

New to Pre-Law?

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Glossary of Terms used in the Application Process

LSAC (Law School Admissions Council):

The LSAC is a non-profit association of U.S. and Canadian law schools approved by the American Bar Association and the Federation of Law Societies of Canada. It is concerned largely with the admissions process and legal education. LSAC developed the LSAT (Law School Admissions Test). (www.lsac.org)

LSAT:

This test is intended to predict performance in law school. It measures analytical ability, judgment, logical reasoning, and writing skills. Plan to take the LSAT only once; NEVER take the test for practice. Although there are law schools that take the higher of double scores (usually if there is a vast difference between the two scores), most schools will average the two.

Writing Sample:

This is part of every LSAT. Basically, the test-taker is required to write extemporaneously on a topic provided as part of the test. Thirty minutes is provided. The sample is sent, ungraded, to each law school to which the applicant applies. It is up to the individual law school to interpret or use the writing sample according to its own policy.

LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service):

Essentially LSDAS summarizes an applicant's academic work from transcripts submitted, provides a report on that work and the LSAT score to each law school designated by the applicant. By providing a system of reporting grades reconciled to a point system, it allows for a uniform interpretation of grades.

The Application Process: A Suggested Timetable

Freshman Year:

Take courses that *challenge* you while appealing to your interests. This does not mean you should attempt a course clearly beyond your preparation or ability. *Challenge* is to take courses for which you have adequate preparation and which will offer intellectual stimulation. The simple message for your first year is to work hard, apply yourself, and keep your goals in mind.

Extra-Curriculars:

Jobs, clubs, volunteer activities -- all make you "well-rounded." Law schools like to see civic leadership and growing maturity. Visit the Morgridge Center for Public Service at

the Red Gym for a listing of campus/community volunteer experiences. Keep this up throughout your undergraduate (and post-baccalaureate) years!

Sophomore Year:

Grades:

Okay, so you turned in a somewhat less than stellar freshman year performance. Rather than becoming discouraged, try to improve. Remember, an upward swing in grades is very apparent on your transcript.

Courses:

Continue to take courses that sharpen your writing and analytical skills—literature, expository writing, logic, math, science courses, to mention a few. Be sure to pick up a copy of “Suggested Courses for Pre-law Students,” a brochure prepared by the Letters and Science Advising Center (B-12 Bascom Hall).

Major:

During your sophomore year, you should be thinking about your major. Your choice should be based on your interest in the subject matter, since you will probably turn in your best performance in a discipline that interests you.

Career Planning:

Along about this time, you should start sorting out your reasons for pursuing a legal education and career. Does your early decision reflect only a family tradition? Have you been overly influenced by a family friend, or by the often and loudly announced intentions of your dorm acquaintances, frat or sorority associates? Do you find yourself frequently thinking of other careers, other goals? This is the time to examine carefully your early choice of a career, engage in some honest self-assessment and career exploration. Take advantage of the Pre-Law Society (website) and learn how practicing lawyers perceive their profession, and what specializations seem to attract you. Read about the profession; understand that the law degree opens the doors to many careers other than “standard” law practice. You are going to spend a great deal of time and money acquiring a legal education. Do you really want to be a lawyer?

Junior Year:

Researching Schools:

Now is the time to begin thinking about where you want to spend an intensive three years studying law. The *Law School Caravan* brought to the Madison campus by the Midwest Association of Pre-Law Advisors (MAPLA) is an opportunity to visit with admissions officers and representatives. A large number of law school recruiters provide information on size, location, prestige, cost, student body, and other factors you should consider. By this time, your GPA should give you some indication of your relative strength when applying. The LSAT and GPA are the main factors in your application credentials, and unless you are extremely unrealistic about yourself and your abilities, you should be able to start narrowing your range of admissions targets. Preparation can

do much to enhance your LSAT and help you perform at the top of your normal range, but it is not a magic device to compensate for a low GPA. If you have a very high LSAT score, far beyond your GPA would have normally indicated, be prepared to justify this discrepancy. Admissions committees will want to know why you let your undergraduate years slide by without responsibly applying your talents.

Recommendations:

Now is the time to think seriously about who is going to stand in your corner, offer insight into your past performance, and predict your future stardom in the legal world.

Summer Between Junior and Senior Years:

During this period, you might be fortunate to obtain work in a job relevant to your career: clerical work in a law office, a legislative internship, or similar opportunities. Other jobs that afford you experience in management, problem-solving and communication, even though not law-related, can also be valuable.

Taking the LSAT:

The LSAT is offered four times each year. The end of your junior year (June) is a good time to take it, allowing time for you to assess your chances of gaining admission at a given school. It also allows time to retake in the fall, if necessary, and gives you a full summer in which to gather law school catalogs, plan your strategy, and narrow down your application target list. The October test is still practical, especially for students who might be on vacation or on internships during the summer. You must also register with the LSDAS. You will probably find it easier to apply to LSDAS and LSAC at the same time, especially if you take the LSAT during the processing year in which you will be applying to law school. At this point, you should know how many and to which law schools you will apply, and pay LSDAS at the time of your initial LSDAS registration, for this number. You will get one “freebie” law school when you sign up for LSDAS. In other words, one school will receive your Law School Report free of charge to you; all others are extra.

Senior Year:

Applications:

Complete these as early as possible, between October 1 and Thanksgiving break, if you can.

Law School Caravan: Plan to attend the fall law school caravan (usually held in October) where you can meet many law school representatives, collect catalogues, and find out more about schools. The Caravan will be held at Great Hall, Memorial Union, 800 Langdon Street.

Financial Aid:

Obtain financial aid materials from the schools to which you apply, as early as possible. Do not wait for the last minute on this one. Money, scholarships, and other forms of aid

are in short supply. You need to be accepted to law school *before* applying for financial aid. Many advisors recommend that you apply to some schools that are a “notch” below your “profile” in order to gain scholarship offers.

Senior Check List:

Make a check-list containing deadlines, recommendations, transcripts sent out and received. If you want to update your Law School Report, you can submit your first semester senior grades, or other transcript changes. Have the updated transcript sent to LSDAS and they will send a revised report to each school to which you have applied. Keep your check-list handy to make sure that you have done everything, and can see at a glance what remains to be done. Keep a photocopy of all your applications and materials. Most law schools will let you know when something is missing. But do not count on them providing this service.

Now, sit back and wait for law school decisions. You may, however, communicate with the schools after a reasonable period of time, to inquire about your admission status. When you receive an acceptance, you will have to start weighing the pros and cons of attending while you wait for decisions from other schools which, to you, may be more desirable. At this time, you can gather additional information on the law schools, perhaps visit them, and seek the advice of others. Eventually, the decision will be yours and yours alone.