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# **A Guide to The Law School Application Process**



**Political Science Department**

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## ADMISSIONS CRITERIA FOR LAW SCHOOL

The two most important factors in gaining admission to law school are a student's score on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and a student's grade point average. However, law schools are also interested in a student's work experience---in fact many law schools greatly value post-college work experience---and extra-curricular activities. Most law schools also require letters of recommendation, preferably from someone familiar with the student's academic abilities, that is, from a professor. If a student has been out of school for some time, law schools will also accept letters from employers or others capable of making an assessment of the individual's intellectual fitness and capacity to undertake the study of law. Finally, most law school applications require a "personal statement."

### Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)

The Law School Admission Test is administered four times a year (in June, October, December, and February). The most appropriate time to take the test is in June or October prior to one's senior year. Students taking the test in June or October will receive their scores in plenty of time to make decisions about the schools to which they wish to apply.

Many students do not take the LSAT until December of their senior year. **This is a serious mistake.** Most law schools operate what is known as a "rolling admissions" policy, that is, they gradually fill up the seats in their incoming class as they receive applications. A student who takes the LSAT in December will not be able to mail his or her law school applications until January, by which time many schools will have filled a percentage of the seats in their incoming class. All other things being equal, your chances of admission by this point in the admissions cycle will be substantially lower than if your application had been mailed in November or December.

In fact, it has become increasingly common for law schools to make admissions decisions in September and October with respect to applicants who have taken the LSAT in June. The June test is administered on a Monday (rather than a Saturday) and usually coincides with the end of the quarter. It is thus not the most convenient time for DePaul students to take the test. At the same time, taking the test in June will provide students with an added advantage in the application process.

The law school admissions process is administered by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). The two most important components of LSAC are the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Everyone who applies to law school must (1) register with the LSAC Credential Assembly Service and (2) take the LSAT.

When you register with the Credential Assembly Service, a file is created in your name. The file will eventually contain (1) your LSAT score, (2) copies of transcripts from all institutions you have attended, and (3) letters of recommendation written on your behalf. When you apply to a particular law school, the school will request the contents of your file from LSAC.

The first step in applying to law school is to visit the LSAC website (at [www.LSAC.org](http://www.LSAC.org)). The website describes the law school application process in detail. It also includes a sample LSAT, information about ordering various publications (including past tests, which can be used for practice), and an online copy of the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide*, which contains four pages of statistical and descriptive information about all ABA-approved law schools.

The current cost of registering for the LSAT is \$175 and of registering with the LSAC's Credential Assembly Service is \$170. A fee waiver is available, but you must apply in advance and fee

waivers are granted only to students in “extreme financial need.” Registration can be done on the LSAC website.

Your application to take the LSAT must be mailed at least 30 days prior to the date on which you plan to take the test. Therefore, students planning to take the test in late September or early October---the most popular option---will need to register **before** the fall quarter of their senior year actually begins. You will find a schedule of test dates on the LSAC website. Registration materials for the June (and subsequent) tests become available in March.

The LSAT takes one-half day to complete and is usually administered on a Saturday morning (the June exam is administered on a Monday). The test yields a score which ranges from 120 to 180. The median score is thus 150. The test includes sections consisting of multiple choice questions on “reading comprehension,” “analytical reasoning,” and “logical reasoning.” In addition, students taking the test provide a writing sample. The writing sample is not “scored,” but a copy is sent to the law schools to which you apply.

It is possible to order past copies of actual tests from the LSAC website. Some booklets contain not only actual exams but explanations of the questions. Information about the content of the LSAT may also be obtained by purchasing one of the commercial test preparation books available in the DePaul University bookstores on the Lincoln Park and Loop campuses and in other bookstores.

### **Grade Point Average (GPA)**

You must send to the Credential Assembly Service a copy of the transcript of grades you received from **any** undergraduate or graduate education institution you have attended (**including** any institution you attended prior to transferring to DePaul). To request a transcript from DePaul, go to the Student Records website at <http://offices.depaul.edu/student-records/Pages/default.aspx>. You can request that your transcript be sent to LSAC. When you make your request, include your LSAC identification number (an “L” followed by eight digits) in the mailing address to which the transcript should be sent. Remember that you must request a transcript from **all** institutions you have attended, even if you subsequently transferred some or all of your credits to DePaul.

Your transcript is sent directly from DePaul to LSAC, which in turn supplies a summary of your transcript (or transcripts) to the law schools to which you apply. In this summary, your GPA is computed separately for each year, allowing a law school to detect an improvement (or deterioration) in your GPA as well as to see your overall GPA. LSAC also sends to the law schools to which you are applying a raw copy of the transcripts themselves.

Your GPA is the average of the grades you have received during college. Obviously, the higher your GPA, the better your chances of admission to law school. However, a high GPA, in itself, will not be sufficient. It must be based on achievement in serious and challenging courses. The most sensible academic strategy for a pre-law student is to take a manageable number of challenging courses each quarter and to do as well as possible in those courses.

Law schools do not have a preference for students who have majored in any particular subject. They are interested in students with a solid liberal arts background. Thus, regardless of what subject you major in, you should plan to take courses at the appropriate level in a wide variety of subjects--including the social sciences, natural sciences, humanities, business, mathematics, and statistics.

## **Work Experience and Extracurricular Activities**

The most important criteria in law school admissions are your LSAT score and your undergraduate GPA. However, law schools are also interested in evidence that a student is particularly mature or responsible, has participated in various activities during college, or demonstrates exceptional leadership ability. A student planning the use of his or her time during college would be wise to take advantage of opportunities to participate in activities that contribute to personal growth and social competence, e.g., student government or other campus organizations, the school newspaper or campus journals, special research projects, internships and other work experiences, study abroad opportunities, Model United Nations, Model EU, the Mock Trial Team, and other on-campus or off-campus activities.

## **Letters of Recommendation**

Most law schools suggest that an applicant submit two or three letters of recommendation. You should take advantage of opportunities to become acquainted with particular faculty members and be able to identify at least two faculty members from whom to request a recommendation. Faculty members occasionally go on leave for a year or part of a year, and you should determine whether a faculty member from whom they wish to request a recommendation will be available to write such a letter at the appropriate time. Letters of recommendation can be submitted online by your recommender to LSAC. You can also download the letter of recommendation form from the LSAC website and hand deliver it to your recommender. Remember to sign that portion of the form in which you waive your right of access to see the letter.

Law schools do not appreciate and do not place much value on letters of recommendation from relatives or friends of applicants, even if such relatives or friends are lawyers or judges or are otherwise "important" people. The purpose of the recommendation is to assure the law school that the applicant is a conscientious and mature student, and the most useful letters of recommendation will come from faculty members who are familiar with a student's work and work habits.

## **The Personal Statement**

Most law schools require that your application include a "personal statement." This is an essay about yourself, and it represents an opportunity to convey to the law schools to which you are applying what it is that makes you special and why you would be an interesting and valuable addition to the law school's student body. Avoid spending much time explaining how or why you have "always wanted to become a lawyer." The best advice is to be honest, lively, and persuasive. Allow your personality and your distinctive characteristics and values to come through in what you write. Also be sure to proofread your statement for grammatical and spelling errors.

## **APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL**

The first step in the process is to visit the LSAC website ([www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)), download copies of the relevant forms, and decide when you want to register to take the LSAT. You will use the website for four main purposes: (1) to register with the CAS, (2) to register for the LSAT, (3) to request transcripts from the undergraduate institutions you have attended (although in the case of students who have not attended any institution other than DePaul, this can be done directly by requesting your transcripts via the Student Records website), and (4) to request letters of recommendation from professors or others (a form can be downloaded from the LSAC website and given to the person from whom you are requesting a letter of recommendation; letters can also be submitted electronically to LSAC website).

## **LSAC Publications**

LSAC publishes or makes available on its website a variety of books, videos, and other items that may be helpful to pre-law students and to students applying to law school. Perhaps the most useful is the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*. LSAC also publishes several books containing complete versions of previously administered LSATs, which may be ordered from LSAC through its website.

## **The Law School Forum**

Each year, usually in the summer or the fall, LSAC Law School Forums are held around the country. The Forum offers a chance to meet with representatives from nearly all ABA-approved law schools in one room over a one-day period. Workshops on financing a legal education, on minority admissions, and on the law school admissions process are also presented at the Forum. The Forum is the best single way to obtain applications from and chat with representatives of the law schools to which you are thinking of applying. Admission to all LSAC Law School Forums is free.

For information about upcoming forums, visit the website at <http://www.lsac.org/jd/choosing-a-law-school/law-school-recruitment-forums>.

## **PREPARING FOR THE LSAT**

The best preparation for the LSAT is the three years of college education completed prior to taking the exam. At the same time, a student who plans to take the LSAT should be familiar with the content and the format of the test. There are at least four ways to gain this familiarity. First, the LSAC website contains a sample test. Second, LSAC publishes booklets containing previously administered tests. Third, commercial test preparation books are available in most college bookstores. Finally, several commercial test preparation centers operate in the Chicago area (see below for a list of websites).

There is conflicting evidence about whether taking a test preparation course can substantially enhance your LSAT score. At the very least, any student planning to take the LSAT should become familiar with the content and format of the various sections of the test by examining the sample exam available on the LSAC website or examples of previously administered tests published by LSAC or other publishers.

## **CHOOSING A LAW SCHOOL**

The best guide to American law schools is the *Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*, which is available online (for free) at the LSAC website. Among the statistics published in the guide is the median LSAT score of students who have been admitted in recent years to each of the profiled law schools. The guide also contains, for most of these schools, a "grid" which will assist the student in judging his or her chances of admission. The grid indicates what percentage of applicants from the previous year with a particular combination of LSAT score and GPA were admitted to the law school. The grid will enable you to judge your chances of admission to a particular school once you know your LSAT score and your GPA.

Since law schools require an application fee, it is necessary to choose a limited number to which to apply. A common strategy is to apply to two or three schools to which the chances of admission are

quite certain, two or three schools to which the chances are good, and two or three schools to which the chances of admission may not be very high, but which the applicant would be delighted to attend, if admitted.

Even if a student's chances of admission to a particular law school are good, they are never perfect, and it is definitely wise to apply to at least two or three schools. A student who takes the LSAT in June or October will know his or her score in time to make a judgment about the most appropriate law schools to which to apply. You do not need to decide before you take the LSAT which law schools will receive your scores. Your scores will only be sent to the law schools to which you actually decide to apply after you have taken the test.

If you are admitted to several law schools, choosing the one you wish to attend may be a genuine dilemma. On the one hand, attending a law school with a particularly strong reputation may enhance the quality of your education and the diversity of your job opportunities. On the other hand, the better the law school, the more competitive it will be, and the unavoidable fact is that class rank is extremely important in getting job offers at the end of law school. Thus, it may not be wise to attend a law school where your chances of doing well are unpromising. There is no single source of information about what a particular law school is "really like"--not even the students who attend the law school may be able to supply very helpful advice. For this reason, a student who is able to choose from among two or more law schools should at that point speak to as many people as possible--and if possible pay a visit to the schools themselves--in an effort to make a wise decision.

Students also need to carefully consider whether it makes sense to go to law school at all. In the past three or four years, increasing attention is being paid to the fact that law school tuition is very high--often \$45,000-\$50,000 per year---and that jobs in the legal profession, and especially high-paying jobs in the legal profession, have become more scarce. Thus, it is entirely possible to graduate from law school with over \$100,000 of debt and be unable able to find a job in the field of law at all. The decision to attend law school involves a substantial element of risk and students should be aware of the fact that a law degree is very far from being a sure-fire ticket to financial security.

### **FINANCIAL AID, ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE, and MINORITY STUDENTS**

While law school is expensive, there are sources of need-based and merit-based financial aid for prospective law students. Broadly speaking, financial aid is available from three sources: (1) Individual law schools offer grants and scholarship designed to attract students in whom they are particularly interested. Information about such grants or scholarships is obtained from the law school itself. (2) Grants and scholarships may be available from organizations such as local bar associations, veterans' groups, business organizations, individual companies, and fraternities, sororities, and other social groups and ethnic associations. Information about these sources of financial aid may be obtained by consulting books available in college and other bookstores and by searching the World Wide Web. (3) Federal loans are available through banks or financial institutions or through individual law schools. Information about federal loans is available on the LSAC website or the federal government's FAFSA website ([www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)).

The Law School Admission Council and member law schools are committed to ensuring that racial and ethnic minorities are fairly represented in U.S. law schools and in the legal profession. In addition, the fee waiver program is designed to insure that no student is denied access to law school due to financial hardship. Minority students and those who may require economic assistance in applying to or attending law school should visit the LSAC website and seek advice from pre-law students who are active in campus organizations and from advisors and counselors available throughout the University.

## Pre-Law Resources at DePaul

Various resources are available to pre-law students at DePaul. In particular, the following people are available for advising:

- Gil Gott, International Studies, [ggott@depaul.edu](mailto:ggott@depaul.edu), 773-325-4548
- Tera Agyepong, History, [tagyepon@depaul.edu](mailto:tagyepon@depaul.edu), 773-325-8510
- Robert Kallen, Economics, [kalrow@aol.com](mailto:kalrow@aol.com), 312-362-5587
- Beth Kelly, Women's & Gender Studies, [bkelly@depaul.edu](mailto:bkelly@depaul.edu), 773-325-1979
- Theresa Luhrs, Psychology, [tluhrs@depaul.edu](mailto:tluhrs@depaul.edu), 773-325-4256
- Paula McQuade, English, [pmcquade@depaul.edu](mailto:pmcquade@depaul.edu), 773-325-1787
- Joseph Mello, Political Science, [jmello1@depaul.edu](mailto:jmello1@depaul.edu), 773-325-7384
- Christina Rivers, Political Science, [crivers@depaul.edu](mailto:crivers@depaul.edu), 773-325-4593
- Ann Russo, Women's & Gender Studies, [arusso@depaul.edu](mailto:arusso@depaul.edu), 773-325-1774
- David Williams, Political Science, [dwill105@depaul.edu](mailto:dwill105@depaul.edu), 773-325-4906

Several organizations offer students an opportunity to expand their interests and develop their leadership abilities. In recent years, DePaul has sponsored teams in national Mock Trial competitions. Information about the DePaul University Pre-Law Club can be found at <https://orgsync.com/60373/chapter>. There are opportunities for participation in debate through the Department of Communications. The Political Science Department offers a course regarding Model United Nations. The Student Government Association and *The DePaulia* offer challenging extracurricular activities. Students interested in finding out about these and other student organizations may visit the Office of Student Involvement (at the Loop or Lincoln Park Campus) or browse their web site at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/involvement/studentorgs.html>.

## INFORMATION ON THE WEB

**Law School Admission Council:** [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)

### **Financial Aid:**

Access Group: where one can fill out the Need Access Application that most schools require:  
[www.accessgroup.org/index.htm](http://www.accessgroup.org/index.htm)

FAFSA application online: [www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)

Federal Student Aid [www.studentaid.ed.gov](http://www.studentaid.ed.gov)

FinAid! Guide to financial aid: [www.finaid.org](http://www.finaid.org)

### **Minority Students:**

Chicago-Kent College of Law, Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars Program:  
[www.kentlaw.iit.edu/academics/pre-law-undergraduate-scholars-program](http://www.kentlaw.iit.edu/academics/pre-law-undergraduate-scholars-program)

Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO): [www.cleoscholars.com](http://www.cleoscholars.com)

### **Test Preparation:**

Kaplan, Inc.: [www.kaplan.com](http://www.kaplan.com)

Next Step Test Prep: [www.nextsteptestprep.com](http://www.nextsteptestprep.com)  
(NextStepTestPrep regularly offers an inexpensive on-campus test preparation class.)

The Princeton Review: [www.PrincetonReview.com](http://www.PrincetonReview.com)

TestMasters: [www.testmasters.net](http://www.testmasters.net)

PowerScore Test Preparation: [www.powerscore.com](http://www.powerscore.com)

Blueprint LSAT: [www.blueprintlsat.com](http://www.blueprintlsat.com)

### **Cautionary Information about getting a law degree:**

Inside the Law School Scam: [www.insidethelawschoolscam.blogspot.com](http://www.insidethelawschoolscam.blogspot.com)

Brian Tamanaha, *Failing Law Schools* (University Chicago Press, 2012)

Stephen J. Harper, *The Lawyer Bubble* (Basic Books, 2013)