

If you're interested in attending law school, consult the Career Services Center's "Law School Information" web page at <http://career.ucsd.edu/undergraduates/thinking-about-grad-school/law.html> for valuable information and helpful links. In addition, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) website, www.lsac.org, has links to all member law schools and information about legal education and applying to law school. Another important resource for pre-law students is the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* book produced annually by LSAC and the American Bar Association (ABA). A copy is available in the Career Services Center (CSC), but it is also available online at www.lsac.org and can be purchased at most major bookstores. Most questions about law school admission are answered in these resources.

PREPARATION FOR LAW SCHOOL

What Courses Do I Need to Take?

Lawyers and law students need to possess the ability to analyze legal issues in light of existing law, advocate the views of groups and individuals, counsel clients on the law's requirements, write and speak clearly and persuasively, and negotiate effectively. Law schools do not require you to have had any particular major, minor or curricular path for pre-law education but recommend a broad liberal arts background designed to sharpen analytical reasoning skills and writing skills. You are strongly encouraged to develop writing skills by taking courses in which your work is vigorously edited. Since the majority of law schools place strong emphasis on your grade point average (GPA), you should choose a course of study which engages your natural interests, in which your communication and reasoning skills are emphasized and in which your academic performance is high.

UCSD offers an interdisciplinary "Law and Society" minor to all UCSD students, through which students can enhance their critical analysis of social and ethical issues related to law. However, no legal study or experience is required for admission to law school; and many students without any previous law-related study or experience are admitted to law school.

What Experience Do I Need to Have?

Law schools do not specifically require students to have any volunteer or work experience, law-related or otherwise. However, extracurricular activities like jobs, internships, volunteer and community activities can be useful to demonstrate to admissions committees your leadership ability, interpersonal skills, character, talents and traits and can complement your academic record. Involvement in a few activities for a good length of time, showing passion and commitment, can illustrate that you are a dedicated individual with interests beyond the classroom. With whatever you do, you'll want to be able to explain what skills you developed or knowledge you gained from these experiences.

While your experience does not need to be law-related, some personal familiarity with legal careers through volunteer or work experience, informational interviews or shadowing can be very useful to confirm that law school and a legal career are the right choice for you. Some legal experience can also demonstrate to an admissions committee that you've investigated the profession and that you are knowledgeable about and committed to it.

ADMISSIONS CRITERIA

What Do Admissions Committees Look For In Law School Applicants?

Admissions committees want to admit students who will perform well in their school's academic program. Your score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) and your academic record are the two most important criteria used by law schools as predictors of this academic performance. To further evaluate your potential, the admissions committee will look at your extracurricular and community activities, work experience, personal background, letters of recommendation, and personal statement. Law schools seek to admit students from a variety of educational, cultural, economic and social backgrounds.

The *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* contains admission data on individual schools. While admission is competitive, if you assess your credentials accurately and choose to apply where your grades and scores align with the school's previous admittees, you'll have a strong likelihood of admission. Current data on the GPAs and LSAT scores of UCSD* graduates accepted into law school is available in CSC.

**This UCSD admission-rate data is based on the information UCSD students release to UCSD pre-law advisors. When you register for the LSAT or LSDAS, please help us continue to make this information available to future students by agreeing to release your information. Your personal, identifying information will never be disclosed.*

• Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

The LSAT is a half-day standardized test. It consists of five 35-minute multiple-choice sections and one 35-minute writing sample on a prescribed topic. These sections include one reading comprehension section, one analytical reasoning (a.k.a. "games") section, and two logical reasoning sections. The writing sample is not scored but is sent to the law schools to which the applicant applies. Most law schools do not put much weight on the writing sample in making admissions

decisions, but some may compare it to the personal statement if there appears to be a discrepancy between the writing sample and the application essay. One of the five 35-minute sections is "experimental" and is not counted toward the test-taker's grade. The scale for the LSAT scores is 120-180.

At www.lsac.org, you can find information about registering for the LSAT, sample questions, and ordering information for test preparation materials. The LSAT is offered four times each year for a significant fee: June, early fall (September or October), December and February. Both the June and December exams frequently coincide with final exams at UCSD. It is best to take the LSAT *no later than* the fall one year prior to entering law school, but you can take it earlier if you choose (scores are valid for at least 3 years). Taking the fall LSAT allows time for you to receive your score, make an informed decision about where to apply, and complete your applications well before deadlines. You can then repeat the LSAT in December, if needed. The score for the December exam will be available to meet most application deadlines.

Carefully prepare for this examination and to plan to take it only once if possible. You'll want to vigorously prepare for the LSAT on your own (LSAC and bookstores sell test preparation materials) or in a commercial test prep course by reviewing old LSATs and taking multiple practice tests under timed conditions. Many students struggle with the analytical reasoning or "games" section of the LSAT, so for additional, early practice with those sections you may want to check out *Games* magazine or test prep books such as the *LSAT Logic Games Bible*, available at bookstores.

- **Grade Point Average (GPA) and Academic Record**

Admissions committees look at your cumulative GPA from all colleges and universities attended, and also consider a year-by-year GPA trajectory. Substantial and continuing academic improvement will work to your advantage. They may also consider the difficulty of your courses, your major and the school you attended. The GPA in your major is not typically considered as a separate element (although you can choose to highlight your major GPA on your resume or in your personal statement if it is higher than your cumulative GPA). If your grades remain strong and/or improve after your initial application, send updated copies of transcripts to the law schools through LSAC.

- **Personal Statement**

The personal statement portion of the application is a critical sample of your ability to write clearly and cogently. This essay also provides an important opportunity for you to tell the admissions committee about yourself, and to become "alive" to the reader. The essay should include information about meaningful personal and academic experiences which may have helped you define values, set goals, develop skills, work with others, learn to persevere, etc. It may also include information about your interest in a legal education and a career in law. Committees are more interested in specific information about your experiences and history than in speculation about the future. Typically, essays are no longer than two typed pages, double-spaced. For assistance with the content and style of your application essay, a handout titled "Professional School Personal Statement" is available on our website. You can also drop off a typed, double-spaced draft of your personal statement to CSC for a free critique. Books with essay examples are available in the CSC library.

- **Letters of Reference**

Admissions committees use letters of reference to provide context for your academic and personal achievements. Most law schools recommend or require you to submit two or three letters of reference. At least one letter, and preferably two, should be from a professor who has taught you in a class or with whom you've interacted on an academic basis. The best letters will evaluate your academic or work performance – citing specific examples – as well as assess your potential. Information on how to obtain and send letters of reference is available on the CSC website. Your recommenders will submit their letters directly to LSAC for distribution to schools (see "Application Process" below).

- **Resumes and Addenda**

Most law schools are recommending or requiring applicants to submit resumes as part of the law school application. A resume offers you an opportunity to further discuss the relevance of the experiences you've had to your application for law school and the skills and interests you've developed through work and volunteer activities. Additionally, students with a weakness or inconsistency in their academic record (a low grade, a disciplinary action, etc.) can consider using an addendum to clarify or explain the anomaly. Details about these written supplements to the law school application can be found on the "Law" webpage at <http://career.ucsd.edu/>.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

When And How Do I Apply For Law School?

Law schools begin to accept applications in September or October from those who wish to enter in fall of the following year. Deadlines vary but are often around February 1. However, because many law schools use a rolling admissions process to review and decide upon applications as they receive them, it's best to apply early in the cycle, usually by the end of November. An application timeline can be found online on the "Law" page at <http://career.ucsd.edu/>. While most schools start in the fall of each year, some have alternative January start dates and their application times will vary.

- **LSAC Credential Assembly Service (CAS)**

LSAC runs the CAS – a standardized, centralized application - on behalf of its members. Nearly all ABA-approved schools require that applicants apply through CAS. Registration for CAS requires a fee and is done online at www.lsac.org. You'll send your transcripts to CAS and the service will prepare a "Law School Report" to be sent to the schools. This provides a uniform system for law schools to compare applicants' grades. You will want to review a copy of your report for verification of information, leaving time to make corrections if necessary. When you register for the LSAT or CAS you can choose to use the optional free "Candidate Referral Service" to receive recruitment information from schools.

Along with your Law School Report, CAS will also collect and forward copies of your letters of recommendation to the schools to which you've applied. Although most students will send the same letters to all the schools they apply to, CAS allows you to select which letters go to each school or to submit targeted letters to particular schools (this is rare!).

New in 2010, CAS now facilitates the collection and forwarding of "Evaluations" which are separate and in addition to letters of recommendation. Evaluations allow you to designate people to rate your relevant cognitive and non-cognitive skills and abilities through an online ranking form. This data is then sent to the law schools. Not all schools require or even participate in evaluations. Check your schools' websites and www.lsac.org for more information.

Read the information online at www.lsac.org for step-by-step guidance to the CAS application process, including the letter of recommendation and evaluation services and individual school electronic applications.

- **Individual School Applications**

In addition to applying through CAS, separate applications must be completed for each individual law school. Submission of an individual school application will prompt the school to contact CAS to request your Law School Report and letters of recommendation/evaluations. You must pay a fee for each report that is sent. These individual applications can consist of your personal statement, resumes, additional forms or questions and typically require an additional application fee.

Most law schools use the LSAC electronic application service available through your CAS account. This service allows you to simultaneously fill out all of your individual school applications online. As with all aspects of the application process, follow all directions carefully; if you're filling out applications online, you may want to get or download a paper copy of the applications to make sure you complete them as directed and include any and all necessary attachments.

- **Interviews** are not typically a part of the law school application process.
- **Paying for Applications** can be expensive. For this reason, apply only when you are competitive and ready to go to law school. If you have financial need, you can apply for a fee waiver through LSAC to waive the cost of the LSAT and CAS. You can also request waivers for the individual school application fees by contacting the admission offices at your intended schools.

STUDENTS FROM GROUPS UNDERREPRESENTED IN LAW SCHOOL and the LEGAL PROFESSION

Law schools seek to educate a wide range of professionals to serve in an increasingly diverse society. Diversity among law school students also adds to classroom learning as students reflect the variety of perspectives which impact the U.S. legal system. A commitment to alleviate the historic shortage of lawyers from underrepresented groups is shared by most law schools and legal organizations like the LSAC, the ABA and the Association of American Law Schools. Review chapter 6 of the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* and the "Diversity in Law School" section of the LSAC website for more information on this topic.

CHOOSING A LAW SCHOOL

What Should I Look For In A Law School?

Most people apply to 7-9 schools and there are many factors to consider when choosing a law school. It is important to define the criteria which are most important to you as an individual, then try to determine how each law school meets your needs and what your chances for admission are at that school. Visit the schools' websites for details about specific programs, classes, and extracurricular opportunities (club, clinics, journals, etc.). The *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* (searchable online by LSAT score and GPA at www.lsac.org) has useful information and admissions profiles on schools. Another helpful book is *Law School Lists*, which contains information on law schools offering joint degrees; various specialties; study abroad, summer or evening programs; law clinics; scholarships; school attrition, placement and bar passage rates, etc. CSC has these books and also maintains a collection of law school catalogs and well-known rankings of law schools, along with caveats for using them. Additional tools to help you choose schools are available on the "Law" page of <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

THE COST OF A LEGAL EDUCATION and FINANCIAL AID

How Am I Going To Pay For Law School?

In California, tuition at private law schools averages around \$45,000 per year, while the cost for California residents at UC law schools is over \$32,000. Other costs include books, supplies, school fees and interest on loans. Added to living and

transportation costs, these expenses over a three-year period make legal education a substantial investment. The majority of law school students rely on loans as their primary source of financial aid, and the average student graduates with over \$100,000 in law school debt.

The decision to make the investment should be based on a commitment to practice law or a well-thought out determination that law school is the best route to other career aspirations. Some people seek what they perceive as a generic professional degree and go to law school almost by default. A student who attends law school and becomes an attorney but does not have his or her heart in it faces a miserable experience plus a potentially huge debt. However, you should not be deterred from attending law school just for financial reasons because there is help available. Potential law school applicants should endeavor to maintain a good credit rating and to learn about debt management.

Information about financing your law school education can be found at www.lsac.org. Also, the financial aid offices at each law school will work with you on financing your education and are the best source of information about federal, state and private loans, college work-study, scholarships and grants. Most law school loans can be consolidated into payments that usually begin six to nine months after graduation from law school. The non-profit Access Group, www.accessgroup.org, assists students with affordable financing.

THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE and the BAR EXAM

What's Law School Like?

Preparation for the practice of law generally requires a college degree (in most states) and the completion of three (full-time) or four (part-time/evening) years of law school, after which you earn a *juris doctor* degree (J.D.). The first full year of law school is prescribed, and typically includes courses in torts, criminal law, contracts, civil procedure, property, legal research, writing and advocacy. During the second and third years, and in the summer between these years, law students complete elective courses of interest and train in professional settings such as the courts, legal clinics, public defense, prosecution and other areas which provide students with practical experience prior to graduation. Law students generally do not develop specialty expertise in law school; it is typically acquired through work experience after law school. Law graduates seeking further specialization, or research and teaching careers, can complete a master of laws degree (LL.M.), usually one year of advanced legal study in a particular field such as tax, labor or patent law.

How Do I Get My License To Practice Law After I Graduate From Law School?

To become licensed to practice law and give legal counsel, a law school graduate must pass the bar exam, a multiple-day examination, which tests the candidate on areas of law pertinent to that particular state. The bar exam differs from state to state, but some states grant reciprocity, or the privilege to practice law, to those who have already passed the bar in another state. Information on bar passage rates of graduates of individual law schools is available in the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide*.

RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS INTERESTED IN LAW

Where Can I Get More Information About Law School?*

CSC presents a law school fair each fall where you can meet informally with law school representatives to learn about individual schools. Other CSC services include: workshops and panels; printed guides, reference materials and books; admission data on UCSD graduates; links to law school sites at <http://career.ucsd.edu/>; law school catalogs; individual advising appointments; and application essay critique.

Where Can I Find Information About Law-Related Jobs, Internships, and Organizations?

Port Triton, the CSC job posting site found at <http://career.ucsd.edu> sometimes lists a small number of employment opportunities in law offices and legal service organizations. Legal and government-related internships can be found on the Internship Supersite section of CSC's website. The CSC Career & Internship Library has occupational information both in print and online. UCSD's Community Law Project (<http://clp.ucsd.edu>) offers opportunities to get practical experience working with real legal situations. Phi Alpha Delta and the Pre-Law Society are two pre-law student organizations at UCSD and the Mock Trial team at UCSD gives undergraduates sample courtroom experience – information about these organizations can be found at the Center for Student Involvement (<http://getinvolved.ucsd.edu>). Positions on college judicial boards and in student government can also provide opportunities to gain meaningful experience.

Students are strongly encouraged to read the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* online or in print at CSC and review the resources on the Law page of the CSC website. Those who still have questions or concerns may call (858) 534-4939 or stop by CSC to request an individual appointment with an advisor.

*To receive email notification of upcoming pre-law events at UCSD, sign up for the Pre-Law Listserv. Subscribe by entering your email address at <http://lists.ucsd.edu/mailman/listinfo/pre-law-ucsd-/>.