

GETTING INTO LAW SCHOOL

A GUIDE FOR PRE-LAW STUDENTS

KNOWLEDGE IS INDEED POWER.

Students considering or preparing to enter law school can use this guide as a resource before, during and after the admissions process. This guide, published by [AdmissionsDean.com](https://www.admissionsdean.com), is a compilation of helpful insights, advice and details regarding admissions, first year law school experience and financial investment. These articles offer expertise from law school admissions deans, financial aid officers and other legal education professionals from around the country.

 **ADMISSIONSDEAN**

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A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LSAT

The Law School Admission Test, or LSAT, is the test required for admission to any law school accredited by the American Bar Association. Since it is the test to get into law school, you might think the LSAT would test your knowledge of the law, but it does not. Instead, the LSAT attempts to measure the abilities and skills you will need to succeed in law school and as a lawyer.

According to LSAC, the producers of the test, 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.”

How do they measure these skills? By using various types of questions, each designed to test specific abilities. Let’s look at the sections that make up an LSAT:

- > Two scored sections of Logical Reasoning (short arguments, 24-26 questions each)
- > One scored section of Reading Comprehension (three long reading passages, 2 short comparative reading passages, 26-28 total questions)
- > One scored section of Analytical Reasoning (four logic games, 22-24 total questions)
- > One unscored experimental section of one of the above three section types (the experimental section is not specified as such, and there is no way to determine which section is experimental during the test)

You are given 35 minutes to complete each section, with a break of 10 to 15 minutes between the 3rd and 4th sections. The five-section test is followed by a 35 minute, unscored writing sample.

Note that while this writing section is unscored, law schools will receive a copy of your writing sample with your score report.

The typical LSAT takes about 4 hours to complete, and you normally receive your scores back within three weeks. To register for the test, visit www.lsac.org.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE LSAT IN LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

You may be surprised to note that your LSAT score is one of the most important factors in determining which law schools will offer you admission. Your LSAT score may be of at least equal importance as your undergraduate GPA and it could, at times, outweigh your personal statement, work history, and recommendations.

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Use this information to your advantage. If your GPA is below the median for the school of your choice, a relatively good LSAT score could make you more competitive, and if your GPA is well above the median for your dream school, a relatively high score on the LSAT could help earn you a spot.

WHEN TO TAKE THE LSAT

The LSAT is administered four times a year: February, June, September/October and December. If you are still in school and wish to attend law school immediately after graduating, you should take the LSAT before or during the fall of your senior year in college. The earlier you take the LSAT, the more time you will then have to prepare your law school applications (and applying early gives you an admission advantage).

If you are no longer in school, then take the LSAT in June the year prior to your planned law school matriculation. Taking it in June will give you the opportunity to retake the test in September/October should that be necessary.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE LSAT

Everyone can be trained to understand the logic of the LSAT although various learning styles necessitate different approaches to preparing. Some students learn effectively working with books or tests on their own, while others benefit from the interaction of a live classroom. An online course can be a great option for some, while others seek the assistance of a personal tutor. In deciding what will work best for you, start by considering your particular learning style.

Note that the different approaches can vary significantly in cost. Books are typically the least expensive option but you have to be motivated to study and be a good self-learner. Courses are more expensive but they often provide a lot of material, along with a set schedule and general study plan. Tutoring tends to be the most expensive approach but it is completely personalized and focused solely on your needs, which can make this approach an efficient one.

WHERE TO START

Now that you have the basics of the test covered, the next step is to take a sample LSAT and see how it goes. Getting an initial, baseline score will help you identify your strengths and weaknesses, and your results can help you decide what type of preparation is best for you. Whatever your chosen approach to preparation, good luck with the test. ■

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INTERPRETING THE NUMBERS: The Importance of LSAT and UGPA in an Admission Decision

There are usually many questions about how important the numbers – LSAT score and Undergraduate GPA (UGPA) – are in the law school admissions process. If these were the only two things admissions committees looked at, the job would be very simple and quick. My guess is that schools would have a computer program figure out who to admit by imputing those two numbers and a list of admits would be produced. However, this is not true. Every application gets reviewed and is given serious consideration.

These “numbers” are important but they are only one of several pieces of the law admission application puzzle. We do not use an index for evaluating our applicants and the committee does not assign a quantitative value to any component of the application. The admissions committee takes a holistic view of each applicant and reviews every part of every application. The importance of any given component of the application will depend on the strengths and weaknesses of the application as a whole. Reading applications is the most important part of the admissions committee’s role.

It is probably popular advice that you should try to do your best with all parts of the application including the LSAT and UGPA. Presenting as strong as possible everything that is asked of you by the admissions committee is very important. The LSAT is an important part of your application. Although no one factor is a perfect indicator of academic potential, studies demonstrate that the LSAT is a relatively reliable predictor of law school performance. However, the committee evaluates the LSAT in the context of your overall application and an applicant’s LSAT score is not the sole factor in any application. The committee will read every component of your application in its entirety regardless of your LSAT score.

The UGPA is another three-digit number like the LSAT, but there are many factors that are evaluated when considering the UGPA. The committee uses your cumulative GPA as calculated by the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). We will also look at the GPA at your undergraduate degree institution, the GPA within your major, the percentile ranking in comparison to other law school candidates from the same institution (as reported by CAS), academic honors, the difficulty of the academic program, the academic quality of the degree-conferring institution and any trends in your academic performance. Because we consider many factors, successful students show considerable GPA variation and come from a wide range of undergraduate institutions.

Again the two-number components of the application process, the UGPA and the LSAT, are important but they are not the only part of the process. When putting together your application, make sure that all the pieces of the puzzle are as strong as they can be. ■

Editor’s Note: You can interpret your own numbers and compare your UGPA and LSAT scores to other applicants in the current admissions cycle by setting up a free profile at AdmissionsDean.com.



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WRITING A WINNING PERSONAL STATEMENT

For most law schools, the personal statement is a vital element of the application package. Some schools may list specific questions to answer while many allow you to choose what to write about. If schools ask you specific questions, be sure you cover what they are asking. If it is open ended, there is no one formula for the perfect personal statement – it is supposed to be about you, your journey to this point, your goals and so forth.

The personal statement should reflect who you are, why law school is a good choice for you (or that particular institution is a good match for you), and what/how you will contribute to the law school community. Law school is not for spectators so statements that demonstrate you will be proactive in developing opportunities to grow intellectually, professionally and personally tend to be the most powerful. If you wish to explain a weakness or circumstance, do this in an addendum.

- > Proofread your statement very carefully. Be sure your punctuation, grammar and spelling are flawless.
- > Don't just rehash your resume. Carefully choosing the points you wish to make, highlighting your strengths and showing that you will hit the ground running will make your statement more meaningful.
- > Have several people whom you trust review your statement for general feedback but be sure the statement is written by you alone.

If a school specifies a preferred length, then you should adhere to that preference. If it is not specified, the optimal length is approximately two pages (double spaced); however, if you need more room, take it but be succinct and avoid repetitiveness. Short and to the point is often best.

Many people say they have trouble trying to figure out how to start the personal statement and how much to include. Think about it this way: if you had 10 minutes in a room with the people who will be deciding on your application, what are the most important things they need to know about you? Start writing randomly and keep reworking your statement until it really captures the range and depth of who you are. While law schools are certainly looking to admit bright students who can do the work, they also want to know you will be diligent in preparing for class, willing to engage in the discussion and be fun to teach. ■



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INCLUDING A RESUME: FORMATTING AND CONTENT

Including a resume with your application can play a significant role in the admissions decision process. Why do admissions committees ask for a resume? Simply put, we want to get to know more about candidates beyond what they've provided in other parts of their application. In regards to professional work, leadership experiences and volunteer efforts, the resume is a great opportunity for applicants to demonstrate the “well-roundedness” that many law schools look for when reviewing applications.

Like with any part of the application, the first thing an applicant needs to ensure is to follow the application directions when constructing their resume. If the law school instructs an applicant to submit a one-page resume, do not submit a resume that is two pages in length – no matter how valuable the applicant thinks that additional information may be to the admissions committee. If the law school indicates that the font of the resume should not be smaller than 10-point font and should be in Times New Roman, the applicant should not submit a resume that is 8-point font in Wingdings. Following directions is a critical part of the law school application process and there is no better way to get on the wrong side of the admissions committee when applicants do not adhere to simple instructions.

So applicants are probably wondering what to do if they have two pages worth of valuable information but they're struggling with space, page and font limitations. The short answer is to get creative and select the most valuable information to put on the resume.

Depending on the limitations set by the law school, the resume may very well only be a listing of professional activities and volunteer efforts and nothing more. But if they're following the directions, providing the information that the law school is seeking, and complying with their guidelines, applicants should feel comfortable that the resume they submit is an appropriate one.

If the law school does not provide specific instructions on the format or content of the resume, applicants should follow common sense guidelines in crafting their resume. More specifically, make sure that the resume is clear, concise, grammatically correct and professional looking. They should include professional work, leadership roles, volunteer efforts, education, research and any other areas the applicant feels would be important information for the admissions committee during its evaluation. As with the entire application, applicants are trying to make a positive impression on the admissions committee and they should not try to stand out for the wrong reasons.

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One of the common mistakes that applicants make when submitting their resume to law schools is that they submit a resume similar to one that they would submit when applying to a job. The key difference, however, is that they're applying to law school and *not* a job. When students start undergrad, many career coaches began drilling into their minds that employers only want to see a one-page resume and submitting anything more will find their resume in the trash bin. So students had to be very selective in what they put on the resume, which was probably education, professional experiences, and any experiences or skills relevant to the job that they were applying for. (Again, if the law school instructs them to submit a one-page resume, applicants should follow those instructions.)

But in this instance, they're not applying for a *job*, they're applying to *law school*, and law schools generally want a lot more than what an employment resume will contain. If the law school has not confined applicants to a one-page resume format or has given them an opportunity to submit multiple pages, they should take full advantage of it. Remember that applicants don't have the ability to go back-and-forth with the admissions committee (unless the school offers interviews as part of their process) and so they would want to provide the committee with as much information as they can about the experiences they've had.

Another common mistake made by applicants regarding the resume is not providing additional context to some of their experiences. For example, often when we read resumes, applicants will put down something simply as "Annual Burnt Orange Race – Chair" and nothing else. After further exploration, it turns out that the race hosts over 200,000 runners each year to fund a charitable organization and the roles and responsibilities of the chair are quite extensive dealing with finances and logistics. Gleaning over those details is a missed opportunity for the applicant to show the admissions committee a great leadership role they played in chairing that event. Provide the context if space allows it, as that will take the guessing game out for the committee.

The resume is a very important element to the law school application. Students often ask how they can stand apart from other applicants who may be similar in other aspects of their application, i.e., LSAT, grade point average, etc. An applicant who provides a resume rich with details and experiences can impact the admissions committee in a positive way. ■



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LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Letters of recommendation allow admissions officers the opportunity to hear from a third party about an applicant’s candidacy, and as such, play a unique role in the assessment process. Effective recommendations can comment on a wide variety of different characteristics or skills that speak to the applicant’s ability to perform in an academic or professional setting, and will reflect an awareness of how the applicant performs in comparison with his or her peers. It is important for candidates to think strategically about letters of recommendation.

We outline the following advice about who should write your recommendations and how to approach a potential recommender, as well as how many letters are needed.

WHOM SHOULD I ASK TO WRITE ON MY BEHALF

For the applicant who applies directly from college, letters written by faculty members are absolutely key. Choosing faculty members who know you well is essential; this may be your thesis advisor, or someone with whom you have taken more than one class, or simply someone with whom you have worked very closely. What is not essential, however, is that the letter writer has a certain academic pedigree. Too often applicants believe that letter writers must be the chair of the department, when a letter from a TA would provide more detailed information about the applicant and thus could be more effective.

If an applicant has two or more years of work experience, a letter from the employer is strongly recommended. If more than one letter is required, a letter from the current employer and a letter from a faculty member provide a nice balance. We understand that some applicants may not wish to tell their employer of their possible departure. In this case, a trusted advisor such as a colleague or supervisor in another department will work, or perhaps someone who has supervised your work for an extended period in a volunteer setting.

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Finally, think about whether there are any topics you wish an admissions officer to know but that might be awkward for you to address. Those topics might be best handled by a recommender. A spotty academic record because of work demands or family challenges? An anomalous instance of misconduct that is contradicted by the rest of your record? A personal history that puts your achievements into an even more impressive context? For situations like these, having an outside voice attest to the subject often provides an elegant solution to a conundrum.

HOW SHOULD I APPROACH A RECOMMENDER

Once an applicant identifies the person to write the letter, the next step is to gather information to assist the recommender. Be prepared to provide a copy of your resume, a draft of your personal statement and examples of work you have performed for the recommender. The more information an applicant can provide the recommender, the better the letter. Remember, the most effective letter is the one that demonstrates the writer knows the applicant very well. In fact, the strongest letters are those that speak to the candidate outside of the classroom or professional environment. For example, a faculty member who addresses the applicant's extracurricular activities or professional experiences, or mentions the applicant's effectiveness in peer interactions, shows the reader the strength of the relationship.

Occasionally, an applicant misjudges the strength of his or her relationship with a proposed recommender, with the result that the letter is vague or tepid – and even if in no way actually negative, the lack of explicit affirmative support can create doubt in an admissions officer's mind about the judgment and interpersonal skills of the applicant.

Avoid this by allowing your recommenders an “out.” Ask them if they can write a strong letter of recommendation and if you perceive any hesitation, politely withdraw the request. It is far better to do the work to find an alternative letter writer than to risk a letter that will create a negative impression. And for that reason, be sure to allow plenty of time to identify your letter writers (as well, of course, time for them to write the letters).

HOW MANY LETTERS SHOULD I SUBMIT

It depends. The first consideration has to be individual school requirements. Assuming a school will consider more than one letter, be sure to provide a mix that will paint the fullest possible picture. For example, for the applicant directly from college, a letter from a faculty member in the candidate's major and a letter from a writer outside of the major can show nice diversity of training and demonstrate consistent performance in the classroom, even in areas that aren't the candidate's principal academic focus. For the working professional, a letter from the direct supervisor and a second letter from a supervisor from another department with whom the candidate has interacted can show great flexibility in the work place, as well as strong interpersonal skills.

Often, the letters of recommendation are neutral in an application. They speak in generalities and fail to incline the reader in one direction or another. That's a lost opportunity. Strong, detailed, supportive letters of recommendation are impressive and make a candidate stand out – and on occasion, can be the decision-making difference. ■



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THE IMPORTANCE OF FIRST YEAR GRADES

At some point early in your first year of law school, if not before you matriculate, many people will talk with you about first year grades and how important they are to your law school career. Why exactly are they so important? Are they really that important? Below are a few reasons why “doing well” in the first year can be critical.

IT IS VERY DIFFICULT TO SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGE YOUR CLASS RANK AFTER YOUR FIRST YEAR

Most law schools grade on a curve during the first year. After the first year, most students have an understanding of how their professors teach and have a good understanding of how to study in law school. As a result, most students will get relatively the same grades in the second and third year. Therefore, the first year grades end up making the difference in who is ranked in the top of the class and who isn't.

LARGE LAW FIRM JOBS

At several points during your law school career, you may have the opportunity to participate in on campus interviews for employment. In a lot of cases, large law firms only want to interview students who are in the top of the class. The top of the class will vary from school to school, but is typically defined as the top 10-20%. Because it is difficult to significantly change your class rank after your first year, these grades are the ones that will determine not only if you will be eligible to interview for large firm jobs during the summers that you are a student but also whether you will graduate with grades high enough to get a large law firm job after graduation.

LAW REVIEW

The law review is typically the premier scholarly publication in a law school. The law review publishes legal articles written by professors, students, judges and other members of the legal profession. Because these articles are frequently cited by courts or are otherwise influential in the development of the law, the articles or other works submitted for publication must be thoroughly researched and checked for accuracy of sources, in addition to grammar, spelling, punctuation and other hallmarks of good writing. The most popular way to become a member of the law review is by “grading on.” Grading on usually means that being in the top 10-20% of the class (varies by school) garners you an invitation to join the staff of the law review. While schools have other ways of joining the law review, including open writing competitions, grading on is the way most people join law review. In addition, membership on the law review is often one of the requirements that large law firms have if you want to interview for a job.

Editor's note: For an early introduction of what to expect in law school plus the skills and strategies to do well in class and on exams, consider taking the [Law Preview](#) course.

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JUDICIAL CLERKSHIPS

While you can be successful getting a clerkship without being in the top of the class, most of the federal clerkships, especially those at the appellate and Supreme Court level, require that you be at the very top of your class. In addition, many of them require that you also be a member of the law review. Having very good grades and being a member of the law review can send the message to a judge that you have excellent research and writing skills, which are absolutely essential to being an effective judicial clerk.

SCHOLARSHIPS

There are quite a few schools that require a certain grade point average or class rank in order to keep the scholarship you were awarded as an incoming first year student. There are also law schools that have scholarships for continuing students that are based on your grades in law school. Thus, getting good first year grades can provide an opportunity to reduce the cost of attending law school.

While first year grades can be important in pursuing certain career paths, it is important to remember that you should not become overly stressed out over grades that it actually impacts your performance in law school or even worse, your health. Most students find the employment they want without being in the top 10% of their classes. Participation in moot court, mock trial and other advocacy activities can also help you in your employment search. In addition, you should participate in activities that allow you to expand your network of legal professionals. Being involved in student government and other student organizations is a great way to expand your network.

Doing well in your first year of law school expands the options available to you as a law student and can be a stepping stone to careers at large law firms and academia, but your grades don't have to define who you are nor are they an indication of the kind of lawyer you will be. If you study and prepare as well as you can and take advantage of the faculty and other academic resources that are available, you can have a completely fulfilling law school experience which will lead to a fulfilling career. ■



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TRANSFERRING AFTER 1L YEAR & VISITING DURING 3L YEAR

THE PROS & CONS OF TRANSFERRING LAW SCHOOLS

As students choose which law school to attend, it is important that they not only choose the institution that will be the best fit for the first year, but also the institution where they intend to take all classes and complete the J.D. program. The typical course for a law school career is to matriculate and to graduate from the same institution. That said, transferring from one law school to another is possible and has become increasingly popular in the past 15 years. There are also students who may take one or two semesters at other law schools during their second or third years as visiting students.

WHY TRANSFER

Different individuals have different reasons for wanting to leave the law school where they initially enrolled in order to transfer, including: (1) wanting to complete the J.D. at a more prestigious institution that will afford greater career opportunities; (2) finding that there are not a sufficient number of courses or clinical programs at their current school in a new area of law that sparked their interest; (3) experiencing unexpected changes in faculty that resulted in not being able to pursue specific independent coursework or research; (4) needing to be closer to family because of unexpected illness or other personal issues; (5) wanting to move to be closer to a spouse or partner who is relocating for work or educational programs; and/or (6) simply coming to the realization in the first year of legal study that the law school initially selected is the wrong fit and wanting to move to a school at which one believes he or she will be better able to excel and thrive.

Although most law school communities welcome transfer students with open arms, there are a few important considerations to keep in mind when thinking about transferring. First, law school credits will transfer but grades and class rank will not. Thus, transfer students begin their careers at the new institution from scratch, at least grade- and class rank-wise. Likewise, if a student was selected for law review at his or her institution at the end of first year, that law review status will not transfer to the new school. Most law schools offer a limited write-on competition for transfer students seeking to be on law review, but there is no guarantee and slots typically are very limited. If a student's main or sole motivation to transfer is to gain access to greater employment prospects, he or she will enter the fall recruiting process at the new school with a transcript that reflects only performance at the school from which he or she transferred. There are some cases in which transfer students are

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at some disadvantage in second year fall recruiting programs. From a social standpoint, many schools bring in a critical mass of transfer students who will bond with one another, but it can be sometimes challenging for transfer students to become fully integrated into communities of students that have had that 1L bonding experience together. Transfer students may be limited in the number of clinical or externship credits they may take at the new law school and also may not be eligible to participate in study abroad programs or for induction into the Order of the Coif. Finally, most law schools do not provide any scholarships or grants to transfer students. The typical financial aid package for transfer students will be in the form of loans only.

TRANSFER ADMISSION PROCESS

The transfer admission process at all law schools is competitive. In order to be a strong transfer candidate, a student must be in the top of his or her law school class at the end of the first year. One should never begin law school at one institution intending or planning to transfer to another after one year. Transfer is only a possibility; it cannot be a part of a plan set in stone.

Most law schools admit a number of transfer students each year. The size of entering transfer classes can range from just a few to more than 100. Typically, transfer students are admitted after they have completed the first year at another law school. Although a few schools offer early decision and/or binding transfer processes through which a candidate may be offered transfer admission after only the first semester of law school, the majority of law schools make transfer admission decisions only after applicants have completed their entire first year and are able to provide grades in all courses completed. The majority of transfer decisions are made in late May, June and early July.

Most law schools require that transfer applications be submitted online through the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). Transfer applicants generally must provide: (1) a completed transfer application form; (2) a resume; (3) a short statement explaining why he or she wishes to transfer; (4) one or two letters of recommendation, with at least one being from a law school professor; (5) a letter of good standing from the school from which he or she wishes to transfer; and (6) Credential Assembly Service (CAS) Report provided by LSAC and that will provide undergraduate transcripts, as well as transcripts of any other graduate work completed. In general, performance in the first year is the most important factor for admissions committees considering

transfer applicants. All other information in one's file is also considered, including the strength of the law program from which one seeks to transfer.

Individuals interested in transferring should carefully review the application instructions of each law school. Although the general process is the same at most law schools, each school may have specific and unique requirements.

WHY VISIT AT ANOTHER LAW SCHOOL

Many institutions will admit students from other law schools as visiting students for one or two semesters. Typically, students will visit at another school if their home law schools do not provide some very specific courses or clinical programs in which they are interested. Students may also attempt to visit if there is some family situation that requires them to be closer to home.

An important consideration for students interested in visiting: Different institutions provide different levels of service to visiting students. It is very important that one investigate the level of access he or she will have. A number of law schools will not allow visiting students to work with career service counselors or to participate in on-campus recruiting programs. Visiting students may not be eligible to participate in journals and there may be limits on how involved they may be with student organizations (e.g. it is unlikely that they would be eligible to take on leadership positions in student government or other student organizations).

VISITING APPLICATION PROCESS

A threshold issue for anyone thinking about trying to visit is whether his or her home institution will allow a visit and will accept credits from another law school. Some schools are very liberal about granting permission to visit. Others are very strict or unwilling to allow their students to visit. Some schools may allow visits, but must approve each course that will be taken at another institution. Anyone thinking about visiting should, as a first step, pay a visit to the Dean of Students' Office at his or her home school to find out what may or may not be possible.

Visiting student applications generally are simpler than transfer applications. Schools may require that they be submitted online or may offer a short version of the online application. The visiting student application process is a competitive process, although somewhat less competitive than the transfer process. Financial aid for visiting students typically is awarded and administered through their home institutions. ■



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FINANCING A LAW SCHOOL EDUCATION

Attending law school can be expensive and many prospective students find the high costs intimidating. Tuition, plus living expenses and books, can exceed \$60,000 per year. Most law students have to borrow substantial amounts of money to finance their law school education. The average debt for graduating law students is \$100,000¹ and for students at many private law schools in high cost locations it is over \$150,000.² Given these large figures, it is critical for students to carefully consider which law school is a good investment for their future. The financial implications of their choice will have a lasting impact on their professional and personal lives.

Every law school publishes its current tuition figures and annual cost of attendance (COA). These figures are typically available online or in materials provided by the law school admissions office. The COA is set by the school's financial aid office and includes tuition and fees, as well as estimated costs for books, rent, transportation and miscellaneous personal expenses. In addition to the COA, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) provides a helpful list of the information prospective law students should gather about the financial aid resources available to them from each law school they are considering attending.³

SCHOLARSHIPS

Most law school scholarship awards are based on previous academic achievements and potential for excellence in the study of law. These merit-based awards vary widely at different law schools. It is important to note that the same academic credentials may gain a student admission only to a highly selective school but earn the student admission plus a substantial scholarship at a less selective school. Students should be encouraged to apply to a range of schools and wait to compare the costs until they have received all of their scholarship offers. Several law schools also offer a number of named competitive scholarships with specific criteria such as a commitment to public interest or residence in a particular region. These types of

scholarships may have separate application deadlines and require additional materials.

In most cases, scholarship offers are final. However, if a student is weighing two law school choices and feels constrained by financial concerns, the student can contact the law school admissions office to see if additional money may be available. It is important that the student conducts him or herself professionally in this discussion and is prepared to show documentation of the competing scholarship offer. The student should also be sure to research whether the tuition and cost of attendance minus the scholarship award totals are comparable instead of simply looking at the amount of the awards alone.

Finally, it is critical that a student understands what conditions apply to the scholarship offers. Typical award requirements include maintaining a certain GPA or class rank. For many applicants, these requirements appear relatively easy to meet based on their undergraduate performance. But law school grades are a different animal. Most first year classes only have one final exam and a strict grading curve is imposed. The American Bar Association (ABA) now requires law schools to disclose scholarship retention information on their websites. Applicants should investigate what percentage of first year students are able to retain their scholarships into the second and third years.

continued >

Look beyond law schools for additional sources of scholarship money. Bar associations, local community groups, non-profit organizations, large corporations and law firms often offer scholarships to students who fit specific criteria. Even a small award lightens the overall debt burden.

LOANS

Most need-based aid comes in the form of federal loans and almost every law school relies on the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).⁴ Students should plan to complete this form in January of the admissions application year. Federal loans that may be available to law students include:

- > **Unsubsidized Federal Direct Stafford Loans.** These have a fixed interest rate and origination fee of 1%. Students can borrow up to \$20,500 each academic year. Students are responsible for paying the interest on the loan from the time the loan is disbursed until it is re-paid. They can pay the interest while in school or allow it to accrue.
- > **Graduate PLUS Loans for Law Students.** These have a fixed interest rate, a 4% origination fee and students can borrow up to the COA certified by their law school. It is important to note that Grad PLUS borrowers cannot have an adverse credit history so students need to run a credit check and clear up any issues before completing the FAFSA.
- > **The Perkins Loan program.** It is a federally approved lending program operated by individual law schools and the annual borrowing limit is \$8,000. Perkins loan funds are very limited. These loans are only available to students with “exceptional” financial need and not all schools participate in the program.

The standard loan repayment schedule begins six months after graduation and comprises a 10-year repayment period. Federal loans offer graduated, extended, consolidated and income-driven repayment plans that lower monthly payment amounts but increase the number of years of repayment. Students considering a career in government or public interest law should investigate the Equal Justice Works website for information on Service Loan Forgiveness and Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (LRAPs).⁵

Most students should be able to meet their costs of attendance through a combination of federal loans. The financial aid office will guide the student through the necessary requirements to accept the desired loan amount. In the unique situation where a student may need additional funding (i.e., he or she does not qualify for federal student loans), the student will need to seek loans from a private lender. Private loans vary widely in terms of the loan, amounts, interest rates and their availability. Students should also be aware that private loans are usually not eligible for loan forbearance and forgiveness programs. Additional sources of funding at participating law schools include federal work-study programs and veterans educational assistance. The best source of information for these programs is the school’s financial aid office.

If you live like a lawyer while you’re a student, you’ll have to live like a student while you’re a lawyer. It is important to minimize the amount you borrow. The COA is a good gauge for possible overall costs but might be more than a student needs to actually spend. Every dollar borrowed will cost more to pay back. ■

1. <http://www.finaid.org/loans>
2. <http://www.grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/grad-debt-rankings>
3. <http://www.lsac.org/jd/financing-law-school/financial-aid-questions>
4. <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>
5. <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/ed-debt>



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INTERPRETING THE U.S. NEWS LAW RANKINGS

Deciding on a law school to attend is a very personal decision. I encourage students to make a list of the factors that are important to them when choosing a law school.

Interestingly enough, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) conducted a study of admitted applicants in 2012. Admitted students were asked to rate 22 factors on a one to five scale, where a five is “extremely important” in choosing a law school. Only 53% of candidates responded that rankings would be a four or a five on the scale. (I happen to think the rankings play more of a role than these students were willing to admit.)

There is no reason why students should not consider the rankings in making their choice; however, in order to determine how much weight to give the rankings, they need to understand the methodology used to rank schools. This will better enable them to determine how much weight to give the rankings.

The methodology used by U.S. News (as of the most recent fall 2012 survey) is as follows:

40% OF THE RANKINGS ARE BASED ON TWO REPUTATIONAL SURVEYS AND ARE KNOWN AS “PEER ASSESSMENT SCORES”

- > 25% of each schools’ rank is based on a survey sent to four faculty members at each school each fall: the dean, the dean of academic affairs, the chair of faculty appointments and the most recently tenured faculty member. Each is asked to rate programs on a scale from marginal (1) to outstanding (5). Approximately 63% of these individuals responded to the most recent survey.
- > 15% of each schools’ rank is based on a survey sent to hiring partners of law firms, state attorneys general and selected federal and state judges. Each is asked to rate programs on the same scale as above. Approximately 9% of these lawyers and judges responded in the most recent survey.

continued >

25% IS BASED ON “SELECTIVITY”

- > 12.5% is based on the median LSAT of the schools’ entering class. The high LSAT score is used when multiple tests have been taken and those with accommodated scores do not count.
- > 10% is based on the median undergraduate “cumulative” GPA of the schools’ entering class.
- > 2.5% is based on the percentage of students admitted to the law school.

Both full-time and part-time students are considered in these calculations.

20% IS BASED ON “PLACEMENT SUCCESS”

- > 4% is based on the employment rate at graduation.
- > 14% is based on the employment rate nine months after graduation.
- > 2% is based on the bar passage rate for the school.

In determining placement success, U.S. News assigned various weights to the number of graduates employed in 22 different types of post-J.D. jobs and durations. Full weight is given for graduates who had a full-time job lasting at least a year where bar passage was required or a J.D. degree was an advantage.

15% IS BASED ON “FACULTY RESOURCES”

This category includes average expenditures per student for the past two fiscal years.

- > Average instruction, library and supporting services account for 9.75%.
- > Financial aid accounts for 1.5%.
- > 3% consists of the student-faculty ratio.
- > .75% consists of the total volumes and titles in the law library.

Hopefully this analysis will be helpful to you on selecting the right law school. ■



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TO WAIT OR NOT TO WAIT

WHAT IT MEANS TO BE ON THE WAIT LIST (AND HOW TO GET OFF)

The dreaded waitlist. As a dean of admissions, I know that being placed on a college waitlist is akin to being stuck on a far away island hoping that someone will rescue you. But knowing how to get rescued is entirely up to you, and the same goes with waitlists.

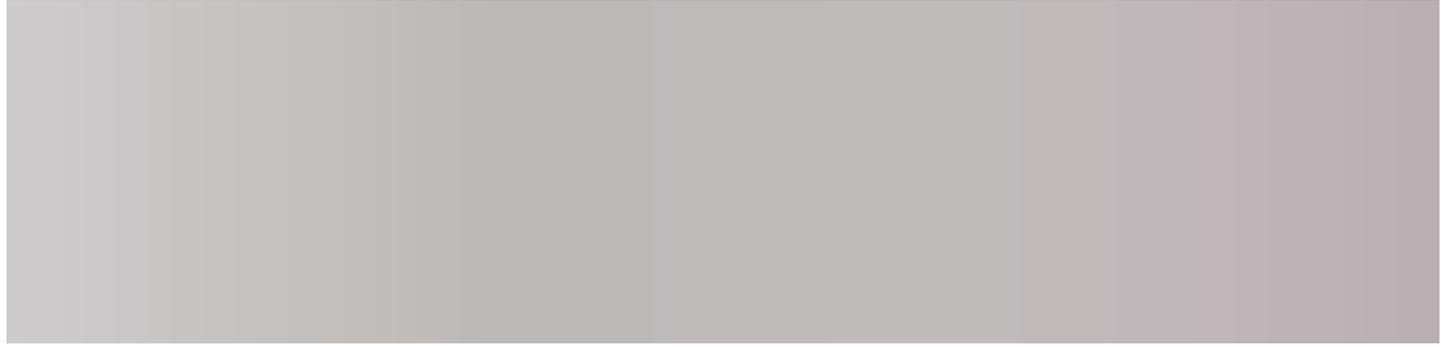
For most institutions the waitlist is a mechanism used to balance all the various needs of the class. It is a tool used to track the size, make-up (diversity) and the quality of the class. No school wants to be oversubscribed or under-enrolled come orientation, so the use of the waitlist is how we manage the class. One thing is for sure – all schools will use some form of “hold” or waitlist. Admission officers are not interested in wasting their offer of admission on a candidate for whom they have not had any contact with. Their goal is to extend as few offers as possible to fill a seat. Consequently, they will be looking at a variety of different factors to determine the likelihood of you accepting their offer.

Applicants should think of being placed on the waitlist as an opportunity at a second bite at the apple. The fact that a school places someone on their waitlist obviously means that there are qualities in the file that remain attractive to them. Candidates should not concern themselves with why they were placed on the list, but rather, what they can do to get off it. Therefore, they need to think about this stage from a procedural perspective, as well as from a strategic manner.

Now some schools will rank their waitlists and tell candidates where they stand. If the list is ranked, it is fair to ask how deep they delved into the waitlist the previous year. This may give a candidate a sense of the likelihood of being accepted. However, it is important to remember that every application cycle is different. One cannot assume that what happened the previous year will be repeated in this cycle. Most schools will not rank their waitlist. Why not? Because they can't read tea leaves any more than you can. They cannot tell what the future will hold as to which candidates may withdraw because the school ahead of them in the rankings has moved on their waitlist.

So, what should a candidate do to get off the waitlist? First and foremost, candidates must read the school's waitlist letter carefully and do exactly as it suggests. Follow the procedures and directions. This is usually a clue as to what the school will be evaluating once it begins review of the waitlist. If it suggests you submit an updated resume or a Letter of Continued Interest (LOCI), then do it. If it encourages you to visit or submit an interview, do it. If it invites you to a special program for waitlist candidates, go. If it says the school will accept additional letters of recommendation, contact some new recommenders. By all means, candidates should demonstrate that they are genuinely interested in their school. But most importantly, follow the instructions.

continued >



Secondly, candidates should be strategic in what they say and what they send to the law school. They should not state that if they are admitted to “X” school, then they will definitely enroll unless they really mean it. This should be reserved only for the school for which it remains true. Lawyers are judged by what they say. Admission officers trust that candidates will honor their word. Therefore, candidates should say what they mean and do what they say. Everything candidates send to the law school should be sent with full knowledge that it will be considered as part of the review process. Emails sent to the admissions general email box and telephone calls are all considered when evaluating candidates. Candidates should be strategic with all interactions with the admission staff. They should also limit the number of phone calls made to check on their status on the waitlist. They do not want to come across as harassing or annoying.

Admission officers would be delighted to finish up enrolling their class by early summer. But the reality is that candidates are constantly changing their minds throughout the summer because they have applied to multiple schools and placed multiple deposits. This restlessness in the applicant pool creates a domino effect in the admissions world. Therefore, we never know precisely when we may need to go to our waitlist. The vast majority of waitlist activity takes place in mid-May to late June, but some candidates can find themselves getting a phone call right up until school starts.

This brings me to the third strategy that candidates should employ. If you are willing to wait until the bitter end, then you should emphatically let the school know. Inevitably schools will have a seat or two to open at the end. Again, the admission officer will not want to wade through a host of people to fill the seat. However, he or she will consult the list of candidates who have expressed interest in waiting until the end – especially those candidates who are local. Local candidates are much more likely to accept an offer than someone who is 1,000 miles away and has already put down housing deposits elsewhere.

We know that the waitlist process is a nightmare for the candidate, but it is just as turbulent for us as well. If we could wrap it all up in a neat bow shortly after the first deposit deadline, then you can rest assured that we would do so. We, too, want to enjoy our summers. ■



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THE LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS INTERVIEW

An interview is one of many tools accessible to applicants within the admission process. Though not uniformly available, the number of law school programs that offer interviews has increased. Too often, applicants consider interviewing as a viable option only when they believe their chances for admission will improve with a face-to-face meeting. I believe that way of thinking is shortsighted. A successful interview is the result of thorough preparation followed by performance during the interview. The effort is well worth the reward, provided prospective students are willing to take time to prepare.

PREPARATION

Identify which law school programs offer interviews from the list of schools you are considering. Once identified, prioritize the program(s) you consider most desirable based upon the factors you deem most important. Ideally, one program will stand out, but when numerous programs make the “list,” it is a good idea, for practicality, to limit yourself to no more than three programs. Once you have determined your targeted programs, look at their interview process and whether it is:

1. by invitation,
2. by request, or
3. informal.

An invitation process is one where an interview is offered at the discretion of the law school, typically to applicants whose applications have received at least a cursory review. Interviews granted by request are initiated by the applicant, though the applicant’s file may not have been reviewed prior to granting the interview. The informal interview is the most common and usually occurs when an applicant meets with

an admission counselor, faculty member or alumnus. Though informal, an assessment of the applicant typically occurs and noteworthy observations are forwarded to the committee or added to the applicant’s file. An interview by invitation is the only one that an applicant cannot initiate. However, it never hurts the applicant to communicate to admission staff that if an interview opportunity becomes available, it would be welcomed and appreciated.

An interview, despite its format, is never an opportunity to “wing it.” Outline the points you wish to address. Identify any perceived weaknesses in your application and be prepared to discuss them if raised. If you request an interview, be prepared to lead the discussion if necessary. On the other hand, if you receive an invitation to interview, ask for the format of the interview and prepare accordingly. Also, ask the name of the person who will conduct the interview and her or his relationship to the law school, if it is not volunteered. In the age of Google, Bing, Facebook and LinkedIn, you should be able to learn something about your interviewer’s background prior to the interview, which may facilitate conversation.

continued >

PERFORMANCE

Regardless of how the interview was initiated, applicant assessment begins when contact is initiated. A polite and professional demeanor extended to the most junior staff member will be remembered and appreciated. Be aware that every aspect of your demeanor will be showcased, hopefully to your benefit.

Dress the part. A suit isn't required but is a nice touch if you have one. However, don't buy one just for this occasion. Save your money for nondiscretionary law school expenses that will come later. Dress slacks and a dress or button-down shirt will suffice for most interviews. Women should feel comfortable wearing the same ensemble, perhaps substituting a skirt for the slacks.

Maintain eye contact and don't forget to smile. You want to hold the attention of the interviewer by making regular eye contact. Nervousness and a few butterflies are normal and expected, but both will dissipate once your interview is underway. The more comfortable you feel during the interview, the better you will present yourself. This is where your preparation will pay off. It is more than appropriate to glance at your notes to ensure you address all of your questions.

Make your case but don't forget to listen. Your interview is a conversation above all else, a natural flow and exchange of information where the interviewee learns more about the law school and available opportunities, while the interviewer gains greater insight into the applicant's skills, strengths, abilities and personality. Hopefully, you will gain information that either cements the program as "the one" or ultimately removes it from further consideration.

Above all else, relish the occasion to present a multidimensional impression of yourself. An interview is an opportunity...so take advantage. ■

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Admissions Cycle: **2012-13** 1-50 1-100 < 1 1 2 3 1 ... 1 124 1 >

APPLICANT	COLLEGE	RANK	GPA	LSAT	ACC	REJ	WAIT	APP	ACTIVITY	VIEWS
meamta					0	0	0	0	about 13 hours	19
amq					0	0	0	0	about 20 hours	21
AJDK				152	2	0	0	0	1 day	18
mly1	Murray St U	N/R			0	0	0	0	1 day	18
mly1	Murray St U	N/R			0	0	0	0	1 day	18
lombomb	UCLA	24			0	0	0	0	1 day	22
Maestro	Boston U	56	3.45	159	0	0	0	0	1 day	256
zeronmme2 UM	U Conn	66	3.54	156	1	0	0	0	1 day	141
kreed					0	0	0	0	1 day	22
bhaylaka	Colo St U	128			0	0	0	0	1 day	22
Kdlee87 UM NT	Berklee Col	N/R			0	0	0	0	2 days	22
TaylorM78	UC-SD	35	3.82	159	0	0	0	0	2 days	22
ichambers9	VCU	3rd Tier			0	0	0	0	2 days	21
taylor1273					0	0	0	0	2 days	20
bd1232321	Georgetown U	23		168	1	0	0	0	4 days	31
ppelo12			2.64	172	0	0	0	0	4 days	31
Katherine UM	Nazareth Col	N/R			0	0	0	0	5 days	80
Mandy78 NT	Bay Path Col	N/R			0	0	0	0	5 days	162
chanelita					0	0	0	0	7 days	229
Cat822					0	0	0	0	8 days	29
Kiharvey09 UM	U Tenn-Merit	N/R	3.5	146	1	0	0	0	8 days	58
ooc11					0	0	0	0	8 days	33
kaikoa89					0	0	0	0	8 days	35
DanKint1991	U TX-EI Paso	4th Tier			0	0	0	0	9 days	49
Brito2013					0	0	0	0	9 days	69
JRosenthal NT	Hofstra U	3rd Tier			0	0	0	0	11 days	98
Hyppm NT	Ariz St Univ	121			0	0	0	0	12 days	232
Rhubarbery	Hood Col	N/R			0	0	0	0	12 days	70
levanil	Duke U	10	4.0	167	1	0	0	2	13 days	76
taz111					0	0	0	0	13 days	76
adfina0223					0	0	0	0	14 days	145
vawagner	Cornell U	15		155	0	0	0	0	14 days	75

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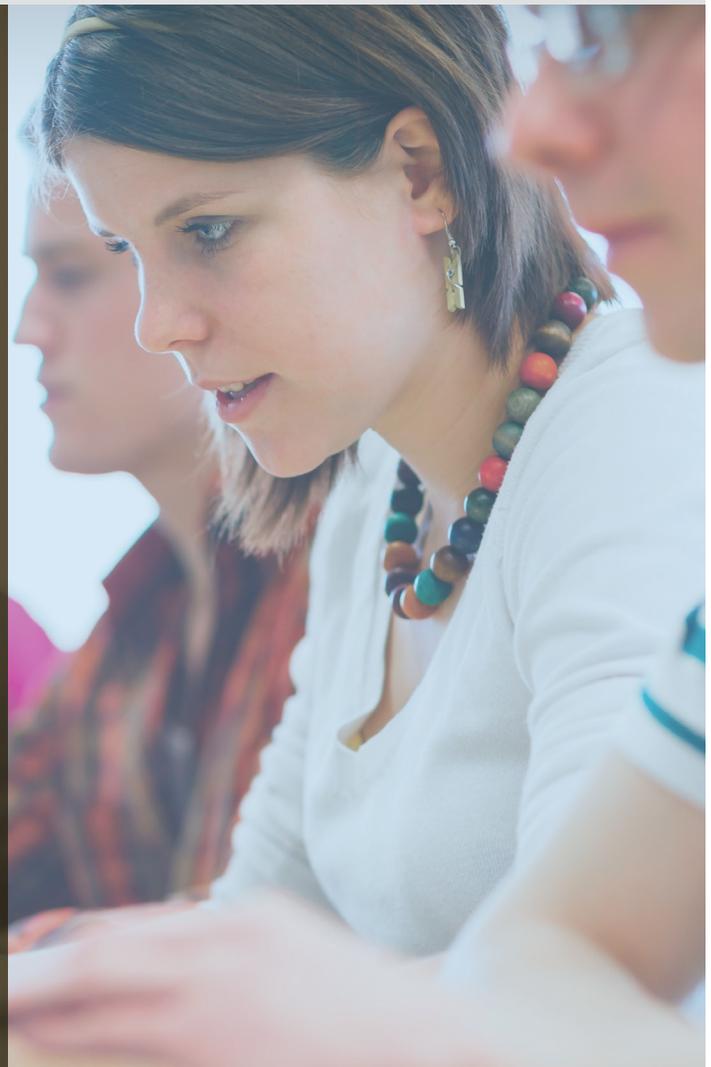
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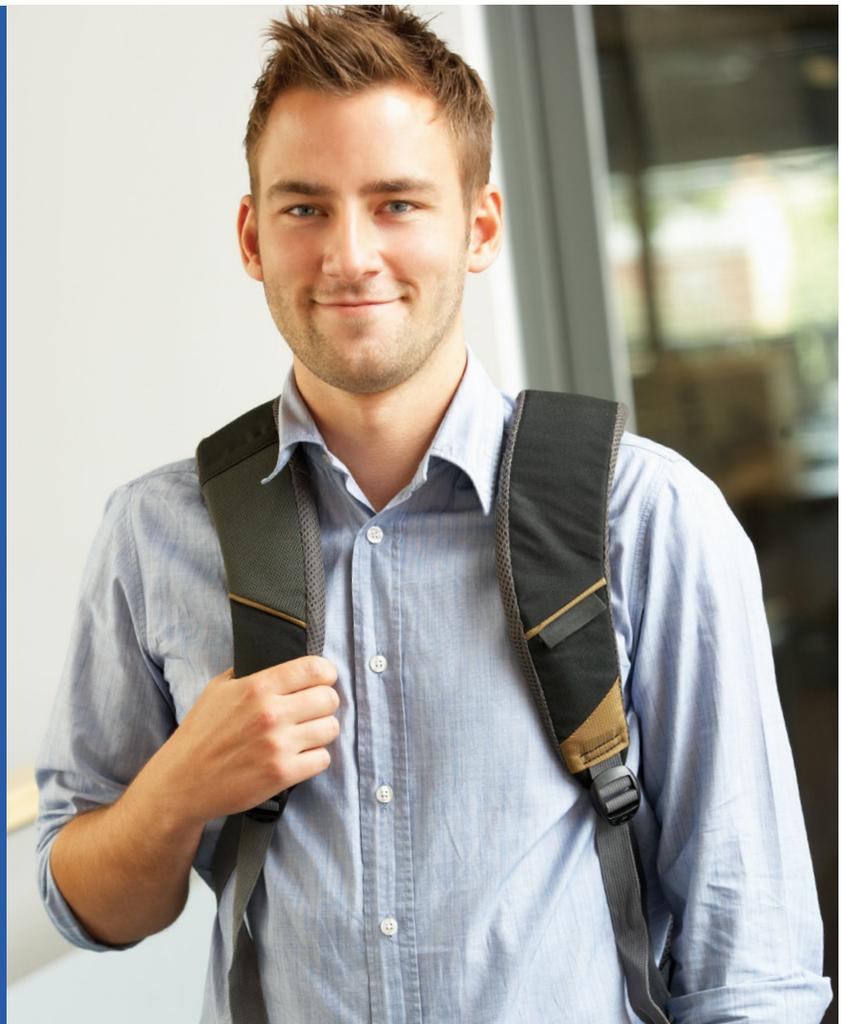
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