IPFW Pre-Law Handbook

Prof. Georgia Wralstad Ulmschneider
Robert Gruber, Jr.
Scott Barnes
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Introduction

The path to law school is full of challenges. This handbook is a guide to help students reach a particular destination: quality legal education preparing graduates for fulfilling careers in both legal and non-legal fields. Those of you who choose to practice in one of the many fields of law will find that instead of having simply a job, you will have found a profession.

Regardless of where you currently stand in the process, whether you are deciding to apply, preparing for admission, or heading off to law school, there is much information here to help you reach your goal of successfully studying and practicing law. This handbook addresses a variety of concerns for prospective law students by narrating a conversation between a motivated undergraduate student and a campus pre-law advisor. This conversation addresses questions such as whether law school is right for you; how best to direct one’s undergraduate studies; how to select the right law school for you; what to expect during the admission process; what kind of concerns confront minority students; how to finance law school; what to expect from legal study; and what kind of career options are available to law school graduates.

This handbook is a tool to be used in conjunction with many other resources for helping students achieve their professional goals. The aim is to cover the most common questions and concerns about law school but won’t include specific details for every unique situation. There is no way around the hard work of preparing, choosing, and applying to law schools. Yet careful planning can increase the potential of finding the law school which best fits your particular goals and temperament.
Several references will be made throughout the handbook to the Law School Admission School Council (LSAC) website at www.lsac.org. The website is a valuable resource for prospective students with questions regarding all aspects of law school. A variety of information can be found on searching for the right law school in addition to LSAT testing dates and even tracking applications. Simply put, the site offers free and easy access to help students throughout the application process from beginning to end.

Note to readers: The Bibliography at the end of handbook contains the works which were specifically consulted in the compilation of this handbook. The Supplemental Reading section contains a much broader array of readings and resources to help students get a fuller picture of what the study of law requires and what the practice of law actually entails. This handbook will cover several broad topics while referring readers to sources to discover more specific information.

Please read the handbook and then feel free to schedule an appointment with the campus pre-law advisor by contacting Barb Blauvelt, Political Science/History secretary, at 481-6686 or stopping in at Liberal Arts room 209.
Deciding to go to Law School

*If I don’t know what kind of lawyer I want to become yet, should I still go to law school?*

First of all, the practice of law covers many different kinds of careers. From private practice to large law firms, corporate counsel to governmental positions, boutique practices to trial litigation – law encompasses many types of practice. The common thread tying together these different kinds of legal practice is what Gary Munneke calls “an orderly process of dispute resolution.” Therefore, if you enjoy solving intricate problems and want to have a challenging and dynamic career then the study of law could be a good fit for you. And don’t worry about not knowing what specialty you would like to practice: most lawyers don’t find their niche until they have explored upper level classes in law school or have had a few years of experience working on different kinds of projects.

*Do all lawyers have to do trial work?*

No. Most lawyers don’t work in court rooms. Litigation is just one kind of legal work. Lawyers also engage in negotiation, counseling, mediation, arbitration, and education. In addition to the wide variety of substantive fields of law, there are several types of organizations that you can work for which deliver countless kinds of services. The important part is finding a work environment where you feel comfortable.

*What kind strengths are most important for lawyers to possess?*

While each field of legal practice has particular skill sets specific to the demands of the discipline, generally speaking, all lawyers must be able to think critically, organize many
different kinds of information, and prioritize underlying ideas and concepts. Additionally, strong reading and writing skills are necessary.

**What is the day-to-day life of a practicing lawyer like?**

Much variation exists in the practice of law across numerous areas and over the years of one’s experience. The first years of practice are generally the most demanding which involve repetitious and detail oriented work. The hours can be long and unpredictable with mandatory travel often required. It’s a general rule that in order to bill a client for eight hours a lawyer has to work ten hours. Yet in the meantime there’s the satisfaction of fulfilling and challenging work which demands critical and creative thought and analysis which combine with a high ceiling for financial reward. New and meaningful friendships are often also formed with your peers at this time. Simply put, the practice of law is not simply a job but a way of life.

**Do I need to have a specific kind of personality in order to be a successful lawyer?**

It’s helpful to ask yourself if you naturally tend more toward being a specialist in a specific area or a generalist who is most comfortable working across disciplines. In *Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want to be a Lawyer* there’s a very good discussion of the differences between specialists and generalists. Basically, specialists prefer independent roles and working with others as an authority figure rather than as a team member whereas generalists prefer a variety of different tasks and a cooperative sharing of responsibility. It’s often said that the practice of law favors specialists more than generalists since subject matter expertise demands focused commitment from the legal practitioner. Generalists, on the other hand, are well-suited to become managers of departments or of the organization in which they work – therefore both kinds of temperaments
can succeed in the practice of law. The goal is to recognize which category you would identify yourself with.

**How much money do most starting lawyers earn?**

Currently, starting salaries range from $20,000 to over $150,000 with a median salary just over $50,000. When calculating your probable starting salary as a lawyer it’s important to consider what Munneke calls the “opportunity cost” of law school: not only are most students going into considerable debt to pay for their education, but you also have to think about the money you are not earning while you are studying. When you consider the loans to be repaid and the money you have not earned in the meantime, the full financial responsibility becomes clear.

**Why do many lawyers end up changing careers after graduating from law school?**

Frankly, lawyers occupy a distinguished position in American society. Many people are drawn by the prestige of the career to the study of law without sufficiently determining if the practice of law suits them personally. A broad impression of what it means to be a lawyer is insufficient – you need to do research and talk with both lawyers and law students before committing to the major investment of time and money for law school. Ask yourself, why do you want to go to law school? Is this your desire or have people simply told you that you would be a good lawyer someday? How do you envision spending your days, evenings, and weekends? The existence of so many unhappy lawyers in large part is due to not enough prospective law students carefully thinking through what it means to be a lawyer. Working as a lawyer in the law profession is a way of life and not simply a job.
Undergraduate Preparation

Should I focus on a pre-law track as an undergraduate?

The notion that there is some set “pre-law” major as an undergraduate is a myth. Law schools are looking for applicants who are academically well-rounded and who have distinguished themselves in many different fields of study. Generally, you should pay close attention to the development of skills and abilities related to reading, oral and written communication, and reasoning. Your courses should emphasize comprehension and analysis, including the critical understanding of institutions and ideas, while cultivating studious thought. You’ll maximize the value of your undergraduate studies by engaging with important issues while investigating your beliefs in the course of practicing close readings of complicated texts.

Also, be cautious about focusing too much energy on law-related classes as an undergraduate. Law schools want to know if you can think and write well, not whether you know the rules of evidence and procedure – that’s what law school is for! An understanding of the principles of law is very helpful whereas the undergraduate study of legal minutia can be counterproductive. Possessing the above mentioned skills will provide a leg up for any law student dealing with the rigorous workload demands.

*The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* points out seven basic areas of knowledge crucial to both a sound legal education and development into a competent attorney (in no particular order):

1) A broad understanding of history, particularly American history, and the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of the pluralistic society that presently exists in the United States;
2) A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory and of the contemporary American political system;

3) A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice;

4) A grounding in economics, particularly elementary microeconomic theory, and an understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy;

5) Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic precalculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data;

6) A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction; and

7) An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, or international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.

**How important is the study of a foreign language in college?**

The old adage runs as follows: ‘you never fully understand your native language until you have studied a foreign language’ – and it’s just as valid today as it ever was. Since law is a written form of communication, the critical understanding of language is very important in both law school and legal practice. Foreign language study teaches students to recognize how the meaning of words, their grammatical function, and their arrangement in sentences all work together to support an interpretation of a text. Such an ability to closely study the interrelationships of a document’s language is a serious competitive advantage in law school. An understanding of cultures and customs other than your own will also help provide you in future dealings with a wide variety of clients.

**What majors are the most popular for students accepted into law schools?**

At the top of the list are political science, English, and history. Just remember that the most important thing is that you feel interested and challenged in your course of study. A high GPA
and a broad course of studies are much more important than the actual major you have completed. So if you are more comfortable focusing on physics, Spanish, or biology it’s no problem so long as you make sure to satisfy the aforementioned seven areas of knowledge.

**How important are extracurriculars as an undergraduate?**

Law schools seek to fill their first year classes with applicants who bring significant life-experiences with them to the study of law. Whether you founded a campus organization, volunteered for non-profits, or served in the military, law schools value students who have learned about themselves and the society in which they live by engaging with life. So too, law schools want to know how your work experience has shaped who you are today. Your undergraduate years are an opportunity to cultivate breadth and depth of experience to draw upon in your study and application of the law.

**What about studying abroad; how important is it?**

Take advantage of the opportunities you have at IPFW to travel and study the languages and literatures of different peoples. Such experiences challenge us to think critically about why the world is the way it is, and this is a very helpful exercise of the faculties sought in a law student. Studying different cultures and languages also helps students to recognize different ways of viewing and interpreting events and ideas from different perspectives.
Self-Assessment

How do I find out if a law school will be a good fit for me?

A good place to begin your search is with a self-assessment. This is where you answer a series of general questions about the different aspects of the law school experience. From this self-assessment you’ll get an idea of the different kinds of environmental and academic conditions in which you are most comfortable. After you determine your specific strengths, preferences, and material needs, you can then bring in the results of your self-assessment for a meeting with the campus pre-law advisor to help focus your search for a law school.

Here’s a small series of representative questions for you to answer to get a more specific idea of what you need from a law school:

1. Where am I most comfortable working? In large, busy settings or do I thrive in more closely-knit and personal surroundings?

2. How important is student body diversity for my educational goals? Do I want many cultural influences to challenge my points of view or do I wish to focus my educational pursuits among those who share similar cultural and intellectual reference points for me to engage with?

3. Am I interested in going to a law school that is faith-based?

4. Would I be in a better position for success by going to a regional or local law school in order to maintain family connections and support networks or might I be motivated to pursue a school in a bigger job-market city?

6. Am I comfortable where I am or am I chomping at the bit to go someplace new?

7. Based on the kinds of classes I’ve taken (or am taking), what type of law school focus would best serve my interests? Do I have a theoretical orientation? Am I a nuts and bolts thinker? Am I motivated to take foreign language classes during law school? Does a dual M.A./J.D. look especially appealing?

_Since law school is so competitive, shouldn’t I be happy just to get accepted somewhere?_

The work you’re going to have to do as a law student will be all-consuming. Since success in law school demands complete attention, make sure that you find a school in which you’ll be comfortable so you can commit yourself fully to your studies. If you’re overwhelmed by large classes or feel suffocated by a homogeneous student body then you’ll have less of yourself to devote to your studies. So take what you’ve found from your self-assessment and compare it to a few dozen schools to find which ones might be a good fit. Another benefit to this self-investigation process is that it makes filling out applications all that much easier later on when you sit down to tell schools why you’re a great applicant. A great place to begin is the [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) website. From the homepage click on the Prospective Students tab followed by the Search for Right Law School link to get started. The search outlines available are excellent and allow students a variety of options to explore. Students can conduct a quick search comparing their GPA and LSAT scores with past average scores for hundreds of institutions. For greater in-depth searches students can take advantage of the “detailed” search option that will be discussed later on page thirteen.
Considering the Differences

*With more than 200 different ABA-approved law schools to choose from, how do prospective students meaningfully make sense of all the differences?*

Well, in a sense you can look at the process of determining which schools to apply to as a foreshadowing of your future work as a lawyer. You have to begin with a strong sense of self-identity and then carefully collect data regarding possible law schools to attend. By weighing the information you collect you will be better able to make an informed decision. So as you can see, identifying the unique qualities of different law schools is a critical factor in finding the right fit for you.

*If law school, like most everything else in life, is largely what a student makes of it, does it really matter where you end up?*

It’s true that you can receive an excellent legal education at all of the different ABA-approved law schools. Yet it’s still the case that the particulars of the various programs have a direct role in shaping the course of your future as a lawyer: emphasis of course offerings, varying teaching methods, cost of attendance, options for independent study, availability of legal internships, degree of financial assistance, involvement in governmental affairs, access to hands-on clinical programs, and even health insurance offerings – all of which have a direct impact on your quality of life for three years of law school.
How do you evaluate the reputation of different law schools?

I recommend consulting the ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools to get an idea of the factors comprising law schools’ reputations in general and how all the specific schools compare with one another. The traditional components of a law school’s reputation are the strength of the curriculum, publication records of the faculty, the ability of your peers, quality of library facilities, the kind of career services offered, and whether the law school is affiliated with a parent university as in the relationship between the Mauer School of Law in Bloomington and Indiana University. An excellent quick reference can be found on the “Detailed Search” option at http://officialguide.lsac.org/release/Search/DetailedSearch.aspx. It can also be accessed from the www.lsac.org homepage by locating the Search for the Right Law School link located under the Prospective Students tab and then clicking on the Search for law schools link. Here students can view a variety of detailed information about hundreds of law schools throughout the country. For example, there are statistics for graduates of universities comparing overall bar passage rates, rates for first time takers of the test, and the percentage of graduates who are employed within 9 months of graduation. This can be a valuable tool in shaping the reputation a particular law school may carry. In all there are detailed tabs for Admissions, Enrollment, Finances, Curriculum, Faculty, and After Graduation that offer additional information.

You can get a sense of curriculum strength in the extent and frequency of class offerings, the number of classes taught by full-time faculty, and the relative importance of visiting professor lectureship programs. The backgrounds and interests of faculty members can be investigated in The Association of American Law School’s Directory of Law Teachers which in turn provides a sense of the law school’s intellectual climate. The most common method of judging the reputation of law schools is simply comparing the average LSAT and GPA of the entering class
of students. This measure gives you a general idea of the ability of one’s co-students. Yet in the end, it’s important to find an environment in which you can shine while also learning from the questions and insights of your peers.

Also, don’t forget to consider the quality of the library. The facilities and resources available at a library go far beyond simply the number of physical books on the shelves – more important is the quality of their resources, the availability of the most commonly used materials, sufficiency of individual and group workspace, access to electronic databases, participation in interlibrary networks for resource retrieval, employment of enough research librarians, and finally, whether the hours of the library match your schedule. Since you’ll probably end up spending more time in the library than anywhere else, make sure it’s able to meet your needs.

A word about a law school’s parent university. When a law school is directly affiliated with a university it often means that more course options are available, student bodies tend to be more diverse, a greater infrastructure of facilities often exists, access to student housing is more common, and there’s generally more support for job placement activities. Don’t underestimate the importance of career services such as a placement office which helps connect students with internships and recruiters or counseling services which help with job searches and interview strategies. Such resources are invaluable aids.

*What’s the difference between national, regional, and local schools?*

If you take a look at *Thinking about Law School: A Minority Guide* you’ll see that “all ABA-approved law schools are, in effect, national because they are required to teach a more or less standard curriculum, maintain a specific level of library holdings, and employ faculties with reasonably diverse academic and professional experiences.” Hence the descriptions of national,
regional, and local are most useful in describing the geographic diversity of a law school’s applicant population. Additionally, national schools tend to focus more on the study of the theory side of law. National schools draw almost indistinguishably from across the nation as a whole and can maximize a student’s hire-ability across the nation and lower some of the initial hurdles job seekers may face. Regional school populations are drawn primarily from the geographic region of its location and often lead to classmates becoming lifelong associates in the practice of law. Local schools are often advantageous for applicants who are rooted locally and want to practice in the area upon graduation. Yet it’s in no way necessary to go to school where you want to practice. In fact, geographic diversity is one admission criteria that just might tip the balance in your favor if you apply to a school outside of the region in which you studied as an undergraduate. Remember that regardless of choice, all schools will emphasize similar skills emphasizing reading, listening, analysis, and organization. Law School searches can be separated by state, region, and national levels on the www.lsac.org website at the address http://officialguide.lsac.org/release/OfficialGuide_Default.aspx. This allows students to get an idea of the available law schools in any given area of the country and to compare the results.

What should I look for in a law school’s legal clinic offerings?

First of all, not all legal clinics are the same. Different schools are more committed philosophically and financially to clinical work. One key difference in the commitment level of different schools is evidenced in whether a school has placement-clinics as opposed to in-house clinics. If the law school operates under a placement-clinic model then you need to see how great of a workload the practicing lawyer in the placement-clinic has and how many students any one attorney is mentoring. In-house clinics often embrace a team-teaching approach. It will be helpful to find out if there is a classroom component before, during, or after the clinic in order to
evaluate the actual commitment of time which clinical participation requires. A helpful question to ask in the process of gauging the importance of the clinical program at a law school is whether or not full-time faculty members work in the clinic. This will show you if their tenured faculty have an active interest in the clinic’s work and give some indication of the kind of resources devoted to the clinic’s work. Generally, it’s really helpful to get a behind-the-scenes view of each prospective school’s legal clinics if you know you’re interested in this hands-on lawyering experience.

*What’s a M.A/J.D.?*

That’s where you complete the degree requirements for two different degrees over the course of generally four years. This can often provide job seekers with certain competitive advantages in the hiring process. In fact, some jobs, like patent lawyers, require master’s work in a scientific field. Seeking an additional degree in conjunction with a J.D. is both extremely difficult and time consuming. Please be sure to speak with an advisor before deciding if this course is best for you.

*What are the differences between the J.D./LLM?*

The J.D. program offers a degree that is required to practice law in the United States. The program is generally three-years and full-time and is considered a first degree in law. The Master of Laws Degree (LLM) is an advanced legal program aimed at J.D. students who desire to study for an advanced legal degree. The LLM requires applicants to have a first degree, such as the J.D., to even apply to an LLM program. For a complete list of primary differences between the two programs please visit [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) and locate the JD and LLM Differences link located under the Prospective Students and Future LLM Students tabs.

*How helpful are joint degree programs for law school students?*
Students who complete joint degree programs generally have more flexibility in the job market, experience greater educational rewards, graduate with more expertise in particular areas of the law, and are often paid more. The J.D./M.B.A. combination is the most common and is particularly helpful for those who hope to be in-house counsel for a corporation since the M.B.A. will help the lawyer understand and achieve the goals and objectives of management. A word of caution to remember that joint degrees increase one’s workload and take at least an extra year to complete. Students are also required to take both the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) and the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) and must be admitted separately to both programs. Therefore it’s critical that both programs are evaluated separately for their respective merits. Additionally, make sure to see if both programs are on the same schedule. Most of the time students complete the first year of one of the programs and then the first year of the other program in their second year of studies. After that the remaining years of both are combined.

*What’s considered a favorable faculty-to-student ratio?*

A ratio of 20:1 or less is seen as favorable and 30:1 is considered unfavorable. Also, it’s helpful to see if the faculty members graduated largely from the law school itself or if there are many different legal education perspectives represented. Prior reading and understanding of the course material is vital and allows students the opportunity to sharpen and refine their reading and analysis skills.

*Do students have time to participate in extracurriculars during law school?*

Finding ways to interact socially is crucial for relieving considerable amounts of stress and for building friendships with your peers. Most schools have numerous student organizations and honors’ societies such as Order of the Coif. Taking advantage of the different opportunities to
socialize is really important because it better equips you to deal with the stress and frustrations of legal study. Discussions with current and former students indicate that some minimum social interaction and activities is helpful to adjusting to a new environment and handling the workload of the first year of law school.

**Minority Students**

*How do law schools view the applications of minority students?*

Law schools today are acutely aware of the fact that minority populations in the United States lack adequate legal representation due to an historical trend of too few minority students studying in law schools. *Thinking about Law School: A Minority Guide* points out that law schools today are actively seeking minority applicants in order to improve the dramatic underrepresentation of minorities in the practice of law.

*Do you recommend drawing attention to minority status in the application process?*

If you have a strong sense of cultural identity which is tied to your status as a minority then I recommend highlighting this in your application. Today, as law schools work to put together first year classes which represent the cultural whole in which we live, minority status stands out as a positive factor in the application process. If you are motivated to provide legal services to communities which are traditionally underrepresented then this is even more helpful to your application.

*Should I apply to schools whose cumulative GPA and LSAT scores are above my own?*

You should note that the cumulative GPA and LSAT scores for admitted students at law schools are averages and may not reflect the school’s admission policies regarding minority or
educationally disadvantaged students. It’s important to remember that drive, motivation, and life-experience can often compensate for lower grades and test scores. Further, it’s well known that there are many successful lawyers who have a wide range of GPAs and LSAT scores. The “quick search” option at http://officialguide.lsac.org/release/OfficialGuide_Default.aspx allows you to quickly and easily compare the average range of scores of the GPA and LSAT scores for recent admitting classes. It can also be accessed by following the Search for the Right Law School link located under the Prospective Students tab located on the www.lsac.org homepage and following it to the Search for law schools link. In the upper left corner will be two search boxes where students can enter their undergraduate GPA and LSAT scores. Search results can be categorized either alphabetically or by likelihood of entry.

**Do you know of any source material regarding the percentages of minority students at different law schools?**

You can consult the “Opportunities in Law for Minority Men and Women” section in The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools for the percentage of minority students in different law schools. You can find up-to-date copies of this at the university library. You can also find additional information by clicking the Enrollment tab located within the “detailed search” at http://officialguide.lsac.org/release/Search/DetailedSearch.aspx to find percentages of both part-time and full time female and minority students currently enrolled at a particular university. You can also access this information by doing a “quick search” of your GPA and LSAT scores and then clicking the box of any schools you wish to learn more about and then clicking the View ABA Key Facts on Selected School search link located just above the sort drop-down tabs.
For further information or help with questions concerning diversity please visit the 
www.lsac.org homepage and locate the Racial/Ethnic Minority Applicants and LGBT Applicant links located near the bottom of the page under the Prospective Students section. Additional questions are addressed in detail and some students share personal experiences in video links as well.

The Admissions Process

What factors are considered by law school admissions offices?

Law schools employ a wide range of evaluative criteria in the process of deciding to whom they will grant their much coveted seats. These factors include, but are not limited to, your undergraduate (and graduate) GPA, the LSAT score, course of study with attention to its difficulty and depth, a personal statement, letters of recommendation, improvement of grades and grade distribution, the reputation of your undergraduate institution, extracurricular activities which exhibit character and commitment, community service, and work experience including any graduate courses you may have previously enrolled in. And as strange as it might sound, a student’s LSAT and GPA scores carry the most combined weight while for some schools the LSAT is the single most important criteria for admission. Oftentimes these two scores are combined into a simply calculated index which facilitates comparisons of different students’ academic strengths. Remember that the LSAT is viewed as an objective score while GPA often lends itself to more scrutiny. For example, if a student scores a 170 (out of a possible 180) it doesn’t matter whether that score came from an Ivy League institution or a small west coast
school. GPA on the other hand can be influenced and interpreted by the reputation of the institution in which it was achieved. All of these factors are compiled and evaluated by file readers at the law schools to which you apply.

*With such formal standards for admission, are law schools able to evaluate me as a distinct person?*

It’s in the interest of admission file readers to understand just who is applying and consider how they might fit into their program. Only a small percentage of applicants are what are called ‘automatic admits’ based on their grades and scores and implicitly expected to succeed in law school. Most applicants are carefully considered to determine what makes each student tick and thereby put together the best possible group of first year students. This can work to the advantage of students that don’t have degrees from a more “prestigious” institution. Law Schools value a diverse and well-rounded student body that has been shaped by real world experience and workloads. Yet since law schools generally don’t rely on interviews in the admissions process, the resources they draw upon are limited. Therefore it’s the responsibility of every applicant to present a picture in which you come to life on paper. Other than test scores, this is the most likely avenue to distinguish you from other applicants. It’s important to remember that in recent year’s law school applications have been steady rising even though the number of available slots has remained nearly the same.

*Can somebody get into law school if they had a couple of bad years and then pulled it together at the end of their undergrad studies?*

Most admitted classes have students who fall into the category of ‘reborn’ students. They’ve gone through difficult circumstances and then found an untapped academic resolve in their hard
times and go on to become successful law students and lawyers. The important thing if you fall into this group is to show evidence that you are part of this group and not simply say that you figured things out. You need to show a file reader that you have authentically grown from some life-changing event and are ready to meet the demands of legal study. Even if your GPA isn’t ideal, showing improvement of GPA can help you in the application process.

**What do people mean when they say you should apply to a certain number of ‘safe’ schools?**

A ‘safe’ school is one where you’re GPA and LSAT scores are above the mean rate of acceptance at the school. If you look at the *Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* you’ll find student acceptance profile grids for each law school to which you might consider applying. When your combined scores fall in the actual mean, these are schools that you have a reasonable possibility of being accepted if you put your best foot forward. Those institutions whose mean of acceptance is above your LSAT and GPA scores may still be sparingly applied to as ‘dream’ schools which might accept you because of intangibles evident in your personal statement, letters of recommendation, and life experience. The “quick search” function on the [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org) website comparing GPA and LSAT scores is once again recommended for “average” ranges of law schools across the country.

**The Application**

*Do you have any advice on how to approach the application process?*

First, think about the objective of your application: you’re working to be admitted to a law school, so you need to show your file readers that you can build a compelling argument. The
different elements of your application need to work together to build a coherent image of who you as a person are and where you see yourself headed in the future. To pull this off you’ll need to employ at least two vital skills required of all successful lawyers: careful planning and convincing advocacy.

It is advantageous at this point in the process to create a JD account on the www.lsac.org website. Creating an account allows prospective students additional services such as purchasing test preparation materials, registering for the LSAT, receiving LSAT scores early, and even applying to law schools online. It is relatively simple and the Create a JD Account link is located under the Prospective Students tab on the www.lsac.org homepage.

**What goes into the successful completion of an application?**

Remember that successful applications show that you’re ready to excel in a particular law school’s program. It’s also your first, and likely, only chance at making a good first impression. In part, your qualifications as an applicant are judged by how carefully and thoughtfully you put together the whole of your application, so it’s highly recommended that you put considerable time and effort into every step of the process. While it might sound simple, complete applications are the name of the game. The LSAT must be satisfactorily completed, personal statements written, two to three letters of recommendation must be gathered, a résumé needs to be updated/created, on average eight to ten applications need to be filled out, academic transcripts must be sent to the LSDAS (for the LSAC’s Credential Assembly Service), and any necessary addenda must be sent out if. For example, if you need to show grade improvements or explain a low LSAT score. Further, if a school invites you to add anything that you feel is relevant to your application be sure to respond to such requests.
How do you recommend keeping track of everything that needs to be done?

After you’ve narrowed down your search to a handful of law schools it’s best to put together a master to-do-list. Make careful note of all the deadlines for each school and establish a plan for completing each step in a timely fashion. Many applicants find creating a flow chart outlining each required step in the process to be helpful and organizing all the different application forms.

Can I simply duplicate the same application material and organization for all the schools I’m applying to?

No. Remember that admission file readers can easily sift out the application materials which are copied and pasted from one school to another. Generic or vague material will not help. Rather, each of your applications needs to be tailored to stress each particular law school’s primary focus. This process will help show the committee that you bring something special to the first year class and are serious about the application process.

When’s the best time to apply?

Since most law schools have rolling admissions, where students are accepted on a first-come first-serve basis, it’s ideal to apply in November to those schools you know you would like to attend. The earlier you finish the application process the sooner you can receive acceptance letters or possible wait-list notifications. And though being wait-listed is no one’s first choice, finding out you are wait-listed in December is much better than finding out in April when there is limited time to send in addenda to further demonstrate why you’re the right choice for a certain school. The chance for admission boils down to a simple calculation: the longer you wait
to apply, the more seats a law school fills with students just as qualified as you. Therefore, begin your preparations early and pace yourself so as to continue fulfilling your undergraduate responsibilities while completing your applications at the same time. This will help avoid the temptation to take shortcuts or submit applications in a hastily completed manner.

**What if I have mistakes in my application?**

Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and content are significant marks against your chances for admission. This is not a way you want to distinguish yourself from other applicants. Whatever you do though, don’t lie on your application. Even if you can avoid being detected for padding your application now, your academic record as a whole will eventually be evaluated by state bar examiners. If they determine that you have lied on your application you may not be allowed to practice law.

**The LSAT**

**What’s the LSAT all about?**

The Law School Admission Test is administered by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) four times a year at pre-established testing centers, one of which is IPFW (though not for June test dates). The test has five 35 minute multiple choice sections covering logical reasoning (two sections), reading comprehension (one section), analytical reasoning (one section), and a fifth section which is experimental and not graded. Additionally, a 35 minute writing sample is administered at the test’s conclusion which isn’t graded but is sent to the law schools that you have on file with the Law School Data Assembly Service. On the homepage of
What specific skills are measured in the different sections of the test?

Well, if we take a look here at the Admission Council’s official website at www.lsac.org you can see that the reading comprehension questions “measure your ability to read, with understanding and insight, examples of lengthy and complex materials similar to those commonly encountered in law school work. The reading comprehension section contains four sets of reading questions, each consisting of a selection of reading material, followed by five to eight questions that test reading and reasoning abilities.”

Further on you can see that analytical reasoning questions “are designed to measure your ability to understand a structure of relationships and to draw logical conclusions about that structure. You are asked to make deductions from a set of statements, rules, or conditions that describe relationships among entities such as persons, places, things, or events. They simulate the kinds of detailed analyses of relationships that a law student must perform in solving legal problems.”

And finally, the questions on logical reasoning “evaluate your ability to understand, analyze, criticize, and complete a variety of arguments. Each logical reasoning question requires you to read and comprehend a short passage, then answer a question about it. The questions test a variety of abilities involved in reasoning logically and thinking critically.”

How’s the test scored?

Scores range from a low of 120 up to a perfect 180 and there is no penalty for wrong answers, so make sure to answer all the questions. While important, the LSAT is not a perfect indication
of future success in law school because it doesn’t measure intangibles such as work ethic and
drive that are particular to each individual.

**When’s the best time to take the LSAT?**

Taking the LSAT in the June between your junior and senior years puts you in an ideal position.
This allows for more test preparation time after spring term ends and you have opportunities to
retake the LSAT if some unaccounted for event keeps you from doing your best. Ultimately, you
should take the test when you believe you’re ready, though never without studying for the test.
There are a couple of good reasons for this: first, test preparation has been shown to improve test
results, and second, your test score affects the median score of all other IPFW students taking the
LSAT. This median score of our university is important because if a law school in not familiar
with IPFW then they consult the median LSAT score for the school, and, the lower the median
score, the more likely a law school is to think that grades have been inflated on students’
transcripts which means that they might treat you’re A-quality work as deserving of a B. So be
prepared when you go in to take the test.

**So test preparation really does improve student scores?**

Research and personal experiences demonstrate that LSAT preparation definitely tends to
improve students’ scores. Many students have found that taking LSAT prep courses, while
expensive, to be extremely beneficial. One student interviewed felt the prep course helped raise
his overall score 12 points from the first practice test to the actual LSAT. While not uncommon
to spend upwards of $1,000 dollars, a high score can possibly earn a student a partial tuition
scholarship which can more than offset the cost of prep materials. At the very least this allows
you to familiarize yourself with the question types and answer formats, understand the
directions, and adjust to the demands of time limitations. Some students prefer to take the LSAT while the semester is in session to take advantage of the semester’s studying and test-taking inertia. Whether you take the test in June, October, December, or February, keep in mind that studying for the LSAT can easily take 80 hours or more of prep time. And further, studies suggest that those who utilize more sources in the course of their preparations seem to do the best. Most university bookstores and pre-law advisors will make available additional study materials.

*How can I prepare for the LSAT?*

There are multiple ways to get ready to take the LSAT. By following the [LSAT](https://www.lsac.org), [Preparing for the LSAT](https://www.lsac.org), and [Free Materials](https://www.lsac.org) links from the www.lsac.org homepage, applicants will find sample questions and advice on how to approach each section of question. In addition students can begin by enrolling in a study class, and/or checking out or purchasing practice books, in addition to consulting the list of websites and resource materials at the end of the handbook. It’s helpful to practice making effective diagrams for answering analytical reasoning questions and determining how best to read and annotate the reading comprehension passages. Try to take at least one test under timed restraints in order to know what the time limits actually feel like. This will make it clear that you can’t dwell too much on any one question and allow you the practice of pacing yourself. Additionally, once you’ve taken the test in a timed setting you’ll get a better idea of your strengths and weaknesses and be able to work from there to improve your score. Feedback from former and current students seem to indicate that while group study sessions can be helpful, the best way to prepare is individual study time.
How do I register?

Students have to register for the LSAT in advance of their test-taking date, either online, by phone or by mail. It’s in your interest to register for the LSAT as soon as you decide when and where to take it. And when you register for the LSAT you can also register for the mandatory Credential Assembly Service provided by the LSDAS which serves as a clearing house for collecting and transmitting undergraduate transcripts, letters of recommendation, and applications for law schools.

What does it cost to take the LSAT?

The basic fees for the test and registering with the LSDAS vary year by year but are approximately $132 and $121 respectively. Fee waivers for both are available for applicants with demonstrable financial need. If you need fee waivers for the LSAT registration and LSDAS subscription you’ll have to explain your financial hardship to a law school admissions office. In their capacity of authorizing fee waiver requests, each law school functions as an agent of the Law School Admission Council. But you need to apply early since schools have limited resources for waiving fees. For the most current information please visit http://www.lsac.org/JD/LSAT/lsat-fees.asp or find it from the www.lsac.org homepage by locating the LSAT link under the Prospective Students tab and following it to the Fees and Fee Waivers link.

Is the LSAT a reliable measure of an applicant’s ability to succeed in law school?

The LSAT is a critical factor in the initial sorting and ordering of applicants because it has been shown to be a statistically significant predictor of first-year performance. Yet the LSAT is not a
complete indicator of success: legal study demands full-time commitment, rigorous discipline, and is premised on motivation and a willingness to work tirelessly.

*Is it advantageous to retake the test and try to improve your score?*

On average, retesting tends to improve previous scores slightly, with a significant amount finding that they received the same or a lower score. Additionally, while the American Bar Association says law schools are to take the higher of one’s test scores, admissions’ personnel have reported that most top law scores appear to average students’ LSAT scores.

**Personal Statement**

*What role does the personal statement play in the admissions process?*

This is your opportunity to set your application apart from all those other students with similar credentials. In the personal statement your story is unique and a chance for the reader to experience the applicant’s personal character. Many well-written personal statements make the difference between acceptance and denial of admission, and particularly when a student is on the boarder of GPA and LSAT scores.

*How do I go about writing an excellent personal statement?*

Remember law schools are looking for students who can mount strong arguments supported by clear evidence while being persuasive. Therefore, take your time and carefully put together a plan of action for answering the specific questions of each law school. Many students write a base personal statement and then personalize it for each school to which they apply. Just remember that each personal statement needs to speak to the meaningful differences between law schools.
Let your personal qualities emerge in a well-constructed narrative in the active voice, conveying where you have come from and where you stand. Each aspect of the personal statement matters – from what you choose to write about to how well you write it. Is your enthusiasm and creativity readily apparent? Can readers appreciate your depth of understanding and get an idea of what you’ve learned from your studies and life experiences? More important is whether you are clear and present a compelling presentation to the reader.

Further, it’s helpful to indicate both your strengths and limits that are relevant while you show how your background has shaped your current worldview. And keep in mind that this type of writing works best when you allow readers to draw conclusions from your actions.

**Should I talk about my work experience in the personal statement?**

If the skills and character you’ve acquired in the workplace are applicable then, by all means, discuss your experience. The longer it has been since you have completed your undergraduate studies, the more important your work experience becomes. Specifically, examples of persuasive writing, insightful analysis, well-reasoned decision making, and resolute leadership, among many others, contribute helpful material for your personal statement. Avoid vague references and focus on specific examples whenever possible.

**How about extracurriculars? Are they worth mentioning at this stage of the application process?**

Not all extracurricular activities are worth mentioning. Sift through your involvement for examples which show the quality of your engagements rather than the quantity of activities. It’s useful to remember the phrase ‘state then evaluate’ when crafting your statement. Avoid simply
listing off numerous bullet points without providing a summary of why they are important. Highlight the significance of your actions instead of simply listing what you’ve done.

*Is focusing on community service helpful in a personal statement?*

The rule of thumb here is that if you have a long-standing commitment to helping others and can relate how particular events have shaped who you are as a person then it’s great to write about. But if community service has neither been a high-priority in your life nor impacted the course of your development, then it’s best to leave this aside. It’s important to be honest. Many poorly written personal statements over the years have tried to gloss over academic weaknesses with unsupported claims which are now detected by admissions file readers with amazing ease.

*Does military service positively affect an application?*

Certain schools weigh an applicant’s military record more heavily than others. Yet, as with work experience and community service, you need to show how your military experience evidences skills and character which will help you succeed as a law student and lawyer. Again, state the relevant particulars of your experience, such as leadership, and then evaluate the significance of these actions in the whole of who you are as an applicant.

*Do you have any other general advice for writing a great personal statement?*

Avoid simply restating what you have said in other places in your application. Be sure that generalities are supported with specific evidence. Hold yourself to the requested page lengths, and if no length is specified then limit yourself to two double-spaced pages. Beware of attempts at humor since a joke which falls flat really hurts whereas a good joke barely helps. And unless dealing with the political issues of the day has been a formative experience for you due to work
on a political campaign or in some other political venue, avoid ideological arguments since they tend to evidence strong opinions rather than the open-minded inquiry needed in law school.

Make sure to carefully edit your personal statement. Ask professors you know if they have time to critique your writing. You want to put your best foot forward here, so take advantage of the resources around you to correct any grammatical, content, or spelling errors. Finally, shy away from colored paper of any variety – though thicker white paper for the statement is ok. You don’t want to distinguish yourself for the wrong reasons!

**Letters of Recommendation**

*Who should I ask to write letters of recommendation?*

The best recommendations for law school are written by professors who know you and can address your specific academic strengths in multiple settings. Since its best when letter writers document what they say, you should provide a packet of information including an updated résumé, a statement of why you want to practice law, your unofficial transcript, any relevant recommendation writing instructions, and stamped and addressed envelopes. Additionally, it’s expected that you disclose any personal relationships you might have with any of your letter writers. Be sure to give professors plenty of time to think about and complete your letter describing your positive academic and personal traits.

*What if there is no prompt for the letter writers? What do I ask them to address?*

A few possible ideas include how well and how long the writer has known the applicant and their academic record; how do the student’s strengths and abilities prepare the applicant for success in law school; in what settings has the writer seen the applicant perform. Especially
helpful are comparisons of the applicant with other students previously accepted from the same institution – this provides a more specific assessment of the applicant’s potential for success.

Also, employers are very acceptable letter writers when they can speak to your skills and abilities in depth. A good rule of thumb is to give anyone writing a letter of recommendation at least a minimum of two weeks to complete it.

**The Addendum**

*Why again would I need to include an addendum to my application?*

A concise addendum is helpful in explaining a low LSAT score, multiple LSAT scores in which one is good, irregular undergraduate grades, or good grades and a bad LSAT. Just remember that the purpose of an addendum is simply to present facts that are not in your application not to try and further persuade your reader.

**Financing Law School**

*How do most students pay for law school?*

It’s each law student’s responsibility to understand and arrange for the financing of law school. Tuition costs vary widely with the high end up to over $50,000 a year, and once you add in housing, food, books, transportation, and personal expenses you’re looking at a sizable financial investment over the course of three years. While scholarships, grants, and work-study are available, about 80% of students rely on education loans to finance tuition and living expenses while in law school. Both federal and private loans are based on the law schools “estimate of need.” Traditionally federal loans provide the lowest interest rates for applicants. For a more detailed account please visit [http://www.lsac.org/jd/finance/financial-aid-overview.asp](http://www.lsac.org/jd/finance/financial-aid-overview.asp). You can
also find it by following the Applying to Law School link followed by the Financing Law School links from the www.lsac.org homepage which outlines a step by step detailed account of the process.

Are there teaching assistant jobs available?

In law school there are a limited number of coveted research fellowships and a handful of writing course assistantships available to defray costs of attendance. Fellowships and assistantships are both awarded on a competitive basis with the difference being that the former provide money which does not have to be paid back while the latter pay a stipend in exchange for a relatively small work load on campus. The Financing a Legal Education link found under the Financing Law School of the www.lsac.org website is another great resource to reference for further details.

Do you have to fill out a FAFSA to get financial aid for law school?

Yes. Each year students must fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid. A completed FAFSA is necessary to be eligible for federal Stafford (subsidized and unsubsidized) and Perkins (on a limited basis) loans. Federal Stafford loans are generally the best financing option due to their maximum interest rate of 6.8%. Eligible students can receive up to $8,500 a year in subsidized Stafford loans (meaning the federal government pays the interest which accrues while you’re in law school) and no more than $20,500 a year in subsidized and unsubsidized Stafford loans combined (unsubsidized Stafford loans are ones where the student is responsible for the interest which builds up during law school).

What do you do if you need to borrow more than $20,500 a year?
After you have borrowed the maximum in Stafford loans, the next best option is going with federal Grad Plus loans. Starting July 1st 2010 the interest rate for these loans will be fixed at 7.9%. These loans are dependent on an applicant’s good credit history though your actual credit score is not consulted. Instead, an applicant’s credit history will be checked for late payments within 90 days prior to applying and for any bankruptcies. Keep in mind that there is a 4% origination fee for these loans with a 1½% upfront rebate for the 2010-11 academic year which turns into a 2½% origination fee deducted out of the loan disbursement. One way or another, read the fine print! For a more detailed description of Federal Work-Study Programs please visit www.lsac.org/jd/finance/financial-aid-options.asp or from the www.lsac.org homepage follow the Applying to Law School, Financing Law School, Find Financial Aid Options links for more information on Federal Work-Study and student loans.

**How do I figure out what lender to go with?**

This is where a little hard work can pay healthy dividends. There are numerous different for-profit and non-profit lenders to ask about interest rate discounts and principal reduction incentives. For competing deals on loan terms among for-profit lenders see www.simpletuition.com. See www.efc.org for a list of non-profit lenders. And no matter which lender you choose, I highly recommend that you minimize your living expenses so as to have to borrow as little as possible. Packing lunches, cutting cable, limiting impulse buys, and shopping around for better interest rates can make a big difference upon graduation.

**What’s an LRAP?**

Loan Repayment Assistance Programs are available at more than 100 different law schools for those graduates who take low paying public interest or government jobs. A good place to begin
your search for these programs is at www.equaljusticeworks.org where you can find a list of all the different law schools’ LRAPs.

**Is funding for veterans readily available?**

Educational assistance for veterans, including but not limited to the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post 9/11 GI Bill, is available. Visit the United States Department of Veterans Affairs at www.va.gov for specific information. The Post 9/11 GI Bill is particularly beneficial to veterans who may have already completed their Montgomery GI Bill benefits. Benefits include up to an additional 12 months of tuition assistance including money for books and a housing allowance. For questions about certification and enrollment please contact Jerrie Dixon at Dixon@ipfw.edu or the Registrar’s office located in Kettler Hall Room 107.

**The Study of Law**

**What is the first year of law school actually like?**

First and foremost, legal education is primarily academic. Students’ devote most of their time to mastering the general concepts and principles which shape the law. This burden of learning rests squarely on the shoulders of the law student. In the process of meeting this challenge you’ll delve into old and new rulings, weigh conflicting theories of the law’s meaning, consider overruled opinions, scour legislative materials, and evaluate scholarly articles.

As a general rule, first year studies include civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law, criminal procedure, legal method, legal writing and research, property, and torts. Most of these classes will be based on the Socratic-method (or “case method”) where professors ask students to summarize cases and defend different positions so as to clarify the underlying
principles shaping the law’s application in different contexts. All students are expected to be prepared with briefs (in which pertinent facts are summarized, the primary legal questions involved in the court’s ruling are identified, and the major legal points considered by the court are outlined) and to accept the anxiety and frustration of learning with this method. There’s a good reason for using the Socratic-method – it reveals both the complexity and ambiguity of legal rulings while sharpening students’ critical reasoning and improving argumentation skills. Such class organization rewards those who are prepared for the discussion with a deeper understanding of the issues and provides a sense of satisfaction which in turn sustains students in the midst of the rigorous academic process. Proper preparation isn’t only helpful, it’s required for success.

How do exams work in law school?

Most first year courses have one 3-4 hour cumulative exam at the end of the course of study for each of your classes. In order to succeed in these exams students must compile course outlines throughout the fall and spring semesters. Continuous study and prioritizing your time are crucial. Case briefs and class notes have to be integrated into an organized whole so as to grasp the interconnections and the nuances of case law as it develops over time. Beware of relying only on commercially available course outlines: nothing substitutes for the learning process of synthesizing all of your relevant materials. Many law schools offer practice exams to help students prepare for the kinds of questions their finals will cover. Further, you have to find your stride, so to speak, before taking the exams to rise above the mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion of the work. I recommend consulting resources such as Bridging the Gap Between
College and Law School: Strategies for Success and The Complete Law School Companion for more specific advice in navigating the transition to law school and succeeding in your studies. Cramming is no longer a viable option for students at this point in your academic life. Law school simply requires too many hours of work and thought.

Many first year law students point to organization and prioritizing your time as significant factors but also encourage you to pay attention to small details which may seem like common sense. As one former student commented the importance of trusting yourself and the hard work that got you into law school. While more challenging, a complete or extreme overhaul of study habits isn’t necessary for every student. Also, pay attention anytime a professor offers the expectations for a class and take advantage of their advice.

**Are all the exams in law school cumulative over the course of a year?**

Thankfully for most students the answer is no. The second and third year’s generally only test over one semester’s worth of material since students are encouraged at this time to take a variety of courses in hopes of gaining exposure to the breadth and depth of legal study. In addition to your academic work, the law school experience opens up in the second year by allowing for part-time clerking jobs in the community, or time to prepare for full-time summer job interviews. Students also now have time to compete for positions at the legal clinic or on a school’s law journals. If you’re interested in these prestigious positions, you should be aware that there are significant case-load responsibilities at the clinic and generally a one or more publishable-paper requirement to hold a position on law review. Even though working in a clinic or on a law journal requires serious commitments of time and energy, there are definite benefits: your research and writing skills improve and you gain experience working in a collaborative clinic or
on a rigorous journal in the process of setting yourselves apart from most other law school grads in the eyes of your legal employers.

**What’s involved in mock trial?**

Mock trial gives students the opportunity for direct advocacy experience while building relationships with judges and practicing attorneys in the meantime. Teams simulate arguments before an appellate judge who reviews the decision of a lower court and listens to presentations of opposing counsel on both the fact and law at issue. Participants find the experience immensely valuable due to the case preparation experience and feedback received from the judges. Yet, like writing on a law review, mock trial demands a significant commitment of time and, during the competition period, 3-4 nights a week for up to a month is required for the winning teams which keep advancing.

**When does the on-campus recruiting season start?**

Law firms and other companies begin recruiting at law schools in the fall. To be prepared you need a polished résumé, professional attire, and enough fortitude to endure the rigorous series of 20-30 minute interviews with generally two representatives from each company. It’s recommended that you target the employers you would feel comfortable working with so as not to drain yourself with interviews for firms which don’t match your interests. Consider what kind of law you want to practice, the advancement opportunities at the firm in that area in next two years, salary and bonus plans, physical facilities, the firm’s method of associate supervision and training, billable hour requirements, and how many associates earn partnership and how soon. Ultimately, you need to ask yourself if you’ll be happy working with the people at the firm. Keep in mind that those who take advantage of the opportunity to work as a summer-associate
often land job offers from the firm at the end of the program. Another recruiting season, though more limited, begins in the spring for those who have not found desired positions and for firms with vacancies to fill.

**How do you recommend preparing for the bar exam after graduation?**

Unfortunately, there is no easy trick to passing. The best preparation is to direct some of your third year classes to the central subjects which will be on your local bar exam and to take the Bar Review Course after you graduate for the state in which you want to practice. Otherwise, there’s nothing but grinding preparation in the months before the test to gain admission to practice at your state’s bar. A valuable website for students taking the bar exam in Indiana can be found at [www.in.gov/judiciary/ble](http://www.in.gov/judiciary/ble). Information on Exam Results from the previous year, to directions for applying to the bar, and general information can all be found.

**How do you deal with the extremes of stress which can come with such heavy workloads?**

Don’t underestimate the demands placed upon students by a very competitive environment compounded by long hours of secluded study and possible financial or employment concerns. All the factors can trigger emotional or stress related problems. Students must take care of themselves in order to avoid the dangers of mental and physical exhaustion. Pay close attention to the little things: get regular (if limited) sleep, eat nutritiously, exercise, and watch out for changes in sleep patterns or appetite, loss of concentration, and social withdrawal. Make sure to take advantage of whatever health services the law school offers, seek out on-campus support groups to find out how others are dealing with the stress, and remember that there’s a national crisis hotline for graduate students at (877) GRAD-HELP. Though perhaps the best medicine of all is to make sure that you have some fun in the process and continue to have a life outside of
the books. Remember that many former and current students experienced varying degrees of 
anxiety, particularly in the first year, and to do so is normal and expected. Take advantage of 
peer networks of those around you who find themselves in similar situations.

The inevitable fact of law school is that the environment is stressful and extremely 
demanding. Because class standing does play a role in the future job market things are very 
competitive between students striving for the best grades. One advantage of building a network 
are the relationships that are formed that might help you get an interview or foot in the door 
down the road. The bottom line is that everyone will adopt their own style, and finding the right 
one for you is the important thing.

**Practice of Law**

*Can you give me an idea of the kind of variety of legal practices?*

Here’s a series of descriptions which reflects the diversity of employment possibilities in the 
various fields of law. The following material comes largely from the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide 
to ABA-Approved Law Schools, Careers in Law,* and *Full Disclosure.*

**Business Practice:** Transactional lawyers spend time “counseling corporate clients on day-to-
day operations and long-term business plans, drafting and negotiating contracts, occasionally 
assisting clients in an attempt to hold a failing deal or business relationship together in order to 
avoid litigation.” Life as a deal maker in most law firms involves practice in one or both of two 
different areas of transactional work: (1) mergers and acquisitions (2) securities law (including 
public offerings, private placements, and regulatory compliance). A good transactional lawyer
must be able to see both sides of the transaction and suggest, analyze, and evaluate creative solutions that both sides can accept.

**Corporate Counsel:** In-house counsel can serve primarily as an intermediary between management and outside counsel, or management may rely exclusively on in-house counsel for legal advice or representation in legal proceedings, and sometimes in-house counsel have both roles. Such lawyers are generally more familiar with the operations of the corporation, the sources of necessary factual information and the key personnel involved. A cumulative knowledge base is developed and an in-house attorney has the relatively unique ability to provide preventative advice to their client (the company).

**Criminal Law:** In every American jurisdiction someone is charged with the responsibility of prosecuting criminal cases on behalf of the state. Plea bargaining is common in the practice and hence criminal lawyers must cultivate strong negotiation skills. Though not highly paid, this field provides lots of hands-on experience for trial practice and the satisfaction knowing that one is working toward the public good. Criminal defense is a highly litigation oriented practice in which many practitioners combine criminal law with some other form of civil litigation.

**Environmental Law:** Cuts across a large number of legal transactions and is a specialty that requires technical as well as legal knowledge; including property, torts, administrative law, frequently multi-national, and litigation. This is not an area for generalists. Most of the available jobs are with companies and individuals being sued, though governments also employ environmental lawyers, but public funding is limited. Another possible option is lobbying to change environmental policy at national and state levels. Such a practice demands an understanding of the multi-faceted regulatory process.
**Family Law**: Domestic relations law includes: divorce (comprising skills in counseling, negotiation, drafting legal documents, trial practice), matrimonial law (such as prenuptial agreements), and issues arising in non-traditional families. Juvenile law focuses on rights of children and is most often dealt with by welfare agencies and legal aid offices; deals with ‘problem’ children. Elder law is an umbrella for many types of substantive practice such as estate planning, health law, real estate, social security, pensions, and retirement.

**Government Practice**: Lawyers are needed at all levels of government (federal, state, county, city), and at specialized entities such as water authorities, taxing entities, and government corporations. All three branches of government, the armed services, the Department of Justice, and nearly all federal agencies employ attorneys. Additionally, government law practice is exceedingly varied in its substantive scope, though such lawyers may lack significant amounts of client contact. Government attorneys serve the public, are free from most constraints of billable hour goals, and often work fewer hours in a day than many other legal practices. The trade-offs are far lower salaries and fewer resources at one’s disposal.

**Health Law**: The direction of the field today is determining how to deal with increased patient autonomy and the fact that people are living longer lives. Medical malpractice falls within this domain. Health lawyers negotiate contracts for doctors, hospitals and HMOs, consider problems of legal-medical ethics, address environmental health problems, and help shape public policy.

**International Law**: The two areas of international law are public international law and private (or commercial) international law. Public international law deals with issues of war and peace, human rights, intelligence gathering, and international organizations. Such lawyers need
advanced language skills and knowledge of local customs. Private international lawyers facilitate commercial transactions for their clients.

**Judicial Clerkships:** Accepted graduates must be at or near the top of their class, academically inclined, like to do legal research, have the ability to write well, and are willing to commit at least a year to a judge. Appellate clerks deal largely with legal theory, or the scholarly side of law, and have exposure to a wide variety of legal issues. Judicial clerks function in a trial atmosphere and perform a variety of functions. Close interpersonal relationships often develop and demands lawyers who are competent, honest, and loyal.

**Employment and Labor Law:** The National Labor Relations Act (NLRA) passed during the Great Depression gave workers the right to bargain collectively with management. Since then an adversarial relationship has been institutionalized between unions and management. Union lawyers (practicing labor law), management lawyers (practicing employment law), and government lawyers all have a role in this field. Due to the centrality of arbitration hearings, strong negotiation skills are a pre-requisite. Labor law incorporates aspects of employment law, workers’ compensation, and benefits law, while being encompassed by Equal Employment Opportunity, OSHA, and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

**Property Law:** Comprises real property (land), personal property, and intellectual property (intangibles). Addresses residential, commercial, zoning and land use issues: wills and trusts, housing, and leasing. Intellectual property deals with copyrights, patents, trademarks, trade secrets, and the moral rights of the artist.

**Public Interest Advocacy:** Such attorneys serve as advocates for individuals and groups who are traditionally unrepresented and underrepresented. This field of practice offers exciting work
which can positively impact not only one’s client, but also sets legal precedents that can improve
conditions for many people. Such lawyers can work for individual clients while working to
further the goal of a broader legal policy. Though budgetary constraints often arise due to
reliance on foundation grants and government funds, some public interest advocacy groups are
membership organizations while others employ fundraising methods (or both). This field
provides hands-on experience at an early stage of one’s career and each lawyer often has primary
responsibility for their caseload. Yet the pay is low and there are fewer resources and training
options. Public interest advocacy jobs are often the product of an interested lawyer showing a
great deal of initiative in identifying and applying for such jobs. Fortunately, Loan Repayment
Assistance Programs (LRAP) are becoming more mainstream and help offset the costs of loan
repayment while working in the public’s interest.

**Teaching Law:** Much work is required, jobs are difficult job to find, and the few available
openings are very competitive. Your whole history matters: the caliber of law school graduated
from, references, academic record, whether on law review, honors, judicial clerkship, publication
record, and teaching experience. The Association of American Law Schools serves as a
coordinating center for teaching applicants and law schools with faculty openings. AALS
sponsors an annual recruiting conference, normally in November, but applicants can also contact
schools directly. Two different kinds of positions are available: an academic teaching slot and a
clinical position; see how both positions are treated at various institutions. Law professors get to
think deeply and critically about the issues of their choice and do not have to advocate for a
client’s viewpoint. Additionally, it’s gratifying to work with law students. Though, with such
heavy workloads law professors depend on assistants to help with their research work. You have
to find satisfaction from individual work or research and be prepared to earn less than you would in many other practices.

**Tort Law**: Focuses on compensation instead of punishment and is comprised of intentional torts, negligence (malpractice), and strict liability. This is a litigation intensive area and negotiation skills are a prerequisite. This field of practice covers issues such as defamation (written and oral), privacy, and misrepresentation. In today’s expanding marketplace of goods and ideas conflicts which require the expertise of a tort lawyer are bound to continue arising.
Bibliography and Consulted Websites


Spahr, Ryan. Law School Student, IUPUI. Email Interview. 4 January 2011.


www.aals.org Association of American Law Students
www.abanet.org/legaled  American Bar Association (ABA) Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar

www.cleoscholars.com  Council on Legal Education Opportunity  www.prelawhandbook.com  pre-law support

www.ed.gov  United States Department of Education

www.efc.org  List of non-profit lenders

www.equaljusticeworks.org  Equal Justice Works

www.fafsa.gov  Free Application for Federal Student Aid

www.finaid.org  The Smart Student Guide to Financial Aid

www.in.gov/judiciary/ble  Indiana Board of Law Examiners

www.ilrg.com/pre-law.html  Internet Legal Research Group

www.lavenderlaw.org  Lavender Law Career Fair and Conference

www.lsac.org/diversity  Information on opportunities in law for minority men and women


www.lsac.org  Law school Admission Council

www.lsac.org  Law School Forums

www.mapla.org  Midwest Association of Prelaw Advisors

www.nalp.org  The Association for Legal Career Professionals

www.nalpdirectory.com  online directory of legal employers and their hiring criteria

www.ncbex.org  Links to state boards

www.pslawnet.org  Public opportunities for law students and lawyers

www.simpletuition.com  Competing deals on loan terms among for-profit lenders
Supplemental Reading List

Both law and learning are lifetime journeys. And since successful legal practice demands well-rounded students and practitioners, our reading lists need to be long and well-considered. The more we appreciate law’s role in the healthy functioning of our political community, the deeper we can understand our responsibility to serve the public interest in our lives as lawyers. With such knowledge we can build fulfilling careers by enriching the lives of our clients and strengthening the communities in which we live while we continue to grow intellectually.

The following is largely an abridgement of the excellently annotated *Dean’s List of Recommended Reading for Prelaw and Law Students* and the LSAC’s reading list “Resources for the Prelaw Candidate.”

Biography


**Jurisprudence**


Simon, James F. *The Antagonists: Hugo Black, Felix Frankfurter, and Civil Liberties in Modern*

Law School and Legal Education
Rogers, Scott L. Mindfulness for Law students: Using the Power of Mindful Awareness to


Legal Profession


