

# Salisbury University Law School Admission Handbook



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Salisbury University Law School Admission Handbook  
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## I. Introduction

### A. Choosing Law School

The question of whether to go to law school deserves serious thought.<sup>1</sup> If you want to practice law in any of its forms, then law school is almost a necessity.<sup>2</sup> If you need a law degree for another vocational endeavor (e.g. legal journalist, as an adjunct to an accounting degree) law school may also be a good choice. The American Bar Association (ABA) in its employment statistics keeps track not only of law school graduates who obtain jobs for which they need to pass the bar, but also jobs for which a J.D. is an advantage.<sup>3</sup> A fairly sizable percentage of law school graduates currently obtain these kind of jobs. Depending on the purpose law school plays in your plans, however, you may want to alter your choice of attending law school, or the kind of law school you wish to attend. You might want to consider the cost of law school, time to complete, and the advantage of the degree.

If you have decided to go to law school because of limited employment options, you may want to carefully consider your decision. Law school and the application process for admittance are time consuming and stressful processes. Admission's offices often evaluate your interest in law; if you are applying because you have nothing else to do, it can show in your application and lower your chance of admittance. Law school, moreover, is a difficult place to mark time. You will likely finish school with significant debt and a J.D. is not the ticket to an immediate high

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<sup>1</sup> I want to thank the current and former student of Salisbury University who helped me with this project by discussing their experiences with me and bringing me their questions, many of the answers to which you will see in this handbook. The remaining work, however, is entirely my own, and is part of an ongoing project; do not quote without my consent.

<sup>2</sup> For the sense of completeness, there are alternative paths to pass the bar and, therefore, practice law in some states. Four states, California, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington, as of 2020 have full apprenticeship programs; one can sit for the bar exam because s/he apprenticed in lieu of the law school requirement. Two states, Maine and New York, allow one to sit for the bar exam after some time in law school and some time apprenticing. This pathway to the practice of law is rare; for example in 2013 only 60 of the 83,986 individuals from across the country, who took the bar exam, had pursued the apprenticeship pathway (.07%) and only 17 of those 60 passed the exam. Sometimes completion of a non-ABA approved law school might also be paired with apprenticeship, or qualify you to sit for the bar exam in some states (see §VB below).

<sup>3</sup> A J.D. is the degree conferred on completion of law school. It stands for *Juris Doctorate* or Doctor of Laws. The ABA defines a job in the "J.D. Advantage" Category as those "for which the employer sought an individual with a J.D., and perhaps even required a J.D., or for which the J.D. provided a demonstrable advantage in obtaining or performing the job, but which does not itself require bar passage or an active law license or involve practicing law. Examples of positions for which a J.D. is an advantage include a corporate contracts administrator, alternative dispute resolution specialist, government regulatory analyst, FBI agent, and accountant. Also included might be jobs in personnel or human resources, jobs with investment banks, jobs with consulting firms, jobs doing compliance work in business and industry, jobs in law firm professional development, and jobs in law school career services offices, admissions offices, or other law school administrative offices. Doctors or nurses who plan to work in a litigation, insurance, or risk management setting, or as expert witnesses, would fall into this category, as would journalists and teachers (in a higher education setting) of law and law related topics. It is an indicator that a position does not fall into this category if a J.D. is uncommon among persons holding such a position."

salary as is often presented in popular media. While most graduates get jobs which provide reliable and stable income, they are not for the exorbitant salaries often portrayed on television. Most lawyers, furthermore, are saddled with significant debt upon graduation. While you might not become rich, if you are interested in the vocation of law (or an ancillary vocation noted above), attending law school should provide that opportunity. You should be certain, however, that you want to complete the degree before you start school. Leaving law school before completion will leave you with debt and unlike some other academic pursuits little or no benefit.

Prospective law students often obtain advice from parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, family friends, or others, about applications, law school, and the practice of law. This well-meaning advice often represents application procedures, law school, and the job market, the way they were, not the way they are. You will need to investigate the situation at the time you apply and compare what you learn to what your goals and expectations are.<sup>4</sup>

Despite your preparation there will still be elements of uncertainty. In 2006, for example, the job market for law school graduates was good, and starting salaries were high. Some people chose to apply to law school based on this information. By the time those students graduated, however, the legal job market had collapsed; some firms merged, others closed, and some graduates had job offers withdrawn. There are advantages to going to law school during an economic downturn, however. One reason that law school applications declined after the 2008 economic slowdown is because of that contraction of the legal marketplace. There was some decrease in the number of law school spots available, but this paled in comparison with the contraction in the legal marketplace. After an initial increase in law school applications, they decreased. A competition was created for students among law schools and a favorable scholarship environment. Essentially, a trade-off was created where choosing to go to school in a difficult job market made an easier application environment.

This is not unusual. Often during economic downturns there is an upswing in applications for graduate and professional schools, including law school. Indeed, the applications for admissions to enter law school in 2009 increased approximately five percent from applications for 2008 entrance, due to that economic downturn; however, by the middle of the last decade (2015 or so) applications had declined, and scholarship offers by law schools had risen as a consequence.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Please note that you can apply to law school multiple times. You may want to “test the marketplace” and then decide to wait a year or a few. This is discussed more below.

<sup>5</sup> What this means for the current decade is unclear. Covid-19 has caused economic slowing and it is unclear how long an economic rebound may take. If applications go through the past pattern, there will likely be more applications for a period of time and scholarship money may also become more competitive. This might not be the case, however, because of the nature of Covid-19 and how it has effected students and made academic pursuits more difficult.

## B. When To Apply

Prospective students also often wonder if they should take time off between their undergraduate degree and law school. If you are not certain about law school taking time to confirm your desire and commitment to law school is a good idea. If you are planning to attend law school, but are considering taking some time before application and attendance to get an interesting job, or make some money, it may be in your interest to apply or at least assess the current application situation. Remember, in a few years it may be more difficult or more expensive to go to law school, though the reverse may happen as well.

In other circumstances you will likely want to wait before beginning the application process. One condition where you should delay your application to law school is weak credentials. If your qualifications are poor, but you still want to go to law school, a good strategy is not to apply while you are finishing college. Instead you might want to gain additional experience and credentials and apply in a few years. I want to note this is true even if you might be able to obtain admittance to a school. There are some schools which have weaker bar passage rates and employment rates. If you have a weaker undergraduate record on which you believe you can improve, you are likely advantaged by improving your record before you apply and attending a school which has a better employment and bar passage rate.

Indeed, if you do not have a sense about what role you want your degree to serve in your future plans, choosing a law school, gaining admittance, and getting through the school itself will be difficult. This does not mean you need to give up on becoming a lawyer. You may want to delay entrance into law school until a later date, however. Despite the desire of many to pursue law school directly after the completion of their undergraduate education, it is not uncommon to enter law school after a few, or even many, years after undergraduate education. Unless you are committed to law school with good credentials, your best plan is likely to wait. If your credentials are good, you may want to test the marketplace even if you want to wait some time before law school.<sup>6</sup> Remember legal practice is dynamic and one should attend law school if one wishes to engage in law as a vocation, not because you believe you can get a job at a specific type of firm.



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<sup>6</sup> Some schools will allow you to defer admittance for a year or even two. This is more likely in an environment where the schools are competing for students.

## II. Using Undergraduate Education to Prepare for Law School



### A. UGPA (Undergraduate Grade Point Average)

The most important thing no matter where you go to school or what courses you take is to get good grades. This is because your undergraduate grade point average (UGPA) along with your score on the law school admissions test (LSAT) are the two largest elements in determining admissions. Sometimes students ask if it matters that they go to Salisbury University (SU) rather than Johns Hopkins when competing for admissions slots. The answer is that it is unlikely to make a difference. If it does matter, any effect will be small, *may be positive or negative*, and only exist if all other things are equal.

Each law school has its own admission's committees and admissions policies; however, most schools draw their incoming classes from a wide variety of undergraduate institutions and view a 3.5 UGPA as a 3.5 UGPA. This is especially true because the Law School Credential Assembly Service (CAS) standardizes grade point averages so that individual law schools are not forced to compare schools with different scales on unequal footing.<sup>7</sup> Still, students that go to

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix II, for information on how CAS standardizes grades and what is included and excluded from the tally. It is important to realize that if you retake a class, both the original and second grade is included. It is not in your interest to retake courses in most instances.

particularly prestigious universities or ones which have reputations for lower average grades may be given priority among broadly similar applicants. This is likely to be more apparent in the most competitive institutions because for schools like Stanford or Yale, for which most of their applicants have extremely high UGPAs and LSATs, it becomes difficult to choose among the applicants. Additional factors can be weighed, therefore, in an attempt to distinguish them. In other situations they are less likely to make a difference.

The advantage of an undergraduate institution is not always clear, however. It is possible, for example, that coming from Salisbury University may be an advantage over Harvard because you are the only applicant from Salisbury to a particular school and there are a dozen from Harvard. This assumes that applicants have roughly the same credentials. Please be aware, that if your UGPA is even slightly lower or higher, or your LSAT score is one point higher or lower, your application may be viewed differently, sometimes **very** differently.

While you should organize your application strategically, planning your undergraduate career strategically is more problematic. You are giving away four useful years for something of nebulous advantage; moreover, if it appears that you are being largely strategic in your undergraduate education your application is likely to be viewed poorly by certain admissions committees. There are more important factors in gaining admittance to law school, i.e. a high UGPA and a strong LSAT score; these are the factors that essentially determine law school admittance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> University of Baltimore has an early entry program. The school markets this program to UB undergrads, but it is open to students with the required courses, GPA and LSAT from Salisbury University. Just because you can get accepted to this, or perhaps another similar program, it does not mean you should. These programs are best for non traditional students with high UGPA. If you think the program is right for you contact your adviser and the University of Baltimore admission's office. There are other programs available for SU students while undergraduates such as the Charles Hamilton Houston Scholars Program. This program is for undergraduates who may need some help in preparation for law school. You can find out more about the program here: <http://law.ubalt.edu/admissions/diversity/chhsp/index.cfm>. University of Baltimore also has the Fannie Angelos program (<http://law.ubalt.edu/admissions/diversity/fannieangelosprogram/index.cfm>) which is designed to "prepare students from Maryland HBCU and other select colleges for admission to law school, and continues to work with them so that they may excel and thrive throughout their legal careers. We provide extensive LSAT preparation, one-on-one academic mentoring, individualized "whole life" supports, and career counseling." Even though the program concentrates on HBCU (historically Black College and University) students, SU students can apply as well. In the past students in the program needed to go to UMES for the LSAT course.

## B. Major



One of the biggest choices you make while an undergraduate is your choice of major(s); however, law schools are generally more concerned with the skill set you obtain while you are an undergraduate, rather than the major you choose. No matter your major your undergraduate preparation should help develop reading skills, writing skills, and help you think analytically and clearly.

The American Bar Association (ABA) which accredits and oversees law schools notes on its website that it

does not recommend any undergraduate majors or group of courses to prepare for a legal education. Students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. You may choose to major in subjects that are considered to be traditional preparation for law school, such as history, English, philosophy, political science, economics or business, or you may focus your undergraduate studies in areas as diverse as art, music, science and mathematics, computer science, engineering, nursing, or education. Whatever major you select, you are encouraged to pursue an area of study that interests and challenges you, while taking advantage of opportunities to develop your research and writing skills. Taking a broad range of difficult courses from demanding instructors is excellent preparation for legal education.

This is good and succinct advice.



In a survey of law school admission deans, only 6.5% claimed that an applicant's choice of major had "a great deal of influence" on the admissions process. Choosing a major strategically, moreover has drawbacks which may override any positives for admission's officials. You will likely do better in classes and majors you enjoy and, therefore, have a higher GPA which will help you get admittance. Remember, successful candidates for admission to law schools are drawn across all majors.

Some preferences do exist. In the same study noted above the most favorably viewed major was that of English; it leads to a development of reading and writing skills which serve law students very well. Philosophy, economics, and political science were also frequently cited positively. This does not mean you should switch your major toward one of these fields cited most positively. Indeed, having an unconventional major may help you in the admissions process by adding to the diversity of the incoming class, something also frequently cited as a goal by admission's committees. A particular admission's committee may decide that you, as a biology major, is providing a perspective that the school's students need in their classes; therefore, you can be given preference over an English major given your **broadly similar credentials**. Students with unconventional majors might consider, in an effort to demonstrate mastery of skills necessary for law school, to either double major, minor, or focus a concentration in one of the more favorable fields. Only do this, however, if you believe it will not damage your credentials. While philosophy might be seen as positive from the standpoint of a particular admission's committee, if you will get a 3.7 UGPA in chemistry and a 2.8 UGPA in philosophy, you should not major, minor, or double major in philosophy. For a possible benefit at the margins (something which might get the admissions committee in your favor if all other things are equal) you have put yourself in a lower category and made it harder for you to gain admittance. Essentially law schools are most concerned that its students have broad training which will enable them to do the work necessary.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1 (below) lists the most popular reported majors for law school applicants and law school enrollees for 2015-2016. In this year, the most popular major for applicants was political science; indeed, the next most popular major, criminal justice, only has about thirty percent of the applicants. Even though the vast majority of political science applicants matriculate (approximately 71 percent). Certain other majors do as well or better (e.g. philosophy majors matriculated at approximately 75.7 percent). Despite this, do not place too much stock in this chart. There are vague majors (e.g. arts and humanities) and some majors which have low numbers which are more likely to vary, both in application and admission over the years. Notice there are non-traditional majors on the list, such as Spanish, which high matriculation rates (approximately 73%) and some traditional majors (e.g. criminal justice — approximately 55%) with lower matriculation rates. The overall lesson is that it is difficult to major strategically.

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<sup>9</sup> This training can be obtained in courses from some of less common majors as well.

Table II — 1  
 Applicants and matriculation by reported major  
 2015-2016<sup>10</sup>

<b>Reported Major</b>	<b>Number of Applicants</b>	<b>Number Matriculating</b>	<b>Rank of Applicants</b>	<b>Rank of Matriculating</b>
<b>Accounting</b>	962	561	16	19
<b>Arts and Humanities</b>	2135	1444	8	8
<b>Biology</b>	744	497	20	20
<b>Business Administration</b>	1554	850	11	12
<b>Business Management</b>	1085	624	14	16
<b>Communications</b>	1809	1195	10	10
<b>Criminal Justice</b>	3857	2106	2	5
<b>Crininology</b>	931	562	17	18
<b>Economics</b>	2717	1943	6	6
<b>English</b>	3549	2437	4	4
<b>Finance</b>	1468	980	12	11
<b>History</b>	3472	2561	5	3
<b>International Relations</b>	1026	754	15	14
<b>Liberal Arts</b>	1311	775	13	13
<b>Marketing</b>	902	591	19	17
<b>Philosophy</b>	2294	1736	7	7
<b>Political Science</b>	12693	9030	1	1
<b>Psychology</b>	3778	2564	3	2
<b>Sociology</b>	2055	1266	9	9
<b>Spanish</b>	906	659	18	15

When deciding on your major you should choose something which you find interesting; this increases the likelihood of achieving good grades. Also choose something which serves

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from Christopher P. Banks, *The American Legal Profession*. Washington, DC: CQ Press, 2018, p. 25

educational or career purposes that might be useful for you. Remember not everyone who initially believes s/he will go to law school does indeed, attend law school. Others attend law school not directly after their undergraduate education, but work or obtain additional education before law school. The best idea is to choose your most favored major and then follow the course suggestions in section 'D' below.

### C. Why is there no prelaw major?

For most law schools undergraduate majors must have legitimate undergraduate purposes, not designed merely strategically. Indeed, one often majors in biology or chemistry, but not pre-med. Law schools generally like to see a broad education rather than a specific one as they believe that such an education is more likely to be a good preparation for law school. As you see from the table II-1 neither law, legal studies, nor prelaw are among the 20 most popular majors.

The American Bar Association notes that, “there is no single path that will prepare you for a legal education.” It also notes that some students come “directly from their undergraduate studies” but some “begin their legal education significantly later in life, and they bring to their law school education the insights and perspectives gained from those life experiences. Legal education welcomes and values diversity and you will benefit from the exchange of ideas and different points of view that your colleagues will bring to the classroom.” A prelaw major would deprive the law school of this diversity.<sup>11</sup> It would also not prepare students for careers before law school.

“Law” classes are taught differently in an undergraduate setting than in law school, which has a more professional and technical focus. Law schools, while wanting to see that potential students have an interest in law, also want law students to be trained in the law in the law school style. For these reasons prelaw majors are sometimes looked on with disfavor by law school deans.<sup>12</sup> Salisbury University provides prelaw resources for prelaw students while encouraging them to major in whatever is most beneficial for them. These services include a prelaw advising and career counselors to try to help you gain law school admission and practice the career of your choice.

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<sup>11</sup> Applying to law school can be viewed in comparison to students seeking admittance to medical school. Like pre-med advising, prelaw advising should enable you to take the correct courses and apply to law school while still pursuing your individuality and expressing that individuality in your application.

<sup>12</sup> Some schools have “Legal Studies” majors and minors. These are generally broadly designed and only a portion of their graduates apply to law school. Often these majors also include students interested in law enforcement or other law or legal related fields. Sometimes these majors focus or offer concentrations similar to criminal justice on one end of the spectrum or similar to prelaw on the other end.

## D. Courses for Law School

In addition to your major (and minor or concentration) you should pursue a broad curriculum. You have an advantage by attending Salisbury University. The general education requirements push you to obtain the broad education most law schools want. This does mean, however, that you need to take your general education requirements seriously. Not only do these classes indicate the preparation law schools desire, but at approximately one-third of Salisbury University's student credits, general education requirements significantly effect your UGPA and chance of law school admittance.

Law schools like applicants to have taken classes in English, including writing and literature. At SU this should be satisfied by English 103 and the required literature class. Classes in American history, political science, psychology, sociology and economics are also cited as desirable. Also in the desirable category are classes in communications and philosophy. Since much law is actually business law you also may find an accounting and business administration class helpful. You should also try to show that you have an interest in law; therefore, you should take a couple of classes that deal with the law. It does not matter if these classes are in the department of political science, philosophy, psychology, others, or in the school of education or business. Taking at least one and probably a few of these classes will show that your interest in law is serious.

You do not necessarily need to take all these courses, but the less conventional your major is e.g. chemistry, the more important your performance in these broad areas become. It shows you have the required skill set to complete a law school program. It is important, however, not to avoid challenging classes. Law schools become concerned about admitting students who appear as if they are avoiding challenging classes as undergraduates. You need to take some courses which appear challenging and do well in these classes. For this reason you should avoid more than one or two pass/fail classes and try to limit these to your first three semesters.

By the time you apply to law school your transcript should show an interest in law and things related to it, but should also reflect your individual interests. Through your major and electives your transcript should indicate what makes you different from other applicants.

## E. Skills For Law School

### 1. General Knowledge

The American Bar Association recommends that for success in law school, a student should obtain knowledge in certain areas. This knowledge need not be obtained through university level courses but the ABA recommends that knowledge in these areas will improve your chances of success in law school and in the practice of law. I list below some courses which may help you gain knowledge in these areas if you feel you need them, but you need not

take these courses if you already have this knowledge or have other methods of obtaining that content: laws schools do not need to see any specific courses on your transcript.<sup>13</sup>

The general knowledge recommended by the American Bar Association includes a “broad understanding of history” including United States history. This can be fulfilled by several courses in the history section of the general education requirements. At SU you need to take two history classes, one of which is a world history course, the other can be an American history course (Hist 201 or 202). The ABA also recommends an understanding of the American political System. Political Science 110 or 102 covers this topic and will fulfill and section IIIB requirement. The ABA recommends some “mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics an ability to analyze financial data.” For most students the math will be satisfied by the mathematics requirement (Section IVB of the General Education requirements). You may want to supplement the basic math requirements with a business or accounting course such as accounting 201, or business administration 103; many lawyers will work with business or finance. The ABA also recommends “A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction.” This can be fulfilled by an appropriate course in sociology, psychology, philosophy, or others; this would fill out you section III general education requirements. Lastly the ABA recommends “an understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, of world events, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.” This can be fulfilled through a variety of courses most notably through a study abroad semester. It can also be fulfilled through a number of courses in political science, history, or a variety of other departments including upper level foreign language courses or area studies minors.

Again, please note, that it is not necessary to take all or any one of these specific courses. The American Bar Association notes that these skills and knowledge can “be acquired in a wide variety of ways.” While you may get some of it by taking “undergraduate, graduate, or even high school courses,” you can get it through “self-learning ... in the workplace, or through various other life experiences.” **THERE IS NO COURSE OR SET OF COURSES WHICH SHOULD BE CONSIDERED NECESSARY FOR LAW SCHOOL.** The same is true for the subsequent skills which are important for law school and which may be tested in the LSAT. While they may be enhanced by certain courses, no particular courses should be considered necessary.

## 2. Reading

Most students are surprised about the required reading for a course in law school and that the required reading is absolutely necessary. In many first year courses a student’s whole grade is based on one exam at the end of the course; it is important, therefore, that you can keep up with the reading. Students also need to synthesize the important points from the copious amount of reading. Reading, synthesizing, and exegesis is also what most lawyers do the majority of their time. If you do not have these skills it is problematic in the long run. Reading, and reading

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<sup>13</sup> I do want to caution future law school applicants that without courses on the transcript you run the risk of schools not knowing you have certain, knowledge or skills. In some cases these need to be mentioned on your application of resumé. You can discuss specific issues with your adviser.

comprehension skills will help develop necessary vocabulary and increase your LSAT score. In addition to enrolling in classes which require a copious amount of reading, you might want to make sure you read for pleasure. This will help you gain necessary reading comprehension skills.

The American Bar Association also notes that, “Preparation for legal education should include substantial experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual material.” It also notes that you can do this by a “close reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy of history.” What is important is engaging with the material and “critically analyzing, complex written material of substantial length.”

### 3. Writing

Writing skills are important because as one progresses through law school, your ability to write well will have a direct bearing on your grades. You will likely take a legal writing class in your first year of law school. Clear, concise writing, in addition, is necessary when you practice law. You will also be required to write an essay for the LSAT exam and that essay will be copied and sent to ALL the law schools to which you apply.<sup>14</sup> Many schools are hesitant to accept a student who cannot write a clear concise and persuasive essay. A personal statement is also included in most applications and can sway the admission’s committee for the majority of applicants whose credentials put them in a category which can lead to either acceptance or rejection. The American Bar Association advises that, “you should seek as many experiences as possible that will require rigorous and analytical writing, including preparing original pieces of substantial length and revising written work in response to constructive criticism.”

### 4. Oral communication

Contrary to what you may observe on television, most of a lawyer’s business is transacted as written communication. Still, it is necessary to verbally convey ideas clearly and persuasively even if you never go inside a courtroom. You need to interact with clients and often other members of a firm. You will also need to express yourself in law school classes. Professors may not be tolerant of poor oral expression.

### 5. Research skills

Lawyers often must research various topics. You will need to use computer based resources such as LEXIS and WESTLAW. Feeling comfortable with using computer based data systems for research is a must. Not all research is done on computer databases, however.

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<sup>14</sup> In the past you could skip the essay and your exam would still be scored, and the blank essay sent to the schools to which you applied. LSAC no longer does this. To complete the LSAT you must write the essay. If you do not, LSAC does not release your LSAT score.

Completing at least a couple of research projects while at Salisbury University will be helpful in law school.

You may also wish to enroll in a legal, political, or other internship. Interning for a law firm, elected official, or nonprofit organization can help you develop legal research and writing skills as well as build contacts for future job prospects during and after law school. Ask your advisor about the intern coordinator in your department. Dr. Adam Hoffman in the political science department operates the Maryland legislative assembly internships in the spring semester. If interested, please contact him for more information.

## 6. Additional Areas

In addition to augmenting skills in the areas of reading, writing, oral communication, and research the American Bar Association also recommends that future law students improve their analytic or problem solving skills, their task organization or management skills (sometimes called executive functioning), and that they do some work in public service or the promotion of justice.

Analytic or problem solving skills is essentially working on critical thinking skills. This includes structuring and evaluating arguments. These skills are necessary for the successful practice of law and success on the LSAT exam and many different classes can help you augment your skills in this area from laboratory science to philosophy.

Task organization or management skills are other skills necessary for a successful law career and success in law school. Obtaining information from a large variety of sources and completing major projects are essential. These skills can also be exercised by major research projects during your undergraduate education. These projects can be a research essay or a scientific study — any project in which you guide your research and task completion. Remember, it is common in law school for grades to be based on a single examination at the end of the semester so organization and management is extremely important.

The American Bar association also notes in regard to serving others and promoting justice that:

Each member of the legal profession should be dedicated both to the objectives of serving other honestly competently, and responsibly and to the goals of improving fairness and the quality of justice in the legal system. If you are thinking of entering the legal profession, you should seek some significant experience before coming to law school in which you may devote substantial effort toward assisting others. Participation in Public Service projects or similar efforts at achieving objectives established for common purposes can be highly helpful.

If you choose to do an internship it could help you gain skills in this area; you can also gain these skills other ways, such as through volunteering, or classes with civic education components.

## F. Extracurriculars

Extracurricular activities are unlikely to be determinative in gaining admittance to law school, and they might not help at all. On the other hand, if you are on the border line between acceptance and rejection at a particular school, extracurriculars can be a plus in your favor. They can indicate that you are the well rounded individual who law schools desire. It is important to remember, however, that for most schools **extracurriculars will not compensate for even a small reduction in your UGPA**. To quote the University of Illinois Law School:

Applications for admission will be evaluated by giving significant and, in many cases, controlling weight to the applicant's undergraduate grade point average and score on the Law School Admission Test. When examining the applications of applicants whose grades and test scores do not automatically determine their acceptance or rejection, the Admission Committee attempts to identify students whose numerical records appear to underpredict their likelihood of success in law school and students whose admission would contribute to the diversity essential in achieving variety and richness in the educational experience.

In sum, engaging in extracurricular activities is likely viewed positively. They should be avoided, however, if engaging in them will likely lead to a reduction in your UGPA, even a relatively small one.

Note, however, that while direct influence of extracurriculars on admittance may be small, indirect influence could be high. In constructing your application, including your personal essay, extracurriculars could be extremely helpful. The above advice still holds, however. An excellent application can help you gain admittance when you might otherwise not, but only if you are in the category of students who the school may admit. If your GPA drops, even slightly, you might have a harder challenge, or you might even be dropped to a category in which you can not be admitted.





### III. The LSAT

#### A. The LSAT Test

In addition to your undergraduate grade point average the other main factor on which law school base admissions is the Law School Admissions Test, known as the LSAT. Schools are open about their reliance on the test. Boston University, for example, states that it “places primary emphasis on an applicant’s undergraduate record and score on the Law School Admission Test.” The admissions office will also consider other factors “where appropriate.” Marquette Law School indicates that, “the two factors which weigh most significantly in the selection process are the academic record and the results of the LSAT. The admissions committee, however, considers non-numerical factors.” Most schools have a formula which weighs your UGPA and LSAT and uses that formula to determine a certain number of automatic acceptances and automatic rejections.<sup>15</sup> This is because the UGPA and LSAT taken together is the best predictor of success in the first year of law school. The majority of the applications are in a category where they can be potentially admitted or rejected; the higher your UGPA and LSAT the better your chance at admittance.

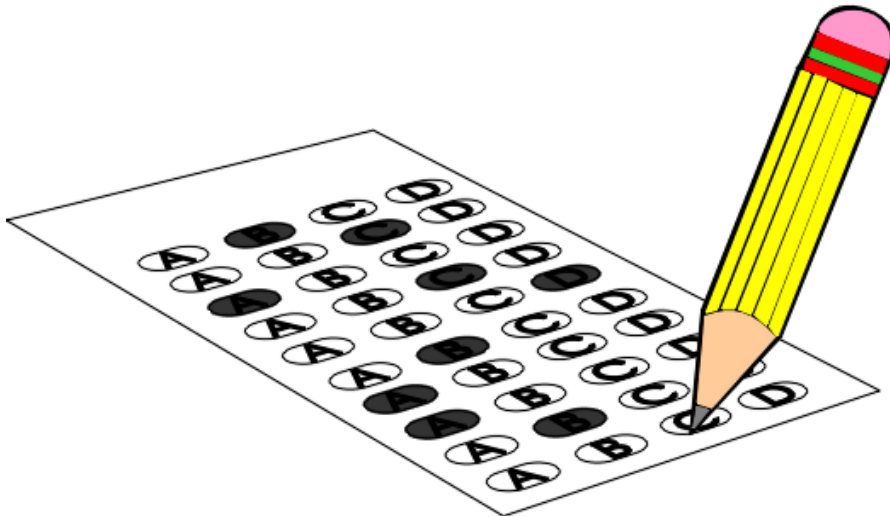
Most schools will allow a low UGPA score to be overcome by a high LSAT.<sup>16</sup> The reverse, low LSAT being offset by a high UGPA, can also happen. A high LSAT does make a law school take a second look at your application if you have a low UGPA, and can be part of the strategy to get accepted to a law school of your choice.

The LSAT is designed to test the skills necessary for success in law school and for use in the practice of law. If you believe you cannot do well in the LSAT because you “do not think that way,” it is possible that you do not think in the way necessary for success in law school or for the practice of law. The old LSAT information book included a statement on the LSAT as a predictor of Law school performance: “When surveying 187 law schools in 2007 LSAT score correlation to first year law school grades is as high as 56% with an average of 33%. When combined with UGPAs the correlation increased to a 46% average with a high of 65%.” Essentially the predictive value of the LSAT is better than whatever else is available, especially when UGPA is included. This is one reason law schools justify its use. Another more crass reason exists as well; the LSAT factors quite highly in law school rankings. Since prospective students and employers are attentive to law school rankings, schools strive to achieve the highest average LSAT score of its incoming class.

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<sup>15</sup> It is important to remember that even if your academic record puts you in the admit category, if the school deems that there are problems with “character and fitness” the school likely will not admit you. This will be discussed more below, but some law schools will reject students even if they would be admitted to the bar. They have higher “character and fitness” standards.

<sup>16</sup> There are a handful of highly selective schools where this is not the case. Your 3.9 UGPA is unlikely to enable you to overcome a low LSAT score at these schools because most of the admitted students have high UGPAs and high LSAT. For most schools, however, there is an interplay between the two measures.



## B. LSAT Sections

According to the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) which administers the LSAT, “The LSAT is designed to measure skills that are considered essential for success in law school: the reading and comprehension of complex texts with accuracy and insight; the organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences from it; the ability to think critically; and the analysis and evaluation of the reasonings and arguments of others.” This means it is largely a logical and analytical reasoning test. You may have heard that the material for the LSAT cannot be taught, unlike vocabulary for the SAT test used for college entry. The analytical and logical thinking and reading comprehension skills, however, can be learned. For more information on that please see the section on skill acquisition above.

The LSAT test includes five thirty-five minute multiple choice questions and a thirty-five minute writing sample. The writing sample is done at a different time and will be discussed below. Only four of the five multiple choice sections are graded. The other section is used as an experimental section which means the questions are being field tested. Please **DO NOT** try to guess which section is the experimental one. It is difficult to determine and test takers are notoriously bad at determining which section is the experimental one. Approach each section with your best effort.

### 1. Reading Comprehension

The scored exam includes one section of reading comprehension. You are likely familiar with these type of questions. The reading comprehension in the LSAT is similar to reading comprehension sections on other standardized tests, but the passages may be a bit more complex than you have seen in the past. You can find sample questions on the LSAC website. If you navigate to “The LSAT” heading you can click on “Type of LSAT questions.” You can also under the same “The LSAT” tab find the “sample tests” tab. In the LSAT’s reading comprehension section there are 3 reading passages each followed by questions about the passage. Since June 2007, the 4th section is known as “comparative reading.” These are two

shorter passages on the same topic adding up to the length of one ordinary passage. Most of the questions following the passages have to do with the relationship between the passages.

## 2. Analytical Reasoning

There is one section on the test called “analytical reasoning.” This section is designed to test your deductive reasoning skills. Students commonly call this section “logic games.” To explain why view this example from the LSAC website.

**Example:** A university library budget committee must reduce exactly five of eight areas of expenditure – G, L, M, N, P, R, S, and W – in accordance with the following conditions:

- If both G and S are reduced, W is also reduced.
- If N is reduced, neither R nor S is reduced.
- If P is reduced, L is not reduced.
- Of the three areas L, M, and R, exactly two are reduced.

**Question:** if both M and R are reduced, which one of the following is a pair of areas neither of which could be reduced.

- A. G, L
- B. G, N
- C. L, N
- D. L, P
- E. P, S

To discern the answer you examine the conditions. The last condition lets you know that with M and R reduced L can not be reduced. Due to the second condition we know that N can not be reduced because if it were R could not be, but we know it is. The answer, therefore, is C.

If you are unfamiliar with these type of question and have read the above example you likely have one of two reactions, either “ok, I get it” or “What?!” This is because some people have a natural ability to solve the analytical reasoning questions and even find them “fun” — hence the games title. Do not fear, however, if you are in the second camp. Analytical reasoning is the most teachable section. Indeed, the LSAT used to contain two analytical reasoning sections, but this led to the concern that students taking LSAT Prep courses might have an unfair advantage. There is another advantage with this section. Unlike other sections, you need not pick the best answer that you can find; there is a clearly defined, “right” answer. If you look at the sample question above, none of the other answers can be true. They are falsifiable. No other section has this certainty. Like with reading comprehension there are four “games” per section.

## 3. Logical Reasoning

The third type of questions are logical reasoning questions. These sections (there are two logical reasoning sections on the exam) are often called arguments by students because there are

approximately twenty-five questions based on short arguments. The LSAT designed this section to test the ability to analyze, critically evaluate, and complete arguments. I have a sample argument question from the LSAC website:

Example:

Laird: Pure research provides us with new technologies that contribute to saving lives. Even more worthwhile than this, however, is its role in expanding our knowledge and providing new, unexplored ideas.

Kim: Your priorities are mistaken. Saving lives is what counts most of all. Without pure research medicine would not be as advanced as it is, Laird and Kim disagree on whether pure research.

Question: Laird and Kim disagree on whether pure research

- A. derives its significance in part from its providing new technologies
- B. expands the boundaries of our knowledge of medicine
- C. should have the saving of human lives as an important goal
- D. has its most valuable achievements in medical applications
- E. has any value apart from its role in providing new technologies to save lives

The credited response to this question is D. Notice that for this question, and most argument (logical reasoning) questions, there is no answer that is true or false. You need to find the best answer. Sometimes, no answer seems great; in these cases choose the answer which fits the best.

The arguments section is different from the other two sections on the exam (reading comprehension and logic games) in a couple of ways. The first is that there are two sections of arguments as opposed to the other sections. This means that if your experimental section is arguments you will have three of five sections arguments (and they can come in any order). Another difference is that instead of four passages or scenarios, there are approximately twenty-five questions. This allows there to be many different types of questions, e.g, parallel the reasoning, identify the flaw, identify the assumption, what is the logical conclusion, and others.

#### 4. Writing

The writing sample is ungraded, but it is copied and sent to every school to which you apply. While some schools may not pay close attention to the essay, others may. Indeed, if you are “on the bubble” at a particular school, or have a lower UGPA the school may look at the essay to see how well you can construct a cogent argument.

Beginning in **August 2020** you **must** have the writing sample on file for your LSAT to be considered complete. You will not be able to get your score, nor will it be sent to prospective

schools, until you complete the writing sample. If you have a writing sample collected in a previous (still valid) test administration you need not complete another.

Also beginning in August 2020, the writing sample will be collected through “LSAT Writing.” This is an online, on demand, component of the LSAT. You will need to download the secure testing software and then administer the exam. The minimum system requirements are listed on the website.<sup>17</sup> Moving to the online LSAT Writing has shortened the length of exam day by thirty-five minutes. The exam is available starting eight days before your scheduled exam. The test taker is given a random prompt (which s/he has not received before) the kind of which would have been received on the pencil and paper test. You complete the essay at home and take the multiple choice test on the test day.

### C. Test Administration

LSAC has phased out the administration of pencil and paper LSAT’s. This does not mean, in theory, that in person LSAT exams have been phased out. Students are meant to still go to the testing center and take the exam on LSAC administered tablets. These exams will be proctored. You can take a sample exam on a sample interface on the LSAC website.

Currently (fall 2020), the LSAT is being given through LSAT-Flex.<sup>18</sup> In this mode you take the exam in a similar way to the LSAT writing. The difference is that it must be individually scheduled because each exam is live proctored. This means exams are scheduled throughout the week that the test was supposed to occur. It is also different in that the test is shorter. There is only one logical reasoning section and no experimental section. You still need to complete the LSAT Writing section separately. LSAC claims that since they are using questions which have been field tested they can accurately place the score on the 120-180 scale.

Whether you take the exam in person or at home the rules are the same. The test day rules for the LSAT are very strict and any violation of the rules can bar you from law school. You must listen to the proctors; if there is a problem you can contact LSAC. If the problem interferes with your score you can cancel your test. While you may want to cancel at the testing site, unless you are certain there was a problem which detracted from your score, you should wait. If you are a first time test taker, LSAC allows you to preview your score (see below). Most schools, moreover, will consider your higher score in your application if you retake the test. Test takers are often poor judges of how they did.

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<sup>17</sup> If you do not have or can not find a computer on which to take LSAT Writing, you can call 215-968-1001 and press zero. The receptionist should be able to help you. LSAC claims that they can help you find an in person testing site; however, since spring 2020 the whole exam has gone to a remotely proctored system, so it is not clear if this is true during covid-19 protocol.

<sup>18</sup> LSAC has recently announced that all tests at least through the 20-21 exam year (until May 31, 2021) will be LSAT flex.

For admittance to a testing center you need an LSAT admission ticket. This is sent to you when you register. You need to upload a photograph which will appear on the admission ticket for identification. You also need to bring a current government issued photo identification. You should also bring sharpened HB or #2 wooden pencils. Bring a sufficient number as pencil sharpeners are not provided. Even though the exam is on tablet, you still need pencils for the scratch paper and for notes you want to take. Remember to use the restroom before you check in (either in person or virtually) as you will not be allowed to go until after the exam has started or until the break after the third section.

Whether you take the LSAT in person or through LSAT Flex All items brought in the test must be in a clear Ziplock bag (maximum size one Gallon) stored under your chair and accessed only during break. The bag can include:

- ID
- Wallet
- Keys
- Medical Supplies
- Feminine Hygiene Products
- Extra Pencils
- Pencil Sharpener
- Erasers (not eraser caps!)
- Highlighters
- Tissues
- Snack and Beverage. The beverage may not be in an aluminum can. It must be in a plastic bottle or a box and have a maximum size of twenty ounces
- Analog watch

You are only allowed the following things on your desk as you take the test. This is true for LSAT Writing and LSAT Flex. You will be asked to show your desk before you begin your test. Putting anything else on your desk is considered misconduct and your score may be cancelled. You are allowed

- Admission Ticket
- ID
- Pencils
- Erasers
- Analog watch: please note that a digital watch (fitbit etc.) on the desk, in the ziplock bag, or anywhere on your person can be considered cheating and will be noted and reported to schools.
- Pencil sharpener
- Highlighter
- Tissues

Additionally, if you are taking LSAT Writing or LSAT Flex you can provide your own scratch paper. You need to show both sides of the paper to the proctor before you begin.

There are items that are specifically prohibited by LSAC; the possession of these items will lead to score cancellation and possible LSAC investigation. These include:

- Briefcases, handbags, or backpacks (The only carrying device you can bring is the one gallon clear ziploc bag)

- You may not wear any hat, cap, hoodie, or anything on your head, except for religious apparel.
- Books or papers of any kind, including dictionaries or any other reference material are prohibited.<sup>19</sup>
- Any electronic timer or digital watch is prohibited (any watch which beeps or has a calculator is prohibited).
- Fitbit, smart watch, or similar device, cell phone, tablet, computer, i.e., all devices except the one on which you are taking the test is prohibited.
- Rulers are prohibited.
- Sunglasses are prohibited.
- Mechanical pencils are prohibited as are mechanical erasers or “erasers with sleeves” (eraser caps). All pencils must be wooden and be HB or #2.
- Ink Pens and felt tip markers are prohibited.
- All weapons and firearms excluded.

You should also be prepared to sign a statement indicating you are the person whose name appears on the admission ticket and answer sheet. If you are late you will not be permitted to take the exam. You are also expected to report it if you see misconduct among any other test takers or proctors.



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<sup>19</sup> For LSAT Writing and LSAT Flex, LSAC recommends libraries as a place to take the test; If you take the test at home you need not remove books from the room in which you take the test, but they must not be on the desk. Follow the directions of the proctor.

## D. Test Preparation

### 1. Self Preparation vs. Courses

It is common for students who would like to attend a competitive law school or for those who have marginal credentials to take a prep course. Students who do particularly well on standardized tests, or who have strong credentials for their target schools, however, often forego these courses. For some students the course is unlikely to boost their performance much more than decent self-preparation — provided one does a decent self-preparation. Good prep courses require you to do preparation for the class. If you are not going to do the homework and preparation that the course directs, it is less likely to help you. Courses also usually include several practice exams and many students find these simulated exams helpful. Exams under simulated test conditions may reduce your anxiety and raise your scores. Sometimes students find that these practice exams by themselves are worth the price of the course.<sup>20</sup>

Keep in mind that most prep courses prepare for changes in the test structure in advance. In the 1990s, for example, there were two sections of analytical reasoning and one of the logical reasoning. It is the reverse now. In mid-2007 there was also a change to the reading comprehension section adding a comparative reading passage. The good prep courses structure their courses so you will be ready for the new structure of the exams when you take them, at least a few months before the change takes place. If you study out of published books (Aarco, Baron, or the like) the publishing of the changes will not take place until a year or more after the changed exams are given.

Others find that given the high cost of prep courses, it may not be worth the money. If you do well on standardized tests these courses should not be considered *de rigeur*. On the other hand, given the high cost of law school, prep courses are a small investment if warranted. Generally, a prep course is most beneficial for people who fit in to at least one of the following categories.

#### a. People who do poorly on standardized tests

These are people whose scores on standardized tests consistently fall short of what one would predict based on other academic measures (e.g. if your SAT scores were of a lower percentile than your GPA would indicate). If you are one of these people, learning the fundamentals of good test-taking may be helpful (this is not always the case, depending on your particular difficulty with standardized tests). Conversely if you have a history of doing well on standardized tests you will likely do well on the LSAT. There is a correlation between different standardized tests. Being a strong test taker makes it much less likely that a prep course will be helpful.

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<sup>20</sup> Widener University Law School is a school in our area which gives mock LSAT exams (not during COVID-19) so you can get the experience of a real exam. You can check the school's website for upcoming dates.



b. People who need the self-discipline

If you do not believe you have the self-discipline to prepare on your own, a prep course will likely be beneficial. Indeed, this is for some the greatest benefit of a prep course. You will need to do practice questions during the class and do prep work before each class meeting. The high cost also inspires people to put in effort they might not otherwise. On the other hand, if you will do preparation on your own, review the test, and practice questions of each type, a prep course may not benefit you.

c. Confidence Boost

There are also psychological reasons to take a prep course. Some people find that the positive reinforcement they get from a prep course boosts their confidence. Most people do best on any test when they are relaxed and confident. Indeed, some people feel that they will be at a competitive disadvantage if they do not take a course. While this is may be untrue if you prepare on your own, if you believe it to be true, it may become true; therefore, if you believe you need a course to be relaxed and confident you may, indeed, benefit from a course.

d. Need help with “logic games”

Lastly, prep classes and study are most likely to improve scores in the “logic games” (analytical reasoning) section. Courses can teach how to do these problems for those people for whom it is not intuitive. They can also teach you some shortcuts if you find that you have trouble finishing more than one “game” or so, in the time allotted. Courses are the least likely to help, on the other hand, with reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is essentially a lifelong skill. While a course can help with test taking techniques, it is unlikely that a short course can improve your reading comprehension. You should work on this throughout your academic career. The logical reasoning section falls somewhere in between the “logic games” and the reading comprehension section. Courses can help you recognize different kinds of questions and solution techniques, but are not as teachable as the “logic games” section. Essentially, a big portion of doing well in this section is reading comprehension and, as noted above, a course cannot teach this.

To make an evaluation of how helpful a course might be in your case, you should take a sample test which will initially give you a score, without preparation. A higher score would make a course less necessary. It will also let you know on what kind of questions you are more proficient and on what kind of questions you may need some work. This may help you decide on the necessity of a course, and help you focus your study. For your “diagnostic” test or for your self study I would strongly recommend that you use actual LSAT exams rather than books produced by companies which write their own tests. The reason is that they never adequately capture the difficulty level of the real tests. They tend to give a score higher than the one you will actually receive in the exam. In addition to the sample exam, available online, you can buy additional past exams from the LSDAS website.

## 2. Prep Courses

The two largest Prep organizations are Stanley H. Kaplan ([http://www.kaplan.com/etc/lSAT/law\\_index.html](http://www.kaplan.com/etc/lSAT/law_index.html) or 1-800-KAP-TEST), and Princeton Review ([http://www.review.com/law/law\\_homepage.html](http://www.review.com/law/law_homepage.html) or 1-800-865-7737). These courses may be available in your hometown if you live on the Western shore or outside of Maryland and can be taken in the summer or in the December/January intersession. If you take the course significantly before the test, you should take a refresher course shortly before the test (this is usually part of the package). If, for example, you take the course given the summer before your Junior year, you should take the refresher course in January or May depending on when you want to take the test. These companies also on occasion can provide a tutor for individual instruction. If you live in a place where the regular classes are unavailable, these tutors may be willing to travel; call for availability. The online courses tend to be less expensive and more flexible, including some which are self paced and others which are synchronous.

Students sometimes ask which course is better. The main issue is what is available in your area and when you can schedule the class. The most important thing is to choose a class which works for you. It is very important that you take a class which occurs over several weeks and requires study and preparation between classes rather than the “cram” classes that occur over a day or a couple of days, typically a weekend shortly before the exam. It is difficult for the “cram” classes to really raise your score much if at all, unless you are entirely unfamiliar with the exam. While the techniques taught in these courses might be helpful, there is not adequate time for practice or review. Use these cram courses only as a last resort, when you need a course to help overcome test anxiety or reinforce knowledge about test questions. Any course is more effective if you prepare and understand something about the test structure and your personal strengths and weaknesses before the course, and continue to prepare and practice what you learned during and after the class.

## 3. Self Preparation

When preparing on your own you should first take the sample test available with the registration materials and familiarize yourself with the test. You should prepare with old tests available from LSAT individually, in groups of three, or in groups of ten. You may also want to get one of the many prep books available to work on the different kinds of questions. These books, on the other hand, are not as good for dry-runs of sections and tests. As noted above this is because the overall difficulty of these produced books often varies, sometimes substantially, from the difficulty of the actual test; this can give testers a false sense of their final score. You should try doing some timed sections of authentic tests and take at least one full authentic sample test.



#### 4. Your Score

The goal of any preparation is to get the highest score possible. If your pretest shows a score which is in the top few percentile it is difficult for a course to be of help. The course is unlikely to give you any strategy or benefit that will be able to significantly raise your score. If it does raise your score any benefit will be minimal, moreover. The reason for this is that the LSAT scores are on a bell curve. A few points at the top of the scale is unlikely raise your chances at admittance. You need to judge for yourself a cutoff number at which a course might be no longer beneficial but probably somewhere in the 160s range is a good number, 165 give or take. Hopefully, an example will be helpful to explain the reasons why.

Let's say you would get 167 on the LSAT without a course. You are doing most things correct to begin with and it would be difficult for a course to give you strategies or approaches which are likely to raise your score significantly if at all. Even in the unlikely event that the course and the accompanying studying were to raise your score three points, your percentile rank would be raised from 96.4 at the 167 score to 98.4 at the 170 score. Essentially you will have moved from doing better than all but about 3000 of the 85,000 or so applicants, to better than all but about 1400 of the 85,000 or so applicants. While this may sound like an improvement it is unlikely to make a difference in all but the most selective schools which choose among these students exclusively and possibly not then depending on your UGPA.

If you compare this to the middle of the scale, however, the difference becomes obvious. In the middle of the scale, where most people lie, courses are more likely to make a difference. An additional two or three points on the middle of the scale can change the character of an application. If you were to score a 151 on your own, you would be about at the midpoint.<sup>21</sup> It is

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<sup>21</sup> The exact percentile of any score varies slightly from year to year.

more likely that a course can teach you strategies and helpful approaches than at significantly higher scores. If your score improves, moreover, 3 points to 154, you have increased your score to the 63.3 percentile. This is quite a jump and can cause quite a difference when applying to schools, especially considering that there is usually one seat for every two test takers or so. Improving your score from 151 to 154 will essentially move you from having a higher score than almost 43,000 of the 85,000 or so applicants, to a higher score than nearly 54,000 of the 85,000 or so applicants. An accurate pretest is important so you can make an accurate assessment.

#### E. When to take the LSAT

Before the LSAT went digital it was given four times a year, with three of the tests “disclosed.” That meant you could get a hard copy of the exam you took minus the experimental section located in each exam. Now that the test has become tablet based it is being given twice as often and you have more choices, but the timing of when you should take the test really has not changed. Even though the test is given via a tablet, LSAC, which administers the law school admissions test, provides the tablets and proctors the exam at designated locations. For the 2020-2021 academic year the LSAT exam dates are Sunday, June 14, 2020; Sunday, July 12, 2020; Saturday, August 29, 2020; Saturday, October 3, 2020; Saturday, November 14, 2020; Saturday, January 16, 2021; Saturday, February 20, 2021; and Saturday, April 10, 2021. Of these eight exams only the August and November 2020 exams are disclosed. If it is important to you to see the exam you took, you need to insure you take a disclosed exams.



##### 1. Summer testing (June-August)

Most Salisbury University students choose to take their LSAT over the summer after their junior year or a year before they wish to begin law school. This is usually a good choice for a student wanting to attend law school immediately upon completion of his or her undergraduate education. You receive your scores in approximately three weeks. If you choose one of these tests the LSAT will be out of the way when you begin your applications in the fall.

This scheduling leaves you plenty of time to plan and choose the schools to which you wish to apply. You will also have plenty of time to make all application deadlines. If you choose

to take a summer test you will also have the ability to retake the test in the fall if you wish to do so (See “What if I Don’t Do as Well as Expected” §IIIH below) in and still be able to apply for admittance for the following fall. Most students also find summer a less stressful time rather than the middle of the semester.



## 2. Fall Testing (October-November)

You can take one of these tests and still apply for the next academic year. You still will be able to choose the schools to which you wish to apply and prepare applications before the end of the year; you will also know your scores when you do. It is still an adequate choice, therefore, for those wanting to start school the next academic year.

There are some difficulties with these tests, however, which should not be minimized especially for those who are still in school. If you take a fall test, you will need to select the schools for which you would like to apply and do the applications during the academic semester. If you do not do as well as you would like or expect, moreover, your retake option is the January test. While most schools will still accept applications with scores from the January test, your chances of acceptance applying so late are significantly diminished (see below). You may also be applying too late to be considered for financial aid with a retake.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Of these tests, the best option is the first test (October). This is early in the semester and you could have used the summer to study and work on your application. You may have a problem if you need to retake, but this date may work for some study schedules.



### 3. Winter (January — February)

- a. If you want to start law school the next academic year.

The winter tests should really only be used as a last resort. This is a hard time for those who want to begin legal studies the next academic year. This is also a difficult time of the year academically for students who are still in school. Because of the short time until deadlines, if you are using this test as your first (or re-test) option you should have selected the schools to which you are applying before the test. This means it is impossible to know your scores when you choose the schools to which you want to apply and work on the applications. The score release date for the January 2021 test, for example, is February 3.

Essentially, if you take the test in the winter you are applying late for fall admission. Indeed, you will miss some applications deadlines if you wait for your score before you apply. If you are able to apply for admissions for that academic year, your chances of admittance are lower than if you had applied earlier in the year, moreover. While there are many schools who have deadlines which allow for the February test, because of rolling admissions policies, there may be few or no spaces left. As applications are submitted spaces are allotted, and fewer and fewer are left. The ones remaining are often held for exceptional applicants who apply. Schools want to make sure they have spots available for the applicant with a 4.0 UGPA and 172 LSAT score who applies in February. The student who is at the median, however, who would be admitted in November may be rejected in February.

Financial aid deadlines are most often earlier than application deadlines and with this test those deadlines are also harder to meet. If you take a winter test and do not do as well as expected, you have no opportunity to retest before even later application deadlines. You also do not have time to revise your school list and craft new applications if you get an unexpectedly high or low score.

- b. For College Juniors or those who want to start law school the following calendar year.

Winter tests are excellent choices, particularly the February test. You can prepare after the fall semester and, depending on the test, either some or all of January break. You also have the advantage of taking the test either before the spring semester, or toward the beginning of it. This has several advantages, if you wish to retake the test you have the option of the spring or summer tests. You can do a retake and you will still be able to make all application deadlines. Another advantage of winter testing is that many Law schools are in the practice of buying information from the winter tests. You may, based on your score, therefore, get fee waivers for applications. While, application fees are a drop in the bucket of how much you are going to end up paying for law school, a fee waiver is a nice benefit, especially if you were planning to apply to that school anyway. In addition some schools might even offer special scholarships for which you can apply based on your LSAT score. This is before the rest of your application (UGPA, personal statement, resumé) is reviewed, moreover. As the year proceeds fewer schools get the information from the tests, or scores need to be higher before schools reach out. If you are able to take a winter test and *are prepared to do so* you should consider these dates.



#### 4. Spring (April)

The spring (April) test is given at a good time for those submitting applications in the fall to begin school the next calendar year. Like the summer tests, the April test leaves you plenty of time to select schools and execute applications. You are also more likely to be contacted by prospective law schools taking the test earlier in the year. There is a drawback to this test, however. The 2021 date for this test is April 10 which is in the heart of the semester. If you take a LSAT prep class, you may be able to take a refresher course over spring break; there is still three weeks before the exam, however. You need to assess your schedule and time constraints before you choose this exam.

#### 5. What if I am not planning on going to law school immediately after graduation?

If you are not going to law school immediately after college, you may have more freedom to choose an LSAT not tied to the academic schedule, though you will still have constraints based on your specific schedule. Still, you should make sure you take the LSAT no later than the fall of the calendar year before you would like to enter law school. A test earlier in the calendar year before you would like to enter law school is preferable. You should leave yourself adequate time in case you decide to retake the test. You may have more flexibility and may choose to take the test in January, or even earlier, depending on your ability to prepare.

**Specific test dates, locations and registration deadlines can be found at [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)**

#### F. Registering for the LSAT

The easiest way to do this is to go to <https://www.lsac.org/lsat/lsat-dates-deadlines-score-release-dates/registering-lsat> and follow the links. Please note to apply to law school you should also register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), formerly known as the data assembly service. The easiest way to do this is to go to <https://www.lsac.org/applying-law-school/jd-application-process/credential-assembly-service-cas> and follow the links. The CAS keeps your records, transcripts, LSAT scores, and is a credential service, forwarding your letters of recommendation to the schools to which you apply. Your membership in CAS lasts five years, the same amount of time your LSAT score is valid. The expectation is that you apply to Law school in this five year period.

You can also register by phone by calling (215) 968-1001. If you do that please review the website for all the information which you need to provide and have it handy when you call. The phone line is open weekdays from 8:30 - 6:00 E.T. between September and February and 8:30 - 4:45 E.T. between March and August.

It is in your interest to register as soon as you know your plans. The earlier you register the better chance you have at getting your first or second choice test center (or in covid times — get the time and date you want). If you register late you may have to take a less desirable or distant test center.





## G. Your Score

Review your score report when it arrives or when you access it on line. It will list the answer you marked and note whether it is a credited (i.e. correct) response. Mistakes are extremely rare, but they have happened.

### 1. Score Audit

If you think a mistake has been made you may request a “score audit” after you have received your score. You must do so within ten days of your score release date (not the date you received your score). You should be aware that even though LSAC does score audits “LSAC routinely conducts multiple procedures to ensure the accuracy of all test response data before scores are released. ...the possibility of finding any scoring errors on computerized test is extremely small.” Indeed, LSAC notes that forty-four people requested audits for the August 2020 test. None of those audits resulted in any score change.

If you request an audit, moreover, your score can go up or down. Be aware, moreover the audit process may take some time, according the LSAC “several weeks,” and that while the audit is ongoing “no new reports will be sent to law schools.” Initiating a score audit currently costs \$125 and will not begin until the fee is paid; you must also let LSAC know the reason for your request. Even if you request a score audit, you will **not** receive the test questions unless you choose a disclosed test date. The audit serves as confirmation of correct grading. You are only allowed one audit per test. If you want the ability to see what you got wrong on the question, you need to choose a disclosed test so you get a copy of the exam with the answers.

### 2. Score Cancellation

If you believe after the test that you had a particularly bad performance, you can cancel your score. You can actually do this before you leave the test site. If you choose this option your test will not be graded. PLEASE RESIST THE URGE TO CANCEL YOUR TEST AT THE TEST CITE. If you do cancel it, there is no way to get your test graded at a later date. If you do not cancel your score at the test cite, you can still get your score canceled within six days if you think it is necessary. Most likely it is NOT in your interest to cancel your score. Most people are not good predictors of their performance; you will also need to take the exam again and will likely be under more pressure when you do. If you are correct and you do get a bad score, it is unlikely to damage your chances of law school admission much depending on your UGPA and the schools to which you are applying.<sup>23</sup> You are limited, moreover in the number of times you can take the LSAT and the cancelled score will count toward that testing limit.

For the past several years law schools see all the scores for all the LSAT exams that you take. While some schools may take an average of the scores, most schools take the higher score. This allows you to retest. If you achieve a much higher score the schools are likely to believe the first score was a mistake. Unless you can point to a particular problem which will not be present

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<sup>23</sup> Most law schools now use your highest LSAT score in the admissions process.

the next time you take the exam, for example, you fell asleep during the exam, it is likely not in your interest to cancel your score. If you think you should cancel your score, you should discuss it with your prelaw/academic adviser before you do so.

### 3. Testing limits

You may only take the exam three times in a testing year, which is defined as June 1 to May 31. You can take the LSAT five times over the five year span that LSAC will report the test to law schools. Tests older than five years are not reported. LSAC also implemented as of September 2019 a seven test lifetime limit. Please note that this policy begins in September 2019 and is exclusively forward looking which means if you took the LSAT before September 2019 it does NOT count toward the lifetime limits. If you cancel your score, LSAC counts it as you having taken the test despite your not receiving a score.

### 4. Score Preview

If you are a first time test taker you can now sign up for “Score Preview.” This is a new service beginning August 2020, but you must be a true first time test taker; if your previous LSAT was prior to August 2020, or even if you have a prior test which is no longer valid, you can not use score preview. LSAC justifies this limited use, by arguing that the idea behind the “score preview” is to relieve anxiety of first time test takers, but LSAC is concerned about students using the service to take the test repeatedly to achieve a higher score.

If you want to sign up for “score preview” it costs \$45 if you sign up PRIOR to the first day of testing for a specific test. The cost rises to \$75 if you sign up AFTER the first day of test administration (whether or not you have taken the test). You can sign up for “score preview” until approximately a week before the score release date. You will get your score (unless you have an account hold) the same time as other test takers. At that point you have six days to cancel your score. If you do not cancel the score in the six days it becomes part of your LSAC account. If you do cancel your score it counts as taking the test toward your testing limits.

### H. What if I Don’t Do as Well as Expected

You **may** want to retake the test. LSAC notes, however, that its test shows a 90 to 95% accuracy. This means that the vast majority of retesters get roughly the same score. (NB: your actual score is reported in a score band. This band is based on your score and the standard deviation in which it falls, i.e. it may vary in size, but in the middle of the testing range it is likely about five or six points.) It is extremely unlikely to score outside your original score band on a retake. Small movements up and **down** are more likely. Unless your pretests indicate a much higher score **and** you have taken the pretests under actual test conditions, you likely want to forego the retest.

The Law School Admission Council does report all LSAT scores from the last five years.<sup>24</sup> Law Services advise:

research indicates that when an applicant has taken the LSAT more than once, the average of the scores has more predictive validity than any one of the scores *unless special circumstances are present*. Otherwise, a decision to use one of the separate scores rather than the average is probably unwise.

Still most law schools take the highest score in considering your application, but some law schools still average scores. You need to know the practice of the schools in which you are interested. Even if your desired school(s) take the higher score, if you repeat the test and get roughly the same score, as most re-takers do, you will merely be confirming the LSAT score and reducing the ability of your GPA to counterbalance it. Only if there is a significant difference between the scores will the school be likely to believe the first one is a mistake or not an accurate reflection of your ability. Remember, though unlikely, it is possible that you can do worse and LSAC will send all scores from the last five years to the law schools to which you apply. The only way to get a score not reported is to wait five years.

Unless you can look back on the test day and identify some special circumstances that will likely NOT be present on the retest, you should consider foregoing the retest. Examples of factors which may lean toward the retest are unusual problems with the testing center, ill health which negatively affects your performance, or lack of preparation to the extent that you were unfamiliar with the questions and were compelled to leave many blank. Essentially if you can identify a specific problem and fix it, it is in your interest to do a retest. If you can not, avoid the retest.

There are two other situations where you should take the retest even if you can not identify a specific problem. The first is if your LSAT grade was in the bottom 20% (below 144 or so) or so. Unless your pretest indicates a score in this range, you should probably retake the test even if you cannot correct a specific problem. The reason is that unless your grades are quite good, you have nothing to lose by a retest because it is difficult to get into a law school with LSAT scores this low and without compensatory high grades.

If you have a high UGPA, you are in a slightly different situation. If you get one of these low LSAT scores but have a UGPA  $4.0 > 3.7$  or even  $4.0 > 3.6$  you are in a slightly different position. Unless your pretest is consistently higher you may want to avoid the pretest. You will no longer be able to get into the most selective law school, but you are unlikely to be able to go even with a good retest. The competition for these schools is just too tough. You will still likely be able to go to a good law school. If you retake the test and do not do significantly better, you have weakened your position by confirming the low score.

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<sup>24</sup> You may have heard that LSAC averages scores and even if you do better on a retake your score may not be raised (because of the score bands). LSAC stopped doing this in 2007. If you have an anomalous score it will no longer weigh your score down for five years. The schools can see the higher score(s) as well.

Another situation where you may want to do a retest is if you have a high UGPA, are looking at the most selective law schools, but you get merely a good LSAT score in the 60 or 70th percentile. Here is why. There are 3 options: you do better, you do approximately the same, or you do worse. If you do better -- great -- you now have a shot at those schools that you would like to attend. If you do the same -- O.K. -- you have not weakened your position and can still go to a good school. If you do worse -- it is not too bad -- unless you get a really bad score, 20th percentile or worse, your situation is not significantly weakened and you should still be able to go to one of your second choice law schools.

If you end up with a weak LSAT score or repeat a low LSAT score and do not have a high compensatory UGPA see the sections on marginal credentials below.

Please remember **the LSAC does not permit an applicant to take the LSAT more than 3 times in any year.** They advise that, **“this policy applies even if you cancel your score or it is not otherwise reported. LSAC reserves the right to cancel your registration, rescind your admission ticket, or take any other steps necessary to enforce the policy.”**<sup>25</sup> Also remember, all scores from the last five years will be reported to each school. There is no way to get this policy waived. After five years, however, your scores are expunged unless you request otherwise. Most schools will not accept older scores, however. If you do extremely poorly and the worst happens, you can wait until the scores are removed before you reapply.

#### I. A note on cheating

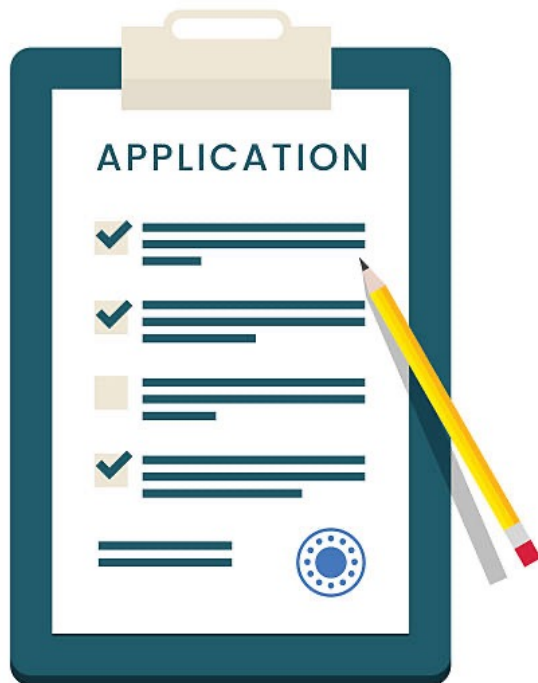
I hope this goes without saying, but **DON'T!** LSAC puts a lot of effort and money into identifying and catching cheaters. Do not give them a reason to investigate you. Do not joke about cheating or give the proctors a hard time. If LSAC finds that you have been cheating that will be reported to all law school to which you apply. They will do this forever; there is no five year expiration date on this report as there is on the LSAT. If such a report is made, it is unlikely that any law school will admit you. You are better off with a weak score and/or having to go to a less desirable law school, then you are being barred from all law schools. It is not worth the risk. Please note: **bringing a cell phone, or even a digital watch, to a test center (or having them while testing at home) is considered misconduct and can be considered cheating.** See above for test day specifics or read the entire rules at [lsac.org](http://lsac.org).



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<sup>25</sup> LSAC will waive their testing limits policy if a school requires an additional or more recent LSAT, but such a requirement must be provided in writing before the test registration deadline

## IV. Applications



### A. Where to Apply

When trying to tackle the large topic of applications, the first issue students often focus on is where to apply. There are a lot of factors that might push you toward certain schools (e.g. certain fields of practice, location, etc.) in addition to the selectivity of schools. In a broad sense a more selective school rather than a less selective one gives you more options. You will have increased access to summer employment opportunities, recruitment by selective firms, and in general, find it easier to gain the employment of your choice.

There are schools, on the other hand, which are particularly strong in a certain field or ideology. If you have a particular interest or believe you know what you want to do after law school, trying to go to a school which is strong in your particular interest makes sense.

Another consideration is where you want to practice. Most law schools tend to have their graduates practice in the same region (with the exception of a handful of highly selective law schools which draw their student body nationally). Certain law schools are more local, others regional, and a few national. University of Baltimore is Maryland's local law school. Many of the state's judges and attorneys went to University of Baltimore. The school and its graduates are well known locally. If someone does not want to practice locally, however, University of Baltimore may not be a good choice.

## 1. Location

One way to tell in which states most students practice is the bar exam data. You should be able to find this data for every school somewhere on its homepage.<sup>26</sup> There will be a link for either “consumer information,” or “ABA required disclosures,” or perhaps both. One of the subsequent links should take you to ABA bar passage rates. I have listed the charts from the 2020 disclosure from the 2019 tests for three schools as they disclosed the information to the ABA.

Table IV—1  
Local School example: University of Baltimore

Jurisdiction	Takers	Passers	%	Overall State Pass % All Schools	Difference
<b>Maryland</b>	168	123	73.21	77.73	-4.52
<b>4 other jurisdictions</b>	6	5	83.33	78.38	4.95

Table IV—2  
Regional School example: Villanova

Jurisdiction	Takers	Passers	%	Overall State Pass % All Schools	Difference
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	138	123	89.13	79.66	9.47
<b>New York</b>	17	17	100	84.12	15.88
<b>Delaware</b>	15	11	73.33	60.90	12.43
<b>New Jersey</b>	12	11	91.67	75.53	16.14
<b>16 other jurisdictions</b>	24	18	75	73.28	1.72

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<sup>26</sup> Some schools provide NALP data. This data will be more specific and can be very helpful; however, not all students have this data. I will briefly discuss the use of this data below.

Table IV—3  
National School example: Harvard

Jurisdiction	Takers	Passers	%	Overall State Pass % All Schools	Difference
<b>New York</b>	268	265	98.88	84.12	14.76
<b>California</b>	88	85	96.59	69.11	27.48
<b>Massachusetts</b>	55	55	100	82.05	17.95
<b>District of Columbia</b>	43	43	100	72.08	27.92
<b>Illinois</b>	25	25	100	74.1	25.9
<b>Texas</b>	18	18	100	77.37	22.63
<b>Maryland</b>	11	11	100	77.73	22.27
<b>Pennsylvania</b>	10	10	100	79.66	20.34
<b>19 other jurisdictions</b>	43	43	100	75.05	24.95

As you can see from the above material almost all the students at University of Baltimore intend to practice in Maryland. If you want to practice somewhere else you will probably have to go somewhere else to do your bar review class. It is also unlikely that there will be many job recruiters from outside the Maryland/DC area. About two-thirds of the graduates from Villanova, do take the bar in Pennsylvania, but a full third take it elsewhere, most in a handful of neighboring states. This school is used to having students wanting to practice out of state and they most likely have recruiters from those states. Harvard students, on the other hand, take the bar in twenty-seven different states. It is a school with a national reputation and international recruiting.

## 2. Bar Passage

Obviously, you can use these charts to get information on bar passage rates. All three schools have solid bar passage rates; there is some variability over the years and most schools provide two years of data. You can compare the above schools to Thomas M. Cooley School of Law which is a Michigan State school below.

Table IV—4  
Thomas M. Cooley School of Law

Jurisdiction	Takers	Passers	%	Overall State Pass % All Schools	Difference
Michigan	144	66	45.83	70.01	-24.18
Florida	81	24	29.63	70.24	-40.61
Illinois	10	0	0	74.1	-74.1
20 other jurisdictions	44	10	22.73	75.91	-53.18

Most people attend law school to get a job. If you are interested in a school and see bar passage rates like this, it should give you pause.<sup>27</sup> That does not mean that you should never go to a school with statistics like this, but you need to do so with open eyes. If one looks deeper into the data s/he can learn a couple things. The above data deals with recent (2019) graduates; the data for all first time test takers is a bit better. The pass rate for all first time test takers is 35.84%. Not great, but significantly better than the 22.73% from the 2019 graduates alone. Indeed, the eventual bar passage rate from the 2017 graduates is 66.01%. Many Thomas M. Cooley graduates seem to delay taking the Bar exam. The 2020 report noted that 100 of the 279 graduates from 2019 did not take the bar, and the same number from previous years did take the exam for the first time. If a student chooses Thomas M. Cooley, which is Western Michigan University’s Law school, s/he may need to consider that another year may need to be factored into your plans before you pass the bar. This is especially true if the exam is not the Michigan bar. Most of the students took the Michigan bar exam and the pass rate for the Michigan bar is significantly higher than for the other states. This reiterates what I wrote above. Thomas M. Cooley is a Michigan State School and, therefore, caters to students from Michigan.

### 3. National Association of Law Placement Reports

If available a National Association of Law Placement (NALP) report, it provides more complete, and more specific information. These reports would be under the same “required disclosures/consumer information” tab as others if available. NALP has divided the country into regions and provides employment data by these regions. Each school reports how many of their graduates practice in these regions. Not all of these regions are self explanatory, however. For example, “West South Central,” consists of Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas. These reports also list in what kinds of employment graduates have engaged and both their average and median salaries. If you are interested in schools which provide these reports you can use this information to compare schools.

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<sup>27</sup> I am merely noting a correlation between the school and bar passage rates, not a causal connection. The bar exam is another standardized test, though at least part of it is a written exam. It is possible that schools, like Thomas M. Cooley, which has a median LSAT score of 147, which is 32.6 percentile, cater more to students who may have a more difficult time with the exam.



## B. Will I get accepted?

### 1. The 25%-75% range

You may find a good school in a great location, but if you cannot gain admittance to that school, it is all for nought. One of the more common mistakes made by prospective law students is that they do not apply to enough schools. Very few schools can be considered ‘safe.’ This is especially true because the number of applications change from year to year and different schools become more competitive, while others may become less so. It is often difficult to predict how your application will fare in an upcoming year. If you only apply to one or two schools, when not accepted by these, you have few or no options. It is important to apply to schools to which you have a good chance of being accepted. While Stanford, Harvard, or Yale might give you the best chance of obtaining the job of your choice, if you have merely good credentials (UGPA 3.3 and LSAT 158, for example), it is probably not in your interest to apply. You need to identify schools you would like to attend, and which might extend an offer of admission to you.

The best way to calculate your chance of acceptance to one of the ABA approved law schools is to examine *The Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools* available from LSAC. You can buy a hard copy, or access it through the LSAC website, [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org). Click on the link for the official guide to ABA approved law schools. The guide provides a link to a two page description of each school and a link to the schools home page.<sup>28</sup> Once you are on the school’s home page click the link “consumer information” or “ABA required disclosures” where you should find a link to the “Standard 509 Information report.” These reports list, on the right hand side of page one, a profile of the previous year’s incoming class. This will let you know at a glance how selective a school is and the LSAT and UGPA of its incoming student population.

Some of the most important information about incoming students is the 25%-75% range for UGPA and LSAT. For University of Maryland’s full time program, for example, the UGPA range is 3.49 to 3.78. This means that only 25% of the admitted students had UGPAs below 3.49 and 25% had UGPAs above 3.78. The 25%-75% LSAT range for the University of Maryland is 153-161. When you examine these ranges, you must be cautious. DO NOT think that if your grades fall in these ranges you will likely be admitted. That is not the case.<sup>29</sup> Acceptance rates vary from school to school, but if both your UGPA and LSAT are in the 25%-75% it is more likely then not you will be rejected than accepted. Most of the school’s acceptances come from

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<sup>28</sup> You can also use your (projected) LSAT and GPA to limit *The Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools*. When looking at the list of all law schools you can click “apply UGPA/LSAT filter”. You can enter a UGPA and LSAT score and it will measure those scores against the 25%-75% of the schools on your list (or all schools). There are limitations with this system as addressed below.

<sup>29</sup> I discerned some of this information from examining published data from “grids” which appeared in the “applicant profile” section of the law school description. These “grids” made it easier to see in a particular year what was a student’s chance of admittance. One could look at students with GPA between 3.5 and 3.74 and LSAT between 155 and 159, for example, and see how many student applied and how many were admitted. These grids began to be phased out by schools about a decade ago. Some of the information in this section comes from examining the grids from the mid part of the last decade before they disappeared.

this pool of students, but so do most of the students that the school rejects. Also, do not misinterpret the 25% mark. Although 25% of the admittees do have UGPAs under 3.49, most are likely close to that point. In addition, most will likely have compensatory high LSATs. Only an extremely small percentage of applicants with identifiable scores below both ranges were admitted. These students, moreover likely stand out due to experience or other factors. These students are more likely to be non traditional applicants.

## 2. Using Ranges

How do you know if you can get into the University of Maryland? The 25%-75% ranges provide merely a quick guide. You can figure that if your grades are above both ranges, your chances are quite good. If one of your scores is in range and the other above, or if both are high in that range, your chances are still very good. On the other hand if your scores are toward the bottom of the range, or one or both of them are below the range, the odds that you will be admitted are poor. If your scores are below the 25% range on both the UGPA and LSAT, you probably want to forego your application.

Given that many applicants who scores are between the 25% and 75% mark gain an offer of admission and many do not, your application or personal story can make a difference. If you are in this category it is especially important to apply early, have strong letters of recommendation, a carefully constructed resumé, a well written and distinctive personal statement, and carefully written additional essays.

You can divide schools into various categories. The first category is schools where your scores are near or above the 75% mark in both the UGPA and LSAT. Based on your credentials schools in this category should be considered “safety schools.” Students are sometimes rejected from schools in this category; however, this is most likely for non-academic reasons. It may be because they applied late in the application year, had bad letters or recommendation, or made a bad impression on the admission’s staff. What the data show is everyone needs to take applications seriously. Still, while you are not guaranteed admission, if your credentials are in these top categories and assuming this year’s application class is much like past years’, you comply with application deadlines and criteria, and have good letters of recommendation, you should be accepted.

The next group of schools are ones where admittance is likely, but not safe. If you have either an LSAT or UGPA above the 75% mark but your other score (LSAT or UGPA) is within the 25%-75% range. As with all of these scenarios, these are ranges. So, the higher you are in the range the better your chances. The 25%-75% for the LSAT at UMD is 153-161 with a median (50th percentile) score of 159. If an applicant has an LSAT score of 158, while it appears to be in the top half of the range on first glance, it is actually in the bottom half. This one point can make a big difference; the margins are very close.

If one of your scores is particularly high (75+ percentile) and the other particularly low (25- percentile) it is hard to tell how your application will fare because these situations are rare. Some schools are more amenable to having a high UGPA or LSAT overcome a low LSAT or

UGPA. If it is an applicant's UGPA that is low, s/he is more likely to be admitted if s/he is not applying immediately after her or his undergraduate education, or has a semester or two at the end of college in which the applicant achieves a GPA at or above the median. If it is an applicant's LSAT which is lower, it may be more difficult, but not impossible to counterbalance with a UGPA.

The next group of schools are ones where an applicant would be "competitive" for admittance. This means that while most students in the range may not gain admittance, a significant number do. This is roughly where the chances of admittance range between one-third and two-thirds. You are in this category if your LSAT and UGPA scores fall in the 25%-75% range. An applicant in this category can gain admittance with a strong application. Again, this is a sliding scale. If both your scores are above the median, you should consider yourself highly competitive. As your scores drop below the median the chances of admittance begin to drop.

Any school where one of your scores is in the 25%-75% range and the other score is below that range should be considered a long shot. Your chances of admittance is poor, but not impossible. An applicant in this situation has a small but significant chance of obtaining admission, between 10% and 25% depending on your scores. If you want to get admitted to one of these long shot schools you need to write a compelling application.

If both of your scores are below the 25% range your chances of admittance is so low that you should probably not waste time applying. To get admitted to a school in this category there must either be a change in the kind or number of applications the school received or be something exceptional about a particular applicant for her or him to gain admittance with these credentials. If you want to go to a particular school and this is where your credentials place you, you should take time off to improve your credentials.<sup>30</sup>

It is possible for schools admittance standards to change. This can be quite dramatic, but usually it is gradually over a period of years, and can be subtle. Here is the 2020 profile for Temple University based on their 2019 incoming class:

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<sup>30</sup> The only way to change your UGPA is with undergraduate grades BEFORE you complete your first undergraduate degree. You can counter balance it with graduate work, but your UGPA will still be the same. If your grades were low at the beginning of your undergraduate career and higher as you progressed through school, you may consider a dual degree program. This requires another year of undergraduate education. Salisbury University requires 150 credits for a dual degree. This is different from a dual major where you get a singular bachelor's degree while majoring in two or more fields; it is two separate bachelor's degrees in two (or more) fields. This is not a good solution for the majority of students, but it has worked for some students.

Table IV—5A  
Temple University 2019 incoming class

	LSAT	UGPA
<b>75%</b>	164	3.73
<b>Median</b>	161	3.59
<b>25%</b>	159	3.29

Examine the same data from seven years ago.

Table IV-5B  
Temple University 2012 incoming class

	LSAT	UGPA
<b>75%</b>	163	3.54
<b>Median</b>	161	3.39
<b>25%</b>	158	3.16

It is clear that in the last seven years the criteria to enter Temple University has gotten (mildly) more difficult. While the median LSAT score remains the same it appears the mean is higher. The UGPA has also risen significantly. Imagine an applicant with LSAT of 162 and UGPA of 3.25. Based on the bottom table it appears the applicant could likely be admitted; based on the top table, admittance is unlikely.

There are many schools whose statistics change rapidly over a few years. When a schools statistics change it is sometimes driven by the law school and other times by applicants. Schools can decide to raise the schools LSAT statistics, for example, by admitting students due to their high LSAT scores even if they would not have been previously. Depending how the school pursues this, its UGPA statistics can be lowered for a time. Schools can also become “hot” and get a sudden influx of applications. Applying early can safeguard an applicant against the rise in applications. On the other hand, sometimes the credentials necessary for a school drops making it easier for students to gain admission. Essentially, the class for which one applies can be different from what is reflected in the school’s report.

### 3. The LSDAS filtering program

The LSDAS also provides a filtering program that provides your approximate chance of admittance at all the ABA approved law schools (currently 200). If you go to [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) and go to the approved law school guide, choose all law schools, and then click on the LSAT/UGPA

filter. You can then enter your information. For each school it compares your LSAT and UGPA to the schools median range. It also gives you your rough chance of admission.

Please note this is rough. The chances of admission is always given as a range of at least ten percent and sometimes significantly more. This data, moreover, is based on the information from previous application years. Each year some schools experience a change in the number or quality of their applications. Other schools have changes in admission's policy. The filter program does not account for this. Some schools note, moreover, that your chances of admittance may be overestimated in this program due to the combining less rigorous part time or conditional programs into the filter, depending on the reporting habits of the school. This should give you a sense of your chances of admittance, however, especially when combined with the 25%-75% range.

### C. Other factors to consider when applying

While finding a school to which you will be accepted is important, you need to narrow down you list and find a school that suits you. This means you likely want to do research into possible schools and think about some other criteria.

#### 1. Courses

When you are choosing where to apply, you should consider if you are interested in any specific areas of study. Specialization is not necessary in law school, but if you have an area which you would like to study you should see if that area is covered by the schools in which you are interested. While the first year of law school is mainly the same no matter the school, the second and third year allow for greater flexibility. Some schools have clinics, many more course offerings, or allow you to take some courses in their graduate divisions. If this is something which interests you, you may want to examine the offerings at a particular school.

#### 2. Attrition

Attrition rates are on page three of the *Standard 509 report* discussed above. Attrition rates range from low (1.9% of first year students at University of Baltimore) to high, such as 14% (12.3% academic) attrition in Ava Maria School of Law as listed in its most recent first year report. It is not clear the reason for the attrition. Schools which require a certain amount of academic attrition may be competitive. Some students thrive on that competition other do not. If you think the school will be a reach and many students are dismissed for academic reasons, you may want to consider other schools.

On the other hand, Ava Maria 25%-75% LSAT range is lower than many other schools, 146-152. It may be that some students are admitted who have trouble keeping up with the work. Indeed, there may be good reason to go to Ava Maria. You might want to look into their class size or class opportunities. Ava Maria is also a small school so a small number of students can

cause wide differences in the attrition rates. You may want to examine the rates from more than one year. High rates of nonacademic attrition may also give you pause and require some investigation. High or low attrition rate should not rule out a schools but should be part of the academic picture.

### 3. Additional information and opportunities

The ABA disclosures provide a wealth of other information. It will also let you know how racially diverse each school is.<sup>31</sup> You can also find out how many students transfer out of the school and how many transfer into the school. These data, like the attrition data, are part of a total picture. You can also learn the average size of a first year class which can vary widely even among the schools discussed above. Thomas M. Cooley has small first year courses with an average size of 23, while University of Vermont’s average first year class size is 87. The report also includes the size of upper level sections and the number of curricular offerings a school has. This is just part of the information that is available through reading the available required disclosures.

While data will tell you something about the learning environment and opportunities, it is not the complete picture. Most schools have open houses, the dates of which are available on their website. If you cannot go to an open house often you can arrange a visit with a school. This will help you get the “feel” of a school. Some schools also have summer programs, undergraduate programs, or programs for under represented groups (e.g. economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities). Some of these program pair summer or undergraduate work with conditional admission. Information on these programs are also available from a school’s webpage.

## D. Financing Law School

One thing many students look to with dread is the financing of law school. Unfortunately, many students consider cost first and then make poor choices. They even may end up with more debt based on that choice. The least expensive schools do not necessarily give you the lowest debt load. Law school is both more and less expensive that the “sticker price.”

### 1. Living Expenses

The first reason law school is more expensive than you might think is living expenses. In the ABA Law School Data, living expenses are approximated. These vary widely from school to school and can be quite high. For example living expenses are estimated at about \$24,000 at University of Maryland (only \$15,000 if living at home), but \$31,000 at New York University.

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<sup>31</sup> If you are interested in diversity issues there is information available on the LSAC website. Under the “Discover Law” tab there is a guide for LGBTQ+ applicants, for applicants with disabilities, as well information about racial and ethnic diversity.

On the other end of the spectrum cost of living is \$17,000 at the University of Wyoming or Montana.

## 2. Tuition

Tuition varies widely as well. Yale's 2019-2020 tuition is \$66,128 while Montana's in-state tuition is \$7,007 and \$17,273 for out-of state students. Many schools or states allow law student to get in-state tuition after a semester or a year; it may even be possible to get in-state tuition before you begin law school. University of Maryland's in-state tuition is \$16,404 while University of Baltimore is \$16,425. While there is good reason to attend an in-state school it might not be the least expensive option.

Now for the good news: For some schools most students do not pay full tuition and may even be given some money for living expenses. An example where few students pay the sticker price tuition is Drexel University, a private school in Philadelphia. Tuition for Drexel University is approximately \$46,000 and living expenses are estimated at approximately \$23,500. This is \$69,500 a year or \$208,500 dollars for three years. At Drexel, however, 91% of the students get grants or scholarships. The median amount of these grants is \$30,410. Even the 25th percentile grant amount \$15,924. This means only a third of the students had a grant or scholarship of this amount or less. Indeed, 53% of the students get grants of half to full tuition and a full quarter of the students get grants over \$40,600. If you are diligent and timely about your application, apply for financial aid, and if the school is not a long shot, you should get financial aid. If a student gets the median amount of financial aid, the yearly cost drops to \$39,090 (\$15,590 without living expenses). This would give you a three year cost of \$117,270 including living expenses. This is not an insignificant amount but it is less than the original amount and many other schools, both public and private.

If Drexel is compared to Baltimore which has a tuition of \$16,425 and a living expense of approximately \$25,200, for a yearly cost of \$41,625. This is potentially more expensive than Drexel depending on grants and scholarships. Baltimore has been providing an increasing amount scholarships and now half the students get grants or scholarships, but these are for lesser amounts. Indeed, the median amount is \$15,000 less than half of Drexel's median. It is not unreasonable that someone would apply to both these schools as their 25%-75% ranges overlap. It is not clear, however, which would be less expensive for any particular applicant.

There are schools out of our local area which are less expensive. The law school at the University of Montana is less expensive — \$21,021 for THREE years of in-state tuition or \$71,973 total, including living expenses. Even if you need to pay \$17,273 out of state tuition for the first year, the THREE years of tuition and living expenses are still \$82,239 total. Montana also offers two-thirds of its students scholarships of grants the median amount of \$5000.

For many applicants, especially those who want to practice Maryland, there are still good reasons to go to a Maryland law school, but not necessarily because it is the least expensive. If you are interested in the price of a Law School education, moreover, you need to look at more than just the tuition price.



### 3. Debt

Potential law students often mistakenly choose a less expensive school, even if that school has a lower record of job placement, and will likely lead to an inferior starting salary. You might be in a better position choosing a school with a better placement record and record of starting salary despite its higher tuition. Starting salary after graduating from Yale is high compared to other schools and employment placement is apparently one hundred percent. Thomas M. Cooley, on the other hand, lists over 22% of its class as unemployed and looking for a job. It also appears, based on the data, that a portion of the class is also not employed optimally.

Through the ABA reports, and more easily through an NALP report, you can get a sense of where students work. Some schools place a lot of students in judicial clerkships, while others place very few. The NALP report will also provide the mean and median salaries for the different practice areas for each school, letting one compare a school's price to its opportunities. Remember, you will likely end up in significant debt and a few thousand dollars either way is likely a drop in the bucket.

No matter the cost you will likely need to take out some loans. According to studies a salary of six times yearly borrowing amount is desirable to pay back loans easily. A salary of three times yearly borrowing amount is necessary for the loan payback to fit reasonably into your budget, and two times yearly borrowing amount to be able to pay back loans at all.



Paying back this amount of money may seem daunting but there are government programs making it possible to payback your loans no matter how much you make. The plan most useful to law school graduates is Income Based Repayment (IBR). Under IBR one consolidates loans into a ten year repayment plan. Each borrower's maximum monthly payment is ten percent of his or her discretionary income.<sup>32</sup> Discretionary income is defined as the difference between your adjusted gross income and 150% of the poverty line. You can find a payment calculator at <http://studentaid.ed.gov/repay-loans/understand/plans/income-based/calculator>. If a borrower works in qualifying public service, any remaining balances will be forgiven after ten years and all balance are forgiven after twenty-five years.

IBR is a great program but there are a couple of negatives. This program is not written into the promissory note; therefore, the program may end. Depending on your discretionary income and loan amounts there is the possibility of negative amortization. This is when the loan amount gets higher because the amount of your payment does not pay for all the interest. Paperwork must also be periodically filed to maintain eligibility and determine payment. The advantage of this program is that anyone can finance law school and, indeed, practice any kind of law, and be able to pay back his or her loans.

## E. Submitting Applications

### 1. For Most applicants

Once you calculate the desirability and odds of obtaining admission and at a particular school, where should you apply? For most applicants (not including those with elite or marginal credentials -- see below) you should identify at least two schools which your admittance should be considered "safe." As long as you are careful about the applications, mindful of deadlines, and procure good letters of recommendation, you should be admitted to both these schools. Be aware, it is possible you will need to attend one of the schools that you consider "safe." Do not apply to any school you consider unacceptable.

Next you should identify to at least three schools at the likely and competitive category. At least one of these schools should be in the competitive category and all three schools can be. You need not apply to any school in the likely category because you have the safe schools. You need to make sure that your "safe" schools are indeed ones which you should be admitted. If you are in the competitive range, you have the credentials to attract the eye of the admissions office when you are careful with your application and essay.

Applying to a long shot school is unnecessary. It can be desirable if there is something about the long shot school, other than its mere selectiveness, which makes it the right school. Suppose that you are committed to working in a particular field and your first choice school is strong in this field. If your credentials are both near the 25% mark you ordinarily would not gain admittance. Even when the school accepts very few people with these credentials, if you are able

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<sup>32</sup> If you have within the consolidated amount a loan which originated before 2007, the amount is fifteen percent of your discretionary income.

to show that you should be one of those few students, then it might be you. You would need to show a long standing interest in that element that is attracting you to that school.<sup>33</sup> You need to also write a persuasive essay and give the University additional indicators of success (a 4.0 in the fall of your senior year can be very helpful, for example -- you may want to discuss with your advisor what you may be able to do) to obtain admittance. If there is a reason that you want to go to a particular school, the application could be worth the odds. Depending on your interests, you may want to apply to a couple of these long shot schools. Each application, however, is time consuming and sometimes costly. You must calculate these factors against the odds of being admitted. Remember you can take a year or a few off to augment your credentials.

If you follow this advice you will have identified 2 “safe schools,” 0-2 “likely schools” 1-3 “competitive schools” and 0-1 “long shot” schools. You do not need to apply to all of these schools. If you apply to schools early enough, you can apply in two rounds. If you are admitted to a school that you would like to attend in the first round, you need not do a second round of applications. All applications, even those in the second round, should be submitted by the end of the year. In the first round you should apply to one “safe” school; you should hear that you are admitted to that school making the second application unnecessary. If you have a long shot school, you should apply to it in this round. If there is any other school which you really wish to attend, you should send it in this round. Unless your “safe” school is your first choice, apply to at least one school from the competitive category. Because of rolling admissions, if you apply early, you should get responses in time to do a second round of applications, if necessary.

One of the reasons that students do not garner an offer of admission is they fail to use the tiered application strategy and instead “play the odds.” They decide to apply, for example, to four schools each with an estimated one-third chance of admittance. Often students think they should get into one of the four schools and can avoid applying to less selective schools. Students often find, however, that they are rejected from all these schools. It is possible that if you applied a different year you may be accepted to all those school. You do not know how your application will fare until afterward.

## 2. For applicants with elite credentials

If you have elite credentials and are applying to the most selective schools, you will need to apply to more of them because no matter your credentials, you will not be more than competitive for admittance. Yale, for example, has 25%-75% LSAT 170-175 and UGPA 3.85-3.99; its median scores are 173 and 3.93 respectively. This means that elite credentials, 3.95 UGPA and 172 LSAT, will give you no more than a 50% chance or so at admittance.

For a school such as Yale the only people in the competitive category are those at the top of the UGPA and LSAT scale. For all others, this school is a long shot. Still most of Yale’s 263

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<sup>33</sup> Suppose you are interested in health care law. You can show through course work, internships, research projects, or employment that you have a long standing interest in health care law. If the school is promoting its health law program other students may claim an interest; your application needs to show that this is a long standing passion and that you would be an asset to the class.

admittees come from these long shot groups. If a student has a 3.8 UGPA and a 178 LSAT or a 4.0 UGPA and a 169 LSAT, you are in the “long shot” category, but unlike other schools, this is a fairly common occurrence among applicants to the most selective schools, and a good portion of their class comes from these applicants. If you want to attend one of these school, you need to submit more applications, therefore. You should apply to at least five schools in this most selective category in the first round. Indeed, you may want to apply for more. You also need to apply to two safety schools as all admittance in the most selective category is somewhat capricious. This means you will apply to a minimum of 7 schools, and will likely apply to more.

### 3. For those with marginal qualifications

You might not be able to find many schools which would be considered “safe.” It is possible that at best you find schools at which you are on the low end of competitive. If you are in this category you need to apply to many schools. If you can identify ten or even fifteen schools at which you may be marginally competitive, you should apply to all of them **YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO ATTEND**. You should also look for schools which tout that in their admissions that look at the “complete individual” or something akin to that. You may be able to sway admissions decisions at these schools with compensatory factors. If you are in this category, however, you should consider ways to improve your credentials.

## F. The Application

Preparing applications is a time consuming process. It is important that you make sure applications are complete, comply with instructions and are on time. The thing that is most likely to lead to a rejection from a safety school is problems with the application. The application has four parts: the application form, the personal statement, letters of recommendation, and addenda.

### 1. The Application Form

Ideally you want to use the open ended questions and essays on the application to enhance your chances of admittance. To do this it is important that you do not leave blanks. This means you need to complete all questions, but also you can not leave missing time periods. If you took a semester off and worked fast food write it down. If you took a semester off and did nothing, list it and explain why.

Sometimes schools ask you to list other qualifications you may have. You should list particular skills or experience which are not mentioned anywhere else in the application. Examples include proficiency in a foreign language, international experience, particular technical skills, publications, additional educational experience, proficiency in some performing art or craft (these should be backed by performances, exhibitions or other evidence of your proficiency).

## 2. The Personal Statement

You should submit a personal statement even when it is optional; it shows a seriousness that schools desire. Most schools will have admission's officers completely read every application, even those whose scores fall below what the school will ordinarily admit. A compelling personal statement can attract the eye of an admission officer. A personal statement is your interview for law school, but one where you get to determine the topic and flow of conversation. Indeed, it might make an admission's official take a second look at a student which the school would not ordinarily admit.

Make sure your essay is well written, clear, and grammatical. If it is not, it raises a red flag. Most times you can write about almost anything as the prompts are vague. This is advantageous as you can use similar essays for all the schools to which you apply. Make sure your statement is of the adequate length. Requested length usually is between 500 and 1000 words; if a school does not request a particular length, stay below 1000 words.

There are a few things you should do to construct an effective personal statement. You should write about yourself, not in the abstract, but with a specific narrative. From the very beginning of the statement tell a story about yourself which exemplifies that you have characteristics which make you a desirable candidate. If possible, you also want to write about something that makes you stand out from other applicants. What you write about should fit into a theme, or show up in different ways, in your application. You want the admission's committee to remember you and be able to summarize your application. This is best done if the personal statement fits in with the character of the whole application.

Your application should include a resume so you should not retell your resume in the personal statement. Instead it should be a discrete narrative and include information that the reader could not get anywhere else in the application. You can expand on a particular entry in your resume or application, but do not be redundant. Another thing you should avoid writing about is your failings. You may want to write about something bad that happened to you or tell a story which started with a mistake you made, but the narrative itself should exemplify your positive characteristics. What you should not do is emphasize negatives, such as bad grade(s). While in your application you can make a brief statement minimizing the importance of some of your weaker qualifications, you should not continue to draw attention to your shortcomings. Avoid writing anything that leads an admissions official to conclude you are of questionable character. You should endeavor to sound thoughtful, mature, and dedicated.

Another approach to avoid in your personal statement is an attempt to be clever, poetic, cute, or too referential to popular culture. This is NOT a creative writing assignment. You need to be serious and concise. Do not use up your precious space with quotations; instead, write things in your own words. Admission's officers are often turned off by the mention of television shows, movies, or other cultural reasons for applying. You do not know who are the people reading your application. It can be a young woman who just graduated law school, or a man who has been on the law school faculty for fifty years. The way to appeal to both, and to maximize admission chances, is to write in a way so that they are both interested in you.

A mistake students sometimes make is to use their personal statement to tell the admission's committee that they want to be a lawyer or go to that law school. This is a waste of your limited space. You are applying to law school because you want to be a lawyer and you are applying to this school because you want to go there. Many applicants will write about law, moreover, but perhaps you might be the only person to write about your topic. You still may want to write about what attracts you to law if it provides a good narrative and reflects positively on you.

A good personal statement can take quite a while to write and go through several drafts. You want to provide a lot of information in a short well written essay. Start early and make sure you give it to an outside reader who can check it for grammar, diction, overall effect, and how it reflects on you. If you want to apply in the fall, you should have the personal statement (or at least a solid draft) by the end of the summer.

### 3. Letters of Recommendation

An application to law school is an application for an academic endeavor. It is important that you get at least **two** academic letters of recommendation, therefore. Some schools allow more than two letters, in which case you can send additional letters from lawyers, judges, or other supervisors, or employers. These people know you in a different way than your professors and can comment on other attributes.

It is better if your recommender can write about you specifically. It is helpful if you have a professor or two with whom you have taken several classes and might comment on some of your qualities and experiences. If your letter fits in with your essay's "theme" it is even better. Without some information this is difficult for your recommender. You should provide each recommender as much information as possible to help him or her write an effective letter. You should, if possible, meet with your recommender at which time you should bring a copy (or drafts) of your personal statement, resume, and other essays. If for some reason this is not possible, at a minimum you should provide your recommender with your resume.

When you solicit your recommendations you should waive the right to see the letter. Not all, but many admission's professionals look with a bit of suspicion on letters where students do not waive the right to see them. You should be able to have a conversation with your recommender which will make you feel secure that the letter will be positive. To help you secure this, allow a reluctant reviewer to back out for any reason. It is possible that a recommender who tells you that s/he is busy and does not know if a letter can be prepared in time, is telling you s/he cannot write you a good letter; the reverse can be true as well, but you want recommenders who are anxious to comment positively on your qualifications. This might not be the instructors in whose courses you have achieved the highest grades, but with whom you have had some positive academic experiences.

If you are applying a significant time past your college graduation and have at least two years of work experience you can have only one of your primary letters an academic letter. The other letter can be from an employer especially if it explains attributes which would make you

successful in law school. If you graduated five or more years ago it is generally expected to get a letter from an employer or a member of the graduate faculty.

Most schools require, at a minimum, two letters of recommendation. You should identify three individuals from which you would like letters of recommendation. If one recommender is not timely with his or her letter of recommendation you still will have two letters to send to schools.

#### 4. Addenda

Addenda are the material added to the application which gives the school a more complete picture than what was sketched out in the application. A school might ask you to describe any special circumstances that would shed light on your academic record. It is here, especially if your credentials are weak that you can explain and minimize the negative implications. Do not dwell on your shortcomings but try to put them into context. For example, if you had two years of a 2.0 GPA, but after taking a couple of years break from school you have maintained a 3.4 GPA, your overall GPA will still only be about 2.7, below the competitive category most schools. You might try writing something like this,

I know my GPA is below your median. When I started college I was not mature enough for college work. After a break I renewed my studies and since my Junior year my GPA has been 3.4. These grades are a more accurate reflection of my ability than my overall GPA.

You can also do similar things with your LSAT score. Do not dwell on shortcomings or make excuses, but be forthcoming.

Do not let the admission's committee speculate about your circumstances. If there are gaps in time or a semester with poor grades, etc. write a short explanation even if it is not something of which you are proud. If, for example, you were on academic probation, state that, and state a positive that has come out of this if you can.

Addenda can be useful, but you do not want to have too many. A few can be effective and enhance your application, but if you add an addendum for everything it becomes difficult to distinguish what is important. You need not explain every sub par grade, for example. If there is one grade that you need to explain, on the other hand, you should do so.

#### 5. Other Considerations

As noted above, applications are better received if they have a theme. It helps admission's officers remember who you are and helps you stand out as an individual. If you are in the competitive category you are more likely to be admitted if you have a theme.

You may need to contact a school about your application, or a visit, or financial aid, or something else. Be professional and respectful in all your interactions with law school staff. You do not know with whom you are talking and if you are rude to an administrative assistant, s/he can kill your application at some schools. You want all interactions to make the school more likely to want to spend three years with you, rather than less.

You should apply as early as possible. At a minimum before the first of the year, but ideally as close as possible to the time the school begins accepting applications. Most schools have a policy of rolling admissions. To guard against the possibility of not filling the entire class, or having to take weaker students to fill that class, most schools set their automatic accept line lower at the beginning of the application year and raise it slightly throughout that period. While this is unlikely to get you into your long shot schools, early application makes it more likely to be accepted to your competitive schools.

Make sure you proofread repeatedly and carefully. Incoherent or sloppy writing can have a school reject you when it would otherwise admit you. It is a good idea to have a least one person proofread your entire application when finished.

If your UGPA is lower than you would like it is also extremely helpful if you are able to put together at least one 4.0, or at least a high UGPA, semester. Doing so will indicate that you have the ability and the discipline to do the work when it is important. The last semester of grades that the school sees (spring semester junior year or fall senior year if you are applying for admittance immediately upon graduation) need to be as high as possible. If applying in December you may want to send your fall grades with the application.

## F. Disclosures

Often people want to go to law schools who have criminal records of one kind or another. While this may create a problem for admission to law school, in most situations, it does not. Most, though not all, law schools will refuse admission to otherwise qualified candidates only if their criminal record keeps them from being admitted to the bar (unable to practice law) in the state which the school is located. You can call your state bar for information on what will or will not cause you to be excluded from its bar. If your transgressions are relatively modest or several years ago, you can likely attend law school. Underage criminal charges, underage drinking charge, or an arrest for possession of marijuana, are rarely problematic, but a long criminal history, especially if it is ongoing, is can get you rejected on “character and fitness grounds”.

Whatever your infractions, you will likely need to disclose them on your application. Indeed, the most important thing is that you disclose any criminal record that you do have. Your application to law school is compared to you application for the bar. Any discrepancy can keep you from practicing law. The state bar also does their own investigation and discover things that you think might be long gone. Just because a lawyer or judge told you that you would not need to worry about something in the future, it does not mean that the bar examiners will not find out about it. If they do it will impact negatively on your application to the bar. While the offense might not keep you from being admitted to the bar, **your failure to disclose might**. Much of

what needs to be disclosed depends on the question. If the question asked if you have ever been arrested you need to disclose any arrests. If it asks for convictions, you need to disclose those, but not arrests. In general if you were convicted of a crime as a juvenile it should not affect law school admissions or admission to the bar. Still, you should disclose it on the application unless the question specifically excludes it. A good rule of thumb is: if in the slightest doubt disclose.

You may have been advised to get your record expunged. It is unlikely that there is anything which can be expunged which will keep you from entering law school. Certain jurisdictions will automatically expunge minor drug possession charges if the offender is not caught again in a certain period of time. If this is the case you would most likely find out about it at the time of conviction or plea bargain. In most cases however, expunging one's record requires action on your part. The procedure to expunge your record varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. You need to call the court which issued your conviction and inquire. In some cases you may need to hire a lawyer. Depending on the crime and jurisdiction you may need to wait a period of time before your record is expunged.

Even after your record is expunged, however, depending on how the question is asked at the particular school, you should still disclose. **Again: when in doubt disclose.** Any omission discovered by bar investigators may keep you from ever practicing law. Even when expunged, things come to light in various ways. An administrative error where the bar examiners learn of a record you did not disclose (even if expunged) can lead the bar examiners to believe that you do not have the "good character" necessary for the bar because you lied.

You may want to get a copy of your university disciplinary record as well. You should disclose any adverse findings on that as well. The university may send those adverse findings to the law schools. You want to be viewed as honest. You also can turn the negative into a positive. Explain what you learned about the experience. Again there is very little which can be expunged or which is done as a juvenile which can keep you from law school. Law schools may be impressed by your honesty. Remember, it is becoming increasingly easy for law schools and state bars to find out about people's pasts.

## G. The Wait List

Being on the wait list is a good thing. This means the admission's committee likes your file, but it cannot yet offer you admission, but you may be offered admission if there is space. Wait lists do not guarantee admission, however. If you have been accepted somewhere, it is likely in your interest to decline an offer of a wait list, or at least decline it by the time the seat deposit is due, even if the school for which you are on the wait list is a preferred choice.

If you stay on the wait list you must be prepared to accept a last minute offer. Students have been called for admission just before, or even after, classes have started. If you know you will not accept the spot if offered, declining the waiting list can mean a lot to a student with fewer options.



If you decide to stay on the wait list you should try to discern if you will be admitted. Many law schools rank their waiting lists and will disclose where you are on the list. The admission's office might also let you know how many people they usually take off the list. Less selective schools generally take more people off the waiting list than more selective schools. If you are at or near the top of the waiting list at a less selective school, you probably have a good chance to be admitted. If you are down the list, or if the law school will not give you any information, you should try to make other plans.<sup>34</sup>

If you are on a wait list you may be able to improve your application. Some schools will allow additional material to be submitted such as an additional letter of recommendation, or essay, or grades. If the school in which you are interested accepts additional material send it in and carefully prepare the allowed material. It shows the school that you are serious about wanting a place in the incoming class. Many schools redo the waiting list after the seat deposit(s) are due and this is a time of a lot of movement for wait lists. Some do not rank their list but try to take someone off the list most like the student they lost. You need to contact the particular school for details.



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<sup>34</sup> There are times during the year when students are more likely to be offered admission from the wait list. The biggest one is **after** seat deposits are due. This means you need to secure a seat somewhere else, and then be prepared to send in the deposit to your preferred school when you are admitted off the wait list. On the other hand, University of Baltimore's seat deposit is \$500 as of 2020; a small fraction of its three year price tag. A seat deposit should not determine to which school you attend.

## Section V -- No offer of admittance

This is unfortunate, but it does happen. Planning your applications carefully will help minimize the chances of this happening. Still, it is possible that the schools to which you applied experience an upswing in the number or quality of applications, or the grades and LSAT scores you were waiting for were not as good as you expected. If this happens to you, you are in an unfortunate situation, but you are not without options.

### A. Options

Though the path may be more difficult, you still have options to become a lawyer. You can always reapply, or appeal a decision, or seek a conditional acceptance, or acceptance in a part time or night division program. There is even the possibility of starting law school at alternative times.

#### 1. Appeals

Appeals rarely work, but they have. If you are rejected by your “safe schools,” you should call the school and ask why you were rejected. In some cases the school will require that you send your request in writing. You will then be sent an explanation by the dean. This explanation can be short and not give you much information, or it might be more extensive. The explanation may give you no room to appeal; you may be told, for example, that you were rejected on character and fitness grounds. That is a judgement call and difficult to appeal.

If you are told that your scores are too low and your scores are above the schools median, or something else that does not quite add up for you, you can appeal. When you appeal you should include your UGPA and LSAT scores. It still occasionally happens that there are mistakes in transferring scores from paper to computer or vice versa.

If the school indicates that you were rejected because your application was incomplete, you should see what piece of information was missing. If it is something which was out of your control you may be able to convince the school that you should not be biased by the oversight and secure an offer of admission. Even if the school places the blame on you, you will probably have a good choice of admission in the future.

In most cases, however, the appeal will be denied. You will merely be told that your scores are below what is necessary to secure admission. You may, however, find out that you were rejected due to deficiencies that you can correct in the future.

#### 2. Conditional Acceptances

You might be able to secure a conditional acceptance from certain schools. Each conditional acceptance program is different. Some programs will require you to attend a summer

program and then admit students on a space available basis. If you successfully complete a summer program, but you are not admitted, you are in a stronger application position for next year. Others guarantee acceptance on completion. Some of these conditional acceptance programs, however, have stringent requirements for completion, while others less so. Please note: if you are not admitted some schools will consider this as a dismissal from law school which you will be required to disclose on future applications. Some conditional acceptance programs are only open to those of disadvantaged background, or certain geographical locations, for example. These programs often cater to students with low LSATs but high UGPAs because those students are disadvantaged by the current system. If this is your situation, you may have an easier time finding a conditional program or acceptance.

### 3. Night and Part-time programs

Some schools have night or part time divisions. These are often, less selective than the day division. As when applying for day programs it is important you check the admission data for the particular school(s) in which you are interested. Not all schools have evening or part time programs and some have programs which are quite small. University of Maryland, for example, in its 2019 incoming class had 192 full time students and 24 part-time students. The admission's criteria are the same for both groups of students. On the other hand at the University of Hawaii both the LSAT and UGPA are considerably lower among the part time students.<sup>35</sup>

Most part-time or night programs are four year programs rather than three year programs. You should be prepared to stay in the program for all four years because meeting transfer requirements can sometimes be difficult. There are some limited opportunities to move to the full time program in some schools. A small number of students, after a semester or a year, may be able to transfer from the night or part time divisions to the day or full time divisions. This depends entirely on the particular school. If you are not accepted to any school, you may wish to try evening divisions. Since application deadlines are often later, moreover, you may be able to still apply for the upcoming academic year. **Do not go to any school with the expectation of transferring to another school or a day or full time program, however. Be prepared to complete the program you start.**

### 4. January or Summer Starts

There are approximately twenty-five schools in the country which allow January start dates and fewer of these even allow other alternative start times. If denied admission for the fall you can try to apply to these schools. Class size varies as does admission requirements. Please be aware not all of these schools admit a full classes; some only admit students on a space available basis. Do not expect admittance to these programs to necessarily be easier than September admittance. It is also probably worth delaying admittance for one semester to find the right fit.

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<sup>35</sup> I selected Hawaii truly at random. To be fair, the first school I selected at random did not have any part time students.

## 5. Reapplication

After you review the reasons that you were unable to secure any offer of admission, you will have a better sense about whether you should apply again. You may come to the conclusion that your scores are too low to gain an offer of admission, or at least gain an offer in the near future. On the other hand, if you find that you overestimated your credentials, you should apply to a different set of schools.

If you encountered a tough application year, you may also wish to apply again. If you choose to apply again you should try to improve your credentials in the intervening year. You may want to try to find an interesting job, or internship that can improve your credentials. You can also consider attending a graduate program. Doing well in a graduate program will make it more likely that a school will look beyond your traditional numbers.<sup>36</sup>

### B. Non-accredited Law Schools

The ABA (American Bar Association) accredits most law schools and some states require a degree from an ABA accredited school to sit for the state's bar exam. Other states do not. LSAC notes on its website

There are a number of law schools that have not been approved by the American Bar Association. Some states permit graduates of these schools to take the bar examination or will admit to their bars a graduate of a non-ABA-approved law school who has been admitted to the bar of another state. Most states do not. Before you enroll in a law school not approved by the ABA, you should research the bar-admission limitations of obtaining a degree from the school and enroll only if it is clear that the school will provide adequate legal training. Questions regarding the acceptability of a JD from such schools should be addressed to the bar-examining authority of each state or jurisdiction.

As of 2020 LSAC lists 32 of these non ABA accredited schools. Most of these are in California, which allows students to take the bar after graduating a non accredited law school. Think carefully before you do this. Check the regulations for taking the bar in the state which you intend to practice. See if attendance at the particular unaccredited law school qualifies. Also be aware that if you go this route you might never be able to practice law in another state, or may need to wait a number of years before you do so.<sup>37</sup>

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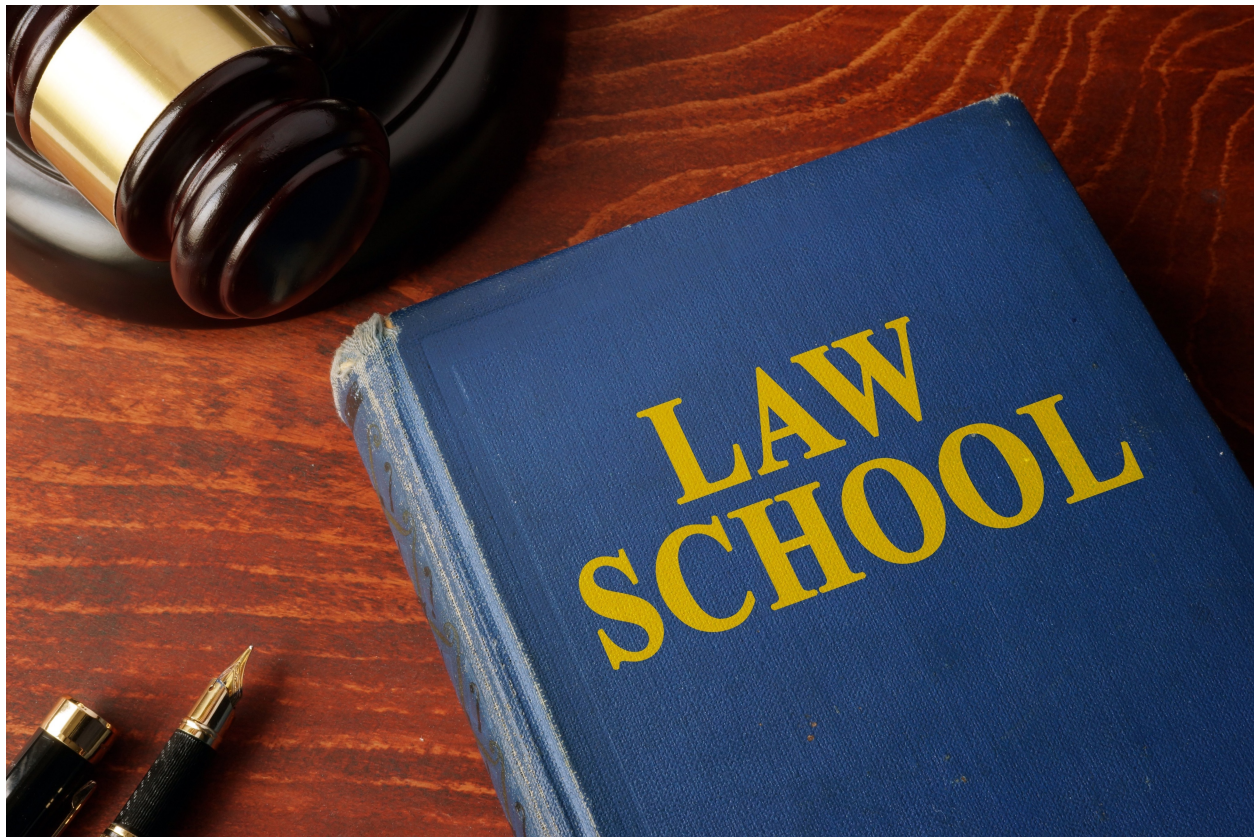
<sup>36</sup> You may want to wait more than one year to apply. It is difficult to include grades from your first year after your undergraduate education and still apply early. Indeed, you will only be six months after graduation, limiting how different your application can be.

<sup>37</sup> At some of these schools there are some innovative teaching methods. Some students are dedicated to their non-ABA accredited *alma matter*.

## Section VI -- Conclusion

Preparing and applying for law school is a time consuming and intense process. You should start preparing right from the beginning of your undergraduate education. On the other hand, it is not too late to start thinking of law school. Students sometimes go to law school years or even decades after graduating college. If you did not prepare effectively for law school during your undergraduate years, you can take some time to prepare for law school.

The most important thing is to be realistic with your expectations and preparation. You need to plan ahead allow adequate time for you to present your best application. Seek help. Not only from your adviser, and professors, but proofreaders, and admission's staff of the schools in which you are interested.



## Appendix

### Four Year Prelaw Plan

This list can be modified. If you want to take time off before law school or are entering the process having already graduated, the year before you want to begin law school in the spring follow the junior year list and in the fall follow the senior year list which should hopefully have you entering law school the following fall.

#### First Year:

- Take general education courses and decide on a course of study
- Perform well academically — Maintain a high UGPA and begin to build relationships with faculty.
- Start to become familiar with LSAT, LSAC, LSDAS, and the law school application process.
- (Re)evaluate whether law school is the correct career for you.

#### Sophomore Year:

- Continue general education courses, and if you have not, decide on a course of study or flesh it out — add a minor or a related major.
- Continue to perform well academically — Maintain a high UGPA and begin to build relationships with faculty in your major area of study.
- Start to become familiar with law school and the practice of law. You may want to contact lawyers, judges or other attorneys to find out about their careers.
- Consider an internship.
- Begin to evaluate law schools on line.
- Consider making a law school visit — contacting admission's personnel, visiting a class, and meeting students.
- (Re)evaluate whether law school is the correct career for you.

### Junior Year:

- This is the year when most of the work into the law school application process is done (though the actual application will be submitted senior year). Be committed to the process.
- Continue to perform well academically — Maintain a high UGPA and begin to build relationships with faculty. These are the most recent grades the law school will see and poor grades can undo your previous hard work.
- Begin LSAT preparation. You should plan about 250 hours for this.
- Narrow down your list of law schools based on grades, projected LSAT score, financial considerations, location, program and other considerations.
- Attend LSAC forums<sup>38</sup>
- Prepare resumé — you want to do this early so it can be proofread and updated.
- Start working on your personal statement — this is difficult and likely will need to go through several drafts. The statement should also be read by several people who know you.
- Work on other supplemental essays from the schools on your list.
- Register for the LSDAS and LSAT (ideally a test either the spring or summer).
- Request letters of recommendation (you must register for the LSDAS to do this).
- Take an LSAT course if you believe one is necessary for preparation.
- Take the LSAT if ready — it is **not** in your interest to take it “to see how you do” or if you are otherwise not ready.

### Senior Year:

- Take your list of law schools and narrow it down to a few schools of high interest (3-5) to which you wish to apply first. These schools are the ones in which you are particularly interested or schools which would be a reach.
- Follow-up with letters of recommendation.
- Submit all transcripts to LSDAS.<sup>39</sup>
- Finish all parts of the application. This can include addenda about a poor semester, supplemental essay, and (if required) dean’s certification.
- Review and submit applications to first choice schools, ideally by end of October.
- Based on response revise application, if necessary, and apply to other part of list before the end of the year.
- If you do not have time to apply in time for two application cycles before the end of the year apply to all schools at once.

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<sup>38</sup> This is being written in the summer of 2020. There are still LSAC forums, they have just gone virtual. These forums can be found on the LSAC website.

<sup>39</sup> This can be a time consuming process as explained above. As soon as you are registered with LSDAS you should start collecting transcripts from schools you have received University credit from but no longer attend.

Appendix — II  
CAS Grade Standardization

conversion	A to F	1 to 5	100 point scale*	4 pass grades	3 pass grades
4.33	A+	1+	98-100		
4.00	A	1	93-97	Highest Pass	Highest Pass
3.67	A-	1-	90-92		
3.5	AB				
3.33	B+	2+	87-89		
3.00	B	2	83-86	Second Pass	Middle Pass
2.67	B-	2-	80-82		
2.5	BC				
2.33	C+	3+	77-79		
2.0	C	3	73-76	Third Pass	Lowest Pass
1.67	C-	3-	70-72		
1.5	CD				
1.33	D+	4+	67-69		
1.0	D	4	63-66	Lowest Pass	
0.67	D-	4-	60-62		
0.5	DE/DF				
0.00	E or F	5	Below 60	Fail	Fail

- The credential assembly service (CAS) includes ALL grades they can discern into your overall UGPA. This means if you retake a class both at SU, the original and the second grade will be included into your UGPA for law school. In most cases, therefore, it is NOT in your interest to retake a class.<sup>40</sup>
- Excluded are grades such as “pass” which has no translation, or grades that cannot be discerned.
- Even if the grade does not figure into your SU UGPA e.g. transfer credit, CAS uses the original grade to determine your UGPA. Your CAS UGPA can be higher or lower than your SU UGPA

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<sup>40</sup> If you have a UGPA of 3.3 and get a D in chemistry and retake the class for a B grade, you have two grades lowering your UGPA instead of just one. You should retake courses if performance in that class would call into question law school success, e.g. formal logic.



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