](#) offers a detailed and useful timetable for applying to law school. It begins roughly two years, or 24 months, before that point in time when a candidate intends to begin law school. By following this time line and its recommended steps, you can be reasonably certain that you will have met all deadlines; selected schools for application in wise and well-informed ways; given yourself sufficient time for application elements such as the personal statement, resume, and letters of recommendation; investigated and used resources regarding the financing the cost of law school, etc.
- Cheng, Peg. [The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Application Timeline](#). (Downloadable for free)
- Hutchison, Jr., Lewis L. & Gear, Lisa M. “[10 law school application tips that pay big dividends](#)” (*preLaw Magazine* [Fall 2017]). In this article these authors (both of whom are law school assistant deans for admission and financial aid) draw on their experience to say “little things mean a lot” in how you conduct yourself in the law school application process. They offer ten no-nonsense, little tips that they claim can yield significant results. (Examples: “If your university has a policy of deleting or changing

your school email address after you graduate, consider using a non-university email address for your law school applications”; “Do not be presumptuous and create an email name with any synonym for ‘law.’ This means avoiding the following words: law, legal, law school, esquire, attorney, lawyer, honorable, judge, Supreme Being -you get the point”; “Create a professional voice mail greeting.”)

- lawschooli.com/ is a web site that offers free LSAT prep & law school admissions advice.
- Levine, Ann K. “[Law School Application Timeline: When Should You Apply to Law School?](#)” *Above the Law* (April 30, 2013).
- Levine, Ann K. “[Law School Admissions Timeline.](#)” *U.S. News & World Report* (August 2, 2010).
- Mantis, Hilary. “[Should you take a year off before law school?](#)” *preLaw Magazine* (Winter 2018)
- Mantis, Hilary. “[Where to research law schools.](#)” *preLaw Magazine* (November 2017)
- Mantis, Hilary. “[Important questions to ask when you visit a law school.](#)” *preLaw Magazine* (January 17, 2019).
- The Princeton Review:
 - [Your Law School Application Strategy.](#) If you are applying to law school, you need an application strategy. Start planning early on when and where to apply.
 - [Law School Application: Overview and Timeline.](#) Learn how to navigate the law school application process and develop a strategy for completing applications.

Choosing Law Schools: Where to Apply

- Alexiou, Nicholas. “[The Best Way To Pick The Best Law School For You.](#)” *Above the Law* (May, 2018). “First and foremost,” the author urges, “take advantage of the information available to you.”

- [Analytix](#) is a tool developed and offered by [AccessLex](#),SM that provides law school data in clear and accessible formats, allowing candidates to readily analyze, research and compare law school-specific information. With this tool, you can benchmark various schools, display trends, and gain other crucial insights into the law schools you are considering. More specifically, you can:
 - Create a downloadable report comparing up to five law schools, side-by-side, across a customized set of figures for the most recent report year.
 - Create a law school peer group comparison in the form of a downloadable report comparing a law school of your choice to a customizable group of institutions across a pre-defined or customized set of figures for the most recent report year.
 - Create trend reports in the form of downloadable graphs and charts to display trends for select figures of your choice. Focus on data for one law school or compare to a customized group of institutions.
 - Select and download a data set of variables for multiple years in CSV and Excel formats to create your own dataset with information for all law schools.
- The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) web site offers a useful discussion entitled "[The Best Law Schools for You](#)," with several suggestions on selecting law schools for application.
- [How I Compare](#) (HIC) is a cloud-based recruitment and enrollment platform for students looking to enter law school. The HIC platform allows pre-law students to enroll into HIC, for free, to identify their best-fit law schools for which to apply, scholarships available and financial aid likelihood. HIC uses a proprietary real-time algorithm to generate an individually customized and up-to date-HIC LIST. In their own words, "With HIC, Pre-Law Students and Law School Admissions teams now have available to them a first-ever platform where they can research, locate and even directly communicate (via a private chat feature) with each other to create a more seamless and individually customized recruitment."
- Johnson, Allie. "[How to Choose a Law School](#)," *Prelaw Magazine* (Spring 2017). Based on interviews with several law school admissions officers, this article suggests seven steps in choosing a law school, in the following categories: geography, specialization in a preferred practice area, admissibility based on LSAT and GPA, rankings, Standard 509 data (on cost, job placement, curriculum, etc.), cost-benefit analysis, and an in-person visit.

- [Law School Numbers](#) (“LSN”) is a dynamic research and social networking tool for prospective law school applicants. LSN was founded in 2003 as a free, publicly accessible database of user-supplied law school applicant information with the intent of helping other applicants judge their chances in the upcoming law school admissions cycle. In 2008, LSN broadened its mission to help applicants, current students, and recent graduates with all aspects of the admissions, law school, and career processes. LSN seeks to accomplish this mission not only through serving as an intermediary for user-generated content, but by compiling and publicly disseminating accurate quantitative information about law schools, law firms, and other institutions that interact with junior members of the legal community.
- From *The Princeton Review*:
 - [Understanding ABA Law School Accreditation](#). Are you familiar with the phrase ABA-Approved? Learn about law school accreditation and whether it ever makes sense to apply to a non-ABA accredited school.
 - [How to Choose a Law School](#). From fields of study to future career paths, here is what you need to keep in mind when choosing a law school.
 - [What's Your Law School Admissions Index?](#). Your law school admissions index (which varies from school to school) is made up of your undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and LSAT score, with the latter almost always given more weight. When you register with the LSAC [Credential Assembly Service](#), you will get access to formulas that will help you calculate your index for each school where you are applying.
- Roberts, Tyler. “[The 20 Most Innovative Law Schools](#).” *preLaw Magazine* (Back to School Issue, Fall 2017). This article focuses on schools “that are on the cutting edge when it comes to preparing students for the future,” in such areas as artificial intelligence, big data, design thinking, and legal technology.
- U.S. News and World Report. “[Best Part-time Law Programs](#)” (2017). A report that purports to rank the nation’s best part-time law school program, with a detailed description of the methodology involved.

Rank and Rankings

Books

- Brennan, Thomas E. and LeDuc, Don. *Judging the Law Schools*. This book ranks all the law schools in a number of different areas, such as LSAT scores, UGPA, Percentage of Graduates Employed, etc. and then gives each an overall ranking.
- Goldfarb, Sally F. and Adams, Edward A. *Inside the Law Schools*. This guide claims to provide a more in-depth look than the rankings from *US News and World Report*, with less biased information than that provided by law school websites and admissions guides.

Other Resources

- “Above the Law” offers a “[Top 50](#)” ranking for “national” schools and based primarily on job placement (i.e., law school “outcomes”) rates.
- [The Internet Legal Research Group](#) offers separate rankings based on:
 - UGPA (high and low)
 - LSAT (high and low)
 - Acceptance rate
 - Student-faculty ratio
 - Employment rate at graduation
 - Employment rate 10 months after graduation
 - State (where school is located)
 - Bar passage rate (multi-state)
 - Bar passage rate (in-state)
 - Law library volumes
- Several issues in recent years of the magazine [PreLaw Insider](#) (a *National Jurist* publication) have offered reviews and annotated lists of “Best U.S. law schools” in several categories (and again, that yield different ranking patterns). Categories have included “Best Law Schools for Practical Training,” “Most Devout Law Schools” (i.e., law schools with a strong religious orientation), and “Best Bargain Law Schools.”
- Princeton Review, [Best Law Schools](#) (editions updated annually). This annual publication by The Princeton Review is based on several thousand students at 150+ law schools, and claims to be able to “tell you which schools have the best career prospects, the best quality of life, and more. It also provides 11 unique ranking lists, based on criteria such as “most/least competitive,” “best for diversity,” and “best career prospects.”

- The [Social Science Research Network](#)—a repository for draft and completed scholarship in law and the social sciences—publishes monthly rankings of law schools based on the number of times faculty members' scholarship was downloaded. Rankings are available by total number of downloads, total number of downloads within the last 12 months, and downloads per faculty member to adjust for the size of different institutions. SSRN also provides rankings of individual law school faculty members on these metrics.
- [startclass](#) is a web site that compares law schools using bar passage rates, median LSAT score, median UGPA, and acceptance rates.
- [TOPUNIVERSITIES](#) uses the “QS World University Rankings by Subject” to identify what they claim to be the 300 top law schools in the world. This list was produced in 2017.
- [U.S. News & World Report](#). No law school rankings list would be complete without this most recognized (but also highly criticized) law school-ranking scheme. See for yourself, and use your own best judgment. USN&WR’s 2020 rankings list can be found [here](#).

Discussions and Critiques of Law School Rankings

Books

- Wendy Nelson Espeland and Michael Sauder. *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability*. Russell Sage Foundation; 1 edition (May 9, 2016). Taking on not just law schools, but American higher education and professional schools in general, the authors provide empirical data and analysis to bolster already widespread anecdotal evidence and sentiment that USNWR rankings “undermine sound decision making and encourage destructive social behavior.”²⁴

Other Resources

- Brink, Andy. “[The Myth of Law School Prestige](#).” *The National Jurist* (October 9, 2017). This article lists 5 starting points for evaluating your decision on where to attend law school, divorced from the law school prestige or rankings.
- [Law School Rankings May Be Hazardous to Health: A Message to Applicants from Law School Deans](#). This is an open letter and essay from several law school deans, published about a decade ago and directed to prospective U.S. law students. In this essay, law school deans take issue with the methodology and arbitrariness used in single-

²⁴ Source: Steven J. Harper, “What Rankings Have Wrought”: a review of *Engines of Anxiety: Academic Rankings, Reputation, and Accountability*, by Wendy Nelson Espeland, and Michael Sauder. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (August 5, 2016), page B13.

dimension law school rankings (taking particular aim at the USNWR rankings), with this as their major point:

In deciding on your own education, you should not substitute someone else's ranking system for your own best judgment. You are simply being misled if you treat some rankings, of which U.S. News is a prominent example, as even a competent and conscientious presentation of the limited information they purport to convey.

- O'Connor, Shawn. "[Weigh 4 Factors Along With the Best Law Schools Rankings.](#)" U.S. News & World Report (*Law-admissions-lowdown* [March 12, 2013])

The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

- Barron's. *LSAT: How to Prepare for the Law School Admissions Test*. This is a full preparation book with advice and information about the test, with a diagnostic mini-test and six model tests. Answers and brief explanations are provided.
- Cliffs. *LSAT Preparation Guide*. This concise guide introduces the test, strategies for each area, and three full-length practice tests with answers and explanations.
- Law School Admission Council. *Digital LSAT Tutorial (videos)* (2019). LSAC's new [Digital LSAT tutorial videos](#) are designed to help you get a clear sense of what the experience of taking the Digital LSAT will be like. According to LSAC, these tutorials are not practice tests in the usual sense: you can't score them, and they won't help you figure out where you need more study. (LSAC claims that their [other Prep Tools](#) can help with that). But they will show you how to highlight passages, how to undo an answer, how to enlarge the font, and more. You can access the tutorial on a laptop, desktop computer, tablet, or even a smartphone. To better simulate the experience of taking the Digital LSAT, you may wish to take the Get Acquainted with the Digital LSAT tutorial on a tablet if you have access to one. However, you can access the tutorial using any Internet-connected device. On non-touchscreen devices, you can use a mouse or trackpad to get comfortable with the Digital LSAT's features so that you're familiar with them on test day.
- Ralston, Rita. "What You Need to Know Before You Go (to the LSAT Test Center)! AKA- Important Regulations, List of Prohibited Items, and Tips for LSAT Takers..." Unpublished essay (2018). In this essay, the author (prelaw academic advisor at Boston University)

offers several practical tips for candidates in the weeks and days leading up to the LSAT. While a bit dated (e.g., it still refers to “No. 2 pencils” and the old paper LSAT format, and not the new digital format), its advice on several other topics is still sound. For example:

- Know the best route to get to your test center, as well as a backup route just in case.
 - Know the test center rules inside and out (e.g., no cell phones) so as to not risk any issues on test day.
 - Check out the test center for such things as air conditioning, and noise that you might expect on test day. Tailor your practices in the days leading up to the test with these conditions in mind.
- Research and Education Association. *LSAT*. This preparation guide has an introduction to the tests as well as strategies for how to perform well. There are six full-length practice exams with answers and explanations.
 - Rinehart, Ross. [“How To Start Studying For The LSAT”](#) (*preLaw Magazine* [January 14, 2018])
 - Webking, Robert. *The Annotated LSAT* (with CD-ROM). Research & Education Association; Pap/Cdr edition (January 16, 2009). This test prep book analyzes the methodology, reasoning, and question patterns that characterize each section of an actual LSAT exam, including:
 - · Logical Reasoning
 - · Analytical Reasoning
 - · Reading Comprehension

It also features an instructive Writing Sample section for in-depth study and review, an annotated review and three full-length practice tests with detailed explanations for every answer, a flexible study schedule, and targeted test strategies. The accompanying CD-ROM contains two practice tests in a timed format with instant scoring and diagnostic feedback. The author (Robert Webking) is a professor of political science at the University of Texas at El Paso (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)

See the annotated list of courses, counselors and self-study guides presented earlier in this handbook (in the “Application” section of this handbook).

Letters of Recommendation

- Abraham, Linda (Founder and President of [Accepted.com](https://www.accepted.com).) “[Ten Tips for Writing Letters of Recommendation.](#)”
 - Center for Prelaw Advising, University of Wisconsin/Madison. “[Letters of Recommendation](#)”
 - Georgia Institute of Technology, Center for Career Discovery and Development. “[REMINDERS \(for faculty\) FOR WRITING LAW SCHOOL LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATIONS \(LORs\)](#)”
 - Kowarski, Ilana. “[3 Signs You’ve Chosen the Wrong Law School Reference,](#)” *U.S. News & World Report* (May 4, 2017)
 - The Law School Admission Council offers on their web site a [List of Official LSAT Content Licensees, Including Fee Waivers](#). This is a comprehensive list of test prep companies that have licensed official LSAC content. LSAC does not review or audit the performance of individual test prep companies, and urges candidates who are considering paid test prep services to do research and due diligence to find a test prep company that is right for them. Many of LSAC’s licensees have decided to offer fee waivers for their courses to students who have obtained [LSAC fee waivers](#) for the LSAT and CAS; these companies and courses are indicated with a “Yes” in the Offers Fee Waiver column in the table to be found on their web site. NOTE that LSAC will not provide the names or contact information of fee waiver recipients directly to any licensee. However, upon written request from a licensee, LSAC will verify whether an LSAC fee waiver has been granted. Please also note that requests for test prep fee waivers must be made directly to the test prep companies providing them.
 - Levine, Anne. “[How to get an Excellent Law School Letter of Recommendation.](#)” (*preLaw Magazine* [January 23, 2018])
 - Pre-Law Advising Office, the University of Massachusetts / Amherst, “[Tips for Law School Recommenders.](#)”
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Personal Statements

Books

- Abraham, Linda. [Law School Personal Statements](#). Nationally-recognized consultant Linda Abraham is the founder of [Accepted](#), a web-based service that focuses on personal statements, letters of recommendation, and other key elements of professional school applications. In her own words: “Understand the question, choose a topic, mine your experiences, and come up with a compelling story that demonstrates your ability to succeed in law school and your skill and passion for a legal career.” On this particular site, she offers detailed discussions and recommendations on almost 50 topics, including:
 - [How to Demonstrate Leadership When You Don’t Have Leadership Experience](#),
 - [Writing About Overcoming Obstacles in Your Application Essays](#)
 - [Writing the Diversity Personal Statement](#), a short video
 - [The Miraculous 15-Minute ROUGH, ROUGH Draft](#)
 - [What 3 Essential Ingredients Must You Include in Your Statement of Purpose?](#)
 - [Writing Tip: Understanding the Fine Line Between Confidence and Arrogance](#)
 - [How to Project Professionalism & Positivity in Your Statement of Purpose](#)
 - [How Personal is Too Personal?](#)
 - [“I’m Smart, Really I Am!” Proving Character Traits in your Essays](#)

- [Barron’s. Essays That Will Get You Into Law School](#). This guide contains advice from admissions officers, guidance on how to write an essay, and 40 essays of admitted students. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*

- [Curry, Boykin. Essays that Worked for Law Schools](#). Boykin Curry presents an analysis of the importance of the law school admissions essay, and gives 35 examples of essays from successful applications. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*

Other Resources

- [Accepted](#). [“10 Tips for Better Essay Writing.”](#) (July 31, 2018)
- [Accepted](#). [“Launch Your Law School Application with the Law School Personal Statements with Pizzazz Webinar”](#) (2019)
- Blaser, Joy. [“Three Key Elements for a Powerful Law School Personal Statement,”](#) by Joy Blaser. *Stratusadmisisonscounseling.com* (July 17, 2017)

- Cornblatt, Andy (Dean of Admissions, Georgetown University Law Center). “[Writing an Effective Personal Statement](#)”; and Mechier, Esther (University of Bridgeport School of Law.²⁵ “[The Role of Style and Tone in the Personal Statement.](#)”
- McInnis, Ian. “Writing Your Personal Statement.” In November 2018, as part of its annual pre-law webinar series, the Michigan State University College of Law hosted a webinar on writing law school personal statements. It continues to be both relevant and useful. You can view this webinar [here](#).
- Meyerowitz, Suzanne (University of Rochester). “[The Essay and the Personal Statement.](#)”
- The Princeton Review. [Law School Personal Statement Tips](#)
- Schwartz, Steve. “[An interview with Linda Abraham](#)” (a noted law school admission consultant, about the choice of topic for a law school personal statement).
- Stockmeyer, Otto. “Specifics Make It Real.” In this blog post, the author (who is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus at Western Michigan University-Cooley Law School, and a past president of Scribes-The American Society of Legal Writers) offers advice and examples of how to bring a personal statement, resume, and any other form of writing alive through “specifics” vs. vague generalizations. He begins by referencing Strunk & White’s classic guide to good writing, *The Elements of Style*, and urges writers to use definite, specific, and concrete language. “Prefer the specific to the general, the definite to the vague, the concrete to the abstract.” The goal is to write “with such accuracy and vigor that the reader, in imagination, can project himself into the scene.
- “[Top-law-schools.com](#)” has as comprehensive and digestible a discussion of the law school personal statement as any that I have seen (short of book-length publications). Without being formulaic, it uses rhetorical theory to portray the personal statement as a distinct “genre,” while also offering practical and quite concrete tips on choosing a topic and theme, opening and closing paragraphs, word choice, length, spacing, font choice, etc. It also offers personal statement samples, with their own critiques of each’s strengths and weaknesses.

²⁵ NOTE: The University of Bridgeport School of Law merged with The Quinnipiac University School of Law, ultimately being subsumed in the 1990s under the one name “Quinnipiac University School of Law.”

Application Addendum

Cheng, Peg. [The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Addendum](#). (Downloadable for free.)

Resume

- Cheng, Peg. [The No B.S. Guide to the Law School Resume](#). (Downloadable for free)
 - Levine, Ann K. "[Résumé Writing for Law School Applications.](#)" *U.S. News and World Report* (August 9, 2010).
 - Patrice, Joe. "[What Font Should You Use For Your Résumé? Apparently This Matters To People.](#)" (*Above the Law* [May 5, 2015])
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Pre-1L Programs and Resources

Books

- Borman, Deborah. *A Short & Happy Guide to Legal Writing (Short & Happy Guides) 1st Edition* (West Academic Publishing; 1 edition [January 28, 2019]). In this book, the author (an Associate Professor at the William H. Bowen School of Law [University of Arkansas, Little Rock]) traces the history, meaning, and purpose of legal writing in the American law. She lays out the essential form and substance necessary to craft an inter-office legal memo, helpful ideas for persuasive brief-writing, and tips for excelling in legal writing.
- Deaver, Jeffrey. *The Complete Law School Companion: How to Excel at America's Most Demanding Post-Graduate Curriculum*. This book offers information ranging from the LSAT, the Bar Exam, Law Review, computerized research and videotape study aids to obtaining clerkships or jobs. It includes recent data on demographics of law school applicants, current salaries for a variety of legal careers, nontraditional courses, legal clinics, detailed discussions regarding the latest law trends such as deregulation and insider trading. (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)
- Emanuel, Lazar. *Strategies & Tactics for the First-Year Law Student*. This book claims to offer "a detailed, step-by-step program for surviving the first year of law school." Topics addressed include note-taking--Sharpening your note-taking skills will maximize your study time and improve your grades; law professor's personality--Understanding it can be to your advantage, study traps, memory aids, handling the pressures of law school,

taking exams--Nine steps to writing exceptional exam answers, and useful internet search engines and websites. (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)

- Hill, Cassandra and Vukadin, Katherine T. *Legal Analysis: 100 Exercises for Mastery, Practice for Every Law Student*. This book offers 100 exercises designed to sharpen students' legal analysis skills; exercises designed to increase the depth of students' writing; exercises to refine understanding of rule-based and analogical reasoning; exercises to practice and self-assess performance; online resources for easy access to exercise cases, statutes, and regulations and helpful tips on improving legal analysis and writing skills. (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)
- Iijima, Ann. *The Law Student's Pocket Mentor: From Surviving to Thriving (Introduction to Law)*. This book claims to guide students from the summer before starting law school straight through to their first clerking experience. It is designed as a practical, step-by-step guide that uses exercises, worksheets, and checklists to help students identify their needs, plan strategies, and organize their efforts to maximize success in law school. (*Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO]*)
- Kiser, Randall. *Soft Skills for the Effective Lawyer* (Cambridge University Press, 2017). The author presents a multi-disciplinary, practice-based introduction to the major soft skills for lawyers: self-awareness, self-development, social proficiency, wisdom, leadership, and professionalism. The work serves as both a map and a vehicle for developing the skills essential to self-knowledge and fulfillment, organizational respect and accomplishment, client satisfaction and appreciation, and professional improvement and distinction. It identifies the most important soft skills for attorneys, describes and applies hundreds of studies regarding psychology, law, and soft skills, and provides concrete steps and methods to improve soft skills.
- Law Preview. *Coursebook*. This book was designed as a supplement to a week-long course offered by Law Preview to prepare students for law school. It contains information about law students' typical schedules, as well as some material similar to law school course material. It also gives hints about how to adjust one's study habits in preparation for law school. (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)
- Levi, Edward H. *An Introduction to Legal Reasoning*. Originally published in 1949, this book is widely acknowledged as a classic text. As its opening sentence states, "This is an attempt to describe generally the process of legal reasoning in the field of case law and

in the interpretation of statutes and of the Constitution.” For the most recent edition, the book includes a substantial new foreword by leading contemporary legal scholar Frederick Schauer that places this foundational book into its historical and legal contexts, explaining its continuing value and relevance to understanding the role of analogical reasoning in the law. One reviewer claims that “(T)his volume will continue to be of great value to students of logic, ethics, and political philosophy, as well as to members of the legal profession and everyone concerned with problems of government and jurisprudence.”

- McKinney, Ruth Ann. *Reading Like a Lawyer: Time Saving Strategies for Reading Like an Expert*. The ability to read law well is an indispensable skill that can make or break the academic career of any aspiring lawyer. Fortunately, the ability to read law well (quickly and accurately) is a skill that can be acquired through knowledge and practice. First published in 2005, *Reading Like a Lawyer* has become a staple on many law school reading lists for prospective and admitted students. The second edition includes the same critical reasoning and reading strategies, accompanied by hands-on practice exercises, that made the first edition such a success. It adds a valuable new chapter on a growing challenge for this generation of legal readers: how to read material that is presented on a screen with maximum efficiency and effectiveness. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list, and recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])*
- Noyes, Shana Connell and Noyes, Henry S. *Acing Your First Year of Law School: The Ten Steps to Success You Won't Learn in Class*. This book offers advice for first-year law students on a variety of issues and strategies to help them avoid the pitfalls that are common among first-year students. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*
- Ramy, Herbert N. *Succeeding in Law School*. This book addresses the question “What do I need to do to succeed in law school?” The most recent edition has several new chapters that are geared toward success both in law school and in the job market. A new chapter on legal analysis addresses one of the most common problems professors see on law school exams — the absence of the counterargument. New materials on interviewing techniques, creating a writing sample, and writing a resume are designed to help students market themselves to prospective employers. *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list)*

- Ray, Mary Barnard. *The Basics of Legal Writing: Revised*. West Academic Publishing; 1st Edition (September 13, 2008) *(Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])*
- Schwartz, Michael Hunter. *Expert Learning for Law Students*. According to the author, this book is designed to help law students build the analytical skills necessary to succeed in law school, on the bar exam, and in law practice. It reveals how successful law students and lawyers plan, monitor, and implement their work and it provides detailed guidance regarding individual student personality types and learning styles. The accompanying workbook includes questions and exercises to assist students in practicing the concepts explained in the text. *(Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])*
- Sloan, Amy E. *Basic Legal Research: Tools and Strategies*. This coursebook on legal research claims to be “known for its clear, step-by-step instruction in the basics. Using a building-block approach,” breaking “material into discrete, readily comprehensible parts. Self-contained chapters on sources make the book flexible for any type of legal research course. *(Recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])*
- Stropus, Ruta K. and Taylor, Charlotte D. *Bridging the Gap Between College and Law School*. This book addresses the transition from students’ undergraduate experience to law school learning. It claims to offer a different approach because it: “explains the “why” of law, providing students with the context necessary to understand why law school is taught in a certain manner; explains the ‘how’ of the law, setting out a step-by-step process that will help students adapt to the law school setting; explains the ‘what’ of the law, giving students the opportunity to practice the problem-solving process by providing numerous exercises in a variety of subject matter areas.” *(Also on the LSAC suggested reading list, and recommended by the Council on Legal Education Opportunity [CLEO])*

Other Resources

- [Law Preview](#), LLC is a company which offers a 5- or 6-day law school prep course called Law Preview, designed to prepare entering law students for law school. The course introduces the six core [law school](#) courses that most students encounter in their first year - [torts](#), [civil procedure](#), [contracts](#), [property](#), [criminal law](#) and [legal research and writing](#). Each day of the course is devoted to one first-year subject and prominent professors are brought in from law schools across the country. Law Preview has also

teamed up with some leading BigLaw firms (and top law schools) to offer scholarships for diverse students matriculating at select law schools.

- The [Law School Toolbox](#) offers a [Start Law School Right](#) course (for a fee) to help students feel confident walking into law school for the first time. They also offer a [free workshop](#) that gives students the opportunity to get some guidance on starting law school and to make a more informed decision about the course. They have also gathered their blog posts and podcasts into [Law School 101](#), organizing tips that students can review throughout their time in law school. They also offer [one-on-one tutoring](#) for any law student who feels that they need a more individualized assist. Finally, they offer the opportunity to subscribe to a [free weekly mailing list](#) to receive regular updates.

- The Princeton Review:
 - [What is Law School Like: First-Year Curriculum](#). Curious about law school? Read an overview of the first year curriculum.
 - [The Law School Case Method](#). Learn everything you need to know about the case method so you are prepared for your first year of law school classes.
 - [What to Expect from the Socratic Method](#). The Socratic Method is a common instructional style in many law schools. Learn how it works and what to expect in your law school classroom.
 - [4 Strategies to Succeed in Law School](#). Because law students with top grades earn top salaries in their first year out of school. Learn the strategies you need to succeed in your law school classes.

Financing Law School

- [AccessLex Institute](#)
- AdmissionsDean, [Scholarship Finder](#)
- [American Bar Association Legal Opportunity Scholarship Fund](#)
- [American Bar Association — Student Loan Repayment and Forgiveness](#)
- [Association of American Law Schools](#)

- [Council on Legal Education Opportunity](#)
- [Equal Justice Works](#) (information about public interest law)
- [Equal Justice Works \(staff writer\). "Evaluate Student Loan Repayment Assistance Programs Before You Apply."](#) *U.S. News & World Report* (Feb. 27, 2013)
- [Federal Trade Commission Consumer Information](#)
- [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#)
- Gobel, Reyna. "Follow These Steps Before Borrowing for Law School." *U.S. News & World Report* (March 29, 2013)
- The [Lloyd M. Johnson, Jr. Scholarship Program](#), established by the [Minority Corporate Counsel Association](#) (MCCA) in 2004, The LMJ Scholarship is a diversity pipeline program that seeks to nurture the academic and professional careers of outstanding law students. The scholarship is open to women and diverse students who have: been accepted to an ABA-accredited law school on a full-time basis; an outstanding or promising academic record; an interest in corporate law; demonstrated community service and leadership qualities; a financial need; and a commitment to diversity, inclusion and equity. The LMJ Scholarship grants scholarships of \$10,000 to students for their first year of law school. In addition to financial support, LMJ scholars are connected with peers, alumni, and mentors, who are available to provide professional support, such as guidance on addressing academic or personal obstacles that arise over the course of their legal career.
- Margiewicz, Rachel. "[9 must-know scholarship tips.](#)" *preLaw Magazine* (January 8, 2019)
- O'Connor, Shawn. "How to Negotiate Law School Financial Aid." *U.S. News & World Report* (March 12, 2013)
- O'Connor, Shawn. "[Learn the Art of Negotiating Law School Financial Aid.](#)" *U.S. News & World Report* (March 25, 2013).
- O'Connor, Shawn. "[How to Decide if You Should Work During Law School.](#)" *U.S. News & World Report* (March 24, 2014)

- O'Connor, Shawn P. "[Draft a Law School Budget Early.](#)" (*U.S. News & World Report* [November 24, 2014]). This article urges pre-law candidates to take the time to map out law school expenses and assess your financial situation before submitting any applications.
- Powell, Farran. "[Expectations for Paying for College, Grad School in 2019.](#)" (*U.S. News & World Report* [January 10, 2018]). Suggests some possible changes ahead include an overhaul of the federal student loan and work-study programs.
- Rothman, Jordan. "[What I Wish I Knew About Student Loans as a Law Student.](#)" *Above the Law* (January 17, 2018)
- Rubino, Kathryn. "[Realistically, How Much Debt Will You Go Into For Law School?](#)" *Above the Law* (February 22, 2019).
- [The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid](#)
- Smith-Barrow, Denise. "[4 Ways to Pick a Cost-Efficient Law School.](#)" *U.S. News & World Report* (January 22, 2015)
- Stout, Kerriann. "[How I Overcame My Paralyzing Fear Of My Law School Loans.](#)" (abovethelaw.com; June 27, 2017)
- [U.S. Department of Education Federal Student Aid](#)
- [US Department of Education—Federal Student Aid \(loan forgiveness\)](#)

CMU Law Alumni/ae Recommendations

- From **Eileen Morrison** (B.S. [CMU], Business Administration, 2008; J.D., Boston University School of Law, 2015. "Here are four books I highly recommend reading before law school":
 - *Gideon's Trumpet: How One Man, a Poor Prisoner, Took His Case to the Supreme Court-and Changed the Law of the United States* (1989), by Anthony Lewis. "It is one of my favorite books, all about how the Sixth Amendment right to counsel was created. Public-interest students will love it." (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)

- *A Civil Action* (1996), by Jonathan Harr. "I had no idea what discovery was before I read this book! A great story and it teaches you about how civil law works." (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)
- *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (2004), by Richard Kluger. "An uplifting reminder of the ways the law changes society for the better." (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list*)
- *Getting to Maybe: How to Excel on Law School Exams* (1999), by Richard Michael Fischl and Jeremy Paul. ""Good tips on how law school exams are different than other exams you've taken - hint: there are no 'right' answers until you get to the bar exam!" (*Also on the LSAC suggested reading list, and a Prelaw advisor listserv recommendation*)

Do you have titles to suggest? If so, please send an annotated list to:

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