EXPLORING AND PLANNING FOR LAW SCHOOL

50 TIPS from 29 EXPERTS
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I’m not 100% certain about earning a law degree. What should I do?

Do more exploration – not only of the legal profession, but also of your own interests and goals. Working after college might give you more clarity about your career goals, and a better understanding of your life goals. It is also beneficial to explore the day-to-day life of attorneys in different types of practices to determine what areas of law might interest you as a practicing attorney.

Dianne McDonald
Pre-Law Advisor, Bucknell University

View the process of exploring the legal field as if you’re choosing a cell phone plan – talk, text, and data.

Talk: This one’s pretty self-explanatory. . . talk to lawyers! It’s very important to get the perspective of those who have already been where you’re trying to go.

Text: Ok, this one’s a little misleading. Here, I mean actual text, as in books. There are tons of great reads published by lawyers, law professors, and even law admissions representatives that can provide critical insight into everything from how to maximize your application for admission to how to make the most of your law school experience and legal career.

Data: As any good researcher will tell you, the only way to collect data is to experiment. Try on the profession for yourself and see how you like it. Look for internships or job opportunities inside of legal environments. These positions will allow you to gain exposure to the field (and actual attorneys) in a more hands-on way. While you won’t be trying any cases at this point, you can certainly learn a lot from watching the attorneys who do.

Rodia Vance
Pre-Law Advisor, Associate Director of the Career Center, Emory University
Past President, Southern Assn. of Pre-Law Advisors (SAPLA)

Since law school is a three-year endeavor and a serious financial commitment, take time to explore why you want to attend. While most students don’t know exactly what area of law they will practice (and I advise students to keep an open mind because interests will likely change), being able to articulate some over-arching goals is important. If your ultimate career goal doesn’t involve taking a bar exam and practicing law, is there another path that would be a better fit such as a master’s degree? Some students benefit from taking a bit of time off before applying to law school and gaining some legal experience, such as working in a law firm or volunteering, to help them decide.

Denise Mallow
Pre-Law Advisor, Montana State University
If you aren’t certain if a law degree is for you, I recommend that you first research the varied and multiple career options and venues for practicing law. Then, either work or volunteer in those settings in some capacity to obtain a first-hand look at how lawyers spend their days and to get a feel for whether the work is truly of interest to you. Other strategies to explore legal careers include reading the many informative books that are available, conducting informational interviews with practicing lawyers, shadowing judges or lawyers, speaking with current law students and speaking to career service professionals at your undergraduate school or the law schools you are researching.

Amee R. McKim  
Director of Legal Recruitment at Duane Morris  
Former Assistant Dean of Professional Development at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law

IS IT BEST TO BEGIN LAW SCHOOL IMMEDIATELY AFTER I GET MY BACHELOR’S DEGREE OR SHOULD I WAIT?

There are advantages (and disadvantages) to both. Going right out of college means you won’t have a chance to earn money or pay down debt and may get burned out without a break. However, you will be familiar with the lifestyle and schedule, including the demands of homework and final exams. By waiting you may find it difficult to later give up a salary or have someone else determine your schedule and priorities for you, but you may have a better sense of what you are looking for as well as a professional perspective and confidence you didn’t have right out of college. As always, the best option is whatever is right for you personally.

Kevin A. Freeman  
Program Manager, Politics, Society, and Law Scholars, The Ohio State University  
President, Midwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors

There is no absolute best time to go to law school. The “best time” is a very personal choice and is grounded in individual circumstances. If you are eager to get started – especially if you have thoroughly researched the field, can articulate why you want to go to law school, how you plan to use the degree, and how you are going to finance your legal education – there is no reason to delay. There are many reasons to wait. Perhaps you want time to augment your application or to confirm your professional interests. Maybe you want to have two or more full semesters of credits under your belt to strengthen your GPA and more time to study for the LSAT, put together a more compelling application, write better essays, obtain stronger reference letters, and research schools more thoroughly. You may need to get finances, personal matters, family life, or health issues in order first. Or you may want a rejuvenating break from the books or need to take care of whatever unfinished “life business” you may have—travel, hobby/interest, service project, and the like before you dive into law school.

Mariella Mecozzi  
Pre-Law Advisor and Senior Assistant Director of Pre-Professional Services, The Career Center, University of Michigan
How often do we as pre-law advisors get the declarative question “I don’t know whether I should go to law school or not?” My response to the student always is, “Given your interests and abilities, what are the possible career paths you could follow and would a legal education/law degree be worth three years of your life and a lot of money?” I go on to say, “Let’s sweep out the underbrush. Do you want to be a master chef? Do you want to be a forest ranger? Do you want to be a sportscaster?” (Apologies to my former pre-law advisee, Jay Bilas!) If these are your career choices, then a legal education/law degree is not really needed.

Think of the things you want to do with your life – things you are passionate about! Knowledge of the law gives you a powerful instrument in today’s society. So the only real question is, “Will obtaining this instrument be of enough value in helping you achieve your goals to justify the time and expense involved in obtaining a legal education/law degree?”

Several years ago at a pre-law advisors’ conference, after the sessions, of course, a couple of pre-law advisors and some law school admissions officers – a total of five – were seated together at a table at a bar. In the conversation it turned out at all five of us had PhDs in history and none of us had a legal education/law degree. We all sort of wished we had the legal education/law degree, but I think I captured the basic feelings of all of us when I said, “I wish I had a legal education/law degree not because I have any desire to practice law, but because I would be a better American historian. But, you know, that simply was never worth three years of my life and a considerable amount of money.”

Gerald Lee Wilson PhD
Senior Associate Dean, Pre-Law Advisor, Duke University
There are four types of courses that you should take if you plan to attend law school:

- Courses that will enhance your writing, which is a core skill for lawyers.
- Courses in subjects that you love: you'll get more out of them, and likely earn better grades. The content won't matter much to law school admission committees, but your overall GPA will.
- Courses in which you can get to know your instructors, and they can get to know you better. This should yield inherent benefits as well as help you begin to build the strategic professional relationships from which compelling letters of recommendation emerge.
- Courses that will give you a taste of the law. While law school admission committees won't care whether you take such courses, they can be helpful to you in assessing your interest in the field (just remember that the study of law is very different from the practice of law).

Arguably, THE most critical skill that you will need for success in law school and your career as an attorney is the ability to read dense material efficiently and critically. Strong reading comprehension comes through practice. Choose courses that are heavy on required reading, join a book club, and read the newspaper regularly. Also, you might find it helpful to select classes that will allow you to engage with the readings: to find themes across the course; to discuss expectations and predictions; to analyze the ideas; and to take positions on the ethical, political, or moral implications of the writings. If you make an effort to develop your reading skills throughout undergrad, you will set yourself up for success in law school and beyond.

Meghan Short  
Academic Success Program Co-Director  
Michigan State University College of Law

Diane Curtis  
Director, Pre-Law Advising  
Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science  
University of Massachusetts Amherst
Take courses that are interesting to you but still challenge you. Having a foundation in basic writing, reading comprehension, and research skills are critical for success in law school. Don’t worry about learning the law - they will teach you that in law school. Philosophy, logic, political science, and any other subjects that would require research are all solid choices. However, it is most important that the courses will be engaging for you so you can really dive in.

Karen Buttenbaum  
Former Director of Admissions, Harvard Law School  
Partner, Spivey Consulting Group

First and foremost, you should make the most of and enjoy your college experience, keeping in mind that your primary mission in college is to get a good education and excel in your studies. Take courses that are of greatest interest to you and select a major about which you are passionate. You do not need to major in pre-law, political science or history.

Some courses that are good preparation for law school are: (1) introduction to legal research and writing; (2) business law or any other course that is taught by the case method (reading court decisions); (3) basic accounting; (4) logic; (5) microeconomics; (6) any course that provides an introduction to the American judicial system and/or American Constitutional Law; (7) courses in which you are required to do extensive research and writing; and (8) seminar courses in which you will be able to get to know professors, who later might provide strong letters of recommendation for law school.

Anne Richard  
Former Dean of Law Admissions, University of Virginia, George Washington University, and George Mason University  
AMRichard Prelaw and Educational Consulting

Lawyers are professional writers, so prepare for law school by taking courses that require a substantial amount of writing. Since crafting a professional document requires revision, ideally writing assignments should include at least two drafts. Writing is hard work for everyone. Be willing to challenge yourself!

Deanne Andrews Lawrence  
Co-Director of the Research, Writing & Advocacy Program  
Michigan State University College of Law

IN ADDITION TO CLASSES, WHAT CAN I DO THAT WILL BE HELPFUL AS I PREPARE FOR LAW SCHOOL?

If possible, try to secure a law-related internship (or internships) that will give you an inside look at practicing lawyers. Many schools will give credit for such internships and some career services offices will help you locate funding for summer internships. Or you can volunteer at a local juvenile justice center or become a CASA volunteer. Such experiences give you invaluable insight on the realities of law and whether it is a path you wish to travel.

Ava Preacher  
Pre-Law Advisor and Assistant Dean  
University of Notre Dame

I think that anything you undertake as a college student is a potential building block towards law school. Part-time jobs can teach you about balancing school and work and relating to people. Internships and shadowing experiences, whether law-related or not, can help you zero in on your interests and passions. If your experiences and studies in college draw you closer to a potential career in law, it is a great idea to seek out an internship or shadowing experience in the legal profession to further explore its fit for you.

And the earlier you start acting like a professional, the better. College is a great time to start developing professionalism - with your classmates, colleagues, professors, and others.

Maria P. Vitullo  
Director, Pre-Law Program  
Miami University
Whether it is expanding your analytical and writing skills in a Shakespeare class, seeing what lawyers do through an internship with the public defender’s office, or learning about social justice issues through your school’s pre-law society, take every opportunity to learn more about yourself and how a law degree can fit into your personal and professional goals.

Gregory Shaffer
Coordinator of Pre-Law Advising
University of Maryland

Talk to and work with as many lawyers as possible – they are your best resource for helping you to determine whether law is the right path for you. Explore non-law-related career opportunities as well: you need a basis for comparison as you make this decision. Be reflective about your experiences in all arenas and take the time to think about what these experiences have offered you in terms of skill-building, perspectives, insights, and satisfaction. Keep a journal of your work and extracurricular experiences, the lawyers you meet and work with, and the insights you gain. You’ll arrive at law school a more thoughtful and well-rounded person.

Diane Curtis
Director, Pre-Law Advising
Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science
University of Massachusetts Amherst

If you don’t have attorneys in your family or haven’t worked around attorneys, set an annual goal of meeting and interacting with 10 attorneys. Meet them in their office or offer to take them out for a cup of coffee and learn about their careers – what they do, skills they use, challenges and rewards of their work, etc. Ask faculty, neighbors, and employers to introduce you to attorneys they know.

Alicia Lane
Senior Assistant Director of Admissions
Michigan State University College of Law
HOW MUCH TIME SHOULD I DEVOTE TO LSAT PREPARATION?

The LSAT is important enough to make sure you put in your best effort. Most students who are successful on the LSAT study between two and four months on a part-time basis (8-12 hours/week). Remember – the bulk of time spent studying for the LSAT isn’t reading through a prep book; it’s completing many, many timed practice exams. If you studied for two to four months, took more than 10 timed full-length practice exams, and then scored on the official test within two or three points of your practice scores, you can feel good that you worked the process. However, if any of those things are not true, it is worth your time to plan to re-take the exam.

John Rood
President, Next Step Test Preparation

HOW MANY TIMES SHOULD I PLAN TO TAKE THE LSAT?

Once. But things happen: you catch a cold, there’s construction noise outside the testing center, the proctors screw up, etc. This is why you get three shots at the LSAT. You definitely do not want to take it just to “see how it goes.”

J.Y. Ping
Founder of 7Sage LSAT Prep
Harvard Law School Class of 2010

WHAT’S THE BEST WAY TO PREPARE – SELF-STUDY OR AN LSAT PREP COURSE?

There are advantages to each type of LSAT prep. Self-study is typically done in the form of static, on-demand content – books, videos, and practice tests – so it’s up to students to react to what they encounter. A live LSAT course (or tutoring) with an instructor is far more adaptable: it allows the material to be tailored very specifically to an individual’s unique needs. Having an expert customize the entire experience based on where you require the most attention can be an incredibly valuable tool!

And any good course will supplement the lessons and interactions with loads of additional content, meaning you can do plenty of self-study too, structuring and pacing your out-of-class time according to your individual strengths and weaknesses as advised by your instructor.

Jon Denning
Vice President, PowerScore LSAT Preparation
Most law schools will look at your highest score, so there’s no harm in retaking it if a test-day issue hurt your score or if you re-evaluate how you prepare (like taking a course or dedicating more time to prep). You’re permitted to take the LSAT three times in two years; if you want to take it more than that, you’ll need to apply to LSAC for an exception.

Justin Williams  
Assistant Director of Admissions, Michigan State University  
College of Law

**HOW MUCH CAN I INCREASE MY LSAT SCORE?**

Score improvements vary from person to person and depend primarily on the amount of time you study and your preparation approach. Double-digit increases are not uncommon, and we’ve even seen students increase their scores by as much as 35 points!

The key to reaching your target score is to start your prep early, and to devote a solid number of hours each week to studying. **The LSAT is not a test you can cram for,** and the biggest increases are typically achieved by those who have a steady, relaxed approach to preparing for the exam.

Dave Killoran  
Author of the LSAT Bibles  
CEO of PowerScore LSAT Preparation

**WHEN SHOULD I TAKE THE LSAT?**

If you plan to go straight to law school, I typically recommend taking the LSAT in June after your junior year.

There are a couple reasons for this. First, it is the only LSAT administration where most students are not in school, so there are a few weeks of uninterrupted time in which you can focus solely on LSAT preparation. Second, June exam takers typically receive their LSAT scores in early July. This allows you time over the summer to begin researching law schools and preparing a law school list. Third, fall is a very busy and stressful time for seniors as they begin the law school application process. Preparing for the fall LSAT administration is adding one more thing to an already long list of tasks to accomplish in the fall. Finally, should the June exam not go as well as planned, you will have another chance to take the LSAT in the fall, which is still considered early in the application process.

Having said all that, I never recommend students take the LSAT without being fully prepared. So, if there is a reason the June administration does not work for you, you should wait to take the LSAT until you are fully prepared.

Maria P. Vitullo  
Director, Pre-Law Program  
Miami University

**WHAT’S A GOOD TIMELINE FOR APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL?**

Most law schools admit students on a rolling basis. Try to get your applications submitted and complete in the fall - by Thanksgiving will get you into the process very early; by January 1 is a good outside deadline to impose upon yourself. However, although applying early is the goal, it is better to be a stronger candidate than an earlier/weaker applicant. **Apply as early as you can and when your application is as strong as it can be.**

Anne Richard  
Former Dean of Law Admissions at the University of Virginia, George Washington University, and George Mason University  
ARichard Prelaw and Educational Consulting

Since the law school application process is a rolling admissions process, it’s always important to be mindful of the timing as you approach the process. Most law school applications become available to applicants in early September. Even though many law schools will maintain application deadlines in February, March, or even later in the spring, applicants should use November 1 as a target...
deadline to have applications both submitted and completed. Completing your applications any time before then will ensure that you’re maximizing the inherent advantages of the rolling admissions process and setting yourself up for success.

Todd Rothman
Pre-Law Advisor and Senior Associate Director of Graduate and Professional School Advising for the Office of Career Services, University of Pennsylvania

HOW MANY SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY TO AND HOW DO I DECIDE WHERE TO APPLY?

As a rule, I advise students to cast a “wide net” because it likely will result in a greater selection of admission and scholarship offers at the end of the process. As you think about where to apply, you might begin with a review of rankings, but keep in mind that many other factors should be considered, including:

• Where do you want to practice geographically? Very often, a strong regional school will have excellent alumni connections and recruiting opportunities.

• Are you interested in a particular (or niche) area of law (energy, entertainment, child advocacy, etc.)? Some schools you might not have originally considered will jump to the front after some research.

• What are your financial concerns? Remember, the lower your debt, the higher your level of freedom when choosing where, and for whom, you’d like to work. A state or regional school might give you an excellent merit aid package, but you’ll never know if you don’t apply.

• Are you interested in public interest work? Be sure to research the LRAPs (loan repayment assistance programs) at each school on your list – all are not created equal! You want to understand what type of employer is included, if there is an income ceiling or minimum number of years required, and so on.

• Do you have certain personal concerns that matter to you? The size of the class, whether it has a significantly diverse student body or is located in an urban or rural area may factor into your particular equation.

Look at a school’s employment statistics before making a final decision!

Victoria Turco
Pre-Law Advisor
Georgetown University

WHAT CAN I DO TO MAKE MY APPLICATION AS STRONG AS POSSIBLE, BESIDES GETTING A HIGH LSAT AND GOOD GRADES IN COLLEGE?

You can strengthen your application by painting a clear, vivid picture of yourself. Get strong letters of recommendation from people such as professors or employers who know you and can say great, detailed things about what you did for them and how you performed. Write a distinctive personal statement and résumé that brings life to who you are, how you became that person, and why you’re applying to law school. What will make your application stand out is the quality and clarity of the picture it presents of you.

Robert Schwartz
Assistant Dean of Admissions
UCLA School of Law
It’s important to **gain some work experience** either through internships or by taking some time off between undergrad and law school. This will give you some exposure on what it’s like to work in the legal field and will also give you some work/life experience.

*Stephanie Ripley*
Program Director of Pre-Law Advising and Associate Director of Health Professions Advising
Tufts University

Law schools engage in holistic file review, so in addition to a strong LSAT score and grades, it’s important to **maximize the other components of your application**. Admissions committees are looking for breadth and depth of involvement outside of the classroom, usually in the form of extracurricular activities, community service, and/or professional experience. They are also paying attention to the duration and consistency of your involvement and, if applicable, if you availed yourself of leadership opportunities within those activities.

**Law schools want engaged students who are leaders**, not ‘back-benchers’ - students who can balance academics with other significant commitments outside of the classroom. It is also important, of course, to be thoughtful about writing your personal statement and selecting the individuals you ask to write your letters of recommendation.

*Todd Rothman*
Pre-Law Advisor and Senior Associate Director of Graduate and Professional School Advising for the Office of Career Services, University of Pennsylvania

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**WHAT MATTERS TO LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS COMMITTEES?**

Since law school is a rigorous academic program, the first thing they will evaluate is your potential for success on an academic level. But other factors matter as well. You will learn as much from your classmates as from your professors in law school, so they will be looking for **ways in which you will contribute to both the classroom and community**. This is where your personal statement, résumé and other materials play a vital role. The committee will see your experiences, desire to learn, character, and personality throughout your application and consider all of the factors when making a decision.

*Karen Buttenbaum*
Former Director of Admissions, Harvard Law School
Partner, Spivey Consulting Group

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Admissions committees are looking for individuals they believe will be able to excel in law school, and who will contribute to their law school communities and to the legal profession. **Demonstrated academic ability** is critically important. **Mastery of the skills tested in the LSAT** (a strong LSAT score) likewise is important. Admissions committees also want to bring in students who are well rounded and who have pursued interests and passions outside of academics. Involvement in extra-curricular activities, internships, and employment, demonstrated leadership, and involvement in community service activities are also evaluated and valued.

*Anne Richard*
Former Dean of Law Admissions at the University of Virginia, George Washington University, and George Mason University
AMRichard Prelaw and Educational Consulting

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Law school admissions committees are interested in bright, committed individuals who love to read and write, think deeply about issues, and are trustworthy. Although they will pay close attention to an applicant’s past academic performance (selectivity of the undergraduate institution, major’s difficulty, grade trend, etc.) they will also heavily weigh the LSAT score, cocurricular activities, work experience, community service, letters of reference, personal statement, diversity statement, state of residency, leadership, and barriers encountered.

In a competitive legal job market, law school admissions committees are increasingly paying attention also to applicants’ employability potential, focusing on factors such as initiative,
professionalism, sound work ethic, team orientation, and technological savvy.

Mariella Mecozzi  
Pre-Law Advisor and Senior Assistant Director of Pre-Professional Services, The Career Center, University of Michigan

I’M A NON-TRADITIONAL STUDENT. HOW WILL LAW SCHOOLS VIEW MY APPLICATION?

Be ready to talk about who you are now and why you are choosing now to return to school. You will bring to the table a different perspective than applicants who are finishing up college – take advantage of that! Highlight your job responsibilities and accomplishments as a way to demonstrate your professionalism and work ethic.

On the flip side, check with law schools to confirm they will accept letters of recommendation from employers/supervisors in place of faculty who may no longer be in a position to remember and recommend you.

Kevin A. Freeman  
Program Manager, Politics, Society, and Law Scholars, The Ohio State University  
President, Midwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors

Be proud of all you have accomplished. Convey to each law school the unique professional and life experiences you will bring to the law school community and to the profession. Also explain why, at this point your career, law school is the right next step for you. You also may have some unique issues in the application process. For example, if you have been out of college for five or more years, it may not be possible for you to find a college professor to write a letter of recommendation for you. Try to talk with admissions officers and explain your unique situation.

Anne Richard  
Former Dean of Law Admissions at the University of Virginia, George Washington University, and George Mason University  
AMRichard Prelaw and Educational Consulting
Think of your personal statement as an interview with a law school admissions committee. The following are questions a member of the admissions committee likely would ask you during a face-to-face meeting (and possible topics for you to address in your personal statement):

- What has influenced your decision to earn a law degree?
- Aside from your grades and LSAT score, what personal qualities will make you an outstanding law student or attorney?
- What are your goals? How have your life experiences or hardships shaped your goals?
- How do you approach your professional responsibilities?

As you draft your personal statement, keep in mind the following qualities that I believe are characteristic of effective personal statements:

**SINCERE AND SUCCINCT.** Share your values, goals, past experiences, and motivation so the admission committee can understand who you are. Stay on topic, and within page limits!

**ORIGINAL.** Borrowing ideas can make yours read as inauthentic, so base your statement on your own ideas and experiences. Including famous quotations can be a distraction, so be cautious.

**POSITIVE IN TONE.** Remember, the personal statement is an interview. You want to come across as approachable rather than arrogant or overly competitive.

**SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.** If you make a claim about yourself, support it with evidence.

**SENSITIVE TO THE AUDIENCE.** Your personal statement should represent you, but also consider how reviewers will read your statement—choose topics and words carefully. Warning: it’s difficult to be appropriately humorous in a personal statement.

Charles Roboski
Assistant Dean for Admissions & Financial Aid, Michigan State University College of Law
Former Dean/Director of Law Admissions at Notre Dame, Ohio State, et. al.
Many law schools require or accept diversity statements in addition to the personal statement. Should I write one? What are schools interested in?

It is wise to provide the law school with a lot of information about you as an applicant; at the same time, you want to make sure that information is relevant and helpful in determining who you are as an individual. Consider the following:

• Be sure to read each school’s application instructions on submitting a diversity statement.

• Race and ethnicity are certainly included in potential topics, but they are not the only ones. Socioeconomic disadvantage, religion, sexual orientation, and unique upbringing are examples of other themes – and this is not an exhaustive list.

• It is truly an optional statement; it will not be a negative mark on your application if you don’t have one. Not everyone should write one.

• It’s intended to allow applicants an opportunity to describe/discuss something that gives them a unique perspective or has affected their outlook so they can bring a different viewpoint to the classroom. It allows the applicant a space to discuss this outside of the personal statement if they wish to do so.

• **It should be different from your personal statement.**

• The topic should be fairly obvious to you; if you can’t think of something that makes sense right away, it is probably a sign that you do not need to write one.

• You shouldn’t try to stretch something that is a temporary hardship into a lifelong challenge. For example, there is a significant difference between growing up poor and going through a temporary drop in disposable income. The former is much more likely to have a deep and lasting impact on someone’s outlook where the latter probably builds character.

Bad topic choices include: getting a used car as a gift instead of a new one because of a parent’s recent job change, being left-handed, having an econ major, appreciating diverse viewpoints, having fallen out of a chairlift, and so on. (And these are all real diversity statements we have seen.) Writing about one of these things will do more harm than good, for sure. It shows poor judgment.

*Karen Buttenbaum*

*Former Director of Admissions, Harvard Law School*

*Partner, Spivey Consulting Group*
HOW DO I DECIDE WHAT LAW SCHOOL IS BEST FOR ME?

In making the final selection of which school to attend, you should consider both your life as a law student and your life after law school. Ask yourself which school(s) would be a good fit in terms of the faculty and student body as well as opportunities to help you prepare for the practice of law. You should keep in mind your career goals, debt load following law school, career prospects following graduation, and the “fit” of the school.

Graduating without debt can give you the freedom to pursue public service or other lower-paying options without concern about policy or legislative changes that might negatively impact you in the future. There are some firms and career paths, however, that only recruit from certain schools, and if you plan to pursue one of these careers, that must be considered when choosing a school.

Dianne McDonald
Pre-Law Advisor, Bucknell University

THE LEGAL CAREER THAT I HAVE IN MIND DOESN’T PAY WELL. SHOULD I GO TO THE LEAST EXPENSIVE LAW SCHOOL?

Not necessarily. More expensive schools may offer more financial aid or have better resources to help you get a job in your chosen legal career.

As with any major decision, be sure to consider everything including faculty expertise, legal clinics and related opportunities, geographic location and cost of living, alumni networking, and more. Cost should be a consideration, but not the only consideration.

Kevin A. Freeman
Program Manager, Politics, Society, and Law Scholars, The Ohio State University
President, Midwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors

Minimizing the cost of your legal education is always a great idea, but there may be trade-offs in terms of the various educational and employment-related opportunities offered by each school you’re considering. At a minimum, develop a spreadsheet showing the net costs of each option: tuition and location-specific cost of living, less any scholarship offers (several law schools have online calculators to help you develop these numbers).

Weigh these costs against what each school offers, both in terms of measurable features like employment rates and placement assistance, as well as educational opportunities, desirable faculty mentoring, student body makeup, location, facilities, and so on. There’s no single answer that makes sense for all applicants.

Diane Curtis
Director, Pre-Law Advising
Senior Lecturer, Department of Political Science
University of Massachusetts Amherst
I’ve heard there are too many lawyers. Is that true? Are there jobs for law graduates?

There are so many different areas of law that one can practice. Nonprofit agencies, government agencies, companies, and private employers are just some of the places you can go to practice law. A law degree is one of the most versatile graduate degrees available, as the critical thinking, problem solving, and communication skills you develop can be used in countless professions outside of the actual practice of law.

Gregory Shaffer
Coordinator of Pre-Law Advising, University of Maryland

What can I do with a law degree?

The list is long and varied. While most people typically think of using a law degree for the traditional practice of law, there are many other options. For example, we’ve always seen people with law degrees in myriad government positions (federal, state and local). Lawyers are common in lobbying, higher education, policy-making, and consulting. We see many lawyers in business, compliance, risk management, and the insurance industry too. Finally, it looks like we might see even more JD-Advantage jobs in the future. JD-Advantage jobs are those not technically requiring admission to a Bar but rather where people with JDs are recruited because of their unique skill set.

Victoria Turco
Pre-Law Advisor, Georgetown University

What are typical starting salaries for new lawyers?

There is a large range of starting salaries for new lawyers and the salaries vary by venue and employer size and type. Recent data provided by National Association of Law Placement (NALP) indicates that starting salaries in private practice range from $50,000 to $180,000, but six figure starting salaries are typically reserved for the very large, multi-office law firms in which positions are limited and competition for these limited positions can be very fierce. Starting salaries in government and business can range from $40,000 to $80,000; and jobs in public interest have typically been in the $45,000 to $50,000 range.

NALP has published a “bi-model salary curve” for new graduates since 2006. This curve demonstrates that starting salaries are actually grouped each year around two points: at the lower end, graduates in the class of 2014 were grouped in the $40,000 to $65,000 range (about half of new graduates were in this range), and at the higher end, they were...
grouped in the $160,000 range (only about 17 percent of new graduates were in this range). To obtain a full picture of starting salaries for law graduates by year, visit the NALP website at www.nalp.org.

Amee R. McKim
Director of Legal Recruitment at Duane Morris
Former Assistant Dean of Professional Development at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law

Given how the media portrays lawyers working at large law firms that are known to pay new attorneys in the $100,000-plus range, it comes as a surprise to many pre-law students when they learn that the typical law school graduate begins with an annual salary of $45,000 to $65,000.

Every law school accredited by the American Bar Association annually publishes employment data for the most recent graduating class (reported 10 months after graduation).

Alicia Lane
Senior Assistant Director of Admissions, Michigan State University College of Law

WHAT CAN I DO NOW (A YEAR OR TWO BEFORE STARTING LAW SCHOOL) TO POSITION MYSELF FOR FUTURE LEGAL EMPLOYMENT?

Network. Reach out to attorneys that you know, that your family knows, or attorneys who share some kind of commonality (same undergraduate school, same fraternity or sorority, etc.). When you initially reach out, do so as an aspiring professional—showing good judgment, respecting their schedule (and being willing to meet at a time that works for them, even if it does not work for you), and expressing your appreciation for their time. By meeting practicing attorneys and learning about their work, you’ll expand your knowledge of legal career options and you may begin to develop relationships with men and women who can offer advice or support as a law student.

Mike Spivey
Former Dean of Career Services, Washington University School of Law
Founder and Principal, Spivey Consulting Group
WHAT GENERAL ADVICE DO YOU HAVE AS I THINK ABOUT THE COSTS OF LAW SCHOOL?

Law school can be a significant financial investment – even before you get there. This is a great time to get a handle on your budget and begin planning for those pre-school expenses, such as the LSAT, the Credential Assembly Service, admission application fees, costs associated with visiting schools, and eventually your seat and/or tuition deposit. Reduce miscellaneous costs by taking care of the details such as ensuring you register for your LSAT exam on time and for the right testing center and/or date. LSAT and application fee waivers are available in limited circumstances. In short, do your financial homework and plan now to be sure you have the funds to begin the law school process.

Lyssa L. Thaden, PhD
Director of Financial Education, Access Group

HOW DO LAW SCHOOLS AWARD SCHOLARSHIP AID? HOW DO I ASK THE SCHOOL FOR INCREASED AID?

Be the strongest applicant you can be. Most schools award scholarships based upon the strength of applications for admission and merit-based scholarships typically are awarded by the Admissions Office. If you talk with an admissions officer about your need and desire to be awarded a scholarship, be professional and courteous. Express to the admissions officer that you really want to attend School X, but the student loan debt you will need to take on is daunting and you hope there may be something that can be done to help you minimize your student loan debt. (There are a few schools that still award some scholarship money...)

Charles Roboski
Assistant Dean for Admissions & Financial Aid, Michigan State University College of Law
Former Dean/Director of Law Admissions at Notre Dame, Ohio State, et. al.
based upon financial need, so you also need to be sure to complete your FAFSA and any other required financial aid forms as early in the process as you can.)

Anne Richard
Former Dean of Law Admissions at the University of Virginia, George Washington University, and George Mason University AMRichard Prelaw and Educational Consulting

IS IT BETTER TO TAKE OUT FEDERAL OR PRIVATE LOANS?

Federal student loans offer a number of benefits not provided with private loans. This includes several different repayment plans to choose from (including income-driven repayment plans), along with deferment and forbearance options. Federal student loans also are eligible for Public Service Loan Forgiveness which can be a significant benefit for those considering employment in non-profit and/or government sectors. More information is available at studentaid.ed.gov/publicservice. Regardless of which loan you choose to borrow, be sure to read all of the fine print, including information on origination fees, interest rates, capitalization schedules and repayment options.

Lyssa L. Thaden, PhD
Director of Financial Education, Access Group

HOW SHOULD EDUCATIONAL DEBT FACTOR INTO MY LAW SCHOOL PLANS?

Many law students obtain a loan at some point in school. Some rely more heavily on loans than others based on personal resources and scholarships. Nationally, the average amount borrowed by law students ranges from about $75,000 for graduates of public law schools to about $115,000 for graduates of private law schools.

If you attend law school and must rely on loans, do what you can to minimize the debt so you have more options when you graduate and so you can achieve other financial goals such as owning a home and funding your retirement.

Too many law graduates are surprised by how much debt they have accumulated. Be proactive by developing a three-year plan for financing law school and understand – before you enroll – how much debt you likely will need to take on. Then do everything you can to make wise choices so your debt is minimized: having a roommate (or two), buying used books, and leaving your car at home are all great ways to reduce reliance on loans.

John Garcia
Director of Financial Aid, Michigan State University College of Law

The typical new college graduate has more than $30,000 in debt from their undergraduate studies, and at least 75 percent of law students rely on loans to finance law school. As you consider law school, make sure you understand the costs and the returns. While some new law grads make $100,000 salaries, most new grads start with salaries in the $40,000 to $70,000 range.

As you consider law school options, give thought to your own financial situation, investigate salaries for those positions of interest to you, and think about the impact of borrowing during repayment.

Justin Williams
Assistant Director of Admissions, Michigan State University College of Law
**LSAT PREP AND APPLICATION TIMELINE**

**MARCH:**
Begin preparing for the LSAT exam

**JUNE:**
Take the LSAT exam

**JUNE - JULY:**
Begin preliminary research on law schools

**JULY:**
Receive LSAT scores from June exam

**JULY - DEC:**
Narrow focus to 8-10 law schools; if necessary, retake the LSAT

**OCT - JAN:**
Submit applications

**THIS CHART REPRESENTS** how your LSAT prep schedule fits within the timeline of law school applications.

**IF YOU ARE DISSATISFIED** with your June LSAT results, this schedule allows you time to retake the LSAT exam in the fall. If you retake, you can either wait to apply to schools until your new LSAT scores are released, or (if the school’s guidelines permit it) apply and request that review of your application be held until your new score is available.

**OFFICIAL LSAT PREP MATERIALS AVAILABLE FROM LSAC**

Find free LSAT prep materials and books available for purchase at www.lsac.org/JD/LSAT

- The Official LSAT Handbook™
- The Official LSAT SuperPrep® (I & II)
- 10 Actual, Official LSAT PrepTests™ Series (50 total – 5 books)
- LSAT ItemWise™ (online LSAT familiarization tool)
- Official LSAT PrepTests™
GET A STRONG START. From exploring the legal profession to choosing a law school, the process can be intimidating. That’s why it’s critical to learn from the pros — deans, admissions counselors, professors, and lawyers.

MSU LAW has assembled a panel of nationwide experts to offer you their insights. Collectively, these professionals have read 100,000+ applications, critiqued countless personal statements, counseled thousands of future lawyers on legal careers, and coached hundreds of incoming law students on developing their financial plans.

GET PROACTIVE
Great law students - and great lawyers - know that you need to get ahead of the curve. Start today by setting realistic goals and working toward them every day.

THINK ABOUT YOUR FUTURE
Knowing where you want to go is the key to getting there. Start by thinking about what kind of work would challenge and reward you, and start gathering information.

MAXIMIZE YOUR CHANCES
Receiving scholarship aid will benefit you for years to come. Work on your LSAT score, build a strong application, and apply early (before schools award all their money).