



Higher Education

What to do if you are thinking about going to law school.

BY PRISCILLA CAMACHO

WHAT TO DO? WHERE TO GO? HOW DO I EVEN GET INTO LAW SCHOOL? These are just a few of the many questions that can run through your mind the minute you think law school might be an option for you. The journey to law school is not complicated and can be easily maneuvered with some simple research and planning.

IS LAW SCHOOL FOR YOU?

If you have even the smallest interest in attending law school, you should consider gaining some firsthand experience in the area of law. To find a place to do this, you will want to contact friends and family—or, as better known in South Texas, your “comadres y compadres”—for potential contacts in the legal arena. While you are in high school or even when you are in college, working in a law office as a runner or a file clerk can give you an idea of the type of work and lifestyle you might experience after law school, and it can help you determine whether you still think the legal profession is the right path for you. It’s not essential to know what kind of law you want

all out. By then, you will be busy planning for graduation and beyond, and you might not have enough time left to take all of the courses that you need for law school, so learning about law school admission requirements in advance will give you an advantage.

HIGH GRADES AND DIVERSE COURSE WORK EQUALS A HIGHER CHANCE OF ADMISSION

In both high school and college, getting high marks in your course work is essential to improving your chances for admittance into law school. Do not assume, however, that having high grades in college guarantees easy admittance into law school or easy high marks in law school.

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to practice at this point, though. Lawyers are not just litigators, and you will have plenty of time to discover which avenue of law you would like to pursue. For example, lawyers handle legal transactions, teach, manage businesses or athletes, work as forensic accountants, and more. In short, lawyers do more than just what you see on *Law and Order*.

RESEARCHING THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Any good trial lawyer knows that the best way to prepare for trial is to figure out what elements need to be proven in court and by what standard those elements must be proved. As a potential law school student, you should approach the application process in a similar way. This means you should look at law school applications and the admission requirements for those schools in your early college years. Some schools might have more preference for community service, while other programs might want to see a certain number of course credits in particular areas. Knowing what you need to do far in advance will be highly beneficial in preparing yourself to meet all admission requirements, rather than waiting until your last year as an undergraduate to try to figure it

Admissions offices want to see that you have had varied course work, particularly in areas that enhance your critical thinking and reading comprehension. Not only does this sort of background appeal to law school admissions committees, but once you get into law school, it will also assist you in learning and applying the famous Socratic method, used by so many law school professors. Long story short: taking one painting class might be fine, but spending a whole semester studying 1990s films might not be the best use of your time.

LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

So you have figured out you want to apply to a law school, but now, where to go? Most folks have heard of that pesky bar exam and know that each state requires law school graduates to take it in order to practice law in that state. Generally speaking, it is beneficial to go to law school in the same state where you intend to practice law. However, attending law school in one state is not a complete barrier to practicing in another state.

First and foremost, your choice of a law school should be based on the programs available at the school. For example, if you desire a curriculum that incorporates a

significant amount of practical experience, then you may find yourself evaluating the pros and cons of out-of-state and in-state schools. Or what if you are interested in pursuing a master's degree while simultaneously completing law school? These are all major factors to consider when deciding which schools you want to apply to. In other words, don't limit yourself to a specific location if your desired program is available outside that area.

In any case, when applying, don't limit yourself to just one or even two schools. Apply to several, including those you consider your dream schools. The more schools you apply to, the more options you will have when it comes time to decide on the one you will attend.

DON'T LET THE EXPENSE OF LAW SCHOOL DETER YOU

A common misconception is that law school is available only to those who have the funds to pay for it. While it is true that attending law school is not cheap, several resources are available to assist applicants in paying for their dream. To start, when you are first applying to law schools, take advantage of waivers for the application fee. Application fees can be costly, so it doesn't hurt to ask

what the requirements are for a fee waiver. The worst they can say is that you don't qualify. And if you do qualify, you have just saved yourself \$50 to \$100 per application. Next, look online to see if you qualify for any scholarships, especially local ones, and check with the prelaw advisers on your college campus to find out what scholarships you may be eligible for. Contrary to what some people say, there are alternatives to relying solely on loans to assist you in paying for law school, but you need to look for them.

At the end of the day, there is no single right way to get to law school. What is vital is that once you decide that law school is for you, take the time to do some research, and don't let anything or anyone keep you from getting to your goal. **TBJ**



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