

Applying to Law School



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Explore. Experience. Engage.

A good, complete application requires proper planning! A complete application consists of five main items: your undergraduate GPA; your LSAT score; the application itself; your resume and your recommendation letters. Some applicants will also include addenda to discuss grade trends, standardized testing conditions or criminal records. To present yourself in the best light, you should begin preparations as soon as possible. The following strategies should help you get started.

Is law school right for you? Many applicants to law school know little about the profession and about trends in law school admissions. While you are completing the application process, take time to learn more about legal education and the profession. See Career Services' "Planning for Law School" and "Do you really want to be a lawyer?" handouts for more information.

Recommended Timetable for Law School Applicants

April/May: Prepare and register for the June LSAT. Begin researching law schools and identify possible choices. Start collecting reference letters.
June: Take the LSAT. Continue research and finalize law school choices. Make a file for each law school and include deadlines, addresses, etc. Update your resume.
July/August : Receive LSAT scores. Send requests for information to law schools of interest. Begin writing your personal statement. Keep track of which reference letters you have received and send thank-you notes to the writers.
August/September: Subscribe to CAS. Have official transcripts from every school you have ever attended sent directly to CAS. Begin completing applications. Keep photocopies of all application materials and correspondence. Forward reference letters to CAS.
October/December: Take, or retake if necessary, the LSAT. Complete remaining applications. Receive notification from CAS that Law School Reports have been mailed to law schools. Rank law schools on your list.
Spring Semester: Receive offers of admission. Apply for scholarships and financial aid. Tour law schools that have offered admission. Inform Career Services of admissions offers and which school you have selected.

One of the first things you should do is set up your [Law School Admission Council \(LSAC\) account](#). This will be your gateway to the entire law school admission process. Your LSAC account number will be your primary identifier for all LSAC services. You will use your LSAC account both for registering for the LSAT, receiving your scores, using the Credential Assembly Service, and submitting law school applications. Once you set up your LSAC account, you will be able to easily go through all of the steps necessary to register for the LSAT, prepare all of your credentials, complete your applications, and check the status of your application process.

Mastering the LSAT

The LSAT tests your reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and logical reasoning skills. While the LSAT is offered four times per year (June, October, December and February), most applicants plan to take the LSAT in June in the year preceding law school entry

in order to send completed applications as early as possible. Many schools practice rolling admissions and early applicants are in a better position. Do not take the test cold and don't take the real test for practice. If you cannot take the June exam due to study abroad, work, or lack of preparation, you can still apply for early admission by taking the October exam. Schools treat multiple scores differently; most will average all scores. Testing locations may change, but SU, as well as UT, ACC and Huston-Tillotson, currently serve as testing sites.

Prepare for the LSAT and plan to take it only once. Many LSAT preparation methods exist, including private prep courses, either live (\$1000+) or on the web (\$500-800) and self-prep (\$70-125). Mock LSATs are available several times per year and you can purchase previous LSATs.

Register for the LSAT as soon as possible to reserve a spot at your first-choice test site. If you're taking the June test, determine where you will live at that time. After registration, don't throw the LSAT Registration book away!! You'll need to refer to it later.

Credential Assembly Service (CAS)

The [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#) streamlines the admission process because you need only have your transcripts, recommendations, and evaluations sent one time to LSAC, and they summarize them and combine them with your LSAT scores and writing samples into a report that is sent to your prospective law schools. The Credential Assembly Service includes access through your LSAC account to electronic applications for all ABA-approved law schools. Most ABA-approved law schools require that applicants use CAS (formerly known as the Law School Data Assembly Service, or LSDAS) as a centralized, standard method of receiving applicant information. The basic steps for assembling your CAS file can be done in any order, but they must all be completed before any law school reports will be sent.

- Create your secure LSAC.org account if you have not already done so
- Make sure there is a reportable LSAT score in your LSAC file
- Provide information about schools you attended to LSAC
- Make sure all required transcripts are sent to LSAC
- Make sure all required letters of recommendation and evaluations are sent to LSAC
- Pay the \$124 fee for the Credential Assembly Service. (Your account will remain active for five years.)

Read carefully the instructions in your CAS registration materials. After registration with CAS, you will contact schools you have attended and request official academic transcripts be sent directly to CAS. Transcripts for courses taken during high school concurrent registration or at a community college must be sent by the school granting the credit. CAS will calculate an overall GPA for you. This GPA may differ from your Southwestern GPA if you have many transfer hours. Finally, you should send reference letters to CAS. You can check the status of your CAS file on the web and determine which letters and transcripts have been received. You can also determine whether a law school has requested your file and when the file was mailed to the school.

After receiving all of your transcripts and forms, CAS will compile a Master Law School Report and send you a copy. Check all of the information to be certain no errors exist. You will also receive a list of mathematical formulas that some law schools use to calculate an index for the admissions process. Schools to which

you have applied will then request a copy of your Report directly from CAS. Be certain to request the proper number of Reports be generated. CAS does not send your resume or personal statement to law schools! Remember that if you create an item, you must send it directly to each law school.

Law School Resumes

Unless forbidden, you should send a resume with each law school application. This resume will generally be longer and contain more detail than a resume used in a job search. A typical senior will have one-and-one-half to two pages. Several good examples of resumes are available in Career Services. The resume should enable the reader to know everything about your community service, employment, extracurricular activities, special programs and academic honors. You should include information about where you went to high school, but you generally don't include details about high school activities. Remember to include specific information and details. For example, selection criteria for honors let the reader understand the significance of the honor. Career Services is always ready to review your resume and offer suggestions.

Personal Statements and Addenda

Your grades and LSAT scores give the committee some idea of your academic abilities. Your resume lets them know what you've done and where you've been. The personal statement can be the most important part of the application because it lets the committee know something about you. Because most law schools do not interview applicants, a personal statement is your only chance to provide additional information to the admissions committee. Your resume in prose format is not a personal statement! Different people will give you different advice on what to include in your statement, so always consider the source of information. Before you mail your application and statement, have others read it and offer objective comments. Career Services, academic advisors, and trusted professors are good choices for critics. Spend time reflecting on your life, the events and people who have impacted you, and the important things in your life. Write a statement that lets the reader know more about you. To have a statement reviewed by Career Services call 512.863.1346 to set up an appointment.

If you had a poor semester or low LSAT scores, you may wish to discuss this in your application. Some will advise you to include that in your personal statement. You should do this only if that is the essence of the story you wish to tell the committee. However, overcoming low grades or doing poorly on the LSAT will not be the thesis of most statements. You may include an addendum with your application that discusses only the reasons for poor performance and how you overcame that hurdle. Reasons may include illness, financial problems, lack of study skills, or lack of motivation. If you wish to prove that the LSAT is not a good indicator of your future performance, you may wish to discuss your SAT/ACT scores and how those scores did not predict your success at Southwestern. Once again, Career Services is happy to review these addenda.

Reference Letters

Reference letters may serve a crucial role when the admissions committee must decide between you and another applicant. Generally, you will need three letters. Choose evaluators who know you and can speak from a first-hand perspective of you and your abilities. At least one letter should be from a faculty member at Southwestern from whom you have taken a class. Faculty can compare you with other students whom they have taught, discuss your writing and analytical abilities, and remark on your behavior and attendance in the classroom. Letters from friends and acquaintances will not hurt your admissions chances, but generally do not improve them. A letter from your employer that discusses your work ethic and skills will generally outweigh a judge you know socially and says that you are a good person.

Law School Applications

You should apply to law schools electronically right from your LSAC.org account (to US member law schools only). Schools will then request your Credential Assembly Service law school report

from LSAC. **Be sure your LSAC application information is correct. If there are mistakes, correct them as soon as possible!**

Your application form will generally be that which you submit via your LSAC account. However, each law school may require other information regarding letters of recommendation, resumes or personal statements. Read each list of requirements thoroughly *before* you begin to submit materials. Consult the law school, Career Services or a professor if you have any questions. Schools request different items, which range from postcards or labels, to second and third essays. Applications should be sent as early in the application season as possible.

Early Decision/Early Admission. Several schools have early decision or early admission programs. Some schools will not have applications until late September or early October. After obtaining all of the applications, keep good records on application deadlines and procedures. **You must also keep a photocopy of each completed application.** When you take the bar exam during your first year of law school, you are required to submit a copy of the application to the bar examiners.

To which law schools should you apply?

You should examine why you want to attend law school and your realistic chances of gaining admission to different schools. *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools* provides a starting place for examining your options; copies are available at www.lsac.org. Factors to consider when choosing law schools include reputation, location, facilities, teaching methods, combined graduate/law programs, placement and bar passage rates, costs, clinical programs, faculty, part-time or evening divisions, class size, and student to faculty ratio. Your list of law schools should include at least one school where your chances of admission are high and at least one school that is a long shot. Your Southwestern professors and Career Services can help you evaluate your list of possible schools. Visit as many law schools as possible. Ask Career Services the name of the Southwestern contact student at a particular school. Many wait to visit schools until the spring semester, when law schools have "admitted student days."

Other Concerns

Several issues may arise during the application process, ranging from questions about trends in grades to minor legal indiscretions. Never assume that you should gloss over any incidents in your past. Remember that the Bar Examiners will receive a copy of your law school application from the law school when you enroll. They are checking for honesty and consistency. Failure to disclose scholastic probation or a minor criminal violation on your application could result in your being denied admission to the bar in three years! All infractions of the law must be reported, *even if they were expunged or if you received deferred adjudication.*

All additional documents, including your personal statement and addenda, should have your name and Social Security number near the top of the page. Keep a file to monitor the progress of each application and apply well in advance of deadlines.

Important Contacts for Law School Applicants

- Law School Admission Council: www.lsac.org (Register for LSAT, check status of CAS file, order old tests, find links to every accredited law school)
- ABA-LSAC Official Guide to Law Schools: <http://officialguide.lsac.org>
- American Bar Association: www.abanet.org
- (Explore careers and specializations)
- National Association of Law Placement: www.nalp.org (Legal careers, current placement statistics and salaries)
- SU Career Services pre-law website: <http://www.southwestern.edu/offices/careers/graduateschool/lawschool.php> (includes various test-prep providers)