



HANDBOOK FOR PRE-LAW STUDENTS

Four-Year Law School Admissions Checklist

First and Second Years of College

1. Establish contact with a Department Pre-Law Advisor in PH 302:
 - College of Sciences Pre-Law Advisor:
 - Dr. Roger Handberg - roger.handberg@ucf.edu
 - Department Pre-Law Advisors:
 - Dr. Drew Lanier - drew.lanier@ucf.edu
 - Dr. Robert Bledsoe - robert.bledsoe@ucf.edu
 - Dr. Barry Edwards - barry.edwards@ucf.edu
 - Dr. Eric Merriam- eric.merriam@ucf.edu
2. Choose an undergraduate major that will challenge you to write, read, and think critically. Be flexible with your degree and career goals – **law is not for everyone**.
3. Regardless of your chosen major, choose a balanced and diversified program of study, including courses that encourage **logical reasoning** and good **writing skills**. You will need these skills to do well on the LSAT, in law school, and in your profession.
4. Select an academic advisor or faculty mentor who has an interest in your academic career and will be willing to write a solid letter of recommendation for you at a later date.
5. Get to know several faculty members who inspire you intellectually and whose interests can help guide you later, including writing letters of recommendation.
6. Get involved in pre-law related activities such as Pi Sigma Alpha, Phi Alpha Delta, Moot Court, debate societies, etc.



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7. Participate in extracurricular activities that can help build needed skills in leadership, self-confidence, verbal and written communication, and mental development (e.g., debate, student government, judicial board, literary magazine or school paper, research assistantships, election campaigns or activities in the community including religious or helping others). The number of activities you participate in does not impress law school admissions committees so much as the quality of the experiences (i.e., mere membership is not as important as active participation including leadership roles). In your personal statement that is part of your admissions package, you will have the opportunity to highlight how those activities prepared you to contribute to the law school environment.
8. Read broadly, including law-related materials (see **Reading Materials**) and talk to lawyers about the legal profession (including the negatives as well as the positives).
9. Purchase a LSAT prep manual/kit from the Law School Admission Council or any of those commercially available and work through them in your spare time to become familiar with the structure and substance of the LSAT and uncover areas of weakness which you can address early on through coursework (e.g., courses in writing or in formal logic) or prepare you for taking a commercial LSAT prep course during your Junior year (see **Web Sites**).
10. Concentrate on building an outstanding GPA. Take advantage of the UCF Grade Forgiveness policy if you had difficulty with GEP courses. Be aware that law school admissions committees are impressed not just with a GPA but also what it reflects (i.e., doing well in challenging courses).

Junior Year of College

1. Take assessment of where you stand thus far and focus on improving your GPA if needed and adding more elective courses that emphasize reading and writing skills if needed.
2. Take a law-related course if you have not already done so to see if the materials interest you. You may find that reading law does not really interest you and it is better to find that out now rather than your first year in law school.
3. Study the LSAC or other sources for materials on law schools (see **Web Sites**) to see which ones interest you, where you are competitive, and what programs they offer. Go to their web sites and, if you have the opportunity, visit the law schools themselves



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Senior Year of College

1. Take LSAT in early Fall if you have not already taken it the summer between your Junior and Senior years. This way you are early in the admissions cycle. Once you have your score, then you are ready to decide which law schools to apply to.
2. Write your personal statement during the summer before your Fall term so you are ready to send out your application packet as soon as possible during the Fall term.
3. If you have not already visited campuses, there is still time early in the Fall term if you are still not sure about which schools you want to apply to.
4. Monitor your progress but do not bug admissions offices.
5. As you receive notifications of acceptance, waitlistings, etc., see Pre-Law advisor for suggestions.

Application Strategies

The two key components of your application are the GPA and LSAT numbers, but there are also ways to enhance your prospects:

1. **Apply early** – many law schools have rolling admissions (i.e., they start reviewing applications early in the Fall term). Thus, even if a law school has a published deadline for applications, getting all your materials to them early is a good strategy (say by Thanksgiving).
2. **GPA** – take challenging courses that require you to think and write critically, since this is what you will do in law school. Admissions committees are far more impressed with above average grades in challenging subjects (statistics, sciences, etc.) than “easy A’s”.
3. **Personal statement** – since you will not likely be able to do personal interviews with all the law schools that interest you, your personal statement is your interview. Treat it that way and let the admissions committee see why they should invite you into the first-year class (i.e., don’t whine about your poor LSAT score; instead, what will you bring to the class that will be positive).



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4. **Campus visit** – if you can make a personal appearance, dress appropriately. There is a sense of what an attorney “looks like” (e.g., pants below your hips and rings in your nose will not be impressive).
5. **Real world experience** – law is not for the timid. A resume with internships, Peace Corps experience, work experience with people contact, leadership roles, etc., can be a benefit.
6. **Wait listing** – if you have the advantage of being waitlisted, do not bug them but do let them know you are interested in attending their program (e.g., an initial contact, updated grades, a major change in the data on your resume, etc.).

Careers in Law

There are many career paths for applying your legal education: private practice (still the biggest absorber of law school graduates), industry, government, non-governmental organizations, teaching, and numerous other areas where one can treat their degree as advanced education for non-legal policy, consulting, organizational, management, and other outlets.

Law Schools by Specialty

Most students when they enroll in law school do not know what area they will eventually practice in, so don't stress out about it. Some legal specialties require previous educational or real world experience (e.g., medical, patents, corporate) but many others are simply a matter of “falling into it.” When you ask some attorneys how they got into the area of law in which they are practicing, often the answer is “they had an opening in this area when I interviewed with them.” All law schools provide a solid curriculum in the law but there are many law schools that are well-known for certain areas of law, such as animal rights, business, environment, family, health, human rights, intellectual property, international law, admiralty, property, tax – to name but a few. Some law schools also are well-known for clinics, study abroad, moot court, etc. Experiential learning equips a law student with practical experience prior to graduation that can make them more practice-ready upon graduation as well as let them see if that is an area of law they are truly committed to. Perhaps you want a school that is strong in diversity, religion (perhaps you seek an environment that supports your religious values), gender (most



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law school student bodies are relatively gender balanced compared to previous eras but some have a history of emphasizing this or may have a larger representation of women than the national norm), or affordability. This is where the Web is a wonderful thing.

LSAT

While the undergraduate course of study is less structured than that for pre-med, veterinary science, dentistry (*e.g.*), law schools are no less demanding in their GPAs and LSAT scores. The LSAT is particularly important because, all else being equal, the LSAT score is weighted more heavily than the GPA for many law schools. Why is the LSAT score so important? Law schools believe it is designed to test the skills and mental processes needed to succeed in legal studies. Thus, a modest GPA and LSAT score are not encouraging indicators for acceptance into a high-tier law school. (see Department of Political Science web site for a link to MSU Law webinar: Strategies for Success on the LSAT)

Majors

Fortunately for students interested in pursuing legal careers, the list of likely majors is vast compared to those seeking entrance into advanced business programs or medical schools, for example. Law school admissions committees do not place heavy significance on what you major is but undergraduate degrees weighted heavily in courses requiring writing and critical analysis are useful, as these are the skills that a lawyer needs to problem solve and write clearly and effectively. If you do not like to do extensive reading and writing, then the law may not be for you. Think twice about courses and majors that emphasize multiple choice/true-false exams. Concentrate upon those courses/majors that require expository writing, term papers, and essay examinations. Major/minor combination options are ideal. For example, if you are a science or engineering major, you are likely strong on analytic skills but short on extensive reading or writing requirements (thus, a minor or electives in the Social Sciences or Humanities may cover those deficiencies). If your major is in the latter areas, then you may need to hone your analytic abilities and a minor or electives in statistics, mathematics, accounting, computers, or logic will help. The important thing is to match structured, methodical problem-solving skills with writing ability. It is important to keep in mind that selecting majors, double majors, majors and minors, majors and electives need to address two important issues: (a) what helps me to think and write critically and, equally important, (b) what are my career options if I do not go to law school?



Part-Time Law Schools

For those working full-time, law schools with part-time and/or evening programs are often the only option for them. There are a surprising number of them, according to a *U.S. News & World Report* (2009):

Arizona: Phoenix.

Arkansas: UArkansas.

California: San Diego; Santa Clara; Southwestern; Golden Gate; Chapman; Thomas Jefferson; California Western; U of Pacific/McGeorge; Loyola/Marymount; San Francisco; Western State; Whittier; La Verne.

Colorado: Denver.

Connecticut: UConnecticut; Quinnipiac.

Delaware: Widener.

DC: Georgetown; George Washington; American; Catholic.

Florida: Stetson; Florida International; Nova Southeastern; Florida Coastal; Florida A&M; Barry.

Georgia: Georgia State; John Marshall.

Hawaii: UHawaii.

Illinois: IIT/Chicago-Kent; Loyola/Chicago; DePaul; John Marshall.

Indiana: IndianaU; Valparaiso.

Kentucky: Louisville; Northern Kentucky.

Louisiana: Loyola.

Maryland: U. of Maryland; U. of Baltimore.

Massachusetts: Suffolk; Western New England; New England.

Michigan: UDetroit; Thomas Cooley; Wayne State; Michigan State.



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Minnesota: William Mitchell; Hamline.

Missouri: St. Louis; UMissouri.

Nevada: Las Vegas.

New Jersey: Rutgers/Newark; Rutgers/Camden; Seton Hall.

New York: New York Law; St. John's; Pace; Hofstra; Yeshiva; Fordham; Tuoro.

North Carolina: Charlotte; North Carolina Central.

Ohio: Capital; Akron; Toledo; Case Western Reserve.

Oklahoma: Tulsa; Oklahoma City.

Oregon: Lewis and Clark.

Pennsylvania: Temple; Duquesne; Penn State.

South Carolina: Charleston.

Tennessee: Cleveland State.

Texas: Houston; South Texas; SMU; Texas Wesleyan; St. Mary's.

Virginia: George Mason.

Washington: Seattle.

Wisconsin: Marquette.

Personal Statement

Unless you are in love with yourself, writing about yourself is very difficult. Since law school admissions committees read piles of them, it is important to say much in little space. How you plan on changing the world will glaze eyes. What events in your life made you who you are? Obstacles overcome? Challenges? What you have done and accomplished is far more important than what you wish to do. What unique something will you bring to the first-year class you will be part of that will make it that much the better? (go to the Department of



Political Science web site and link on the Michigan State University College of Law webinar “Crafting a Winning Law School Personal Statement”)

Reading Materials

Paul Campos, *Don't Go to Law School (Unless): A Law Professor's Inside Guide to Maximizing Opportunity and Minimizing Risk*. (2012)

Charles Cooper, *Later in Life Lawyers: Tips for the Non-Traditional Law Student*. 2d ed (2012)

Joyce Putnam Curll, *The Best Law Schools' Admissions Secrets*. (2008)

Ann Levine, *The Law School Admission Game: Play Like an Expert*. 2d ed (2013)

Richard Montauk, *How to Get Into the Top Law Schools*. 5th ed (2011)

Secrets for Success in Law School

Manage your time – treat law school as if it were your full-time job **but** build in time to “recharge your batteries.” Find a balance between school and personal time. Exercise is important for personal fitness since law school is an endurance contest.

Find support groups – don't be isolated. Seek out “life lines” - faculty mentors; student organizations; ethnic, religious, or cultural organizations.

Pick the “right” study group – this is both a support group and a learning group but the latter is the most important so be picky (these should not be social occasions) and study groups are not for everyone. Some do better alone with no distractions, so find out what works for you personally.

Attend classes – the classroom is where you will learn how to “apply” what you read and also find out where the professor is coming from – important for finding out what the professor emphasizes that will likely be on exams. Prepare fully for every class. If you want to excel, you must read every assignment before every class. Skimming and relying on outlines may be enough to graduate, but not excel. Outlining the classroom material can be crucial for organizing materials for exams. Outlines help evade the trap of focusing upon detail which hides the “neon signs” (big picture). Commercial outlines might be helpful for some but need to be tailored to the peculiarities of the particular professor. But if you don't read thoroughly and carefully, you're not developing the skills lawyers need in practice. Take advantage of



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outside classroom opportunities – work experience, internships, externships, clinics, law review, summer study opportunities, and exchange programs. These provide networking, application of classroom materials, finding out if you really made the “right” choice by going to law school, work experience, identifying potential job opportunities.

Avoid the “Paper Chase” – law school is competitive but fixating on class rank only increases your stress level in an already stressful environment. Law school should be a shared experience, as some of your peers will be close to you for years and might also provide future job opportunities.

Know your professors – while the Socratic method feels intimidating, your professors are there to help you succeed in law school. Empty seats are a financial drain for a law school (but see 2008 edition of *Official Guide to ABA-approved Law Schools* for information on schools with high 1L attrition rates). Get to know your professors, become a student assistant or research assistant, do library work for them or help with the mechanics of the classroom. This is not “brown nosing” but rather learning, networking, getting a feel for what the law is all about, getting references and recommendations, and possible future job opportunities. (adapted from *preLaw Magazine*, Spring 2004)

Social Media

Social contacts and networking are an everyday element of life in the digital age. But Facebook, LinkedIn, blogs, etc. are a double-edged sword. The material on them represent a first impression of who you are. Do they convey information on your successes, accomplishments, community activities, etc. or consist primarily of photos of you at parties or doing unprofessional or inappropriate things? Continually monitor your sites and delete anything that you would not want a law school admissions office or potential employer to view.

Web Sites

<https://sciences.ucf.edu/politicalscience/undergraduate/materials/>

Department website with advising materials and the MSU Law webinars.

<http://www.abanet.org>

This is the American Bar Association site and useful both for what is going on in law schools and in the legal profession.



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<http://www.AdmissionsDean.com>

A very useful site launched in 2009 that provides information on researching law schools, taking the LSAT, applying to law schools, and paying for law school. Much information on the site is free but detailed information and search support requires a registration fee.

<http://www.discoverlaw.org>

A LSAC site with extensive introductory information on law schools, preparing for law school, diversity, the Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars program (PLUS) for lower division minority college students, etc.

<http://www.kaptest.com>

Commercial LSAT preparation programs, assessment of law school programs.

<http://www.lsac.org>

This is your main site for the LSAT, the admissions process, financing, and information on law schools.

<http://www.nationaljurist.com>

Excellent source of information on law schools, trends, specialty programs, etc.

<http://www.preLawmagazine.com>

www.Princetonreview.com

Commercial LSAT test prep provider, good source for information on law schools, , and general advice on specific subject areas.

www.TestMasters.net

A LSAT commercial prep program designed by an extremely successful LSAT test taker. Lots of information here.

www.testprep.ucf.edu/LSAT

UCF Continuing Education collaboration with Blackstone LSAT Prep program. Check on availability of discounts for Criminal Justice Society, BALSAs, and Phi Alpha Delta (PAD) members.