

Law School Recruiting and Application Choices

Charting a Law School Course

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Charting a Law School Course

There are two stages in the decision-making process of applying to law school where your own needs should be paramount: (1) when deciding where to submit an application for admission, and (2) when deciding where to attend law school.

Each school will end up with a number grade (with 1 the lowest and 5 the highest) for each factor. For example, a school with desirable on-campus housing might receive a 4 while a school with no on-campus housing and only distant or undesirable off-campus housing might receive a 1 (if you want to live on campus). After grading each school on each factor, you should add each school's column of grades.

While the chart should prove helpful to students whose heads are spinning from indecision at least three general observations (in addition to the detailed specific footnotes below) should be made. First, the chart is somewhat "over-standardized": each factor has an equal opportunity to receive the range of grades suggested. Accordingly, it might make sense to pick a single most important factor to you, (i.e. need to earn money part-time) and accentuate that factor by awarding the "best" school on that factor bonus (i.e., in excess of) points. Second, there may be categories here that do not matter to you. They should be treated accordingly, including being ignored. Third, if the chart produces a relative "tie" in total points, the schools are probably relatively equal (though perhaps for different reasons), and you will not be making a bad decision no matter which school you choose to attend. You should be aware, however, that you should consider no decision final until they have visited the school (see 2b, 10, and 14, below).

1. **Geography:** There are good law schools in all parts of the country. Do you have a particular need to be in the Northeast or the Southwest? If so, you should have applied to schools mainly in that region, thus rendering this factor a relative constant.

2. **Setting**

a. **Physical Plant:** Is the law school all in one modern building, or dispersed through ill-equipped ones? Is the library a comfortable place to study and convenient to the classrooms? Is room devoted to student activities, like lounge space, Student Bar Association offices, and the like?

b. **Surrounding Community:** Is the environment of the law school urban, suburban, or rural? Do you have a strong feeling for one versus the others for nightlife, safety, or tranquility? Despite cost, you should visit the law schools being considered for an open house or admitted students' day before committing to that school. You should take advantage of the opportunity to sit in on law classes and speak with faculty, administrators, and current students.

3. **Availability and Desirability of Housing:** Do you want to live on campus? If so, are dormitories available? Some university-affiliated law schools have dorm space for law students; many do not. Is the off-campus housing expensive, desirable, nearby? Does it matter if you are married or single?

4. **Availability of Public Transportation:** Is there public transportation or is the expense of a car a necessity? Is the public transportation cheap, clean, safe, convenient? How frequently do buses and subways run, and what are their closing times?

5. **Size of the Entering Class:** Schools vary in the number of incoming students and in the relative size of the facility. Will you feel lost? What are your chances of doing well against the competition? This factor may affect comfort in the classroom as well as the use of the library and other parts of the physical plant.

6. **Size of First-year Section:** This factor is something of a control on the size of the first-year class. Since most law schools spread their first-year classes into two or more sections (typically traveling "home-rooms" of 50 to 100 students), the student should ask whether he or she will feel more comfortable or satisfied with 50 or 150 others in a classroom. Size of first-year section may be controlled, but after the first year the size of classes may vary greatly. The assumption should not be made that a large school will necessarily have an overall "large" feel. A school with a large first-year class may have smaller first-year sections than those at some "smaller" schools and vice versa.

7. **Opportunity for Part-time Employment:** Do you need or want to earn money while attending law school? While working as a first-year law student is discouraged by ABA standards and classroom teachers' preferences, part-time employment has become an economic fact of life for many entering students. An urban law school may be likely to have legally-oriented jobs, (law firm, government agency, insurance company) or not, available off-campus within reasonable commuting distance from the law school. A rural law school may have more on-campus jobs available (food services, resident advisor, etc.) and less legally-oriented ones, but living expenses may be less in the rural area. This is a factor to be checked on an individual basis for each school being considered. If money is an

overriding consideration, you may wish to consider working during the day and attending Evening Division law school (generally, a four-year program).

8. Placement Services: You should analyze the placement statistics of each law school to determine not only how many graduates get jobs, but also to determine how many graduates enter a particular type of job. For example, do many of a law school's graduating seniors begin at large law firms with only a few entering District Attorney or Public Defender's offices?. For a compilation of such statistics, see Jobs & J.D.'s Employment and Salaries of New Law Graduates-Class of 2006 (NALP, 2007).

9. Perceived Prestige of the Institution: Is the law school generally considered in the top 10 or 20 nationally? Are such considerations actually valid? Is the law school's reputation really a reflection of its present merit? The candidate may consider utilizing the Martindale Hubbell Law Directory (Martindale-Hubbell, 2006), which lists by location of practice all attorneys and rates most of them..

10. Perceived Quality of the Institution: Consider the expertise, reputation, perceived availability and/or limitations of the faculty. What is the perceived approach to learning taken by the faculty? What is the atmosphere or personality of the school?

11. Institution's Perceived Ability to Accommodate Personal Educational Needs and Goals: How can the school accommodate you in terms of the following, or other factors, which may be of interest to you: (a) areas of specialization, (b) joint degree programs, or association with a university where you can take electives, (c) clinical programs, (d) special admissions policies, (e) percent of minorities or women in attendance, (f) student support groups, (g) extra-curricular activities?

12. Net Overall Cost. We saved this until near the end of the list because the above factors probably trigger "hidden" costs of attending any school. Roughly speaking, you should weigh schools on this factor by adding together the gross overall cost of attending the school (tuition, fees, books, housing, food, local transportation, long-distance transportation, etc.) minus financial aid (grants and loans-some of which are based on need and others on merit) and part-time employment available. This will give you a net overall cost figure that you can use to rank the schools on this factor.

13. Bar Passage: This is a difficult factor to control for because each state has a markedly different scale for bar passage. Note the difference between each school's bar passage rate compared to its state's average bar passage rate. However, if there is a great disparity of the bar passage rates among different schools there may be a sufficiently different dynamic occurring at the different programs.

14. Other: This factor is provided to allow you to individualize the chart. For example, did your father or mother attend one of the schools? Do you wish to attend the law school affiliated with your undergraduate institution for sports access or in the interest of maintaining your circle of friends?

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Charting a Law School Course			
	School A	School B	School C
Geography			
Physical Plant			
Surrounding Community			
Availability and Desirability of Housing			
Availability of Public Transportation			
Size of Entering Class			
Size of First-Year Section			
Opportunity for Part-time Employment			
Placement Statistics			
Perceived Prestige of institution			
Perceived Quality of Education			
Institution's Perceived Ability to Accommodate Personal Needs			
Net Overall Cost			
Bar Passage Rate			
Other			
TOTAL POINTS			

A Strategy for Successful Application Choices

There are many factors students should consider in deciding where to apply to law school and subsequently, where to attend. The article, "Charting a Law School Course" detailed many of the important criteria upon which students can weigh the relative merits of law schools. Students' assessment of the relative merits of schools should go hand in hand with self-assessment to determine the likelihood of acceptance to different law schools. Additionally, students should be discouraged from applying to any schools they do not wish to attend, and students should be encouraged to visit a school prior to making a final decision to attend or not attend that school.

Two questions which are often asked by those who are considering applying to law school are, "What are the statistical chances for admission to law school?", and then, "What are 'my' chances for admission?" The Fall 2006 data from the Law School Admission Council indicates that for the 2005-2006 application cycle there were 137,400 LSATs administered. That same year there were 88,700 applicants to ABA-approved law schools, and there were 56,000 candidates admitted. To answer the question of the statistical chances of admission to law school, one could answer that less than 63% of those applying to law school are admitted. Then there is a factor for candidates who are admitted to law school and do not attend or defer admissions. This results in approximately 46,000 students in the first year law school class. It is probably reasonable, therefore, to believe that approximately 52% (just over one out of two) of those in the application pool are successful in the quest for a seat in a first year law school class.

This information is much too general to be useful for any specific person or for any specific law school. Therefore, it might be useful for a prospective applicant to have a strategy with which to work to deal with his or her own personal situation. The strategy which follows may be very useful to applicants although there is no scientific data to establish its guidelines as any more accurate than any others. There is probably no strategy which will "guarantee" success, or which could be considered a "formula" for successful applications.

Many prospective applicants use the Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools to choose law schools in each of such categories as "long-shots", "expected acceptance", and "sure shots" Other prospective applicants use the NAPLA Law School Locator to compare their grade point average (gpa) and their Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) score to a category of law schools or to a median or mean gpa and LSAT score for each school. These prospective applicants are advised in the NAPLA Law School Locator to choose law schools in categories such as "competitive", "safe", and "reach" which parallel "expected acceptance", "sure-shots", and "long-shots" mentioned above.

Each applicant should select a cross-section of law schools which have varying degrees of selectivity in choosing applicants for admissions. The NAPLA Law School Locator also states, however, that "[t]he Locator cannot rank the quality of the schools, nor can it tell you which is the best school for you. It simply provides a rough indicator for competitiveness for admission at different schools, only one of the many criteria that you should consider in selecting the schools to which you apply."

The applicant needs to be cognizant of the limitations of the Official Guide ABA-Approved Law Schools. The graphs or tables provided by many of the law schools are said to represent the number of applicants and acceptances by categories which are established with reference to a combination

of gpa and LSAT score. There are a number of problems with relying on these statistics: 1) the statistics are reported by the law schools, and are not uniformly reported, 2) the statistics may or may not include students accepted off the "wait list" in the number of acceptances, 3) the statistics may or may not include "special" admissions candidates, 4) the statistics include the acceptances and not those students who actually attend a particular law school, and 5) the statistics may or may not have been manipulated by other means not mentioned or thought of here.

Notwithstanding the problems with the statistics, the Official Guide is still a most helpful guide in determining to which school to apply. An applicant should make four lists of law schools based on his or her individual LSAT score and gpa. If an applicant has taken the LSAT more than once, it is suggested that the applicant use the average score of all the LSATs taken. There is no useful purpose for an applicant not to be honest at this stage concerning the accuracy of gpa and LSAT. Each law school will have these actual numbers available to them when reviewing each application. For purposes of this presentation and analysis, a student should ignore trends in grades, extracurricular activities, employment record, hardship, excellent recommendations and other so-called "plusses". "Plusses" are often useful in getting admitted over others in a particular statistical category, but there is little evidence that such "plusses" will move someone into a different statistical category.

The four lists are as follows:

- 1) List I consists of those law schools where the applicant has a 20-50% chance of acceptance;
- 2) List II consists of those law schools where the applicant has a 50-80% chance of acceptance;
- 3) List III consists of those law schools where the applicant has an 80-100% chance of acceptance;
- 4) List IV consists of those law schools where the applicant has a 0-20% chance of acceptance, or the percentage of acceptance is "unknown". A pre-law advisor, but not an applicant, might venture to move a List IV "unknown" school into an applicant's List I, II, or III.

Then, using the criteria mentioned in "Charting a Law School Course," the applicant should choose two schools from List I, two or three schools from List II, and two or three schools from List III. A minimum of seven schools should be chosen. There is probably a number of schools which could be "too many" to apply to, and thus inefficient. The suggestion here is to use a maximum of 15 schools to which to apply. An applicant should not count any schools in list List IV in the minimum, basic list.

As a final note, pre-law advisors should keep in mind that while they can give guidance and information, it is ultimately the applicant's singular and personal responsibility to decide where to apply and to how many law schools to apply. As a final note to applicants, three rules about applying to law schools should be kept in mind at all times: 1) If you do not apply to a particular school, you will not be admitted there; 2) Do not apply to any school which you would not wish to attend; 3) If you want to be a lawyer, you have got to go to law school.

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