

LAW SCHOOL SELECTION STRATEGIES

(Adapted from Cornell's Legal Careers Guide)

With 186 accredited law schools in the United States, how do you decide where to apply and ultimately where to attend? It will be important to balance factors that address your personal preferences with those that affect your chances of admission. Do not let the search for "long shots, good chances, and sure things" govern your selection process. Begin by assembling a list of law schools based on criteria that are important to you, then revise your choices according to your chances of admission. This systematic approach should help limit frustration and confusion during the process of applying to law school. Selecting schools carefully will help reduce the time and expense of applying to an excessive number of schools.

Criteria for Selection

Consider the following factors and determine which are important to you:

National/Regional Schools: Does the school attract applicants from across the country and abroad? Or do most students come from the region in which the school is located? Where do most students want to work following graduation—throughout the country or in the school's region?

Faculty: What are the academic and experiential backgrounds of faculty? How accessible are they? What is the faculty-student ratio, the number of full-time vs. adjunct faculty, and the number of female and minority faculty?

Facilities and Resources: Is the school affiliated with a university? Do students have access to courses from a range of academic disciplines to supplement their legal curriculum? Is the library large enough to accommodate holdings and permit students to conduct research and study? How helpful is the library staff? How accessible are electronic databases such as Lexis and Westlaw? In general, do the facilities provide a comfortable learning environment?

Student Body: What is the size of the entering class? What does the admissions profile tell you about the quality of the student body? Where did students study as undergraduates and what are their geographic backgrounds? Does the student body reflect a diversity of interests and personal/cultural backgrounds? What is the overall atmosphere—are students friendly or overly competitive? Is there much interaction with fellow students outside the classroom?

Special Programs: What coursework is available in specialized areas? Are there any joint degree programs of interest to you available? What are the opportunities for practical experience, including clinics, internships, etc.? What specialized institutes, journals, or organizations exist in your areas of interest? Does the school demonstrate a commitment to women and minorities through special programs?

Placement: What advising and resources are available to help you find a job? Is career counseling available? How many employers recruit at the law school and who are they? What percentage of the class has positions at graduation? In what types of positions and geographic areas are they employed? What is the percentage of graduates holding judicial

clerkships? What assistance is given to students not interested in working in law firms? What is the bar passage rate for recent graduates?

Student Life: Is housing provided for first-year students? If not, does the school offer assistance in locating off-campus housing? Is the school located in a safe area? Is the location rural or urban? What is the cost of living? What types of cultural opportunities are there? Does the school provide recreational facilities?

Costs: What are tuition, housing, and transportation costs? Is financial aid exclusively need-based, or are merit scholarships available?

Reputation

The issue most often discussed by prospective law students, yet the most difficult to define, is “reputation”. A number of factors contribute to a school’s reputation, including faculty, facilities, career services, reputation of the parent university, etc. Though a number of law school rankings are available, most factors evaluated are not quantifiable, and therefore you should not perceive the rankings as accurate or definitive. Selectivity at law schools, however, is one factor which can be quantified; you can gauge a school’s relative selectivity by comparing the number of applicants accepted to the overall number of applications. *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools* and the *Official American Bar Association Guide to Approved Law Schools* contain charts and tables of recent admissions cycles at most schools, reflecting the level of selectivity.

Schools can be divided roughly into three groups:

- Schools with national reputations which tend to appear in various “top ten” lists. They draw students from a national pool and offer geographic mobility to graduates.
- Schools with good regional reputations which are attended primarily by students from the region, who may want to remain in the area following graduation, but who may also seek positions throughout the country.
- Local schools which draw students primarily from the immediate area who want to practice there following graduation.

For a more detailed discussion of law school reputation, refer to *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*.

Non-Traditional Alternatives

You should be aware that some law schools offer alternatives to fall admission in a full-time law program. Evening divisions and part-time programs make it possible for students to work and study law simultaneously, earning a J.D. in four years. A few schools on the quarter system allow students to enter mid-year. Summer entry and/or summer courses can accelerate the degree program from three to two-and-a-half calendar years. And finally, some law schools have created summer trial programs, which allow applicants who may need additional preparation to ready themselves for legal study in time for fall entrance.

Publications and Online Resources

The ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools is available for applicants to review in the Academic and Pre-Professional Advising Center. It’s also available on-line at

LSAC.org. Applicants can order the Guide on-line from LSAC.org or from Barnes & Noble and Amazon.

Catalogs and bulletins published and distributed by law schools are available by contacting the schools by phone, by U.S. mail, or through their web sites.

The Boston College Online Law School Locator helps applicants identify schools where their LSAT score and grades are most competitive for admission. www.bc.edu/LawLocator.

School Visits are extremely important in helping an applicant determine if the school is the "right fit" for him or her. Each school has its own culture. It's intangible but you can feel it during a visit. Do not make your decision of where to attend law school solely on ranking and prestige.

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