

Applying to Law School



Career Services

Southwestern University at Georgetown, Texas
McCook-Crain Building, 512.863.1346, 512.863.1270 fax
career.services@southwestern.edu
www.southwestern.edu/careers
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 letters you have received and send Thank You cards to the writers.
August/September: Subscribe to LSDAS. Have official transcripts from every school you have ever attended sent directly to LSDAS. Begin completing applications. Keep photocopies of all application materials and correspondence. Forward reference letters to LSDAS.
September/December: Take, or retake if necessary, the LSAT. Complete remaining applications. Receive notification from LSDAS that Law School Reports have been mailed to law schools. Rank law schools on your list.
Spring Semester: Receive offers of admission. Apply for financial aid and scholarships. Tour law schools that have offered admission. Inform Career Services of admissions offers and which school you have selected.

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, September, 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 September exam. Schools treat multiple scores differently; most will average all scores. The three closest testing sites to SU are in Austin at UT, ACC and Huston-Tillotson.

Prepare for the test and plan to take it only once. There are many LSAT preparation methods. Some students choose to enroll in private prep courses, either live (\$1000+) or on the web (\$500-800), while others do 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 are taking the June test, determine where you will be living at that time. After registration, do not throw the LSAT Registration book away!! You will need to refer to it later.

Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS)

ABA-approved law schools require that applicants use LSDAS as a centralized, standard method of receiving applicant information, including: undergraduate academic summaries; copies of all academic transcripts; copies of LSAT scores, and LSAT writing samples; and letters of evaluation. Read carefully the instructions in your LSDAS registration materials. After registration with LSDAS, you will contact schools you have attended and request official academic transcripts be sent directly to LSDAS. Transcripts for courses taken during high school concurrent registration or at a community college must be sent by the school granting the credit. LSDAS 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 LSDAS. You can check the status of your LSDAS 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, LSDAS 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 LSDAS. Be certain to request the proper number of Reports be generated. LSDAS 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 lets 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 have done and where you have 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 x1346 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

Each law school application is different. You should read each application thoroughly *before* you begin to fill it out. Consult the law school or Career Services or a professor if you have any questions. ***If you fill out a portion of your application incorrectly and send it to the law school, you cannot correct the mistake.*** Instructions accompanying applications should be understood before beginning the process. 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. Applications are not available in Career Services because law schools prefer to know which students are interested in their school. 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.

Applicants may choose to purchase LSACD from the Law School Admissions Council, either in CD format or the web version. The program contains applications from all accredited law schools, as well as a computerized copy of *The Official Guide to Law Schools*.

You may find using the computer less stressful than typing application forms. After completing information on the computer, applicants can print the application or transmit it electronically, depending on the law school. All law schools will accept applications prepared using this program. See www.lsac.org for details. If you choose to purchase the LSACD, you must also submit postcards and other materials that are not included on the CD. You should also read the entire application booklet prior to application. Important information about the application process and scholarship opportunities is listed in each booklet. Some schools have on-line versions of their application, which you submit electronically. Be extremely cautious when reviewing your application before you hit the "submit" button.

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.*

Finally, be neat! All applications should be typed or computer-processed, even if the instructions say that handwritten answers are acceptable. All additional pages, 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 LSDAS 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 (Learn about legal careers, current placement statistics and salaries)
- Princeton Review: www.princetonreview.com/law/default.asp
- Kaplan Test Prep: www.kaptest.com