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Prelaw 101

Deciding on a Career in Law

A law degree can lead to a career in government, business, higher education, communications, sports and entertainment, among others. The basic functions of the legal profession call upon reasoning, analytical and communications skills.

Expectations of a law career are not always in-line with reality. The following is a list of some of what can be expected in a legal career:

- Long hours; including weekend work
- Tedious research and administrative tasks
- Varied salaries based on the type of law someone practices

The following are a list of ways a student should explore his or her interest in a legal profession:

- Register to receive emails about law-related programs
- Conduct online research
- Intern with a law firm or law-related organization or take a position as a legal assistant/paralegal
- Conduct information interviews to learn about the daily life of a lawyer, what it takes to be successful, satisfaction/dissatisfaction of the field
- Discuss law school experience with current law students

Law School Preparation

Law schools are primarily interested in an applicant's academic preparation and performance. While there are no specific requirements beyond the bachelor's degree, undergraduates should select a major or concentration that interests and allows them to excel in the classroom. Students are encouraged to take a variety of courses, which expose them to different disciplines and assist in the development of their analytic, critical thinking, finance acumen, and writing skills. If there are law-related courses, students should enroll to get a feel for law as a general subject.

Students should take a normal to heavy course-load each semester; however, students should not jeopardize their grade point average by taking too many credits in a given semester. The Pass/Fail option should be limited to one or two courses during their undergraduate career. Overall, students need to demonstrate that they are motivated learners by going beyond what is required of them.

If full-time study is not possible, please remember that most law schools admit students who have completed their undergraduate study on a part-time basis. These students must demonstrate their ability to perform at the highest level by taking rigorous courses.

The Prelaw Advisor

All prelaw students are encouraged to consult their prelaw advisor. A Prelaw Advisor provides students with:

- Individual appointments
- Feedback on personal statements and the application process
- Special topics; for example, opportunities to meet law school admissions recruiters

The LSAT

- Prelaw students must release their LSAT scores to GS
- The LSAT is a test of logic, and takes three hours and thirty minutes. For more information, visit www.lsac.org/LSAT/about-the-lsat.asp.

The best time to take the LSAT is when an applicant is prepared. With that said, applicants should take the LSAT in June because if he or she needs to cancel the June score, there is still time to take the October exam and have applications completed by early November.

Applicants prepare alone, with a group, or through a prep course. Many of the test companies offer scholarships for applicants with financial need. Inquire with each company.

Binary Solutions – www.binarysolution.com (*gives discounts to Columbia students and alumni*)

Kaplan – www.kaplan.com

Princeton Review – www.princetonreview.com

Powerscore – www.powerscore.com

TestMasters – www.testmasters.com

Applicants may cancel their scores at the test site or via written requests received by LSAC within nine calendar days of the test. Law schools, however, may question multiple score cancellations.

Note: *Online Services Registration (www.LSAC.org) closes midnight ET on deadline date. Early registration helps guarantee a preferred test center location. Also LSDAS will provide accommodations for individuals who have documented disabilities. Refer to www.LSAC.org on the inside cover of the LSAT & LSDAS Information Book for more information about LSAT dates and registration deadlines.*

Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS)

Almost all the ABA approved law schools require that applicants register with the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS). LSDAS provides each law school an applicant applies to with a master report that includes the following:

- Undergraduate academic summary
- Copies of all undergraduate, graduate, and law school/professional transcripts
- LSAT scores and writing sample copies
- Copies of letters of reference processed by Law School Admissions Council

LSDAS also provides applicants with the following services:

- Ability to track LSAC file status and electronically file law school applications
- Recommendation service active for five years
- Resources available for purchase and for FREE
- ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools - Free On-line Edition

Applicants may register with LSDAS anytime, but should register with LSDAS before recommendations and applications are submitted. Registration is good for five years. Applicants may register at www.LSAC.org, or call (215) 968-1001.

Master Report & Transcripts

Applicants must send a list of school names and transcripts to LSAC from each undergraduate and graduate school attended. If an applicant studied abroad, he or she should list the name of the sponsoring institution. Applicants should fill-out an LSDAS Transcript Request Form for each school attended and give a copy to each school to attach to transcripts sent to LSDAS.

Current students must request their Columbia transcript from the Registrar's Office in-person at 205 Kent, but should wait until they receive their spring or summer grades. Alums may mail their LSDAS Transcript Request Form to the address listed below. All applicants should submit transcripts in the summer because LSDAS experiences a backlog in the fall. Applicants in school during the fall semester should send their updated transcript to LSAC and to the individual schools when fall grades are in. The transcripts are free.

Office of the Registrar
Columbia University
205 Kent Hall, MC 9202
1140 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10027

Once LSAC has summarized your transcripts, applicants may view the LSDAS Law School Report online. Applicants should check it for accuracy, and order enough LSDAS Law School Reports to accompany each application. When law schools receive an application, they request a law school report from LSDAS. Applicants may apply for fee waivers online for both the LSAT and LSDAS.

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

Timeline for Applying to Law School

First Semester	Second Semester	Summer before the Final Year	Fall Application Year	Spring Application Year
Enroll in an undergraduate logic course	Finalize the decision to go to law school	Continue law school and legal career research	Attend Law School Forum in NYC	Check application status if completed file confirmation not received
Begin investigation law schools	Pursue legal internships & oppt.	Register for the LSAT if not already done so	Compile list of law schools to apply	File FAFSA Form available Jan. 1
Discuss the decision to go to law school with respected persons	Continue a serious investigation of law schools	Write personal statement Optional: Submit personal statement to prelaw advisor for review (allow 2-4 weeks)	Check with LSAC to assure recommendations were submitted	Complete additional financial aid forms and scholarship applications
Schedule a meeting with prelaw advisor	Ask two faculty members to write letters of recommendation <i>*Remember to thank them</i>	Review Columbia transcript & make realistic decisions on schools	Attend CC Office of Prewlaw Advising programs	Discuss law school decision with prelaw advisor
Attend law school admissions and financial aid meeting	Register EARLY for June/Oct. LSAT	Determine application method (email, mail)	Finalize personal statement	If wait-listed, submit additional information and contact prelaw advisor for guidance
Explore the AILE program with prelaw advisor	Check with prelaw advisor to verify LSAT fee waiver qualification	Submit registration form to prelaw advisor to assist in writing Dean's Certification	Visit law schools	Make decision about school and notify all schools, recommenders and prelaw advisors of decision
	Attend alum law school & attorney panels	Finalize personal statement	Review financial aid options	Notify recommenders where you were accepted and where you will matriculate
	Discuss law school application process prelaw advisor process in March		Submit law school applications no later than November	
	Register & send letters of rec. to the Law School Data Assembly Service		Submit updated transcript with fall semester grades to LSAC & law schools	
	Get a free credit report to assure good credit score		Check status of applications	

Applications

General Tips:

1. Start early.
2. Check transcript and compare GPA and LSAT requirements
3. Make realistic choices on schools.
4. Take the LSAT when you are ready.
5. Read bulletins and application materials carefully
6. Follow directions.
7. Make copies of all applications to use as drafts
8. Type applications or complete applications electronically.
9. Provide complete and accurate responses.
10. Keep a list of law schools. (Some states will want to know which law schools the applicant sought admission to when applying for the Bar)

Where to Apply

The majority of applicants will have to weigh a variety of personal and academic factors to come up with a list of potential schools. Students should apply to a two or three reach schools, five or six competitive schools, and two or three safety schools. A safety school is one with a high acceptance rate of applicants with lower GPAs and LSAT scores as the person who applies. Many students on average apply to nine schools.

Applicants should use a guide to help determine schools where they will be a competitive based solely on the LSAT score and GPA. However, applicants should not limit their law school choices based solely on LSAT scores and GPA searches.

Guides:

- The Boston College Online Law School Locator
<http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/lawlocator.html>.
- The LSAC Search for Schools Based on LSAT and Undergraduate GPA Credentials:
<http://officialguide.lsat.org/search/cgi-bin/lsatgpa.asp>
- LSAC has a tool, which allows applicants to insert their GPA and LSAT score and view schools who are more likely to accept them: www.lsatnet.org

In addition to objective criteria such as the LSAT and GPA, law schools use subjective criteria such as a personal statement, letters of recommendation and experience in admissions decisions.

Part-time and Evening Programs

Part-time law programs may be offered either in the evening or the day and take four years to complete instead of three years. For the past 10 years, approximately 17 percent of law students have enrolled in part-time programs. The conventional wisdom is that if an applicant is financially able to attend law school full-time, they ought to do so. Less than half of the law schools offer part-time programs.

Application Submission

The following are ways in which applications are submitted:

- LSAC: Submits applications to individual schools at no additional cost (see http://www.lsat.org/demos/LSDAS_Demo.htm for a demo of how e-apps works)
- Online applications available at the individual school websites

- Paper applications

Some schools definition of a completed application is not only an application, recommendations, and Dean's Certification*, but also an LSDAS Report. For a school to request and receive an LSDAS report can take up to four to six weeks after they receive your application.

***Note: Deans Certifications:** Less than ten percent of schools require a Dean's Certification, which states the applicant graduated in good standing. Applicants may visit specific school websites to verify if a Dean's Certification is required.

Application Deadlines

Most schools have rolling admissions. Therefore, applicants should not apply right at the deadline because he or she will compete for fewer seats with more competition.

Admission Types:

- *Early Decision* is binding. Applicants should only apply Early Decision if the school is their first choice. If the applicant's law school choice 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.
- *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 denied Early Action are considered in the general pool of applicants. Policies differ from school-to-school.

Costs

Costs are associated with the following:

- LSAT
- LSDAS Registration
- LSDAS Law School Reports
- Application Fees
- Visiting Schools

The Make-up of the Application

Confidential Letters of Recommendation

Only confidential letters are considered legitimate. Applicants should:

- Request recommendation letters from faculty members and employers who know them well. Letters from graduate student instructors are acceptable. Letters should be from objective recommenders; letters from advisors are discouraged.
- As if the recommender provide a favorable recommendation.
- Make sure the person asked has the option of saying no.
- Make an appointment to ask the person to write the letter of recommendation. Don't ask for a reference over email.
- Give referees plenty of 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

- 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 matriculate and thank them again for their assistance and support.
- LDAS will collect the letters

The applicant should bring the following to meet with the referee:

- Résumé
- Transcript
- Tests/papers from classes taken with the faculty member
- Recommendation Waiver Form from LSAC.
- A stamped envelope addressed to LSAC. Do not rely on campus mail.

The most useful letters include the following:

- Explanation of relationship between applicant and referee
- How long the referee has known the applicant
- Information on applicant's social skills
 - *Interpersonal skills, ability to interact with others in groups, ability to establish peer relationships*
- Information on applicant's personal characteristics
 - *Integrity, reliability, determination, motivation, honesty, professionalism, leadership, character, maturity*
- Comparative information
 - *Comparison to other students referee has taught or with whom worked*
- Assessment of applicant's academic potential (if applicable to relationship)
 - *Student ready for the rigors of their intended program of study*

LSDAS Recommendation Service (www.lsac.org)

All ABA-approved schools require applicants to use LSDAS' recommendation service. A list of ABA-approved schools may be found in the *ABA-LSAC Guide to US Law Schools*. The LSDAS fee covers the cost of use of the recommendation service.

The LSAC letter of recommendation (LOR) service is offered as a convenience to LSDAS registrants, recommendation letter writers, and law schools. Applicants may have no more than three general letters on file in addition to numerous directed letters. Multiple LORs from a single recommender will be accepted. Directed letters of recommendation are for the 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.

In the absence of any specific designations, LSAC will send general letters in the order they are received, up to the number of letters each school will accept. Letters must be received by LSAC at least two weeks prior to a school's application deadline to ensure letters will be sent to the school before its deadline. Applicants can monitor the status of their letters in the Account Status area of their LSAC online account.

Personal Statement

Purpose

The purpose of the personal statement is to gather information about the applicant outside of the academic performance, LSAT score and extracurricular activities. A personal statement should not read like resume. Law schools do not typically interview candidates (Northwestern is the exception). The most important consideration is the applicant's impression he or she creates through the personal statement.

A personal statement is a self-reflective piece and narrates the following:

- Motivation for a career as a law professional
- Influences of family/early life experiences
- Influences of extracurricular, work or volunteer experiences
- Personal philosophies as related to personal goals
- Mastery of obstacles or disadvantages
- Unique traits and interests
- Growth as a result of a tragedy or success
- A revelatory experience gained from a course, professor, or event in college or post-college
- Hobbies, passions, ideals and how they determined to the decision to attend law school

Prior to Writing the Personal Statement

Applicants should:

- Brainstorm
- Complete self-reflection exercises
- Free-write
- Decide the approach in terms of content
- Tailor the message to the target audience
- Write an outline
- List personal skills and assets related to the law school or legal community
- Practice answering questions verbally through mock interview conducted by a friend or colleague
- Write a short paragraph that uses adjectives to describe them

Writing a Personal Statement

After applicants complete the writing exercises listed above, he or she should begin writing a first draft. Multiple drafts give the writer perspective.

Personal statements should:

- Use an active voice.
- Be positive and honest.
- Be concise and kept a reasonable length. If the length is prescribed, it should be kept within that length; otherwise, a good rule is to keep it to two pages.
- Answer the questions asked. Do not use the same statement for all applications.
- Tell a story from the heart and the brain to demonstrate main points through the use of concrete examples. Writing about a failure can demonstrate how an applicant was able to learn and grow from past mistakes.
- Be thoroughly edited

- Be tailored to the school in which the applicant is applying.
- Find an angle to make your statement interesting.
- Have a strong opening paragraph. State the thesis and grab the reader's attention.
- Show continuity. Conclude by referring back to the introductory paragraph and restate your main thesis in a slightly different way.
- Avoid clichés and quotes. Do not borrow from others words.
- Find a balance between creative and cautious.
- Avoid "legalese."

Personal statements should NOT:

- Be a descriptive résumé.
- Be about high school experiences.
- Focus on another person, even if he or she is a positive influence
- Discuss only on why he or she wants to become an attorney.
- Discuss controversial issues.
- Be humorous.
- Have a title.

Revisions

The applicant should allow for plenty of time for revision and expect to go through multiple drafts.

Applicants should:

- Be meticulous about your writing style. Type and proofread your essay very carefully. Don't rely on spellchecker.
- Not be afraid to delete.
- Double space and make the margins at least an inch.
- Put their name on each page.
- Take a day or two and then come back to look at it with fresh eyes.
- Read their personal statement aloud to see how it sounds.
- Have someone who knows the applicant well read their work.
- Submit their personal statement to a prelaw advisor for comment after you have proof read your statement.

An applicant or someone who revises a personal statement should answer the following questions:

- Is the introductory paragraph interesting?
- Is the direction clear from the first paragraph?
- Is there a clear theme? What the theme and why is it appropriate?
- Is there a relationship with the audience?
- Does the statement have continuity and focus and a successful organizational structure?
- Does the conclusion pull things together and at the same time bow to the future?

For current undergraduates, free, one-on-one consultants are also available at the Undergraduate Writing Program in 310 Philosophy.

Optional Essays

Applicants should always answer optional essay questions as a way to enhance communication with the admissions committee.

The Addendum

Applicants should NOT explain any academic irregularities or disparities in a personal statement. If there is something on an applicant's record that needs further explanation, he or she should address this in a separate letter or addendum to your application. The addendum should be reviewed by the prelaw advisor.

Here are some examples:

- If two LSAT scores are very different due to illness during one examination, applicants may express this reason in an attachment entitled "Explanation of LSAT Scores,"
- If an applicant's grades were low during sophomore year because of difficulty choosing a major, entitle the attachment "Sophomore Slump."

Law School Acceptance

There is no single notification date for law school acceptance. Early decision and early action candidates will hear before the end of the year. Some regular acceptances are sent between January and March, but the majority of acceptances are not announced until early April. Initial acceptances and waiting list notifications continue throughout the summer as candidates choose between multiple acceptances. *Note:* Law schools continue to accept students up until slots open up the first day of class.

Law School Choice

Law school choice is a considered decision and includes a range of factors. Each listing in the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* (<http://officialguide.lsac.org/docs/cgi-bin/home.asp>) provides school-specific information in the following categories:

- Enrollment/Student Body
- Curriculum
- Faculty
- Library
- Cost & financial aid
- Campus life: special considerations-population; ADA, LGBT
- Student Journals
- Size
- Prestige of the parent institution
- Reputation
- Job Placement

At minimum, a student should visit the school, attend classes, meet faculty, and speak to students.

Rankings

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. If an applicant is interested in rankings, he or she should refer to *US News and World Report* on graduate schools.

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.

Since there is no official ranking authority, applicants should be cautious in using such rankings. More substantive differences between schools should be the focus when making a decision rather than the school's reputed ranking.

The School Name

While going to a "name" school may mean an easier time finding a first job, it doesn't necessarily mean a better legal education than going 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 changed their public image.

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.

The following are advantages to attending a law school, which is a part of a university:

- Career services
- Student Housing
- Expanded facilities
- Options for joint-degree programs
- Taking non-law school courses
- Academic and social activities
- Campus theater groups

The School Type

The three types of law schools include:

- National: National and international applicant population and student body
- Regional: Regional and national applicant population and student body; Students conduct national job search
- Local: Applicants 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.

Financing Law School

When applying for financial aid, the student should consider the following:

- Law schools may request financial information from a student's parents, even if he or she has been out of school for a while.
- Outstanding debt or bad credit may affect the ability to borrow money
- Investigation of loan-forgiveness programs, especially if he or she is considering a career in public interest law

Financial Aid websites to visit:

- Free Application for Federal Student Aid: FAFSA.gov
- Financial Aid: Finaid.org
- (Parents) Access Group: Accessgroup.org; College Scholarship Service Financial Aid Profile: collegeboard.com
- Free credit rating

Three types of need-based loans exist through the Federal Direct Student Loan Program or the Federal Family Education Loan Program and they include:

- *Subsidized Federal Stafford Loan*: Interest paid by Government while student is in school
- *Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loan*: Interest paid by students
- *Federal PLUS Loan Program*: Graduate & professional students; Interest is not subsidized while student is in school

In addition to need-based loans, the Federal College Work Study Program is available to law students, as well as private loans.

Finally, merit-based aid decisions are made based on the law school's criteria.

Special Programs

Joint-Degree Programs

Joint-degree programs allow students 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., J.D. /M.S.W., 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.)

Many law schools offer advanced academic or research degrees that allow students to take graduate-level law courses. The LL.M. degree is a course of specialized research pursued after earning a first degree in law. Some schools offer Master of Laws in taxation, aerospace, or comparative law. Students may enroll in LL.M. only after having received the J.D. or LL.B. degree.

Specialized-Degree Programs

A few schools also offer the equivalent of a Ph.D. called a Doctor of Juridical Science (S.JD); the highest research degree. Some of these specialties include a Doctorate in Civil Law, Doctor of Juridical Science and Doctor of Jurisprudence and Social Policy. The advanced degrees types offered by a law school are a good indicator of emphases of the school.

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 program is to ensure that students have an equal opportunity to compete in law school and graduate school. For further information about academic assistance programs, consult the admissions office at the law school.

Clinical Advising and Moot Court Competition

Many law schools offer students authentic experiences as lawyers through involvement with clients and provide opportunities to rehearse trials and appellate advocacy in trial team and moot court competitions. Moot court is an extracurricular activity at many law schools in which participants take part in simulated court proceedings, usually to include drafting briefs and participating in oral argument. 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. It is important that students become adept at using interviewing, counseling, research, advocacy, and negotiation skills.

Deferment, Waitlisting & Re-application

Deferment

The deferment option varies by school.

Many law schools will allow students to defer enrollment for one year. Some schools are very permissive about deferral; requests for time off are often granted. Other schools require students to present compelling reasons for deferral. Some schools will not allow students to defer law school at all. Generally, it is preferable for students to defer application until they are certain they want to attend law school, rather than applying and then deferring attendance.

Waitlisting

If a student is wait-listed, the following are ways in which he or she can improve chances of admission:

- Write a letter to the director of admissions which indicates a strong interest in the school; the student should state that if accepted they will attend
- If the student is a senior inform the school of accomplishments since you applied
- If the student is working, send an updated resume
- Send an additional letter of recommendation
- Visit the law school to demonstrate your strong interest

Re-application

If a student is not accepted to a law school, the student should retake the LSAT and revisit the list of schools to which he or she has applied. Students should take into consideration that working a few years may make a difference in the admissions process.

Transfer

Some law schools accept transfer students after their first year. Students who wish to transfer should excel in their first year courses.

Appendix One: Recommended Courses

Although no specific courses are required for admission to law school, some courses may be helpful. Economics and accounting courses have become increasingly reluctant. Additionally, course which examine contemporary societal issues in the Constitution, social theory and behavior, and the development of political thought are helpful.

Philosophy C1010

METHODS/ PROBS OF PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHT

Critical introduction to philosophical problems, ideas, and methods.

PHIL F1401y Elementary Logic 3 pts.

Explicit criteria for recognizing valid and fallacious arguments, together with various methods for schematizing discourse for the purpose of logical analysis. Illustrative material taken from science and everyday life.

PHIL V2702y Contemporary Moral Problems 3 pts.

In this class, we will discuss the moral dimensions of several contemporary issues, including (but not limited to) affirmative action, abortion, poverty, the treatment of non-human animals, punishment, and terrorism. As we delve into these specific issues, we will also explore different conceptions of morality and justice, and the presuppositions about human nature and value that underlie them.

Philosophy V3411**SYMBOLIC LOGIC**

Advanced introduction to classical sentential and predicate logic. No previous acquaintance with logic is required; nonetheless a willingness to master technicalities and to work at a certain level of abstraction is desirable. Discussion Section Required.

Appendix Two: Web Resources

Many of the websites listed below are starting places for law school applicants. The GS Dean of Students prelaw advising office does not endorse any of the organizations or companies, which may be associated with the following links. Additionally, we cannot ensure the accuracy of the information contained on external sites.

Minority Legal Organizations/Pre-Law Preparatory Programs

[Council on Legal Education Opportunity](#) (also for economically disadvantaged students)

[Council on Legal Education Scholars](#)

[Earl Warren Legal Training Program Scholarship](#)

[Florida State University Summer Law Program](#) (also for economically disadvantaged students)

[The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund](#)

[Tennessee Institute for Pre-Law](#)

Appendix Three: Quotes from Admissions Officers**Joyce P. Curl, 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 changes to political science may want to tell us why; otherwise, that is 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 Are From:

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

Appendix Four: Suggested Reading for Prelaw Students

The following list of selected books and videos are reprinted with permission from the prelaw readings list published in the Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools.

Law School and Legal Education

Believe and Achieve: Latinos and Law. [video, 20 mins.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 2000.

Bay Monica. *Careers in Civil Litigation.* Chicago: American Bar Association/Law Student Division, 1990.

Briggs, Amy Thompson. *Degrees of Difference: A How-to Guide to Choosing a Law School.* Washington, DC: National Association of Law Placement, 1998.

Dworkin, Elizabeth, Jack Himmelstein, and Howard Lesnick. *Becoming a Lawyer: A Humanistic Perspective on Legal Education and Professionalism.* St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1989.

Farnsworth, Edward A. *An Introduction to the Legal System of the United States.* 3d ed. Dobbs Ferry NY: Oceana Publications, 1996. (available in the Columbia Law Library)

Getting There: 4 Paths to Law School. [video, 20 min.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 2001.

Gillers, Stephen, ed. *Looking at Law School: A Student Guide From the Society of American Law Teachers.* 3d ed. New York: NAL/Dutton, 1990.

Hirshman, Linda. *A Woman's Guide to Law School.* Bergenfield, NJ: Viking Penguin, 1999.

Indian Lawyers: Translators of Two Worlds. [video, 20 mins.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 1999.

Journeys: Minorities and the Law School Experience [video, 22 mins.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 2001.

Llewellyn, Karl N. *The Bramble Bush: On Our Law and Its Study.* rev. ed. Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1981.

OutLooks. [video, 27 min.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 1998.

Roth, George. *Slaying the Law School Dragon: How to Survive-and Thrive-in First-Year Law School.* 2d ed. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1991.

Shapo, Helene and Marshall Shapo. *Law School Without Fear: Strategies for Success.* (2nd ed.) New York: Foundation Press, 2002.

So You Want to Be a Lawyer: A Practical Guide to Law as a Career. Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 1999.

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

Stewart, Mark. *Perfect Personal Statements.* New York: Macmillan, 1996.

Stevens, Robert. *Law School: Legal Education in America From the 1850s to the 1980s*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1983. (available in the Columbia Law Library)

Stover, Robert V. *Making It and Breaking It: The Fate of Public Interest Commitment During Law School*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1989.

Turow, Scott. *One L.: An Inside Account of Life in the First Year at Harvard Law School*. New York: Penguin Books, 1978.

The Legal Profession

American Bar Association Center for Pro Bono. *Law School Public Interest Law Support Programs: A Directory*. Chicago: ABA, 2000.

Abrams, Lisa L. *The Official Guide to Legal Specialties: An Insider's Guide to Every Major Practice Area*. Chicago: The BarBri Group in association with the National Association for Law Placement (NALP), 2000.

Caplan, Lincoln. *Skadden: Inside the Business of Law in America*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1993.

Epstein, Cynthia Fuchs. *Women in Law*. 2d ed. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993.

Fox, Ronald W. *Lawful Pursuit: Careers in Public Interest Law*. Chicago: American Bar Association, Career Series, 1995.

Glendon, Mary Ann. *A Nation Under Lawyers: How the Crisis in the Legal Profession is Transforming American Society*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1994.

Greene, Robert Michael. *Making Partner: A Guide for Law Firm Associates*. Chicago: American Bar Association, Section of Law Practice Management, 1992.

Henslee, William D. *Careers in Entertainment Law*. Chicago: American Bar Association/Law Student Division, 1990.

Kelly, Michael J. *Lives of Lawyers: Journeys in the Organizations of Practice*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

Luney, Perey R., Jr. *Careers in Natural Resources and Environmental Law*. Chicago: American Bar Association/Law Student Division, 1987.

Munneke, Gary A. *The Legal Career Guide: From Lazy Student to Lawyer*. Chicago: American Bar Association Career Series, 1992.(available on-line at [NetLibrary](#).)

Munneke, Gary A. and William D. Henslee. *Nonlegal Careers for Lawyers*. Chicago: American Bar Association, 1994.

O'Neill, Suzanne B. and Catherine Gerhauser Sparkman. *From Law School to Law Practice: The New Associate's Guide*. Philadelphia: American Law Institute /American Bar Association Committee on Continuing Professional Education, 1989.

Shaffer, Thomas L., with Mary M. Shaffer. *American Lawyers and Their Communities: Ethics in the Legal Profession*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.

Short Stories From the Real World of Law. [video, 20 min.] Newtown, PA: Law School Admission Council, 1997.

Shropshire, Kenneth. *Careers in Sports Law*. Chicago: American Bar Association/Law Student Division, 1990.

Smith, J. Clay, Jr. *Rebels in Law: Voices in History of Black Women Lawyers*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998.

Strauss, Debra M. *Behind the Bench: The Guide to judicial Clerkships*. Chicago: The BarBri Group, 2002.

Wayne, Ellen. *Careers in Labor Law*. Chicago: American Bar Association /Law Student Division, 1985.

Financing Law School

Schlachter, Gail Ann. *Financial Aid for Women*, 1999-2001. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Schlachter, Gail Ann and R. David Weber. *Financial Aid for African Americans*, 1999-2001. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Schlachter, Gail Ann and R. David Weber. *Financial Aid for Asian Americans*, 1999-2001. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Schlachter, Gail Ann and R. David Weber. *Financial Aid for Hispanic Americans*, 1999-2001. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Schlachter, Gail Ann and R. David Weber. *Financial Aid for Native Americans*, 1999-2001. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Schlachter, Gail Ann and R. David Weber. *Financial Aid for the Disabled and Their Families*, 1998-2000. El Dorado Hills, CA: Reference Service Press.

Biography

Auchincloss, Louis. *Life, Law and Letters: Essays and Sketches*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979.

Baker, Leonard. *John Marshall: A Life in Law*. New York: Macmillan, 1974.

Barth, Alan. *Prophets With Honor: Great Dissents and Great Dissenters in the Supreme Court*. New York: Vintage Books, 1975.

Cray, Ed. *Chief Justice: A Biography of Earl Warren*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997.

Douglas, William O. *Go East Young Man: The Early Years*. New York: Random House, 1974.

Douglas, William O. *Court Years, 1939-1975: The Autobiography of William O. Douglas*. New York: Random House, 1980.

Dunne, Gerald T. *Hugo Black and the Judicial Revolution*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1977.

Frankfurter, Felix. *Felix Frankfurter Reminisces*. New York: Reynal & Co., 1960.

- Goldman, Roger, with David Gallen. *Justice William J. Brennan, Jr.: Freedom First*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, Inc., 1994.
- Griswold, Erwin N. *Ould Fields, Nezo Corne: The Personal Memoirs of a Twentieth Century Lawyer*, St. Paul, MN: West Publishing, 1992.
- Gunther, Gerald. *Learned Hand: The Man and the Judge*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.
- Jeffries, John, Jr. *Justice Lewis E Powell*. New York: Scribner, 1994.
- Lynn, Conrad J. *There Is a Foundation: The Autobiography of a Civil Rights Lawyer*. Westport, CT: Hill & Company, 1978.
- Mason, Alpheus. *Harlan Fiske Stone: Pillar of the Law*. New York: Viking Press, 1956.
- Noonan, John T., Jr. *Persons and Masks of the Law: Cardozo, Holmes, Jefferson, and Wythe as Makers of the Masks*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1976.
- Strum, Phillippa. *Brandeis: Beyond Progressivism*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993. Thomas, Evan. *The Man to See: Edward Bennett Williams, Ultimate Insider; Legendary Trial Lawyer*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1991.
- White, G. Edward. *Earl Warren: A Public Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- White, G. Edward. *Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes: Law and the Inner Self*. New York: Oxford University, 1993.
- Williams, Juan. *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary*. New York: Time Books, 1998.