



GOING TO  
LAW SCHOOL

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# So You Want To Go To Law School

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Now that you have decided to attend law school, we have compiled information that will support and guide you through the application process. We encourage you to schedule an appointment with a UCS Pre-Law counselor to discuss your individual application. This booklet provides a general guideline that will get you on track and is by no means completely comprehensive and should not substitute your personal research.

## Academic Preparation

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Do you find yourself asking.....What courses should be on my transcript? Is there a certain major I should select? The good news – there is no pre-requisite major or course requirement for law school. However, it is advisable for you to attain skills and experience in a variety of areas which will contribute to your law school education. As you matriculate through Yale, think about ways you might gain these values. This can be done through course selection, internship experience, extracurricular activities, or your major. Law schools appreciate students who are thoughtful about the breadth and depth of courses they select through their undergraduate education. A range of courses and experience will add positively to your application, as well as, maintaining a strong GPA. Listed below are skills and knowledge areas a law school applicant should possess:

### **Analytical and Problem Solving Skills**

Includes critical thinking, tolerance for ambiguity, ability to structure and evaluate arguments, ability to apply principles or theories to new situations, and developing solutions to new problems.

### **Critical Reasoning Skills**

Includes experience reading and critically analyzing complex texts, whether in literature, politics, economics, history, or philosophy, and the ability to read and assimilate large amounts of material in short amounts of time.

### **Writing Skills**

Ability to express oneself clearly and concisely, mastery of language, grammar, and syntax. Includes analytical and interpretive writing, and writing works of substantial length.

### **Oral Communication and Listening Skills**

Ability to speak clearly and persuasively, to understand and interpret others' communications quickly, and to respond in an organized, critical, and composed manner.

### **Research Skills**

Ability to complete projects involving significant library research and the analysis of large amounts of information. Skill at planning a research strategy, analyzing, organizing, and presenting a large amount of material, and familiarity with computerized tools of research.

### **Knowledge Areas**

- A broad understanding of history and the various factors (social, political, economic and cultural) that have influenced the development of the pluralistic society that presently exists in the United States. Examples: history, American studies, political science
- A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory, and of the contemporary American political system. Examples: political science
- A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice. Examples: philosophy, ethics
- A grounding in economics and an understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy. Examples: economics, politics
- Some basic mathematical and financial skills. Examples: math, statistics
- A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction. Examples: psychology, sociology
- An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities of our world. Examples: African and African American studies, history, American studies, East Asian studies, ethnicity/race/migration, international studies, Latin American studies, East European studies

## **What Is The LSAT & Do I Have To Take It?**

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The answer is YES. In the words of the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC), the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is, "... a half-day standardized test administered four times each year at designated testing centers throughout the world. It is required that you take this test as part of the application process for all ABA- approved law schools. It provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills that law

schools can use as one of several factors in assessing applicants. You should study and familiarize yourself with the style and format of the test. Try to take this test only once. If you opt to take it multiple times, all of your scores will be reported to the law schools you apply. Most schools average the scores so if you take it once and are not pleased with your score, you would have to fare significantly better the second time around for it to make a difference. Alternatively, you may end up scoring lower. The key here is to do as well as you can the first time. We will discuss, in the Application Timetable section, when you should think about taking the test.

We encourage you to register for the LSAT as soon as you make your decision to apply to law school. Spacing is limited at each testing site, so to ensure you get your first choice, register early. **Be sure to check YES to Question #19 on the registration form to release your ...”information to UCS Pre-Law counselor at the undergraduate institution....”** We then compile the data gathered into valuable statistics used to assist other students, like you, through the law school selection process. Your contribution will be helping all those who come after you. Information regarding registration, test dates, deadlines, and fees can be viewed on the LSAC website: [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) or you can stop by UCS to obtain a copy of the LSAT/LSDAS Registration and Information Book from the resource library.

Aside from the LSAT itself, you also need to register for LSDAS (the Law School Data Assembly Service). This can be done at the same time you register to take your LSAT or shortly after. Your scores will be processed and distributed through LSDAS. One report is provided for free, additional reports cost \$12 each. If you overestimate the number of reports required, you will not receive a refund. Carefully think through the schools you want to apply to and order the number of reports you will need. Once you register for LSDAS, be sure to have transcripts from all colleges you have attended forwarded to the service. This is very important because otherwise, your scores will not be released to the law schools. Once your application is submitted to the school, the admissions office will contact LSDAS for your report.

<sup>1</sup> LSAT and LSDAS Registration and Information Book, 2006-2007 Edition, p. 1.

## **Application Timetable**

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Apply to law school when you are prepared to attend either directly after you finish your undergraduate degree or within a few years. Some students know as undergraduates, that they want to continue directly on to law school while others do not come to that decision until they have worked for a year or more. Unlike your undergraduate education, be aware that your class will be more diverse professionally. Fellow 1L’s may be straight out of their undergraduate institution mixed with those who have gained a year or two of

professional experience. *While this is not a requirement for admission, it may be a factor that will be considered in the admission process.*

## **JUNIOR YEAR (or 2 years prior to law school entry)**

### **September - December**

- Register for the UCS Law Email Distribution List. This is the main resource for alerting you of all upcoming pre-law related activities regarding the application process, including but not limited to workshops and panels; and internships opportunities.
- If you have not done so already, begin establishing ties with faculty members who may write you letters of recommendation.
- Attend the UCS Law School and Public Policy School Fair.

### **Late Winter - Early Spring (March)**

- Register to take the June LSAT (only if you are prepared). The LSAT/LSDAS registration bulletin is available in the UCS library. Register for the LSDAS service, at some point, if it is not the same time you register for the LSAT. Those choosing to use the LSDAS service will be able to view law school applications starting in August.
- Open a file for letters of recommendation in your residential College Dean's office, if you choose. You may also use the LSDAS service to process your recommendation letters.

### **June**

- Take the LSAT (if prepared).
- Begin drafting your personal statement and construct a resume to be included with your applications.
- Research law schools; prepare a list of places to which you will apply.

### **Summer (August)**

- If you have not registered with the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), you should do so now. Registration forms are found in the same booklet as the LSAT registration forms or online at [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org).
- Have your transcripts (from every institution of higher education you have ever attended) sent to LSDAS or wait until your fall courses are listed.
- Register for the September/October LSAT if you did not take it in June.

## **SENIOR YEAR (or 1 year prior to law school entry)**

### **September**

- Check UCS calendar of events for upcoming law panels, law fairs, and law forums.
- Discuss your school choices with the UCS Pre-Law counselor.
- Send away for catalogues and application materials or order the LSACD electronic application.
- Finalize personal statement and have it reviewed by your writing tutor, the UCS Pre-Law counselor, and several other readers.
- Ask two professors for letters of recommendation to be sent to your credential file or LSDAS. Consider asking a third person for an additional reference (another professor or a professional reference such as an internship supervisor, boss, coach, etc. is ideal.)

**October - November**

- Take the Fall LSAT (if you are repeating it or did not take it in June).
- Check with your College Dean's office to be sure your file is complete. Arrange to have your materials sent to the law schools. It is your responsibility to let your College Dean's office know which schools to send your letters to.
- Complete and submit law school applications. Filing by early November 15 statistically may give you the best chances for acceptance.
- Begin investigating sources of financial aid (federal, institutional, private). Obtain applications and file as early as possible.

**December**

- If you have not received a confirmation from the law schools you applied to, check with them to be sure that your files are complete.
- Obtain a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from the financial aid office or from <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov> and file well before the deadline.

**January**

- Have an updated transcript with your fall term grades sent directly to law schools or through LSDAS.

**February - April**

- Evaluate offers of acceptance and financial aid. You will not be required to place a deposit at any particular school until after April 1.

Throughout this process, we strongly encourage you to meet with your UCS Pre-Law counselor so assistance can be provided as needed.

## **Recommendation Letters**

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Plan to ask for two to three recommendation letters. Law schools want to hear from those who have taught you, i.e. your professors, lecturers, T.A.'s. A third letter can be from a mentor, coach, supervisor, or advisor. If you utilize your college dean's office confirm that your file is complete before having your letters forwarded to the law schools. Admission committees get frustrated when bits and pieces of information from an applicant are submitted 'piece-meal.' Help streamline the process by adhering to the guidelines. If you choose to utilize the LSDAS recommendation letter forwarding service, have your letters and coversheet sent to LSDAS by the recommender.

Think about having a one-on-one conversation with your recommender so you can let them know of your plans, interests and goals. Bring along your resume, a copy of your transcript, any papers you might have written, the list of schools you are considering and if you are comfortable, share your personal statement. Ask your recommender if they know you well enough to write a letter of recommendation. By having a discussion with your recommender in advance, it may have an impact on the type of letter they will write.

Do not wait until the last minute to ask for your letters. It is considerate (and in your best interest) to provide them with ample time to write your letter. Once your letter is submitted to your file, be sure to send a note of thanks to your recommender.

## **Personal Statement**

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The personal statement is an integral part of the application process and one that many applicants find challenging. Think of the personal statement as your opportunity to 'speak' directly to the admissions committee. Keep in mind that a personal statement is not a statement of purpose. It may be an articulation of your journey, an indication of your intellectual prowess, or can reveal your passions. Effective personal statements read more like a story and less like a narrative resume. Use this time and space to elaborate on a significant occurrence in your life that has helped shape you into who you are today; an experience that has impacted you; or something that is important to you. It is best to use this space to 'market' yourself, rather than explain a low grade or challenges on your transcript. Keep the tone positive and laud your strengths.

Typically, personal statements are no longer than two pages, double spaced. Be sure to proofread very carefully. You do not want minor errors to detract from the quality of your work. It is not necessary to 'name' the law school in the essay.

Aside from providing interesting insights about yourself, the personal statement serves as an example of your writing. Use the opportunity to display your skills. Write well, be concise and straight forward. Do not force the reader to work to understand your statement or find hidden meaning in what you have to convey. Poems, obituaries,

case/trial studies, using fancy words not typically in your vocabulary can have a negative effect because they distract from the statement.

## **Acceptances, Wait-Lists and Deferrals**

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### **Acceptances**

The timetable for notification varies from school to school. Applicants may learn as early as December or as late as August (if an applicant is on a wait-list). If you are able, consider visiting the law school, talk to faculty, students, and /or ask their career services administrators about placement; get a ‘feel’ for the campus. Take advantage of the Law School surveys – a database of evaluations first year alumni have submitted about their law school experience. Often, alumni offer their contact information in case you have further questions or need additional information. The site is password protected; to gain access please email [undergraduate.careerservices@yale.edu](mailto:undergraduate.careerservices@yale.edu) .

In comparing each school, take into consideration: the faculty, financial package offers, geographic location, student body, career placement opportunities, resources offered to students, clinics and other practical training programs, and type of schools – regional vs. national.

### **Wait-Lists**

If you have been placed on a ‘wait-list’, you may take action to help improve your chances for admission: submit a letter to the admissions dean informing them of your strong interest in the school. If the school is your first choice, tell them. Provide an updated transcript; send an additional letter of recommendation (one or two) only if you have not reached the schools accepted limit.

### **Deferrals**

Deferrals are not granted automatically. It is a privilege offered to you by the law school. The policy for applying for deferrals varies greatly from school to school so please be sure to research this thoroughly if you plan on asking for one. We do not encourage you to make alternate plans based on the fact that you will receive a deferral from law school because it may not happen. For example, if you accept another commitment before hearing from the law schools of your choice, gain admission and are not granted a deferral, it could potentially be disastrous.

## **Financing Your Law Education**

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The cost of law school tuition can range from a few thousand to more than \$35,000 per year depending on where you choose to attend. The median salary for the Class of '05 was \$60,000<sup>2</sup> – the total cost of a three year law school education could exceed \$150,000<sup>3</sup>. Given the potentially high price tag, students often have to secure loans to finance their education. How then, does one pay for law school? Aside from personal resources and perhaps assistance from your families many students rely on federal aid loans, private loans, and institutional loans. The law schools financial aid offices are often the best source for information about paying for law school.

### **Which issues should be considered BEFORE applying for financial aid?**

- *You're not on your own just yet!* Law schools vary widely in the information they use to compute financial aid packages. Many will request financial information from your parents or others who have provided support for you, even if you have been out of school for some time.
- *Are you in DEBT?* Outstanding debt on credit cards or a bad credit rating may affect your ability to borrow money. NOW is the time to get rid of all but one credit card (the amount of credit available to you counts as “potential debt”), pay off your balances, and clean up your credit report. 15-20% of financial aid applicants are rejected for bad credit alone! Contact one of these crediting agencies to get a copy of your report:

Free Annual Credit Report: [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com)

Experian: [www.experian.com](http://www.experian.com); (888) 397-3742

Trans Union: [www.tuc.com](http://www.tuc.com); (800) 888-4213

CBI/Equifax: [www.equifax.com](http://www.equifax.com); (800) 997-2493

- *Considering a career in public interest law?* LRAPs can provide substantial aid to law school graduates working in the public interest sector. LRAPs now exist in some form at more than 70 law schools. Whether they are referred to as debt management programs, loan forgiveness programs or low-income protection plans, LRAPs share a common design, offering grants or loans to graduates to help them repay a portion of their annual educational debt payments.

### **What are the different types of financial assistance?**

#### **Scholarships and Grants**

A scholarship or grant is an award that does not have to be repaid. It may be given on the basis of need or merit or both. Most scholarships are conferred by individual law schools. You will have to take the initiative in researching these possible scholarship

resources. Deadlines may vary so be sure to do your homework early in the application process. A number of companies offer tuition reimbursement benefits to their employees and to their employees' dependents as well.

### **Federal Loans**

There are three types of federal loans available to law students: the Federal Stafford and Ford Loans, the Federal Perkins Loan, and the Graduate PLUS Loans for Law Students.

- Need-based aid

*Subsidized Federal Stafford Loan*—students with demonstrated financial need can borrow up to \$8500/year. The federal government pays the interest while you are in school.

*Unsubsidized Federal Stafford Loan*—students can borrow up to \$10,000/year for a combined total of \$18,500 in subsidized and unsubsidized loans. Students may pay the interest or let it accrue while in school.

*Perkins Federal Loan* — available to students at certain schools. The amount is determined on an individual basis and the government pays the interest while you are in school.

- Private Loans

Information on specialized lenders such as *Law Access* (800-282-1550), *Law-Loans* (800-984-0190), or *The Educational Resource Institute* (800-255-TERI) is available at the financial aid office of any ABA-approved law school, on-line, or you can call them directly. Interest rates from private lenders tend to be higher than federally based programs. Commercial lenders and financial institutions like banks usually charge the highest interest rates.

- Graduate PLUS Loans for Law Students

The Graduate PLUS loan is a new loan for law students. Graduate students with an absence of bad credit may be eligible to borrow a Graduate PLUS loan. The PLUS is federally guaranteed and the interest rate is subsidized. Interest accrues while the student is in school, and repayment begins immediately. The interest rate is 8.5 percent fixed for the life of the loan. Forbearance is available while the student is in school. Many students who have good credit are choosing Graduate PLUS instead of private loans.

### **How does a person apply for aid?**

- Complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) early in the calendar year. You must have already filed your tax return in order to file a FAFSA form. Applications are available from any college financial aid office or online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. FAFSA forms must be filed *each year* in order to obtain aid and are based on need.

- Contact individual law schools about institutional merit- and need-based awards and institutional loans. Obtain applications and complete well before deadlines.
- Determine if you will also need to take out private loans and contact one of the specialized lenders for application information.

#### **Where do I find additional information?**

- The Law School Admission Council <http://www.lsac.org>
- FindLaw <http://stu.findlaw.com/pre-law/finance.html>
- Princeton Review <http://www.review.com/law/index.cfm>
- FastWeb <http://fastweb.monster.com/>
- Access Loan Group <http://www.accessgroup.org/>
- FinAid <http://www.finaid.org>

Speak with the law school financial aid offices; they are often the best source for information about paying for law school.

<sup>2</sup>The ABA=LSAC official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, 2007 Edition, p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>The ABA=LSAC official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, 2007 Edition, p. 34.

## **Utilize UCS Resources**

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- UCS Pre-Law counselors are here to assist you. Call (203)432•0800 to schedule a 30 minute counseling appointment.
- Plan to attend the Law and Public Policy School Fair typically held in September. This is a valuable opportunity to meet admissions representatives from a wide variety of law schools, speak to them, and gain information about their school.
- Sign up for the Law distribution list on eRecruiting if you have not already done so. In order to receive information on presentations, events, law school panels throughout the year, visit <http://yale.erecruiting.com/er/security/login.jsp> and follow the directions to sign up to be on the Law distribution list.
- We have over 40 original LSATs you can borrow from UCS with a \$10 refundable deposit; however your deposit will be forfeited if you mark the book. There is no limit to how many tests you can borrow, but you may only do so one at a time.
- Throughout the year, we hold workshops such as “The Law School Personal Statement”, “Applying to Law School”, and “A Conversation with Lawyers” which provide valuable information for those students thinking about attending law school. In addition, you may have the opportunity to meet other students with similar interests and engage in meaningful conversations during the session. We invite you to take advantage of the workshops. For a complete listing of all workshops/presentations, visit the UCS calendar at <http://www.yale.edu/career/calendar/index.html>

- Take advantage and attend the law school panels. Schools such as Duke, Columbia, Georgetown, Harvard, Stanford, University of Chicago, University of Michigan, Yale and others travel to campus and conduct information sessions. This is an opportunity for you to meet the Law School Deans.