



Pre-Law Student Guide



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Introduction and Acknowledgements

The 2017-2018 Pre-Law Student Guide was prepared with the assistance of NAPLA, with their permission to alter the original guide and distribute to students. The Pre-Law Student Guide was designed for current and prospective University of Memphis students who are interested in pursuing a career in law. These students should familiarize themselves with the content in this guide.

The NAPLA Pre-Law Guide is based on Cornell University's Legal Careers Guide, which was used by permission of Cornell Career Services. NAPLA would like to acknowledge the following schools for their contributions to the Guide: Binghamton University, Boston College, Boston University, Bucknell University, Columbia University, Duke University, Northeastern University, Princeton University, and Texas A & M University. The Law School Admission Council provided information on study abroad transcripts, and the Financial Aid section is based on the "Financial Aid Toolkit" developed by the Pre-Law Advisors National Council (PLANC).

This version of the Pre-Law Student Guide was last updated August 2017.

Greetings from the Pre-Professional Advisor

Welcome to Pre-Professional Advising at The University of Memphis! I look forward to working with you throughout your collegiate career as you prepare for the next step on your journey to entering the legal profession. This guide was designed to provide you with an overview of the resources available at The University of Memphis, as well as outline the various aspects involved in pursuing a career in law.

My role as the Pre-Professional Advisor is to serve as a resource for you! Please know that it is never too early to meet with me to start discussing your plans and developing a timeline for applying to law school. I am available to help you determine whether a career in law is a good fit for you based on your skills, interests, and academic performance.

Your first step as a pre-law student is to sign up for our listserv. Doing so will enable you to receive current information about pre-law events, volunteer and employment opportunities, and important dates and deadlines. Numerous events for pre-law students are held each year including an information fair with admissions officials and a tour of The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law.

Join the Pre-Law Listserv by emailing listserv@listserv.memphis.edu and typing **Subscribe Pre-Law-L in the body of the email. Make sure you do not include anything else in the body of the email!**

By now, you are probably wondering how you can guarantee admission to law school and the short answer is, unfortunately, you cannot. There is no magic formula to guarantee admission to any professional school. However, there are many things you can do at the undergraduate level to present yourself as a competitive applicant to these schools. You should successfully complete the required coursework for your degree program and spend significant time preparing for LSAT. You should participate in student organizations and develop leadership skills. Building strong relationships with your faculty members will provide you with a wide array of people you can enlist to write recommendation letters on your behalf. You will need to strengthen your interviewing and writing skills and make sure you can clearly articulate, on paper and in person, your motivation for pursuing this profession. You should do research on the legal profession and the schools where you are seeking admission.

Use the resources available to you, including Pre-Professional Advising, to help you stay on track. I look forward to meeting with you soon!

Best wishes,

Jessica Clifford Kelso

Pre-Law Advising

Contact Information

Jessica Kelso, Pre-Professional Advisor

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In addition to Ms. Kelso, we have three Faculty Affiliate Advisors available to meet with students:

- Professor Ebony Dawkins, Political Science
(endawkns@memphis.edu)
- Dr. Verena Erlenbusch, Philosophy
(vrlnbsch@memphis.edu)
- Professor Mary Tucker, Criminology and Criminal Justice
(mhtucker@memphis.edu)

Our goal is to help students navigate the application process for law school, including developing a timeline for application and the LSAT through individual and group advising. Workshops on various topics related to the application process including personal statements, goal setting, and establishing a 4 year plan, are offered throughout the year.

Student Responsibilities:

- ❑ Students are strongly encouraged to meet with the Pre-Professional Advisor early in their academic career to discuss their interest in law school and develop a timeline to application.
- ❑ Our website is updated regularly with upcoming events. Students should email the Pre-Professional Advisor (jessica.kelso@memphis.edu) to be added to a mailing list for notifications of workshops, guest speakers, Pre-Law Society meetings, etc.
- ❑ Students should set realistic goals and develop a parallel plan for an alternate professional school or career if admission to law school is not successful.

Exploring a Career in Law

A J.D., Juris Doctor, can lead to a wide range of law-related careers and can open doors to careers in government, business, higher education, communications, and numerous other fields. Law school graduates are administrators, teachers, librarians, and business managers as well as advocates, judges, and politicians.

Law can be a rewarding profession. At its best, legal practice challenges the intellect, demanding the exercise of reason and judgment. The ethics of the profession require attorneys to promote justice, fairness, and morality; thus, legal employment can bring particular satisfaction to those who aspire to work within the law to seek social justice.

Exploring Your Interest

Before beginning the application process, consider carefully if a law degree is right for you. It is not necessary to know what kind of law you want to practice, or even if you want to practice law, to decide to attend law school. There are a number of ways you can explore the field of law:

- ❑ Email the Pre-Professional Advisor to be added to the mailing list to stay informed of law-related programs and opportunities.
- ❑ Become an *active* member of the Pre-Law Society.
- ❑ Talk with the Pre-Professional Advisor about your interest in pursuing legal studies.
- ❑ Conduct research on legal careers using resources available through Career Services and/or The Career and Psychological Counseling Center.
- ❑ Investigate online resources that provide information on legal careers, law school, employment statistics, and other law-related topics.
- ❑ Intern with a law firm or law-related organization to gain exposure to the field and to experience the work environment.
- ❑ Take a tour of The University of Memphis Cecil C. Humphreys School of Law and speak with a law student ambassador about the law school experience. Contact the Law Admissions Office at 901-678-5403 to schedule a tour.
- ❑ Conduct information interviews to learn about the legal profession. Discuss what lawyers do in a typical work day, personal attributes needed to be successful in a legal career, and satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the field.

Realities of a Legal Career

An important step in making a decision is to distinguish between commonly held expectations and the reality of legal practice. Hours can be very long and often include weekends. Legal work can require spending considerable time in tedious, painstaking research. Depending on the type of law practiced and the location, entry into law firms can be difficult and salaries may not meet expectations. The market for new lawyers is competitive for those seeking positions in cities and firms that are in high demand.

Employment statistics for the class of 2015 law graduates based on responses from 39,298 (around 98% of all graduates) reveal the following¹:

- ❑ 67.7% of respondents remained in-state for employment.
- ❑ The average starting salary was \$83,797; the median salary was \$64,800.
- ❑ Approximately 51.3% of the class chose private practice in law firms.
- ❑ Slightly over 29% took positions in public service, including judicial clerkships, government agencies, and public interest organizations.
- ❑ Graduates entering business accounted for 17.2%.

While a corporate lawyer in a private firm may earn \$100,000+ the first year, he or she may also work twelve hours a day, six or seven days a week. For those graduates pursuing public interest law, the median starting salary is around \$45,000.

There are significant differences in career choices lawyers make, from public interest law and government law to private practice in a firm. The range in starting salaries alone can exceed \$100,000. Career choices of new graduates are also likely to be influenced by the amount of debt most law students accumulate while pursuing their J.D.

¹ [NALP Recent Graduates Class of 2015](#) ; *National Summary Report for Class of 2015*

Preparing for Law School

Law schools are interested in your ability to do rigorous analytical research, to write well, to present, and to persuade. Therefore, students should choose a variety of courses that develop and enhance these skills. The American Bar Association offers an overview of the skills and values important to preparing for a legal education and a career in law.

Choosing a Major

“Pre-Law” is your career focus, not your actual major. Although the American Bar Association (ABA) requires law school applicants to have completed an undergraduate degree, it does not require any one major in particular nor does it specify particular prerequisite courses for admission. Many “pre-law” students major in what are considered traditional majors for admission to law school, such as history, philosophy, political science, and English, but it is becoming increasingly common for students to major in a variety of other fields and seek (and gain!) admission to law school.

Ultimately it is up to you! Choose a major you are interested in and then do well in that major while taking advantage of opportunities to develop strong research, writing, critical thinking, and communication skills. Regardless of the major, students admitted to law school excel academically, score competitively on the LSAT, and are overall well-rounded applicants. Not sure what to major in? Check out all the [majors, minors, and concentrations](#) offered at the U of M.

You will be advised in the department that houses your major but should contact the Pre-Professional Advisor to be added to the pre-law mailing list. You are encouraged to meet with the Pre-Professional Advisor at least once a year.

Compile an Impressive Record

A solid GPA, particularly within your major, is expected, but a willingness to go beyond requirements demonstrates an intellectual curiosity that would be advantageous in the study of law. Academic excellence reflects discipline and abilities, though the variety and depth of your coursework will also be seriously considered by admissions committees as evidence of your interests and motivation.

In general, lecture courses provide a good foundation for further instruction, while seminars allow you to present, discuss, critique, and defend more specific ideas. Smaller classes give you the opportunity to interact with faculty. Get to know faculty whom you might later ask for recommendations; make yourself stand out as an individual by attending office hours and asking questions in class.

Planning Your Schedule

It is understandable that you have more going on in your life than just attending class. Many students balance family and work responsibilities with homework, time in class, and student involvement. In addition, as a pre-law student, you may be gaining experience through volunteering, internships, and leadership roles in student organizations. Keep in mind, however, that there is no substitute for good grades when applying to law school.

Withdrawing/Repeating Courses

Most law schools take into account all grades earned at the undergraduate level, including any repeated courses. This means that law schools will consider both your old grade and new grade in your overall GPA calculation. You should also avoid withdrawing from a course after the first week of class when possible. A pattern of withdrawals and repeated courses may end up costing you in terms of time, money, and lost opportunities. Student involvement, volunteering, work, etc., are all aspects of a well-rounded applicant but should enhance rather than harm your GPA.

Extracurricular Activities

There are many elements involved in becoming a competitive candidate for law school. In addition to superior grades and strong performance on the LSAT, law schools will be interested in your extracurricular activities, leadership experience, summer jobs, internships, and public service since they seek well-rounded candidates for admission. Select activities that interest you; they do not have to be directly related to law. Over time, get more actively involved in fewer activities, perhaps in a leadership position.

Your academic department may have directed studies and research opportunities available. This is a good place to start. In addition, The University of Memphis provides support to students interested in obtaining an internship through the [Office of Academic Internships](#).

There are over 150 registered student organizations at The University of Memphis. Students should review the [database of organizations](#) for membership criteria and contact information.

The Pre-Law Society hosts informational meetings each month on topics such as admissions, LSAT preparation, and career options in the legal profession. Students can contact the Pre-Professional Advisor for membership information. A full schedule of events hosted by the Pre-Law Society is available on the [pre-law calendar of events](#).

Legal Thought & Liberal Arts Minor

The Legal Thought and Liberal Arts Minor is designed to provide an interdisciplinary liberal arts program for students in any major who intend to enter the legal profession. The minor will be of particular benefit to pre-law students whose majors are more professional in nature and who are not exposed to the broader liberal arts curriculum. Students will be introduced to major intellectual traditions of the West and to ethical, social, and economic issues of significance to our time. The courses in the minor require that students read critically, think logically, and write clearly; all of which are attributes required of persons in the legal profession.

Students should visit 107 Scates Hall to declare a minor in Legal Thought and Liberal Arts.

Minor Requirements

The minor consists of 18 semester hours of required courses and electives. Some of these courses may have prerequisites. Students are responsible for obtaining permission from the instructor to attend any course in which prerequisites have not been met.

A.) Required Core Courses

- ❑ PHIL 1611 (Elementary Logic)
- ❑ ENGL 3604 or ENGL 4602

B.) Electives : Select one course from four of the following five groups (each course MUST be chosen from a different group)

- a. Economic Context of Law: ECON 2010, 2020, 4210, 4220, 4250, 4340
- b. Historical Context of Law: HIST 3121, 4506, 3840
- c. Practical Foundations of Jurisprudence: CJUS 3510, 4521; POLS 3219, POLS 4212, 4405, 4504
- d. Theoretical Foundations of Jurisprudence: PHIL 3411, 3511, 3514, 3516, 4551; POLS 3401, 3402, 3405 UNIV 3580
- e. Critical Reading and Thinking: any 4000 level ENGL literature course (4230-4461); ENGL 4602 if not taken as part of the required core; any upper division PHIL course not listed above

Legal Career Checklist

Freshman and Sophomore Years

- Select a major that you are interested in and do well in it.
- Begin to form relationships with professors, advisors, supervisors, etc. so that they will know your work well enough to serve as recommendation writers in the future.
- Expand your education by seeking summer jobs or internships in fields of interest.
- Get involved in student organizations including the Pre-Law Society.
- Meet with the Pre-Professional Advisor once a year to discuss your academic goals and progress in relation to law school admission.

Junior Year

- Meet with the Pre-Professional Advisor to assess your academic, extracurricular, and work experiences and to discuss the application process.
- Begin preparing for the LSAT; if you are ready, register for the June administration.
- Secure a summer job or internship, if possible, in a law-related field.
- Research law schools and compile a list of tentative schools.

Senior Year (or Year Prior to Entering Law School)

- Attend law school fairs and programs offered on the application process.
- Register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) through LSAC.org.
- Have transcripts from all undergraduate institutions you have attended sent to CAS. View your Academic Summary Report once all transcripts have been summarized.
- Ask potential recommendation writers if they are willing to write letters on your behalf.
- Take the September/October LSAT if you did not take the LSAT in June.
- Begin drafting and revising your personal statement.
- Apply to law schools electronically through your LSAC.org account.
- Take the December LSAT if you are retesting.
- Complete the FAFSA and other need analysis forms as well as any institutional financial aid applications as soon after January 1st as possible.
- Take appropriate action on acceptances, wait-list status, and financial aid offers.

Determining Where to Apply

With 2 accredited law schools in the United States, the process of deciding where to apply, and ultimately where to attend, may seem daunting. To make the process manageable, begin assembling a list of schools based on the criteria that are important to you, and then revise your choices according to your chances of admission. Do not let the search for "long shots, good chances, and sure things" govern your selection process. Selecting schools carefully will help reduce the time and expense of applying to an excessive number of schools.

Two resources that will help you determine your competitiveness for schools are the [Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools](#) and the [Boston College Online Law School Locator](#).

Reputation

A number of factors contribute to a school's reputation, including faculty, facilities, and career services. There are many types of rankings for law schools, ranging from personal rankings to the US News and World Report Standings. However, it is very important to understand all rankings are subjective, and the methodology in most rankings is not very sound. Therefore, it is best for you to visit law schools, talk to admission representatives, and make an informed decision about which schools best meet your individual needs and interests.

Selectivity at law schools, however, is one factor which can be quantified. You can gauge a school's relative selectivity by comparing the number of applicants accepted to the overall number of applications. *The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* contains charts and tables of recent admissions cycles at most schools that reflect selectivity.

Schools can be divided roughly into three groups:

- ❑ Schools with national reputations tend to appear in various "top ten" lists. These schools draw students from a national pool and offer geographic mobility to graduates.
- ❑ Schools with good regional reputations are attended primarily by students from the region, who may want to remain in the area following graduation, but who may also seek positions throughout the country.
- ❑ Local schools draw students primarily from the immediate area who want to remain there to practice law following graduation.

For a more detailed discussion of law school reputation and the process for evaluating schools, refer to the *Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*.

Criteria for Selection

Location: Is the school in an urban area or in a suburban/rural setting? Are there other graduate schools nearby? Is the school located somewhere you would be comfortable living and where you would possibly be willing to work following graduation? Does the school attract applicants from across the country or primarily from that region?

Costs: What are tuition, housing, and transportation costs? Is financial aid exclusively need-based, or are merit scholarships available? Does the school offer a loan forgiveness program for public interest lawyers? What is the average debt burden for graduates from this school?

Faculty/Classes: What are the academic and experiential backgrounds of faculty? How accessible are they? What is the faculty-student ratio, the number of full-time vs. adjunct faculty, and the number of female and minority faculty? How many students are in each course? Are classes taught in the Socratic method or lecture?

Facilities and Resources: Is the school affiliated with a university? Do students have access to courses from a range of academic disciplines to supplement their legal curriculum? Is the library large enough to accommodate holdings and permit students to conduct research and study? In general, do the facilities provide a comfortable learning environment?

Special Programs: What courses are available in specialized areas? What joint degree programs of interest are available? What are the opportunities for practical experience, including clinics, internships, etc.? Can you “write” on to law reviews in addition to being selected based on class rank? What specialized institutes, journals, or organizations exist in your areas of interest?

Student Body: What is the size of the entering class? What does the admissions profile tell you about the quality of the student body? Where did students study as undergraduates and what are their geographic backgrounds? Is there diversity in interests and personal/cultural backgrounds? Is the student body friendly or overly competitive? Is there much interaction with fellow students outside the classroom?

Student Life: Is the school located in a safe area? What is the cost of living? What types of cultural opportunities are there? Does the school provide recreational facilities? What is the general ambiance?

Career Services: What advising and resources are available to help students find a job? Is career counseling available? How many employers recruit at the law school and who are they? What percentage of the class has positions at graduation? In what types of positions and geographic areas are they employed? What is the percentage of graduates holding judicial clerkships? How involved are alumni in career activities?

Understanding Admissions Criteria

Objective Criteria

Law schools consider the objective criteria, GPA and LSAT score, to be the factors that most accurately predict how applicants will perform in their first year.

- ❑ **Law School Admission Test (LSAT):** Applicants take the LSAT, a half-day standardized test, during one of four test administrations offered annually by the Law School Admission Council. Scores, which range from 120 to 180, are used by most law schools as a common measurement of potential for success in law school.
- ❑ **Undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA):** Applicants submit undergraduate transcripts to the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), which converts grades to a cumulative grade point average using a set of consistent values. The GPA offers admissions committees another numerical basis for comparing applicants.
- ❑ **Applicant Index:** Many law schools ask the CAS to combine applicants' LSAT scores and GPAs with weighted constants to produce a single number which can be used to assess and compare potential for doing well.

Subjective Criteria

Although your GPA and LSAT score are a very large piece of the admissions puzzle, law schools also take into account some subjective criteria.

- ❑ **Personal Statement:** Applicants submit a personal statement as part of the application process for almost all law schools. Admissions committees look for a concise, detailed, well-written statement revealing the applicant's individuality. They want to learn from the statement who the applicant is and what makes him/her qualified to study at their law schools.
- ❑ **Letters of Recommendation:** Most law schools require applicants to submit letters of recommendation from professors or employers to gain a different perspective on the applicant's academic strength and personal qualities. Admissions officers find most helpful specific examples of applicants' motivation and intellectual curiosity, an assessment of communication skills, and a comparison with peers.
- ❑ **Experience:** This factor includes undergraduate curricular and extracurricular activities, internships, part-time and full-time work experience.

Applying to Law School

After reaching the decision to pursue a law degree, you will want to file a strong and complete application to increase your chances for admission. The first step in the application process will be to **meet with the Pre-Professional Advisor or Faculty Affiliate Advisor**, who can help you create a strategy for maximizing your chances for success. Next you should open an online account with the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). LSAC is comprised of the 205 American Bar Association-approved law schools in the U.S. and 15 Canadian law schools, and was founded to coordinate and facilitate the process of applying to law school.

Application Costs

Be aware that applying to law school is an expensive endeavor. Basic costs include:

- CAS registration fee
- LSAT registration fee
- Law School Reports
- Application fees (per school)

You might need to add other costs such as LSAT preparation, travel to visit law schools, etc. LSAC offers fee waivers for those with a demonstrated inability to pay for essential parts of the application. The waivers cover two LSATs per testing year (June through February); the CAS registration, including a total of four CAS Law School Reports; and, a copy of *The Official LSAT SuperPrep*.

Filing Your Applications

Remember that your file is not complete until all parts, including the recommendation letters and the CAS report, have been received by law schools. Completing application forms is a fairly straightforward process. Schools will be seeking basic information about you, including your academic background, extracurricular activities, and employment history. You may be asked to list other schools to which you are applying; responding to this question and/or indicating an interest in financial aid will not affect your chances for admission. Be truthful and forthright as you complete the applications. Enclose a resume with your application, but be sure to respond to all of the questions on the applications.

Dean's Certifications

A dean's certification is required by some law schools to confirm that applicants have not been involved in academic or disciplinary transgressions as undergraduates. At the University of Memphis, this certification is handled by The Office of Student Conduct (359 University Center; studentconduct@memphis.edu).

Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is required for admission to all American Bar Association-approved law schools. The test is administered four times per year by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). Detailed test information regarding dates, sites, registration forms, fees, and deadlines, as well as registration, is available online. LSAT test sites can fill quickly, especially in or around major cities. It is advisable to register several months in advance of a test date so that you can take the test in a convenient location.

Scheduling the LSAT

The optimal time to take the exam is June of the year you apply, but taking the test in the fall will still allow you to see your LSAT score before applying. Scores from the December administration will reach law schools in time to complete application deadlines at all schools. If you take the December test, plan to submit your applications around the time of the test. You may, however, decide to wait to see your score before submitting your applications.

Applicants should never take the LSAT on a “trial run” and should be thoroughly prepared for each attempt.

Content and Scoring

The LSAT is designed to provide law school admissions committees with a common measure of applicants' aptitude for legal study. The test consists of five multiple choice sections, each thirty-five minutes in length:

- ❑ One reading comprehension section
- ❑ One analytical reasoning section
- ❑ Two logical reasoning sections
- ❑ One experimental test question section (not scored)

A 35-minute writing sample at the end of the test is also not scored; copies of the writing sample are sent to schools where you apply.

Your score is computed on a scale of 120 to 180, based on the number of questions you answer correctly; there is no deduction or penalty for incorrect answers, so it is advantageous to guess if you do not have time to answer a question.

LSAT Preparation

Begin your preparation with LSAC materials and then assess your progress. If you feel you would benefit from a more structured program of study, you may want to consider taking a commercial test preparation course. There are a number of companies that offer test prep including Kaplan, PowerScore, and Princeton Review, as well as various printed study materials. The University of Memphis does not suggest any one particular method of test preparation over another and encourages students to research all options and devise a study plan that works best for each individual.

Commercial courses are expensive and the quality of instruction can be uneven, so it is important to learn who will be teaching the course and what materials will be used. Talk with others who have taken the LSAT to learn from their experience, especially concerning the effectiveness of courses you may be considering.

Most students consider the logical reasoning sections to be the most difficult part of the LSAT. Students are strongly encouraged to complete Philosophy 1611: Elementary Logic as a means of developing skills related to approaching questions of this nature.

If you are registered for a test but feel you are not fully prepared or in a frame of mind to perform well, it may be better not to take the test; law schools will not view your absence on the test date negatively. Plan to be well-prepared and to take the test only once, but if you do not believe your score is representative of your abilities, for example, you were scoring considerably higher on practice tests, you may want to consider retaking the test.

Score Reporting

Law schools are required to report the highest scores for students in their entering class to the American Bar Association. Those scores are then reported to organizations such as the Law School Admission Council for use in their online and print information.

Schools vary, however, in how they consider multiple LSAT scores in making admissions decisions. Though many schools use the higher/highest score in reaching decisions, some of the more competitive schools use the average of multiple scores unless there is a compelling reason to use the higher/highest score.

Most schools welcome an addendum explaining the point difference in scores, including any extenuating circumstances and a history of performance on standardized tests. LSAC will report the results of all LSATs you have taken within five years; however, you may find some schools willing to consider only scores received within a three- or four-year period.

Credential Assembly Service (CAS)

To centralize and standardize the objective application information (GPAs and LSAT scores) ABA-approved law schools require applicants to subscribe to the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). This service organizes and analyzes applicant information in a way that allows law schools to compare academic records from undergraduate schools that use different grading systems.

CAS Registration

You register for the CAS through your LSAC account. Once registered, you will then send or take transcript request forms, available through CAS, to each college or university from which you have earned academic credit.

CAS Report

The report prepared by CAS will include the following:

- ❑ A year by year grade and credit summary.
- ❑ Photocopies of all your transcripts.
- ❑ Your GPA for each academic year, your degree GPA for your home institution, and your cumulative GPA reflecting work at your home institution and all other institutions you have attended.
- ❑ A description of your overall grade distribution.
- ❑ The mean LSAT score and GPA of students at your undergraduate school who have subscribed to the CAS and your percentile graduation rank among those students.
- ❑ Up to 12 LSAT scores from the past five years, including cancellations and absences.
- ❑ An average LSAT score, if you have more than one score on file.
- ❑ Copies of your LSAT writing sample.

The CAS report may also include an applicant index described in the Admissions Criteria section.

Personal Statements

Personal statements are requested by most law schools and provide you with the opportunity to go beyond the objective aspects of the application to discuss who you are and what is important to you. Your personal statement is crucial since the majority of law schools do not conduct interviews as part of the application process.

Personal statements provide law schools with a chance to review your writing skills and your ability to follow instructions.

Personal Statement Content

Schools will be seeking information about your background, personal qualities and leadership skills, and motivation to learn what is unique about you and what distinguishes you from other candidates with similar GPAs and LSAT scores. Your goal, then, will be to write a concise, detailed statement establishing yourself as an individual. An interesting and personal discussion about yourself, one that reveals your personality and character, will help you come alive to the admissions committee. Your personal statement is your opportunity to highlight your accomplishments, address any serious obstacles you have overcome, and touch on noteworthy personal experiences and how these have been impactful. It is important to remember that your personal statement should not be an expanded version of your resume and that it highlights you and what you learned from the experience(s), rather than just the experience itself.

Some schools will ask you to respond to a specific question or suggest a topic for your personal statement, but most will leave it open-ended. If you are applying to a school with a specific prompt, it is important to clearly address what they are asking for. Many applicants will write one personal statement and then adapt it to meet the requirements of each school. This is perfectly acceptable, however, make sure you do not send an essay detailing your excitement about School A's curriculum to School B by mistake.

Your statement should be serious, honest, and sincere, and the tone should be confident and positive; any negative information you feel compelled or are required to discuss should be addressed in other parts of the application or in an addendum.

Personal Statement Format

Personal statements are typically two double-spaced pages, though you may find that some schools will give more latitude in length. If schools do not provide guidelines on length, it is advisable to submit a statement that is approximately two pages in length. A few schools will limit the number of words permitted and you should abide by their guidelines.

Law schools will be looking for evidence that you can write a coherent statement. Follow general guidelines for writing essays: there should be introductory and concluding paragraphs, each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence, and there should be a clear line of development through the statement. Support your ideas with concrete examples and use action words to show the reader, rather than just tell them. Allow the reader to draw inferences from your descriptions rather than explicitly stating your positive qualities. Listing your strengths is never good; rather, you want to develop an essay that showcases those qualities (character, values, commitment, passion, etc.).

Proofread carefully, as any typographical or grammatical errors will detract from the favorable impression the statement might otherwise make. Do not use large words in an attempt to impress readers; instead, use simple language correctly, and rely on well-organized, interesting content to make an impression. Seek advice and input from various people once you have written your personal statement.

Addendum

As mentioned above, you typically do not want to discuss negative information in your personal statement. If there is a weakness in your application and you think your explanation will help your cause, you should address it in the addendum. Your discussion in the addendum should be brief and to the point; identify the issue, describe how you dealt with it, and state the outcome. Remember, an addendum is not a second personal statement.

Letters of Recommendation

Most law schools request that one or two letters of recommendation be submitted on behalf of applicants. Even if letters of recommendation are not required, you are still strongly encouraged to submit them. Admissions committees will be seeking information not provided elsewhere in the applications. Recommendation letters should include concrete examples of intellectual strength, judgment, motivation, and leadership, along with an appraisal of communication skills and a comparison to peers.

Appropriate Letter Writers

Recommendation letters written by members of the academic community carry the most weight, since they can address your performance in an academic setting and discuss your potential for success in law school. Law schools value letters that address a student's writing, class participation, research, analytical skills, and other academic abilities. They are especially interested in a professor's assessment of a student, as compared to other students he or she has taught over the years. At least one letter should be from a professor in your undergraduate major, if possible.

As you consider whom to ask, remember that it is better to have an in-depth letter from a teaching assistant or lecturer with whom you worked closely than to have a cursory letter from a renowned professor who barely knows you. Letters from people outside academia may carry less weight, since they may be unable to address the topic of greatest interest to admissions committees: your academic potential. However, if you have been in the work force a couple of years or more, letters from supervisors can be helpful. Law schools are typically less impressed with letters from well-known politicians since the letters tend to be demonstrative in praise but containing little to no essential information about the applicant's academic skills.

Asking for a Recommendation

Make an appointment to meet with letter writers well in advance of the application deadline. Ask them, "Do you feel you know my work well enough to write a positive letter on behalf of my application to law school?" Provide information about your background to assist him/her in writing a detailed letter:

- A copy of your transcript.
- A draft of your personal statement.
- A resume.
- Copies of exams or papers written in his/her class.
- Recommendation forms from CAS or the law schools.
- Stamped envelopes addressed to LSAC.
- A list of dates when recommendations are due.

Be sure to discuss waiving your right of access to your letters. You may want to waive your right since you may find some writers unwilling to write letters if applicants have access to them, and some admissions committee members may discount disclosed letters.

If you have not been notified that your application is complete by about one month before a deadline, contact the school to see if your recommendations have arrived. Speak with those writers who have not sent letters yet to remind them politely of the approaching deadline. After you have received decisions, send thank-you letters to your recommenders, and let them know where you have been accepted and where you intend to enroll.

Number of Recommendations

You can submit additional letters even though a school asks for only one or two. Three letters will be acceptable at most schools, and four should be considered the absolute maximum.

Letter of Recommendation (LOR) Service

LOR services are offered as a convenience to Credential Assembly Service (CAS) registrants, recommendation/evaluation writers, and law schools. A letter discusses the qualities and characteristics of the applicant's ability, academic and otherwise, to study law. Letters may be submitted electronically or on paper, depending on the recommender's preference. Use of [LSAC's LOR service](#) is optional unless a law school to which you are applying states that its use is required. These services allow you to use your LSAC.org account to have your LORs and evaluations sent to law schools based on each school's requirements or preferences. Letters will be maintained for five years from the time you register for CAS or from the time you take the LSAT, whichever comes last.

Admissions Decisions

The timetable for reviewing law applications and informing applicants of admissions decisions varies from school to school. Notifications can come any time between December and late spring/early summer. Applicants are informed by e-mail or letter of the schools' decisions; candidates are either accepted, denied, or wait-listed, which means the applicant is considered a desirable candidate and may be admitted later.

Law schools often place applicants on "hold" or "reserve" prior to reaching a decision and frequently notify candidates of this status. Applications of those on hold or reserve are reconsidered at a later date, usually before the files of those who have been wait-listed.

Enhancing Your Application

There are several things you can do to improve your chances of admission if you are on reserve or have been wait-listed:

- ❑ Write a letter to the director of admissions to inform him/her of your strong interest in the school and to provide an update on your activities since you submitted your application.
- ❑ If the school is your first choice, state that you will attend if accepted.
- ❑ If you are a senior, inform the school of accomplishments since you applied. Perhaps you have completed your honors thesis or you were accepted into Phi Beta Kappa.
- ❑ If you are currently working, describe your professional responsibilities and include an updated resume.
- ❑ Send an additional letter of recommendation from a professor or employer; however, the total number of recommendation letters on your behalf should not exceed four.
- ❑ Visit the law school to demonstrate your strong interest. Contact the admissions office to arrange a tour and sit in on a class or two. Some admissions officers will agree to meet with applicants, but generally these discussions are not evaluative.

Making a Decision

An actual visit to the law schools you have been admitted to can be invaluable when making your final decision. Not only will you be able to take a tour of each school and attend classes, you have the opportunity to meet faculty and staff and speak with current students about their perspective on factors important to you, such as accessibility of faculty, career services, competitiveness of students, etc. Follow up with a thank-you letter to the admissions office stating what impressed you about the school. If you are unable to visit the school, contact the admissions office to inquire about current students and alumni who may be available to speak with you. Cost and financial aid awards should also be considered when making a decision. If you will be entering law school with debt accumulated as an undergraduate, financial factors can play an even greater role in your decision. Ultimately, you need to decide which school is best for you and where you can thrive as a law student. Your performance in law school will have a significant impact on the type of employment opportunities available to you after graduation.

You will typically be required to submit a deposit to each school you are accepted to, to hold your space. Deposits may be due before you hear from all schools. Contact schools that accept you to explain your situation and ask if they would be willing to extend the deposit deadline. Once you have reached a final decision on which school you will attend, notify all schools you were accepted to so that they can offer your seat to someone else.

Reapplying Later

If you are **not accepted** at a law school you would like to attend, consider retaking the LSAT if you feel that you can improve your score, or revising your list of schools if you decide to reapply. Working for a few years can make a difference in the admissions process and can also provide exposure to another career field that might engage your interest.

Financing Law School

Law school is an important investment in your future. Consider the financial aid process as seriously as you do the law school application process. Before you apply to law school, spend money wisely and pay your bills on time to ensure a good credit record. Bad credit will affect your ability to borrow money. If possible, pay off credit cards and other consumer debt before law school.

Think about your post-law school goals. Salaries for lawyers vary widely, depending on the type of practice and region. Law school debt may claim a significant portion of your income as a lawyer, so consider ways to keep debt at a minimum, such as state-supported schools or schools that offer merit-based aid. If you are considering a career in government or public interest law, investigate loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) that help law school graduates repay their education debt.

Funding Sources

It is often said, “If you live like a lawyer in law school, you will live like a law student once you graduate.” Frugality can be your best friend when preparing for law school.

- ❑ **Personal Savings/Family Support:** If possible, set aside your own funds to help pay for law school. Talk with family members about whether they can help with law school expenses. Some students choose to live at home during law school to avoid paying rent.
- ❑ **Federal Loans:** Many students rely primarily on federal loan programs to finance law school. Total federal aid is available to cover (but not exceed) the law school’s student expense budget, which includes tuition and fees, room and board, books and supplies, transportation, and other expenses. Because you are applying for graduate study, you are considered independent of your parents for these loans.
- ❑ **Private Loans:** Credit is an important factor in securing private loans. Interest rates, fees, and terms of repayment vary significantly. It is best to work with your law school financial aid office BEFORE making a decision about loans for law school. Beware of direct marketing from private lenders. It is possible to finance your legal education entirely through federal financial aid programs which are regulated by the federal government and typically have lower interest rates.

- ❑ Grants and Scholarships: Grants and scholarships are offered by law schools based upon criteria set by the school, which can include academic merit, financial need, ethnicity, specific talents, residency or other qualifications. Check with each law school early in the application process for more information. Law schools may offer merit scholarships to highly qualified applicants with an offer of admission. When law schools consider your financial need, they may require family income information even if you are considered independent for tax purposes, or for federal education loans. Some states provide limited grants for law school; there are no federal grants for law students. Certain national foundations and organizations offer grants and scholarships for law school through a competitive application process.
- ❑ Earnings: The American Bar Association sets limits on the number of hours a first-year law student can work per week. After the first year, many law students obtain summer employment and part-time employment during the school year. This can help reduce the amount of money borrowed.

Applying for Financial Aid

Before you begin the financial aid process, check your credit. You can order a free copy of your credit report from annualcreditreport.com; once you receive your report you should review the information for accuracy. Certain loans may not be available to you if your credit history does not meet minimum standards.

It is very important to apply early for financial aid. Check each law school's website for their aid deadlines. Some schools have priority dates for submitting financial aid information; students who apply earlier have a better opportunity to obtain limited grant money.

Complete your [FAFSA](#) as soon as possible after January 1. Completion of the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) is required for all federal student loan programs. The FAFSA is also used by some law schools to collect information for their own institutional aid. Because the FAFSA requires tax information from the previous year, it cannot be completed before January 1. Some schools have separate applications for financial aid, while others use the law school application or the FAFSA. Schools also vary in how they distribute their own funds. Do not wait to complete the FAFSA until after you are admitted to a law school. You can list up to six law schools where you want reports sent, and update this list with additional schools.

If you have special circumstances, provide this information to the law school financial aid office. This can be critical for law students who have been working full-time in the prior year or who have unusual medical or family expenses.

Financial Aid Decisions

Once you have provided all required information, law schools can offer you a financial aid package. To determine your financial need, schools take the estimated contribution calculated by the federal government on your FAFSA and subtract it from the school's student expense budget. In deciding which law school to attend, it is important to balance your financial considerations with other criteria, such as reputation, location, size, faculty, programs and placement success. Compare the net of your projected costs at each school you are considering, offset by any offers of grants or scholarships from the school, to determine the amount you will need to make up through loans or personal funds.

Once you have chosen a law school, expect to receive important additional financial information from the school. Even though you have already completed the FAFSA and law school financial aid forms, you must still apply for the loans. Your law school financial aid office will help you identify the correct process for securing federal loans, and, if needed, private loans. Do your homework to compare fees and repayment terms for all of your loans, using loan calculators available on financial aid websites. Keep good records of all loan transactions.

Borrow only what you need, and not more, to keep your debt low and your monthly repayment amount manageable.

Financial Aid Resources

- ❑ [Federal Student Aid](#)
- ❑ Information on public interest law programs and law school loan repayment assistance programs ([LRAP](#))
- ❑ [Student guide to financial aid](#)
- ❑ [Financial aid search engine](#)

Legal Career Resources

The Law School Admission Council provides a comprehensive listing of resources to help prospective law students explore legal careers, consider legal education, apply to law school, and finance their law school education.

Law Related Organizations

[American Bar Association \(ABA\)](#) is the national organization of the legal profession. The Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the ABA is identified by the U.S. Department of Education as the “nationally recognized accrediting agency for professional schools of law.”

[Council on Legal Education Opportunity \(CLEO\)](#) assists economically and educationally disadvantaged applicants in preparing for law school.

[Law School Admission Council \(LSAC\)](#) is a nonprofit corporation comprising 210 law schools in the U.S. and Canada that provides services to the legal education community.

[The Association for Legal Career Professionals \(NALP\)](#) is dedicated to facilitating legal career counseling and planning, recruitment and retention, and the professional development of law students and lawyers.

[HEATH Resource Center](#) is a national clearinghouse for persons with disabilities.

The following organizations can provide advice and help to minority candidates applying to law school:

- ❑ [ABA Commission on Racial and Ethnic Diversity in the Profession](#)
- ❑ [Hispanic National Bar Association](#)
- ❑ [Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund](#)
- ❑ [NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund](#)
- ❑ [National Asian Pacific American Bar Association](#)
- ❑ [Native American Rights Fund](#)