

# Applying to Law School

**SEAVER COLLEGE CAREER CENTER**  
Pepperdine University



Tyler Campus Center, Suite 270  
(310) 506-4184

<http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/studentaffairs/careercenter/>

# Table of Contents

Planning for Law School.....	2
Application Materials.....	6
Taking the LSAT.....	8
Timeline for Applying to Law School.....	9
Pre-Law at Pepperdine.....	11
Frequently Asked Questions.....	12
Important Things to Consider.....	14
Useful Websites .....	16

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**Criteria That May Be Considered by Law school Admission Committees**

- 1) LSAT score
- 2) Undergraduate grade-point average
- 3) Personal statement or essay
- 4) Letters of recommendation
- 5) Undergraduate course of study
- 6) Improvement in grades and grade distribution
- 7) Writing skills
- 8) Work experience or other post-undergraduate experiences
- 9) College curricular and extracurricular activities
- 10) Community activities
- 11) Motivation to study and reasons for deciding to study law
- 12) Ethnic/racial background
- 13) Obstacles that have been overcome
- 14) Past accomplishments and leadership
- 15) Anything else that stands out in an application

**1.) LSAT Score:**

- Plan in advance to give yourself enough time to adequately study for the LSAT exam.
- Sign up for a study class like Kaplan or Princeton Review, etc.
- It is best to study hard for the first test, but if needed you can re-take the test. If you think you may need to re-take the test, be sure to plan ahead to give yourself enough time to meet application deadlines.
- Typically, schools will average the two scores when computing your LSAT results. Some law schools have been known to take the **higher score** and others have been known to take the **most recent score**. It's a mixed bag! Check out this website for more information: [http://lawschoolnumbers.com/multiple\\_lsats.php](http://lawschoolnumbers.com/multiple_lsats.php)

**2.) Undergraduate GPA:**

- Your undergraduate GPA will be used to calculate your standing as an applicant as it is one way to quantify the achievements of each student.
- Some schools do use a cutoff scoring method and others will take all factors into account when considering an applicant.
- Having a strong GPA can be a great asset to your law school application. However, if you are not an A+ student, do not worry; all the other areas of your application count as well!

**3.) Personal Statement/Essay:**

- The personal statement or essay is the chance for you to show who you are as an individual beyond your LSAT score and GPA.
- This should be one of your key areas of focus as you apply to law school.
- Begin drafting your ideas **very early** in the process to allow for editing and changes.
- Allow the essay to show who you are as an individual and why you want to pursue a degree in law.
- Some schools have specific instructions; be sure to adhere to these.
- See the section on "Personal Statement" on page 7 for more information.

#### 4.) Letters of Recommendation:

- Letters of Recommendation enable the admissions committee to see you beyond your scores and personal statements.
- This is a great way to pull ahead of other applicants—so use caution and choose your references wisely.
- See the section on “Letters of Recommendation” on page 6 for more information.

#### 5.) College Major

- While there are no standard pre-requisites for gaining admission to a law school, almost all law schools require the completion of a **bachelors degree**.
- Many law schools suggest that you take coursework in the following areas:
  - critical analysis
  - logical reasoning
  - writing skills
  - organized expression of ideas
  - research skills
  - public speaking
- There is a **wide range of undergraduate backgrounds** represented in law schools
- Choose a major which you will enjoy and do well in.
- What counts is the **intensity and depth** of your undergraduate program and your capacity to perform well in a rigorous academic environment.

#### 6.) Improvement in Grades

- Even if you weren't getting A's all along, law schools are most interested to see that your grades **changed for the better** during your time at Pepperdine.
- Law schools will give the most attention to your **last two years** of coursework, as well as to your grades in specific areas pertinent to the study of law (i.e. philosophy, government, economics, psychology, etc.)

#### 7.) Writing Abilities:

- Your writing style and ability will be evaluated, as strong writing skills are required for entrance to law school.
- Take advantage of resources such as the Writing Center and your professor's office hours.
- Keep in Mind: The Career Center is available to help you with your personal statement.

#### 8.) Work Experience:

- If you have work experience while in college that relates to your interest or experience in the field of law, this may help strengthen your case.
- Some take time between the undergraduate and professional studies to work as **legal assistants or other law related positions** in order to boost their applications.
- Choosing a job in law at an early stage will not only confirm your interest and understanding of the field, but will show a strong **commitment to the field**.

#### 9.) Extracurricular activities:

- Evidence of **extracurricular activities** can be important to law school admission.
- Highlight your student activities, volunteer work, and leadership experiences.
- If possible, become involved in **law-related activities** such as Mock-Trial or Debate.
- Consider joining Pepperdine's Pre-Law society, **Phi Alpha Delta**

#### 10.) Community Activities:

- While extra-curricular activities are important, volunteer and community experiences are also another area of your application which can help demonstrate your personal character and your **desire to be a valuable part of your community**.

### 11.) Reason for studying Law:

- Be clear and concise about your reasoning for pursuing law.
- **Be positive.** It is important to be clear about your strong desire to be part of the field, but you do not want the reason for this to come across as negative (i.e. “cannot stand the current law field and want to change it”) or too superficial (i.e. “I like the large salaries paid to the top NYC lawyers”).

### 12.) Ethnic/Racial Background:

- Promoting **equal access to attending and attaining a law degree** is important to law schools. Therefore, students from under-represented backgrounds are of high interest to many schools.
- If relevant, talk about your ethnic/racial background as it relates to your decision to pursue a degree/career in law.

### 13.) Obstacles Overcome:

- If there are specific experiences in your life or obstacles which you have personally had to overcome, be sure to address these factors.

### 14.) Past Accomplishments and Leadership Experience:

- Lawyers are often noted as being leaders in the workforce. Thus, law schools often look for students who have demonstrated leadership abilities. If you have the experience, emphasize it. If you do not, work towards gaining more experience in the activities you currently enjoy.

### 15.) Other Relevant Information

- In some circumstances additional information is needed to allow the admissions committee a chance to understand special circumstances or other information which is relevant for your consideration into a program.
- Be sure to strictly adhere to the requirements of each application and do not provide more information than requested. Many schools only look at the required materials due to the large number of applications they receive each year.

## Application Materials

### Required Materials

- Completed Online Application
- Application fee (varies per school)
- Two (or Three) letters of recommendation
- Personal Statement
- Resume
- Supplemental Forms (if requested)
- Certification Letter or Transcript

### Online Application and Application Fee

- Follow the directions for each school on how to apply.
- Be sure to keep a timeline—make a list of schools and application deadlines to keep yourself organized.
- Each school will vary in the application fee required and payment methods. Check with each school of interest for more information.

### Letters of Recommendation

- You will need at least two letters of recommendation from individuals familiar with your academic work.
  - It is preferable to have two academic letters. However, some schools will accept one letter to be a **non-academic** letter of recommendation.
- When requesting letters of your references, be sure to provide them with plenty of time—**at least one month**—to complete the letter. Remember, your professors will most likely have numerous letters to write for students.
- **Provide** your reference with as much information as possible:
  - resume
  - transcript
  - personal statement
  - writing sample
  - brief write up on the length and details of your relationship to the reference
  - list of your school(s) of interest
  - addressed and stamped envelope for each school
  - a brief synopsis of any other activities, research experience, community efforts, or volunteer work you have done.
- Providing your recommenders **detailed information** about yourself will ensure your letters have accurate information regarding your experiences, such as dates and places you've worked.
- The more information one has about you, the more comprehensive his or her letter can be.
- Keep these tips in mind when **selecting references**:
  - The best letter will come from an individual who **knows you best**.
  - Be sure you have **spent enough time with each recommender** so that they fully understand your interest in going to law school.
- On the Letter of Recommendation Form, provided through the Law School Data Assembly Service (pg. 8), candidates have the choice to waive their rights to view their letter(s) of recommendation.
  - The **assumption** is that a waived letter of recommendation is bound to be more **candid**. However, please note that **law schools do not hold it against candidates** if they choose to retain their rights to view the letters.

## Personal Statement/Essay

- School applications may request that you write on a specific topic, but many request you "Tell us something about yourself." The length of essays may vary from school to school.
- Your essay needs to be well thought-out, concise, and compelling. Remember, admissions officers read **hundreds** of personal essays. Keep in mind the following suggestions:
  1. Start your essay with something that will **grab the reader's attention**. Often personal anecdotes can help draw the reader into the essay and keep them reading.
  2. **Make the essay personal**. Try not to simply repeat the information that can be read on your application. Provide the reader with an inside view on your thoughts, interests, or motivation to become a Juris Doctor, J.D.
  3. **Keep it concise in order to make your motivation and drive clear** to the reader.
  4. **Create a well-written document**. Your essay is a sample of your writing abilities. It is important that you convey your thoughts clearly, intelligently, and effectively in your essay.
  5. **Have your essay critiqued** by an academic advisor, writing center staff member, career counselor, Pre-law advisor, or peer.

### Check out these resources for writing the Personal Essay/Statement:

- <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/essay.pdf>
- [http://writing.englishclub.com/ee/lo\\_law.html](http://writing.englishclub.com/ee/lo_law.html)

## Resume

- Utilize the Career Center resources including our **Resume 101** Guide and Career Ambassador resume review hours.

## Transcript or Certification Letter

- Request your transcript through ONESop
- Follow each school's instructions for submitting your transcript or certification letter

Adapted from: <http://web.mit.edu/career/www/preprof/lawadmissions.html>

## Taking the LSAT

### About the LSAT:

- The Law school Admission Test (LSAT), administered by the Law School Admission Council, is a half-day standardized test required for admission to **all ABA-approved** law schools, most Canadian law schools, and many non-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.
- The test is administered **four times a year** at hundreds of locations around the world.
- Many law schools require that the LSAT be taken by December for admission the following fall. However, taking the test earlier—in June or October—is often advised.

### Registration Fees:

- The registration fee for the LSAT in 2008 is \$127.
- If you meet certain criteria, you may qualify for an LSAC fee waiver (see [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) for details).
- Late registrants must pay an additional \$64.

### How to Register Online:

<https://os.lsac.org/Release/logon/logon.aspx>

### Upcoming LSAT dates:

- Saturday, June 16, 2008 → Register by May 13, 2008
- Saturday, October 4, 2008 → Register by September 2, 2008
- Saturday, December 6, 2008 → Register by November 4, 2008
- Saturday, February 7, 2009 → Register by January 6, 2009

### More Information:

- Visit the Law school Admission Council at [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)

## Registering with Law school Data Assembly Service (LSDAS):

- The LSDAS will translate your coursework and grades into a standardized format and compute GPAs for each academic year, for each undergraduate institution you've attended, and overall as a way of streamlining for schools.
- They will also send copies of all your undergraduate and graduate transcripts, along with these GPA summaries, your LSAT scores and your LSAT writing sample to the law schools to which you are applying.
- They also provide an optional letter of recommendation service.
- You can register for these services for \$117 or for a fee waiver (U.S. citizens only) at [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org).
- **SOME SCHOOLS REQUIRE YOU USE THE LSDAS IN CONJUNCTION WITH YOUR APPLICATION**, and nearly all U.S. accredited law schools work with the LSDAS as a clearinghouse for individual transcripts from applicants.
- For more information, **visit [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)**.



## Suggested\* Timeline for Applying to Law school

\*If you plan to attend Law School right after graduation, this process should start during spring of your Junior year.

### **Junior Year:**

#### **Fall Semester:**

- View different catalogs and directories on Law schools (in print and online), such as *The Official Guide to U.S. Law schools*, published by The Princeton Review.
  - See *Frequently Asked Questions* and *Useful Websites* sections of this packet
- Start establishing strong relationships with faculty.
- Begin preparing for the June LSAT.
- Gain experience in the field.

#### **Spring Semester:**

##### **March**

- Register for the June LSAT.
- Discuss your plans with a pre-law advisor (see "Pre Law @ Pepperdine" page 11)
- Create a list of faculty who you wish to write letters of reference for you and keep these on file.

##### **June**

- Take the LSAT exam.
- Prepare a draft of your personal statement and have it reviewed by a pre-law advisor.
- Prepare a draft of your resume.
- Create a list of schools to which you plan to apply.

##### **July-August**

- Register with the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) if necessary.
- Have your Pepperdine transcript sent to LSDAS.
- Request information packets from law schools.
- Visit law schools.
- If necessary, register and prepare for the Fall LSAT.

### **Senior Year:**

#### **September**

- Order the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) catalog and application or complete an electronic version.
- Finish writing your personal statement.
- Update your resume.
- Ask faculty for letters of recommendation.
- Ask a professional acquaintance or employer for a reference. Provide employers with a sample reference.
- Continue to visit law schools campuses.

**October**

- If needed, take the Fall LSAT.
- Begin researching financial aid and scholarship options.
- Finalize your personal statement.
- Finalize your letters of recommendation.
- Complete the LSDAS report.
- Make sure all applications have been completed before mailed.

**November**

- Mail completed applications to Law schools.
- Obtain most current applications for financial aid (federal, institutional, private), e.g. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

**December**

- Contact law schools to confirm your application has been received.
- Relax and enjoy the holidays!

**January**

- Have an updated transcript (which includes your most recent fall term) sent to schools and/or LSDAS.
- Submit completed financial aid forms.
- Prepare for interviews.

**February - April**

- Evaluate offers of acceptance.
- Evaluate financial aid offers.
- Submit an acceptance letter to the school of your choice.
- Notify other school that you have chosen not to attend.

Source: <http://gradschool.about.com/od/lawschool/a/lawtimeline.htm>

**Need Pre-law Advisement?**

Contact:

**Curt Portzel, J.D.**  
Pre-Law Advisor  
(310) 506-4003  
curt.portzel@pepperdine.edu

Seaver College Pre-law website:

**<http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/socialscience/programs/prelaw.htm>**

Phi Alpha Delta, Pre-Law Society

**<http://seaver.pepperdine.edu/socialscience/programs/phialphadelta.htm>**

**SEAVER COLLEGE CAREER CENTER**

**Students**

**Katrina Davy**  
Career Counselor

**Sheila Benko**  
Career Counselor

Call (310) 506-4184 to set up an appointment

**Alumni**

**Greta Couper**  
Career Counselor

Call (310) 506-4074 to set up an appointment

### What is a Legal Education?

- A legal education is designed to develop your analytical, creative, & logical reasoning abilities.
- Law school will also strengthen your reading and debating skills.
- Lawyers must know how to analyze legal issues in light of the constantly changing state of the law and public policy.
- They must be able to advocate the views of individuals and diverse interest groups within the context of the legal system. They must be able to synthesize material that relates to multifaceted issues. They must give intelligent counsel on the law's requirements. Moreover, lawyers must write and speak clearly and be able to persuade and negotiate effectively.

### What is involved in the law school curriculum?

- In nearly every state, graduation from an ABA-approved (American Bar Association) law school is required for admission to the bar
  - Each ABA-approved law school provides basic training in American law sufficient to qualify its graduates to take the bar examination in all states
- Most law schools require three years of full-time attendance, or four years of part-time study, if offered.
- Many law schools utilize the **"Socratic Method"** of teaching
  - This style requires students to come prepared to all lectures, as the professor will call on students (at random) to answer questions and hold in-depth conversations about the lecture and readings.
  - Law students learn to be prepared for each class and often spend most of their time outside of class preparing for their next lecture.
- Although law schools differ in the emphasis they give to certain subjects and in the degree to which they provide opportunities for independent study and clinical experience, nearly all law schools have certain basic similarities.
  - Most law schools rely on the **"case method" approach** to teaching.
  - Most law schools share a common approach to the task of training lawyers.
- First-year curricula usually include courses in civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and criminal procedure, legal methods, legal writing and research, property law, and torts.
- A number of schools have developed specialized programs of instruction combining law with other disciplines such as business, public administration, international relations, science, and technology.

### Who is applying to law school?

- For Fall 2005:
  - 25% were 22 years old or younger
  - 37% were ages 23 to 25
  - 19% were ages 26 and 29
  - 9% were ages 30 to 34
  - 10% were over 34 years old
- Currently, nearly one-half of all applicants are women.
- For Fall 2005, there were over 26,500 applicants.
  - 25 -28 % of applicants were ethnic minorities
  - The number of minority applicants has **more than tripled** over the past 21 years

## Everything you wanted to know about Law school but were afraid to ask (Cont'd):

### How can I find out more about law schools?

- Look widely and inquire carefully. You really cannot spend too much time or effort gathering and studying information on law programs. Select the schools to which you will apply only after reviewing all admission materials available.
- Visit school websites or write to schools for their bulletins, catalogs, or other materials that include complete and current information. A complete list with addresses for all LSAC-member schools in the US and Canada, go here: <http://www.lsac.org/lsac/download-forms-guidelines-checklists.asp#think-about-law-school>.
- Consult your **college pre-law advisor**. Undergraduate institutions with pre-law advisors or career counselors encourage students and alumni to contact them for assistance—**even if you have been out of school for a number of years**.
- **Visit law schools**. You can learn a great deal by talking with students and faculty members, and by visiting classes. Talk to alumni of the schools, preferably a recent graduate or one who is active in alumni affairs.
- Attend a **free LSAC law school forum**. Law school forums are excellent opportunities to talk with law school representatives from around the country in one central location.
- For law school contact information, visit the law school links area of: [www.lsac.org/lsac/law-school-links.asp](http://www.lsac.org/lsac/law-school-links.asp) or you can access the *ABA/LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law schools* at <http://officialguide.lsac.org/docs/cgi-bin/home.asp>.

### How do I choose a law school?

- You should begin the process of choosing a law school with an honest appraisal of your **strengths and preferences**.
- You should consider the **size, composition, and background of the student body**; the location, size, and **nature of the surrounding community**; the particular strengths or interests of the faculty; the degree to which clinical experience or classroom learning is emphasized; the nature of any special programs offered; the number and type of student organizations; the range of library holdings; and whether a school is public or private.
- You may wish to consider a school with strong minority recruitment, retention, and mentoring program, or one with an active student organization for students of your particular ethnic background.
- At any rate, you should actually select more than one law school where you think you could succeed. Today, the **average applicant applies to four or more schools**.
- To become a practicing lawyer in the United States, you **MUST** attend an **ABA-approved institution** (see list at <http://www.lsac.org/Choosing/law-school-links.asp>)

Answers provided by: Law school Admission Council (LSAC)

## Important Things to Consider:

### **Part-Time vs. Full-Time**

- Most professionals will say that you should attend law school full time, as this immerses you completely in your legal training.
- There are also many benefits of attending part-time such as saved resources and income and balanced lifestyle while attending school.
- If you are considering part-time study, be sure your school(s) of interest offer(s) this.

### **Geography**

- Where do you want to practice law?
- Statistically speaking, most lawyers practice in fairly close proximity to their school after graduation.
- However, don't feel as though you have to choose a law school in terms of your future career location. You must also consider your personal preferences and which school is best for you.

### **School Reputation**

- Use the annual rankings of law schools as a starting point to review law schools, but not as the final deciding factor.
- Research the reputation of a school by asking lawyers or law students for their impressions.
- Look through law school catalogs to see which schools the professors attended.
- Consider whether a local, national, or international reputation is most important to you.

### **Placement**

- Spend some time familiarizing yourself with each school's placement rates, the location of job placements, the on-campus recruitment program, and the law school personnel devoted to helping you find the right job after graduation.
- Look to see where recent graduates are currently working—always keep in mind the alumni-student network involved at each law school can be extremely valuable.
  - Many jobs are attained through networking and connections!

### **Financial Aid**

- Financing law school is a very different process than financing a college education, largely because of your access to loans and potential earning power after graduation.
- When evaluating offers, take into consideration the financial aid offered to you by each prospective school.
- Many law students are also successful in attaining well-paying summer jobs in between the spring and fall semesters. This income is often substantial and can help reduce the expenses of attending law school full-time.

### **School Size**

- A smaller school may potentially have smaller classes and a more intimate environment
- A larger school usually has in its size a greater diversity of both its faculty and students.

### **Joint-Degree Programs**

- Joint-degree programs are often offered within larger universities with a good selection of graduate and professional programs and usually allow you to earn two degrees in a shorter time than it would take to earn each degree separately. For example:
  - J.D. and Ph.D. in Political Science
  - J.D. and Ph.D. in Psychology
  - J.D. and M.B.A.
  - J.D. and M.Div.

### **Student Body**

- Law schools utilize a class ranking system of their student bodies, and your standing in this is very important. Consider how your classmates will determine the level of intellectual challenge you will face.

### **Class Size**

- One faculty member to 30 full-time students is considered the limit of acceptability. Beyond this basic ratio, assess the following characteristics of a school's faculty: Educational background, professional experience beyond the classroom, accessibility, reputation, continued professional activity, and ethnic, academic, gender, and racial diversity.

### **Library and Facilities**

- Spend some time assessing the research facilities and resources available at each of the schools you are considering.

### **Clinical Programs**

- Clinics allow law students to try out their legal skills representing clients in a variety of settings. However, not all clinical programs are of the same quality. Find out whether a school's clinical experience is a **simulated or a real-world experience** and decide which you would prefer. Make sure the kinds of topics with which the clinics deal are of interest to you.

### **Student Services**

- Administrative offices, such as registration and financial aid, can have a dramatic impact on your school experience. Talk to current students, read the literature, and call the offices yourself to judge how responsive you think the staff will be to your needs.

### **Student Organizations**

- Much of your law school experience will be enhanced by your involvement in a number of extracurricular activities, and a much can be learned about a school by the **nature of its student organizations**. Obtain a list of your potential school's organizations.

### **Academic Rigor**

- Not only is the ranking of the school itself important, but **your success there** is equally, if not more, important.
- When choosing your law school, think about your personal potential for success: is it better to be at the bottom a Top Ten school, or at the top of middle-ranked school?

Source:

[http://education.yahoo.com/college/essentials/articles/law/law\\_choosing\\_program.html;\\_ylt=An0w9EQznSM\\_oIz4c0qdA1spmRQF](http://education.yahoo.com/college/essentials/articles/law/law_choosing_program.html;_ylt=An0w9EQznSM_oIz4c0qdA1spmRQF)

## Useful Websites

### **Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools**

A comprehensive general website which should provide answers to most of your questions:

<http://officialguide.lsac.org/docs/cgi-bin/home.asp>

### **Law-related Info Links** (schools, LSAC, Discussion Boards, etc.)

<http://www.princetonreview.com/law/testprep/testprep.asp?TPRPAGE=300&TYPE=LSAT>

- o Admissions Statistics for all US Law Schools

<http://www.lawschoolnumbers.com/links.php>

- o The Anna Ivey link is especially helpful (use the free sections of it).

### **Law school Rankings:**

<http://www.leiterrankings.com/>

<http://www.ilrg.com/rankings/>

[http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/brief/lawrank\\_brief.php](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/brief/lawrank_brief.php)

- o Use caution when looking at these schools, consider other factors besides “rank” in your decision such as location, cost of attendance and your personal objective

### **Sites useful to compare yourself to other current applicants:**

<http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/lawlocator/>

[http://www.lawschoolnumbers.com/index\\_number.php](http://www.lawschoolnumbers.com/index_number.php)

<http://www.chiashu.com/lsat.html>

- o These sites are used by students to figure out their “safety” and “reach” schools and are not a definite sign of whether you will gain admission. **Each year admission standards change**, and therefore it is impossible to predict exactly who will gain admission to any given school.

### **NYU Pre-law Handbook:**

<http://www.nyu.edu/cas/prelaw/>

### **Regional Starting Salaries for Practicing Lawyers:**

<http://www.infirmation.com/shared/insider/payscale.tcl>