



**Columbia College  
&  
Fu Foundation School of Engineering and Applied Science**

**2017 Law School Application Process Packet**

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## **Office of Preprofessional Advising Timeline for Applying to Law School**

### **Spring Semester Prior To Applying To Law School:**

- Think about your decision to go to law school, and if you are unsure, research other career options. Most 1Ls have taken time off between college and law school.
- Pursue internships and other opportunities to gain information and experience about careers in the legal profession.
- Begin serious investigation of law schools. Review law school websites. Look at each school's profile in the *Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools* available for free on-line at [www.LSAC.org](http://www.LSAC.org) and at the Office of Preprofessional Advising. Refer to the "Choosing a Law School" section of this packet.
- Most law schools want two faculty letters of recommendation. Begin to consider and ask referees to write a letter on your behalf. Refer to "Obtaining Letters of Reference" and "Guidelines for Letter Writers" in this packet.
- If planning to take the LSAT in June, begin preparing early in the semester. Practice! Practice! Practice! Applicants may want to take a commercial preparation course.
- Applicants who think they may qualify for the LSAT fee waiver or for accommodated testing should apply by the deadlines. Applicants may direct questions to an advisor in the Office of Preprofessional Advising.
- Register early in the semester for the June or September/October LSAT. Early registrants have a better chance of being assigned to their first- or second-choice test center.
- Attend campus sponsored alumni/ae law student and attorney panels.
- Attend one of the sessions on the "Law School Application Process" in March or April.
- Register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). Have recommendations sent to LSAC.
- Obtain a credit report to ensure that there are no errors. You can obtain an annual free credit report at <https://www.annualcreditreport.com/cra/index.jsp>. Applicants who have imperfect credit or errors on their report need to address these matters now.

### **Summer Prior to Applying to Law School**

- For those taking the June LSAT, good luck!
- Continue reading about legal careers and researching schools.
- If taking the LSAT in September/October, register for it as soon as possible. Again, the earlier an applicant registers for the exam, the better their chances are of being assigned their first- or second-choice test center. Registration information is available on the LSAC web site. Practice! Practice! Practice!
- Register with Credential Assembly Service (CAS) if not already registered and have recommendation letters sent to LSAC.
- Begin writing the personal statement. Review "Writing the Law School Personal Statement." Staff members in the Office of Preprofessional Advising are available to give applicants feedback on personal statements.
- Review Columbia transcript. If accurate, submit the Columbia transcript and transcripts from any other colleges attended to the Credential Assembly Service. Undergraduates who have an inaccurate Columbia transcript should contact their advising dean and alumni/ae should contact the Office of Preprofessional Advising.

## **Fall Semester**

- Submit the online Registration Form at <https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/preprofessional/law> in early September to the Office of Preprofessional Advising to assist us in writing your Dean's Certification.
- Attend the Law School Forum in New York City on October 14 & 15, 2016. LSAC also holds forums around the country. Check [www.LSAC.org](http://www.LSAC.org) for the schedule.
- Compile a tentative list of law schools to which to apply. Share this list with an advisor in the Office of Preprofessional Advising.
- Check online with LSAC to see if all recommendations have been submitted to them.
- Attend programs sponsored by the Office of Preprofessional Advising featuring admissions officers from various law schools and attend a personal statement workshop.
- Finalize your personal statement.
- Visit law schools.
- Become familiar with the financial aid opportunities, procedures, and deadlines for each school applied to. Law school web sites have invaluable information.
- Submit law school applications by early to mid-November.
- Good luck to those taking the September/October or December LSAT!
- Check the status of your application with individual schools. Be sure that they have received all of your documents.
- Students should submit an updated transcript with fall semester grades to the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and to the law schools.

## **Spring Semester:**

- Check application status at schools if a completed file confirmation has not been received.
- File early Federal Income Tax forms and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. The FAFSA is available on January 1.
- Complete any additional school-specific financial aid forms or scholarship applications.
- Attend "Admitted Student Days" to help make decisions about where to matriculate.
- Wait-listed applicants should submit additional information if still interested in the school.
- If wait-listed at a school, contact the Office of Preprofessional Advising for strategies about what to do.
- Start making decisions about where to attend, and notify schools if no longer interested in their school. Notify the Office of Preprofessional Advising and recommenders of outcomes of applications and final decision. Thank recommenders.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What are the services provided by the Office of Preprofessional Advising?

- a. We provide feedback on personal statements.
- b. We meet individually with applicants needing additional advice.
- c. We review applicants list of schools they are applying to and provide feedback.
- d. We sponsor programs that educate students and alums about the process of applying to law school, address special topics, and we also host law school admission officers' visits to our campus.
- e. We sponsor the Prelaw Listserv. See instructions on how to subscribe to the listserv on the last page of this packet.

## LSAT

### When is the LSAT offered during the year?

*2016 – 2017 Test Dates – see page 33*

**You may register on-line NOW to take the June LSAT for any of the dates listed above. Register for the LSAT ASAP so that you have a better chance at being assigned your first choice of test sites! Registration for the October and December and February tests will begin in late May. Cost: \$175.00.**

Refer to [www.LSAC.org](http://www.LSAC.org) for more information about LSAT dates and registration deadlines.

### When is the best time to take the LSAT?

The best time to take the LSAT is when you are prepared! Preparing for the LSAT takes PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! Taking the LSAT in June is ideal because if you need to cancel your June score, you still have time to take the October exam and have your applications completed at the schools by early to mid-November.

### Should I take a commercial LSAT preparation course?

This is a matter of personal choice. Some applicants prepare alone or with a group by buying LSAT prep tests through LSAC.org or other LSAT books on the market. They find that this works for them. Others determine that they need the structure of a class to prepare for the exam or they need help with a particular section of the exam. Many applicants also find that the insight and strategies for taking the exam they learn from the course are extremely helpful. The KEY no matter whether you take a course or prepare on your own is to PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE under simulated LSAT conditions.

### What companies in the New York City area offer a LSAT preparation course?

Binary Solutions – [www.binarysolution.com](http://www.binarysolution.com) (gives discounts to Columbia students and alums)  
Kaplan – [www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com)  
PreProBono – [www.preprobono.org](http://www.preprobono.org)  
Princeton Review – [www.princetonreview.com](http://www.princetonreview.com)  
PowerScore – [www.powerscore.com](http://www.powerscore.com)  
TestMasters – <http://www.testmasters.net/lsat-prep-courses>  
Blueprint Test Preparation - [www.blueprintprep.com](http://www.blueprintprep.com)

Many of the test companies offer scholarships for applicants with financial need. Inquire with each company.

### **Is it a good idea to take the LSAT in June as a practice test?**

No, it's not. Ideally only want to take this test **ONCE when you are the most prepared!** Law schools reserve the right to average multiple LSAT scores. Furthermore, law schools may question multiple score cancellations.

### **What should I do if I am sick or lose my concentration during the LSAT and need to cancel my score?**

Applicants may cancel their scores at the test site and via the online LSAT status page of your LSAC.org account. **This option is only available to you within six calendar days of the test.** The deadline to cancel your score online will be 11:59 PM (ET) on the sixth day after your LSAT date. Don't wait until the last minute to avoid technical problems with canceling your score!

### **Does CAS offer accommodations for persons with disabilities taking the LSAT?**

Yes, CAS will provide accommodations for individuals who have documented disabilities. Please refer to deadlines and the required forms. You may also meet with a staff member to discuss specific issues. For more information visit, <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/accommodated-testing>.

### **What can I bring with me into the LSAT test room?**

LSAC has strict guidelines regarding what candidates have to bring and should leave at home or in their car. Please see <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/day-of-test> for explicit instructions.

### **What type of identification do I need to bring to be allowed into the test center?**

**Identification.** You will be required to present a valid, government-issued ID. The ID must be current (or have expired within 90 days of your test date) and must contain a recent and recognizable photo of you. The first and last name listed on your ID must match exactly the first and last name printed on your LSAT Admission Ticket. (Make sure all of your biographical data is consistent.) More information can be found at <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/day-of-test>.

### **Credential Assembly Service (CAS) - <http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas>**

#### **What is the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and do all law schools require that I register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS)?**

All ABA approved law schools require that applicants register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). The Credential Assembly Service provides each law school an applicant applies to with a centralized and standardized report that includes the following:

1. Undergraduate academic summary - view via your online Credential Assembly Service (CAS) account
2. Copies of all undergraduate, graduate, and law school/professional transcripts
3. Your GPA for each academic year, your degree GPA from your home institution, and your cumulative GPA reflecting work at your home institution and all other institutions you have attended
4. A description of your overall grade distribution
5. The mean LSAT score and GPA of students at your undergraduate school who have subscribed to the Credential Assembly Service and your percentile graduation rank among those students
6. Up to twelve LSAT scores from the past five years, including cancellations and absences
7. An average LSAT score, if you have more than one score on file
8. Copies of your LSAT writing sample
9. Copies of letters of recommendation processed by LSAC

The Credential Assembly Service also provides applicants with the following services:

1. Ability to track LSAC file status and electronically file law school applications
2. Recommendation service active for five years
3. Great resources available for purchase and for FREE
4. ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools - Free On-line Edition

### **How do I register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS)?**

Applicants may register with the Credential Assembly Service anytime. You do not have to register at the time you register for the LSAT, but you will want to register with Credential Assembly Service before you have recommendations and transcript(s) sent to them and before you submit your applications to the schools. Your registration is good for five years. You can register on-line at <http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas>. **Cost: \$170.**

### **Will I have an opportunity to view the Master Law School Report sent to the law schools?**

Yes. Once LSAC has summarized your transcripts, you will be able to view your Credential Assembly Service Law School Report on-line by logging-in to your Credential Assembly Service (CAS) account. **It is important that you check it for accuracy.** If there are errors, you will need to write to LSAC to have it corrected.

### **Does the Credential Assembly Service offer fee waiver for the LSAT, CAS, and school reports?**

Yes, the Credential Assembly Service does offer fee waivers for the LSAT, school reports, and application fees. For more information and to apply for a fee waiver on-line please visit <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/fee-waivers>.

### **Do I inform the Credential Assembly Service of the law schools that I am applying to?**

No. Instead, you order a Law School Report when you apply to a law school through the LSAC website. When the law schools receive your application, they request your law school report from the Credential Assembly Service.

## **Transcripts**

### **If I studied abroad or attended another college do I need to submit a transcript from these institutions to LSAC?**

Yes. You must have a transcript sent to LSAC from each undergraduate and graduate school you have attended. Please refer to <http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas/requesting-transcripts> for further details and/or confer with a staff member. **IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU LIST THE NAMES OF ALL SCHOOL(S) ATTENDED WHEN REGISTERING WITH CAS. IF you studied abroad, list the name of the sponsoring institution. IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS PLEASE ASK A STAFF MEMBER.**

### **When listing colleges attended, do I need to include the name of the sponsoring institution if I studied abroad?**

Yes. List the name of the sponsoring institution (e.g., Butler, NYU, Vassar, Hebrew U.). If you spent your junior year studying at Oxford-Cambridge or another program such as Kyoto and you completed a year or less of work at the school you do not need to have a transcript sent to CAS. For those who spent their junior year at Oxford-Cambridge we recommend that you request a copy of your evaluation from Cindy Cogdill and submit it directly to all your schools. If the foreign institution does not have a US sponsoring institution please contact Cindy for further instructions as many schools will still want you to send a transcript from the school or program. You may also be required to list your attendance at such institutions on your applications to law schools.

### **How do I order transcripts from Columbia?**

Current students and alumni/ae must request their Columbia transcript from the Registrar's Office. Requests may be made in-person at 205 Kent by submitting the LSAC Transcript Request Form or via e-mail. To order via email, complete the **Request for Transcript** form found at <http://registrar.columbia.edu/content/transcripts-0> under the heading of "Ordering a Transcript along with the LSAC Transcript Request Form for Columbia and email the forms to [registrar@columbia.edu](mailto:registrar@columbia.edu).

### **What should I do if my Columbia transcript is inaccurate?**

If you are an undergraduate, see your advising dean/counselor. If you are an alumnus/alumna, please contact a staff member.

### **When should I submit my transcript(s) to the Credential Assembly Service?**

We recommend submitting transcripts over the summer. Applicants currently in school should wait until they receive their spring (or summer) grades. Applicants in school this fall should send their updated transcript to LSAC and to the individual schools as soon as all their fall grades are in.

## **Dean's Certification**

### **What is a Dean's Certification?**

1. Verifies for the law schools whether an applicant has had any academic or disciplinary sanctions.
2. The staff in the Office of Preprofessional Advising writes Certifications for seniors and alumni/ae.
3. Applicants do not need to submit Dean's Certification/recommendation forms from individual schools. **ALL** law schools accept our form.
4. Some schools do not require a Dean's Certification/recommendation. A list of schools requiring the Dean's Certification is on page 32 of this packet. You can also check the schools' application materials.
5. The Dean's Certification is not considered a recommendation letter. The writer does not need to know or meet with the applicant.
6. Applicants who transferred to Columbia from another college or university often times must also have the school(s) submit a Dean's Certification to the law schools.
7. **The Office of Preprofessional Advising needs at least two weeks advance notice to send out a Dean's Certification Form. They are written in the order received from applicants. In order to write the Dean's Certification, applicants must complete the online Registration Form found at <https://www.cc-seas.columbia.edu/preprofessional/law>. Please refer to page 13 of this packet for an explanation of the information requested to complete the Registration Form.**
8. The Dean's Certification is sent directly to the schools requiring it and not to LSAC/CAS.

### **Which law schools require a Dean's Certification?**

On page 32 we have included a list of schools that require the Dean's Certification. Check the school's application when in doubt.

## **Recommendation Service/Obtaining Recommendations**

### **Do law schools prefer that applicants use the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) recommendation/evaluation service?**

The majority of law schools require that applicants use the Credential Assembly Service recommendation service.

### **How does the LSAC Recommendation Service work?**

For a comprehensive overview of the LSAC Recommendation Service please read further information at <http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/cas/lor-evaluations>. The LSAC letter of recommendation (LOR) service is offered as a convenience to Credential Assembly Service registrants, recommendation letter writers, and law schools. Law school candidates are able to use their LSAC online accounts to direct letters of recommendation to specific law schools based on each school's requirements or preferences. Different letters can also be directed to different schools based on the intended use of the letter.

For example:

1. A student who interned for the Department of Environmental Protection might ask a professor to write a specific letter, including information about the internship, to a law school that offers an environmental law specialty. The description of the letter would be: "For Smith School of Law's Environmental Law Program."
2. A professor might be a law school graduate and want to recommend the applicant to her alma mater. The description of this letter might be: "For Smith School of Law."

A candidate may have as many general letters on file as they want in addition to numerous directed letters. Multiple LORs from a single recommender will be accepted. This provides the opportunity to request both general and targeted letters from each recommender.



**Applicants have to indicate where each general and targeted letter is to be sent.** Letters must be received by LSAC at least two weeks prior to a school's application deadline in order for LSAC to ensure that the letters will be sent to the school before its deadline. LSAC will also accept copies of letters from the Office of Preprofessional Advising. Candidates can monitor the status of their letters in the Account Status area of their LSAC online account.

#### **What does it cost to use the Credential Assembly Service recommendation service?**

The fee applicants pay to register with the Credential Assembly Service covers the cost of using their recommendation and evaluation services.

#### **Who should I ask to write my recommendation letters?**

Applicants should request recommendation letters from faculty members and employers who know them well. Please refer to "Obtaining Letters of Reference" and "Guidelines for Letter Writers" in this packet.

#### **Does the Office of Preprofessional Advising select the best recommendations submitted on my behalf and forward those to LSAC?**

No. The advisors in the Office of Preprofessional Advising can talk with you about who might be the best individuals to approach for letters of recommendation, but will not violate the confidentiality of these letters once they are submitted to our office.

#### **Should I waive my right to see recommendation letters?**

The general feeling is the referee will be more candid if it is a closed letter. The choice is yours.

#### **I have recommendations in my permanent file or with the Office of Preprofessional Advising that need to be forwarded to CAS, what should I do?**

When identifying your recommenders in your LSAC.org account, enter the name of the person who wrote the letter. For the email address use: [cfc5@columbia.edu](mailto:cfc5@columbia.edu). Use the following mailing address: Center for Student Advising, 403 Lerner Hall, 2920 Broadway MC 1201, NY, NY 10027.

### **Deciding Where to Apply**

#### **Based on my LSAT score and GPA, how do I determine where I will be a competitive applicant?**

We recommend using one or both of the following tools listed below as a GUIDE to help you determine schools where you will be a competitive based SOLELY on your LSAT score and GPA. **However, LSAC and the Boston College Law Locators print an important disclaimer stating that you should not limit your law school choices based solely on LSAT/GPA searches.**

\***The Boston College Online Law School Locator** helps applicants identify schools where their LSAT score and grades are most competitive for admission: <http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/research/lawlocator.html#locator>.

\***The LSAC Search For Schools Based on LSAT and Undergraduate GPA Credentials:**  
[https://officialguide.lsac.org/release/OfficialGuide\\_Default.aspx](https://officialguide.lsac.org/release/OfficialGuide_Default.aspx)

\***The Boston College Online Part-time Law School Locator** helps applicants identify schools where their LSAT score and grades are competitive for admission to part-time and evening divisions. Students work and study law simultaneously, earning a J.D. in four years. The locator can be found at

<https://htmlbprod.bc.edu/prd/f?p=703:2:.....>

### **What factors should I consider in deciding where to apply?**

We have included in this packet on pages 17-23 a section on “Choosing a Law School” reprinted from the *Official Guide To ABA-Approved Law Schools* that discusses the different factors an applicant should consider when determining schools to apply to and ultimately where to matriculate. The NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists at

[http://saplaonline.org/resources/2014%20NAPLA%20Law%20School%20Lists\\_lr.pdf](http://saplaonline.org/resources/2014%20NAPLA%20Law%20School%20Lists_lr.pdf)

provides information about joint degrees, areas of academic emphasis within the schools, schools that grant one-year deferrals, bar passage rates at a number of schools, schools that award non-need-based scholarships, etc.

### **What strategy should I be using to determine how many schools to apply to?**

We recommend applying to a couple of “reach” schools, a few where you should be competitive, and a couple of “safety” schools.” Columbia students and alums on average apply to nine schools.

## **Submission of Applications**

### **How do I order Credential Assembly Service School Reports?**

Whenever applicants transmit an electronic application via LSAC, they will be charged \$30 for a report to be sent to the law school to which they apply. Applicants may still order Credential Assembly Service school reports by mail, by phone, or online if they are applying directly to the law schools.

### **Ideally, when should I have all my applications submitted to the law schools?**

The earlier, the better! We recommend having all your applications submitted by no later than Thanksgiving as most schools have rolling admissions. Do NOT wait until the last minute and apply close to the school’s deadline. Apply EARLY! Some schools definition of a completed application is not only your application, recommendations, and Dean’s Certification but also the Credential Assembly Service Report. For a school to request and receive the Credential Assembly Service Report can take two to three weeks after they receive your application.

### **What is the difference between early decision and early action?**

1. *Early Decision* is **BINDING** and you should only apply Early Decision to a school if it is your first choice. If your decision of where to attend law school is dependent on the financial aid package offered by a school it may not be wise to apply early decision. Check with the school. These applications are due earlier so be sure to follow deadlines. Check with individual schools as to whether applicants who are not admitted through the Early Decision process are considered in the general pool of applicants. Policies differ from school-to-school.
2. *Early Action* is non-binding but it allows applicants to get an admission decision much earlier, usually by mid December. Check with individual schools as to whether applicants who are not admitted through Early Action are considered in the general pool of applicants. Policies differ from school-to-school.

### **What should I write about in my personal statement?**

Write about you! Law schools do not typically interview candidates (Northwestern, Pace, and Vanderbilt are the exceptions) so this is your chance to tell the admissions officers who you are beyond your GPA, LSAT score, awards, and activities. This is an important part of the application and you should treat it seriously. Please refer to the section in this packet on writing a personal statement. The Office of Preprofessional Advising staff members are available to give feedback on personal statements. For current undergraduates, consultants are also available at the Undergraduate Writing Program, 310 Philosophy, to work with you one-on-one. This is a free service. Their telephone number is x4-3141 and their e-mail address is [writingcenter@columbia.edu](mailto:writingcenter@columbia.edu). You may also schedule an appointment online at <http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/uwp/writing-center>.

Alumni/ae can receive feedback on their personal statements by sending their statement as a Word attachment (saved as Last Name, First Name Law School PS) to Niki Cunningham at [njc2001@columbia.edu](mailto:njc2001@columbia.edu). In the subject line please include your first and last name and Law School Personal Statement. Please allow 7 business days for feedback and please do not send multiple drafts before receiving feedback. Please also include your name on document.

### **Do I need to include a résumé?**

Yes, for the majority of schools! The applications provide very little space to list awards, activities, and work experience. However, be sure to respond to *all* questions on the applications. Unless instructed to keep your résumé to one page it can be longer. Some wonderful examples are found at

Harvard Law School (3 examples) - <http://www.law.harvard.edu/prospective/jd/apply/the-application-process/resources.html>

Center for Career Education - <http://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/tipsheets>. Students and alumni/ae can also have their résumés critiqued Monday – Friday from 1pm – 4pm during a walk-in hours. Alumni/ae can also take advantage of walk-in hours as well as make in-person and telephone appointments by calling 212.854.5609.

### **What is the appropriate format for explaining irregularities, disparities, or question marks regarding my academic record?**

Use an addendum to explain any irregularities and disparities. **Do not include them in your personal statement.** If, for example, your two LSAT scores are very different due to your illness during one examination, express this reason in an attachment entitled “Explanation of LSAT Scores,” not in your personal statement. If you need to explain that your grades were low during your sophomore year because you were experiencing difficulty choosing a major, entitle the attachment “Sophomore Slump.” You should approach problem areas in your background frankly rather than leaving the admissions committee members with unanswered questions. (Adapted from Johns Hopkins University's Prelaw Top Ten Tips). **If you are considering writing an addendum, please talk this over and have the statement reviewed by a staff member in the Office of Preprofessional Advising.**

### **Does Columbia provide class rank and class size?**

No. Please write, “Columbia does not rank students nor provide class size.”

### **Do you have any final tips for applying to law school? (**

Start early and apply early. This means apply by mid-November if at all possible.

- a. Make realistic choices on schools.
- b. Read websites and application materials carefully.
- c. Follow directions.
- d. Provide complete and accurate responses.
- e. Keep a list of law schools you apply to because some states will want to know which law schools you sought admission to when applying for the Bar.
- f. Respect deadlines.
- g. **On June 15 each year, law schools may be provided information concerning applicants' commitments to enroll. Applicants should be aware of policies on multiple deposits set by schools to which they applied.**
- h. Once you have reached a final decision on which school you will attend, notify schools that accepted you so that they can offer your place to someone else.

### **Do I need to open a file with the Office of Preprofessional Advising if I am using the Credential Assembly Service recommendation service and none of the schools I am applying to require a Dean's Certification?**

We ask that all applicants register with us even if they do not need a dean's certification for any of the schools. This helps us to collect important data that will assist in advising future Columbia students and graduates.

## **Explanation of Registration Form**

### **Registration**

This page asks applicants for demographic and contact information. It also serves as notification that an alumna/alumnus or student is applying to law school.

### **List of Law Schools**

Applicants indicate which law schools they are applying to on this page. Please list ALL schools not just the ones requiring the Dean's Certification. Applicants should specify if they are applying to a school Early Action or Early Decision. They should also list their target date for submitting applications. The Office of Preprofessional Advising is aware of Early Action and Early Decision deadlines as well as schools that require the Dean's Certification.

### **Honors and Awards**

This will inform us of any honors and/or awards that an applicant may have received as an undergraduate or a professional. This information will assist us in composing your Dean's Certification. Applicants are asked to provide this type of information on law school applications.

### **Addendum**

Explain any leaves of absence, changes in academic performance, academic and/or disciplinary sanctions, or any other circumstance that is important for our office to know about that may impact your application.

### **Access Decision Form**

This form indicates whether an applicant waives his or her right to see the Dean's Certification. The form will be sent to law schools with the applicant's Dean's Certification. **THIS FORM MUST BE SUBMITTED TO THE OFFICE OF PREPROFESSIONAL ADVISING** via fax, email as a signed pdf document, in person, or snail mail.

**Submit the online Registration Form available via**

**<http://www.studentaffairs.columbia.edu/preprofessional/law/>.**

The Office of Preprofessional Advising will begin accepting the online Registration Form the first Monday in August. **The Office of Preprofessional Advising will begin writing Dean's Certifications the third week of September.**

**ACCESS DECISION FORM**  
for Columbia College/SEAS students applying to Law School

Under the terms of the FERPA act of 1974, you may waive or not waive any right to inspect the Dean's Certification which is written by the Office of Preprofessional Advising for the purpose of law school applications. I understand this certification will be used only for the purpose stated above, and that this waiver is not required as a precondition of the certification, or for my consideration for admission, or for any other services or benefits.

Please record your decision below.

\_\_\_ I wish access to my Dean's Certification.

\_\_\_ I expressly waive my statutory right to access my Dean's Certification.

I \_\_\_\_\_ (applicant name) authorize Judicial Affairs to release disciplinary records regarding incidents that resulted in a university sanction of probation, suspension or dismissal to the Columbia University Office of Preprofessional Advising.

I understand that if I receive a sanction of probation or more at any time, this will be considered and reported in my Dean's Certification. I also understand that I have the obligation to self-report this information on professional school applications when asked. If a sanction occurs after the records have been released to the Office of Preprofessional Advising or after the Dean's Certification has been sent, the Office of Judicial Affairs will notify the Office of Preprofessional Advising and this information will in turn be reported to the law schools to which I have applied.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
UNI

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print or type name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Preprofessional Advising**  
Center for Student Advising  
Columbia College and The Fu Foundation  
Of Engineering and Applied Science  
Columbia University  
403 Lerner Hall  
2920 Broadway, MC1201  
NY, NY 10027  
T 212-854-6378, F 212-854-0042

## Obtaining Letters of Reference

- Choose your referees carefully. A person who knows you well can write a more substantial and helpful letter than someone who hardly knows you. In choosing between a person who taught you in a small class versus someone with a famous name or title but who cannot write a personal letter, choose the former. Letters from graduate student instructors are acceptable.
- When asking for the letter, make sure that you make an appointment to meet with the person whom you are asking. Don't ask for a reference over email. This is very impersonal and can be off-putting. Bring your résumé, transcript, and tests/papers from classes taken with the faculty member and be prepared to talk about your future goals and past achievements. If an individual agrees to write on your behalf, present him/her with Recommendation Waiver Form from the Office of Preprofessional Advising or LSAC.
- Make sure that you allow the person the option of saying NO. You want to have strong letters and if a person is somewhat uncomfortable writing for you or doesn't have enough time, it is likely that the result will be short and weak. It is much better to have someone be honest with you at the start, so that you can find another referee who will be more enthusiastic.
- Give your referees plenty of advance notice and time to write a good letter of recommendation (a month or even two), but also negotiate a deadline. Make sure that they know your application timeline.
- Give your referees a stamped envelope addressed to either LSAC or the Office of Preprofessional Advising. **Do not rely on campus mail.**
- Write a thank you note following your initial request for the letter, thanking the individual for agreeing to write the letter.
- Inform your writers when you have decided where you will be attending school and thank them again for their assistance and support.

## **Guidelines for Recommenders**

To Recommenders:

We thank you for agreeing to write a letter of recommendation for an aspiring lawyer. We realize that you are taking valuable time from your busy schedules to contribute. We would like to offer you some guidelines to help make this task more manageable. If you have any questions please feel free to contact the Office of Preprofessional Advising at (212) 854-6378.

### **What are they looking for?**

Law schools request that applicants submit only two and at most three letters of reference. These letters are carefully read and considered in the application process. We have found that the most useful letters include the following:

- 1) Explanation of relationship between applicant and referee**
- 2) Information on applicant's personal characteristics**  
(i.e. integrity, reliability, judgment, determination, motivation, honesty, professionalism, leadership, character, maturity, etc.)
- 3) Information regarding applicant's social skills**  
(i.e. interpersonal skills, ability to interact with others in groups, ability to establish peer relationships, etc.).
- 4) Comparative information**  
How does this student compare to others whom you have taught or with whom you have worked?
- 5) Assessment of applicant's academic potential**  
(if applicable to relationship) – Is this student ready for the rigors of their intended program of study? Do they have good critical thinking, problem solving, writing and analytical skills?

**Formatting:** Please submit your letter on official letterhead when possible, date and sign it.

## Choosing a Law School

For some people, the choice of which law school to attend is an easy one. The most outstanding students will probably be able to go anywhere and will select the schools they perceive to be the most prestigious or those which offer a program of particular interest, or the greatest amount of financial support. Others, who need to stay in a particular area perhaps because of family or job obligations, will choose nearby schools and schools with part-time programs.

However, the majority of applicants will have to weigh a variety of personal and academic factors to come up with a list of potential schools. Once you have a list, and more than one acceptance letter, you will have to choose a school. Applicants should consider carefully the offerings of each law school before making a decision. The quality of a law school is certainly a major consideration; however, estimations of quality are very subjective. **Factors such as campus atmosphere, the school's devotion to teaching and learning, and the applicant's enthusiasm for the school are very important.** Remember that the law school is going to be your home for three years. Adjusting to law school and the general attitudes of a professional school is difficult enough without the additional hardship of culture shock. Don't choose a law school in a large city if you can't bear crowds, noise, and a fast pace. And, if you've lived your entire life in an urban environment, can you face the change you will experience in a small town? You also may want to ask yourself if you are already set in an unshakable lifestyle or if you are eager for a new environment.

### Ranking Law Schools

#### Law Schools and Reputation

Many people will tell you to apply to the schools that take students in your GPA and LSAT ranges, and then enroll in the best one that accepts you. Law school quality can be assessed in a number of ways.

There is a hierarchy of law schools based on reputation, job placement success, strength of faculty, and the prestige of the parent institution (if there is one). In fact a study done at one university suggests that undergraduate students perceive schools not only in terms of hierarchy but also in terms of hierarchical clusters. In other words, certain schools are grouped together in terms of equivalent quality and prestige. Also, there are books or magazine articles that assign law schools purported numerical quality rankings.

However, according to the American Bar Association (ABA): No rating of law schools beyond the simple statement of their accreditation status is attempted or advocated by the official organizations in legal education. Qualities that make one school good for one student may not be as important to another. The American Bar Association and its Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar have issued disclaimers of any law school rating system. Prospective law students should consider a variety of factors in making their choice among schools.<sup>1</sup>

Since there is no official ranking authority, you should be cautious in using such rankings. The factors that make up a law school's reputation---strength of curriculum, faculty, career services, ability of students, quality of library facilities, and the like---don't lend themselves to quantification. Even if the rankings were more or less accurate, the school's reputation is only one factor among many for you to consider.

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<sup>1</sup> The American Bar Association Standards for Approval of Law Schools, General Information of the Council for the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, Number 8, "Rating of Law Schools," p. 146, American Bar Association, Chicago, IL, 2001



## What's in a Name?

While going to a "name" school may mean that you will have an easier time finding your first job, it doesn't necessarily mean that you will get a better legal education than if you go to a lesser-known law school. Some schools that were at their peaks years ago are still riding on the wave of that earlier reputation. Others have greatly improved their programs and have recruited talented faculty but have not yet made a name for themselves. Of course, schools already considered excellent have a stake in maintaining their status.

Once admitted, many applicants elect to attend the best-known schools. However, in making this decision you should consider a variety of factors, such as the contacts you might acquire at a school in the area where you hope to practice, the size of the school, and cost. The substantive differences between schools should be your focus when making this important choice rather than the school's reputed ranking.

## The Parent University

About 90 percent of ABA-approved law schools are part of a larger university. The reputation of an undergraduate school may influence the reputation of the law school so you may want to investigate the university before committing to the law school.

In addition, there are many advantages to attending a law school that is part of a university. Such law schools may have more options for joint-degree programs or for taking a non-law school course or two. They also may have more academic and social activities, campus theater groups, sports teams, and everything else that comes with university life. Perhaps most importantly, the university can act as a support system for the law school by providing a wealth of facilities, including student housing and support for career services.

## National, Regional, and Local Schools

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

## **Evaluating Law Schools**

**The best advice on how to select a law school is to choose the school that is best for you.** The law schools invest substantial time and effort in evaluating prospective students, and applicants should evaluate law schools with equivalent care. The following are some features to keep in mind as you systematically evaluate law schools.

Each listing in the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* (provides school-specific information in the following categories as well.

## Enrollment/Student Body

The academic qualifications of the student body are important to consider. It's a good idea to select a law school where you will be challenged by your classmates. Use the admission profile grids in this book to check the LSAT scores and GPAs for the previous year's entering class. Try to select a school where your averages will not be significantly different from those of your fellow law students. This is especially true for those with high scores and high GPAs, who are likely to be successful at any law school. Because of the important role of student participation in law school classes, your legal education might not be as rewarding as it could be if you are not challenged by your classmates.

You might also inquire about the diversity of the student body. Are a majority of the students the same age, race, sex, and so on? Remember, differences among students will expose you to various points of view; this will be important aspect of your law school education.

Find out how many students are in a typical class. Much of the learning in law school depends on the quality of class discussion. Small classes provide essential interaction; large classes (and the Socratic method) provide diversity, challenge, and a good mix of reactions, opinions, and criticism.

It is also important to find out the total number of students enrolled at the school. Not surprisingly, the larger law schools tend to offer a larger selection of courses. Of course, more doesn't always mean better, and no one student has time to take all the courses offered at a large school. However, if you think you want to sample a wide range of courses, you are apt to have more opportunity to do so at a law school with a large faculty.

Part of the law school learning experience takes place after class with fellow students and with members of the faculty. Check to see if faculty and students are on campus for a substantial part of the day.

Larger schools may also offer more extracurricular activities, advising, greater student services, and a larger library. However, faculties and administrators at smaller schools may be able to give students more attention, and students at smaller schools may experience greater camaraderie. The size of a school is a personal consideration. Some students thrive in large schools; others prefer a smaller student community. Ask yourself which kind of student you are.

## Faculty

You will undoubtedly want to assess the faculties of the law schools you are considering. School catalogs will give you some idea of the backgrounds of the full-time faculty--what specialties they have, what they have published, and their public service activities. If the catalog tells you only where degrees were earned, ask for more information. You may also want to check the latest edition of the Association of American Law Schools' *Directory of Law Teachers* available at law school libraries.

It may help you to know that some members of the faculty have interests similar to your own.

Is the faculty relatively diverse with respect to race, ethnic background, gender, degrees in other fields, and breadth of experience? A faculty with diverse backgrounds will have various points of view and experiences. This diversity will enrich your legal education, broaden your own point of view, and help prepare you for the variety of clients you will work with after law school.

How many full-time professors teach how many students--that is, what is the faculty/student ratio?

Although some of the most prestigious law schools are famous for their large sections in the introductory courses, they also provide smaller classes, clinics, simulations, and seminars in advanced subjects. According to the *ABA Standards for Approval of Law Schools*, it is not favorable to have a full-time faculty to full-time student ratio of 30 to 1 or more.

Are some of the teachers recognized as authorities in their respective fields through their writings and professional activities? Law school catalogs and web sites vary widely regarding information about faculty. Some merely list each faculty member's name along with schools attended and degrees earned. Others may provide details about publications, professional activities, and noteworthy achievements, particularly when an individual is an authority in his or her field.

Are there visiting professors, distinguished lecturers and visitors, symposiums and the like at the schools you are considering?

### The Library and Other Physical Facilities

Chances are you will spend more time in the library than anywhere else, so take stock of the library before you enroll. There are several factors to consider when assessing a law school library: the quality of its holdings, cataloging methods, access to electronic databases, participation in library networks for information retrieval, staff, facilities, and the hours the library is available to students.

Whether it has 250,000 volumes or 2.5 million volumes tells you little about the actual usefulness of the library. It may have an unfathomable number of volumes, but many of them may be outdated, irrelevant, or not readily available to students. All ABA-approved law schools must maintain a library that has the research materials considered essential for the study of law. Beyond that, find out if the school has any special collections, subscribes to computerized legal research services, or participates in interlibrary loan networks. Also, find out how many copies of essential materials are available, particularly for large classes.

Even if the library has all the materials you need, you won't be able to get your hands on them if the cataloging is years behind. Find out about the quality of the library's professional staff. Is there an adequate number of reference librarians for the number of students and faculty being served? Is the staff helpful?

Be sure the library has an adequate number of comfortable seats with at least enough carrels to accommodate a reasonable number of students at any given time. Either in the library or elsewhere in the law building, there should be suitable space for group study and other forms of collaborative work.

Because you will need to spend much of your time in the library, make sure its hours will accommodate just about any schedule you might have. While it is not necessary for a library to be open around the clock, it should be open before classes begin each day and remain open well into the night with a professional library staff on hand to assist students.

Access to technology should not only be available in the library, but throughout the law building, so that students can use computers to retrieve information outside the actual library space.

### Curriculum

The range and quality of academic programs is one of the most important factors to consider when choosing a law school.

Almost all law schools follow the traditional first-year core curriculum of civil procedure, criminal law, contracts, legal research and writing, torts and property. Do not assume that all law schools have programs that suit your personal needs and special interests. If you don't have any specific interests in mind--and many beginning students don't---try to make sure the school offers a wide range of electives so that you will have many options. A thorough grounding in basic legal theory will enable you to apply the principles learned to any area of law to which they pertain.

In fact, you shouldn't overemphasize your search for specialties; most law students are not specialists when they graduate nor do they need to be. Generally speaking, new lawyers begin to find their specialties only in the second to fifth years of their careers. A well-rounded legal education is the best preparation for almost any career path you take. The school's catalogs and the descriptions in this book will tell you a good deal about academic programs. You may also wish to ask school representatives questions such as: Does the school offer a variety of courses, or is it especially strong in certain areas? What size are the classes, the seminars and are small-group classroom experiences available? Are there ample opportunities for developing writing, researching, and drafting skills?

Beyond the content of law school courses, other academic program considerations may be of interest to you as a prospective law student.

## **Special Programs and Academic Activities**

### **Joint Degree Programs**

Joint-degree programs allow you to pursue law school degrees and other graduate degrees simultaneously. Almost every combination is available at some institutions. Among the more popular degrees are the J.D./M.B.A. and the J.D./M.A. in such area as economics or political science. For details, check the law school's recruitment materials.

### **Master of Laws (LL.M.) Advising and Special-Degree Programs**

Many law schools offer advance degrees that allow students to take graduate-level law courses. The LL.M. degree is quite common and usually is tailored to individual interests. Some schools offer master of laws in taxation and master of comparative law. Students may enroll in LL.M. only after having received the J.D. degree.

A few schools also offer very specific, special degree programs. Some of these specialties include a Doctorate in Civil Law, Doctor of Juridical Science, and Doctor of Jurisprudence and Social Policy. Finding out what types of advanced degrees a law school offers may help you determine the emphases of the school.

### **Part-time and Evening Programs**

Part-time programs may be offered either in the evening or the day. For the past 10 years, approximately 17 percent of law students have enrolled in part-time programs. The conventional wisdom is that if you are financially able to attend law school full-time, you ought to do so.

Part-time programs generally take four years to complete instead of three years. If you wish to enroll in such a program, you may be limiting your options somewhat, since less than half of the law schools offer part-time programs.

## Clinical Advising and Moot Court Competition

Many law schools offer students authentic experiences as lawyers by involving them with clients and providing opportunities to rehearse trial and appellate advocacy in trial team and moot court competitions. It is important that students become adept at using interviewing, counseling, research, advocacy, and negotiation skills.

The best clinical programs involve students in actual legal situations, simulations of such situations, or a combination of both, either at the school itself or in the community. Clinical programs at some schools offer a team-teaching approach; practical, professional skills are taught along with traditional classroom theory. In this manner, faculty can advise and work closely with students.

## Student Journals

Most law schools have a law review--a journal of scholarly articles and commentaries on the law--and other student-edited scholarly journals. Writing for the journals of a school can be important to both your legal education and career in law. Thus, evaluation of the journals at a particular school may be worthwhile when trying to choose the right school to attend.

Traditionally, student journal editors are chosen on the basis of academic standing--usually from the top 10 percent of the class--but writing ability, regardless of class rank, may also be a criterion. Today, a growing number of schools select journal editors by holding a competition in which students submit a previously assigned writing sample to the current editorial board. If you are on a journal, employers may assume you are either one of the brightest in your class, or an outstanding writer--or both.

If possible, check the journals of the schools you are considering. The character of the journals may be a reflection of the character of the institution that supports it.

## Order of the Coif

Many law schools have a chapter of the Order of the Coif, a national honor society for outstanding students. Students are elected to Coif on the basis of scholarship and character. Check to see if the schools you are considering include such a chapter.

## Academic Support Programs

Programs for students who need or who are expected to need assistance with legal analysis and writing are offered by most schools. Students are invited to participate in these programs on the basis of either their entering credentials or their actual law school performance. This assistance may be offered in the summer prior to beginning law school, during the academic year, or both. The aim of the academic support programs is to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to compete in law school. For further information about academic assistance programs, consult the admissions office at the law school.

## Student Organizations

You can tell something about a law school's intellectual resources and its students by the number and range of student associations and organizations sponsored on campus.

## Publications and Online Resources

There are a number of resources designed to help you research and evaluate law schools.

*The ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* is available for applicants to review in the Office of Preprofessional Advising. It's also available on-line at LSAC.org. Applicants can order the Guide on-line from [www.LSAC.org](http://www.LSAC.org) or from Barnes and Noble and Amazon. Amazon has the lowest price.

**Catalogs and bulletins** published and distributed by law schools are available by contacting the schools by phone, by U.S. mail, or through their web sites.

**\*The Boston College Online Law School Locator** helps applicants identify schools where their LSAT score and grades are most competitive for admission:

<http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/careers/gradschool/law/research/lawlocator.html#locator>.

**\*The LSAC Search For Schools Based on LSAT and Undergraduate GPA Credentials:**

[http://officialguide.lsc.org/release/OfficialGuide\\_Default.aspx](http://officialguide.lsc.org/release/OfficialGuide_Default.aspx).

**\*Equal Justice Works** – an authoritative website for applicants interested in public interest law:

<http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/>.

**Important Note From LSAC.** The data for the LSAT/GPA search were provided by the law schools themselves to LSAC. Law schools use a number of factors to make admission decisions. The following LSAT/GPA searches do not take factors other than LSAT score and GPA into account. Do not limit your law school choices based solely on LSAT/GPA searches.

**School Visits** are extremely important in helping an applicant determine if the school is the "right fit" for him or her. Each school has its own culture. It's intangible but you can feel it during a visit. Do not make your decision of where to attend law school solely on ranking and prestige.

## **Personal Statements**

Personal statements are typically two double-spaced pages, though you may find that some schools will give you more latitude. If schools do not provide guidelines on length, it is advisable to submit a statement that is approximately two pages in length. Above all, follow a school's instructions!

### **I. What is the purpose of the personal statement?**

The purpose of the personal statement is to gather information about you outside of your academic performance, LSAT score and extracurricular activities. Think of it as a written interview, one where you have control of the questions and answers.

The most important consideration in your personal statement, no matter what the topic, is the impression of yourself that you are creating.

The personal statement is your opportunity to distinguish yourself.

#### **Types:**

1. General/Comprehensive/Vague
2. Specific Pointed Question

#### **Possible Topic Areas**

1. Your motivation for a career as a law professional
2. The influence of your family/early experiences on your life
3. The influence of extracurricular, work or volunteer experiences on your life
4. Personal philosophies as related to your goals
5. How you've overcome an obstacle or disadvantage
6. What is unique about you or what interests or excites you.
7. Examine a tragedy or success. Discuss how you have grown from this experience.
8. The most important course, professor, or event that has happened to you in college or post-college.
9. Hobbies, passions, ideals and how they are related to your choice to attend law school and become a lawyer.

### **II. Before You Begin:**

- Brainstorm
- Self-Reflection Exercises
- Free-write
- Decide your approach in terms of content
- Think about your readers and tailor your message
- Write an outline
- List your personal skills and consider how they will make you an asset to the law school or legal community
- Have a friend or colleague do a mock interview with you regarding why you are interested in applying to law school and other questions about yourself.

- Write several adjectives that characterize you and then write a short paragraph explaining how these words describe you.

### III. Writing Process

- Getting Started – Writing 1<sup>st</sup> Draft
- Revise, Revise, Revise!
- Proofread

**Q. How long should this take?**

A. Probably longer than you'd like. Give yourself plenty of time to go through this writing process. The longer that you have, the more revising you can do and, as a result the better your statement.

**Q. Who should I ask to read my work?**

A. A multitude of perspectives is good. You should ask someone who knows you well and others who don't know you that well. The staff in the Office of Preprofessional Advising are certainly willing to help in this regard. Listen to the feedback and don't take it personally – both friends and advisors are trying to help you tailor your message.

**Q. How do I know when I'm done writing and revising?**

A. Only you can know the answer to this question. When you read it out loud and feel happy with the result.

**Q. How should I handle optional essay questions?**

A. Answer them. Don't squander opportunities to communicate with admissions committee. If you don't take this opportunity – you may appear lazy.

**Q. Should I talk about a bad semester or a bad grade on my transcript within the personal statement?**

A. No. If you feel there is something on your record that needs further explanation, you should address this in a separate letter or addendum to your application. Your personal statement should stick to the positives.

### General Advice

- **Answer the questions** that are asked. Don't be tempted to use the same statement for all applications.
- **Tell a Story.** Show or demonstrate your points using concrete examples from your experience.
- **The essay should come from your heart and brain.**
- **Give yourself some distance.** During the revision process put your writing away for a day or two and then come back to look at it with fresh eyes.
- **Don't be afraid to delete.** It's okay to let it go. Sometimes you will need to delete words, sentences, or entire paragraphs as your writing and ideas evolve. Get rid of that which no longer fits.
- **Be specific.** Broad sweeping statements will not make you stand out as an individual. Illustrate your points with personal examples or experiences.



- **Find an angle.** An angle helps you to focus and make your statement interesting.
- **Have a strong opening paragraph.** Your first paragraph should state your thesis and grab the reader's attention. Examples include a remarkable or life-changing experience, an anecdote, or a question that will be answered by your personal statement.
- **Show continuity.** Conclude your personal statement by referring back to the introductory paragraph and restate your main thesis in a slightly different way.
- **Avoid clichés and quotes.** This statement is about you and should not borrow from other's words.
- **Write well.** Be meticulous about your writing style. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Don't rely on spellchecker.
- **Don't write a descriptive résumé.** This is a common mistake. Don't restate your resume in prose. This information can be found in other parts of your application.
- **Avoid writing about high school experiences.** Professional schools will expect that you have had significant experiences while in college.
- **Don't focus too much on another person, even if they have been influential in your life.**
- **Do not solely discuss why you want to become an attorney. Instead, again, try to discuss what experiences led to your choice and what unique attributes you will bring to law school and the legal field.**
- **Be positive.** Don't badmouth the profession.
- **Avoid controversial issues.** While you may be an outspoken critic of "x" issue, the person(s) reading your statement may be offended by your views.
- **Be honest.**
- **Everyone Fails.** Writing about a failure can demonstrate that you have been able to learn and grow from your mistakes.
- **Find a balance between creative and cautious.** This can be tricky. There is a fine line between creative and interesting and odd and gimmicky. Don't write your personal statement as a legal brief or as a poem.
- **Be concise.** This is greatly appreciated by those who are reading thousands of applications.
- **It's hard to be a stand-up comedian.** Humor is difficult and can be misinterpreted. It's best to avoid it.
- **Read the statement aloud.**
- **Keep it a reasonable length.** If the length is prescribed, keep it within that length, otherwise a good rule is to keep it to two pages.
- **Double space and make the margins at least an inch.**
- **Put your name on each page.**
- **A title is not necessary.**
- **Do not write like a lawyer. Avoid legalese.**
- **Use an "active" voice.**

#### IV. Questions to Ask during Revision

(This is taken from a handout from the former CU Office of Scholars and Fellows)

Is your introductory paragraph interesting? How so?

Is the direction of your essay clear from the first paragraph?

Do you establish a clear theme that will guide how the essay develops? What is it and why is it appropriate?

Do you establish a relationship with your audience that will compel them to become interested in what you have to say?

Does your statement have continuity and focus and a successful organizational structure?

How can you tell? Check your thesis against every paragraph and then check every sentence within a paragraph for relation to theme.

Is your conclusion interesting? How so? Does it pull things together and at the same time bow to the future, to something just slightly beyond the scope of the statement? Why is it important?

Have you paid attention to diction, sentence flow and accuracy?

### **Information Adapted From:**

**Longley, Charles & Wright, Carol L. The Application Process. *NAPLA Handbook for Pre-law Advisors*. Northeast Association of Pre-law Advisors, 3 ed., 2000.**

**Savage, Mary C. *Pre-law Guide*. Johns Hopkins University, Office of Preprofessional Advising <http://www.jhu.edu/~preprof/PrelawGuide/index.html>, 2001.**

**DeLeon, Ken. *Law School Personal Statements Advice*. Top-Law-Schools.com. <http://www.top-law-schools.com/law-school-personal-statements.shtml>, 2003.**

**Joyce P. Curll**  
**Former Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid**  
**Harvard Law School**

*I look for a well-written statement that conveys coherent thoughts and ideas and that helps me know the applicant better. I hope it will be interesting and that after reading it I will have a better sense of who the person is and what kind of student that person will be when he or she joins the class. The more a statement conveys how a person thinks, what he or she thinks is important, or other such insights, the better. You should think of the statement as an opportunity to round out pieces to the puzzle that makes up your application. Write about issues or problems you think about and how you have dealt with them. The more personal you can be – the more you can bring in your own background or history – the more valuable the statement can be.*

*Peel away the preconceived notions about what you think is expected, then think about what you want to convey to the committee and how that ties in with everything else in your application. Think about leaving the committee with an impression of you. Be comfortable with whatever you write.*

*In some of the most successful statements, applicants have reflected on who they are, what they're all about, and why they have done what they have done, and have left the committee with one or two thoughts about them.*

**Edward Tom**  
**Director of Admissions**  
**UC Berkeley School of Law**

*We don't have a standard form; we leave it pretty open-ended. We do warn applicants that our job is to choose law students, not lawyers, so to that extent we're interested in their academic potential, not exactly why they want to go to law school or what they want to do with their law degree upon graduation (because people often change their minds). In some cases, applicants have some burning interest or a significant event in their lives that compels them to go to law school for a specific reason, or else they have volunteered or worked actively in some area that interests them very much. And in those cases, of course, they should talk about why they want to get into environmental law or why they want to do public interest. So there are always exceptions, but, in the main, people who don't have that experience or unique interest ought to be talking about how they are different from everybody else.*

*Applicants should outline what they want to say in the personal statement and write clear, concise sentences, keeping in mind who their audience is and what our purpose is. I would stay away from trying to be cute. There's no really good substitute for a cogent sentence. Humor, unless it's done really well, often falls flat on its face.*

**Faye Deal**  
**Director of Admissions**  
**Stanford Law School**

*There are a variety of things an applicant can write about; it does not have to be about why he or she wants to go to law school. I tell applicants who are in the process of writing that this is their one opportunity to tell the admissions committee why they're different from every other applicant in the pool, what makes them special and how they can stand out from the 4,000 other applicants we look at every year.*

*What I want to come away with is something new about the applicant that I haven't picked up from anywhere else in the file.*

*If someone is an older applicant who has been out working in a particular field and now is making the jump over to law school, that person should anticipate that one of the questions that's going to come up when we review the file is "Why is this person changing careers?" so that person may want to focus their personal statement on that. An applicant who was clearly premed the first couple of years of college and then changed to poli sci might want to tell us why; otherwise, that's an unanswered question we have.*

*Some applicants mistakenly think that in all cases what we want to know is why they want to go to law school, and that's not necessarily true.*

*Keep in mind that part of the exercise is to say what you want to say and to do so in about two pages. Two pages should be enough to get your point across.*

**Dennis Shields**  
**Former Assistant Dean and Director of Admissions**  
**University of Michigan Law School and Duke Law**

*The essay should follow the directions in the application; if it asks for one page or 250 words, the applicant should try to stay within those boundaries....Whoever sits down to read the applicant's file has probably, if they're lucky, half an hour to do it. So the candidate needs to make judgments about what's most important....Also, they ought to be themselves; they ought not to try to sway the reader by their apparent vocabulary and multi-syllable words. They're much better off being direct and succinct.*

*Each essay ought to fit the parameters of what a particular school asks for. It is easy for me to pick up a file and know that Yale got the same essay that we did. You don't want to create a new one for each school from whole cloth but each essay should be a little more different than which law school it mentions by name.*

Quotes from:

Stelzer, Richard. How to Write a Winning Personal Statement for Graduate and Professional School. Princeton, NJ: Peterson's Guides, 1997.

## Understanding Admissions Criteria

### Objective Criteria

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

**Law School Admission Test (LSAT):** Applicants take the LSAT, a half-day standardized test, during one of four test administrations offered annually by the Law School Admission Council. Scores, which range from 120 to 180, are used by most law schools as a common measurement of potential for success in law school.

**Undergraduate Grade Point Average (GPA):** Applicants submit undergraduate transcripts to the Law School Data Assembly Service (CAS), which converts grades to a cumulative grade point average using a set of consistent values. The GPA offers admissions committees another numerical basis for comparing applicants.

**Applicant Index:** Many law schools ask the CAS to combine applicants' LSAT scores and GPAs with weighted constants to produce a single number which can be used to assess and compare potential for doing well.

### Subjective Criteria

Subjective criteria are the factors law schools consider in addition to GPAs and LSAT scores:

**Personal Statement:** Applicants submit a personal statement as part of the application process for almost all law schools. Admissions committees look for a concise, detailed, well-written statement revealing the applicant's individuality. They want to learn more about the applicant and what makes him/her qualified to study at their law schools.

**Letters of Recommendation:** Most law schools require applicants to submit letters of recommendation from professors or employers to gain a different perspective on the applicant's academic strength and personal qualities. Admissions officers find most helpful specific examples of applicants' motivation and intellectual curiosity, an assessment of communication skills, and a comparison with peers.

**Experience:** This factor includes undergraduate curricular and extracurricular activities, internships, part-time and full-time work experience. Include a resume in your application materials that demonstrates your skills and abilities relevant to the study of law and how you will contribute to the diversity and strength of the class.

Most law schools have **recruitment programs** to increase participation in the legal profession by underrepresented groups. State schools may reserve seats for state residents. Review websites of schools to learn about their selection criteria, and you may want to contact schools about your specific concerns.

## *Factors to Consider When Reviewing a File*

### **Academic Factors**

- LSAT score(s)
- Undergraduate GPA
- Any advanced work, other degrees
- Major
- Difficulty of college course work
- Grade trends
- Quality of high school and prior academic experience, if known
- Other test scores, if known

### **Demographic & Diversity Factors**

- Age
- Gender
- Race/ethnicity
- Geographic residence
- Socioeconomic status, family size
- Religion
- Multicultural experiences
- Growing up in a low-income community
- Family history of higher education: first generation to attend college
- Dominant language, other languages
- Parents' and grandparents' education level, if known
- Number of hours worked and other responsibilities during school
- Legacy, relative attended

### **Work, Internship & Professional Experience**

- Position/type
- Level of Responsibility achieved
- Full-time, part-time
- Number of years worked
- Type of industry or business
- Law-related experience of knowledge
- Military service
- Internships
- Other significant professional exp.

### **Leadership, Accomplishments & Extracurricular Activities**

- Undergraduate or graduate leadership activities
- Community leadership and organizations
- Special skills and talents
- Overcoming/persevering in face of adversity
- Significant personal accomplishments of any kind
- Overcoming substantial hardship (*i.e.*, discrimination, disability, etc...)
- Helping others overcome hardship
- Serving underserved communities or peoples
- Service activities
- Athletic activities
- Music, drama, writing, artistic ability
- Travel, foreign living

### **Other Factors to be Considered**

- Writing ability
- Planning ability
- Communication skills
- Analytical skills
  - Advocacy skills
- Problem-solving skills

This list developed (in part) from Law School Admission Council publication, *The Art and Science of Law School Admission Decision Making* and is not meant to be all-inclusive.

## SCHOOLS REQUIRING THE DEAN'S CERTIFICATION

**Boston University** – required of matriculants

**Brooklyn** – required only if the applicant has/had academic or disciplinary sanctions.

**Cardozo** - required only if the applicant has had academic or disciplinary sanctions *or* is accepted and chooses to matriculate at Cardozo.

**Charleston School of Law** - required of matriculants

**Columbia** - required only if the applicant has had academic or disciplinary sanctions and matriculants

**Cornell** - - required of applicants who have had academic or disciplinary sanctions and matriculants.

**Duke** - required from applicants who have had academic or disciplinary sanctions.

**Florida A & M** - required if the applicant has had academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**Florida State** - required if the applicant has had academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**University of Florida** - required if the applicant has had academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**Georgetown** - required of matriculants.

**Harvard** - required of matriculants

**Howard** -

**University of Memphis** - required if the applicant has had academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**New York University** - required of matriculants or applicants with academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**U Penn** - Required after an applicant is accepted and decides to matriculate at U Penn.

**University of Richmond** – required of matriculants **and** must be submitted for all institutions attended whether or not a degree was earned.

**University of Southern California** - required if the applicant has had academic and/or disciplinary sanctions.

**Stanford** – required of matriculants

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