

Law school is most often a 3-year, full-time program that results in a Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree. To practice law in the United States, lawyers must first attend law school, obtain a J.D., and then pass the bar examination in at least one state (normally the state in which the individual intends to practice). While not everyone who goes to law school intends to actually practice law, it is the most common path.

Interested in a career in law? Discover if law school is right for you. Visit cla.umn.edu/prelaw to get started.

While exploring law school, consider alternative paths as well. Careers in compliance, government, human rights, nonprofit organizations, finance, and politics are just a few examples of industries that do not always require a law degree to work with legal issues.

Explore Law

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Why are you interested in law school? This is the first question that a law school admissions officer, and the pre-law advisor will ask you. Having a concrete answer to that question is a great first step.

Common answers:

- I like to argue
- I took Constitutional Law/Civil Liberties/etc. and it was mind-blowing
- Law is so fascinating
- I want a reliable, interesting job
- I want to make a lot of money
- I want to help people
- I don't know, it's just what I always thought I'd do

This list of responses may be common, but they are just a starting point. Law school is an enormous commitment of both time and money, and it is not necessarily true that you will be able to easily take a J.D. and work in any field if you decide that law is not the right path for you while in law school. It is critical to determine if law is right for you PRIOR to going.

Learn more about law-related events, classes, and more on the Pre-Law Advising Facebook page: fb.me/UMNPreLaw

First steps to exploring law:

- Talk to as many attorneys as you can (ask a pre-law advisor for help)
- Take a class to explore a legal topic area. For ideas, check the list of Pre-Law Recommended Classes on the pre-law website - cla.umn.edu/prelaw
- Observe a class at one of the local law schools (University of Minnesota, Mitchell Hamline, and University of St. Thomas) by contacting the admissions department
- Join a student group like University Student Legal Services or Pre-Law Society
- Start developing a rapport with professors and advisors who you might consider asking for a recommendation letter later on



Experience Law

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The best way to determine if law is the right career path for you is to gain experience. After you have been exposed to law by talking to attorneys, taking courses, and joining student groups, the next step is to work with the law in some capacity.

- Volunteer with an organization that works with legal issues through the Center for Community-Engaged Learning
- Look for an internship or part-time job using GoldPASS (internships do not need to be in a law firm to be valuable!)
- Attend law events - follow the Pre-Law Advising office on Facebook for ideas
- Prep for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) through a workshop, research, or exploring the preparation materials available in the CLA Career Services Resource Room

Apply and Excel in Law School

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Once you have decided to apply to law school, whether that is when you are still in undergrad, or after you have graduated, the process typically takes 1-2 years before you will matriculate at a law school.

Applications for law school are reviewed on a rolling basis, beginning in September for admission the following fall. The earlier you apply, the greater your chances are of admission, and of receiving a scholarship.

Applications to all law schools are submitted through the Law School Admission Council (LSAC). Individual school's requirements may vary, but will require:

- **Law School Admissions Test (LSAT):** offered four times per year: September, December, February, and June. Your score is good for five years, and you can take the test up to three times.
- **Transcript(s)** You are responsible for sending transcripts from every institution where you've received college credit. This includes dual enrollment during high school, summer school at a community college, as well as study abroad programs if you attended the foreign university for a year or longer. LSAC will calculate a cumulative GPA based on all of your undergraduate coursework, not just your time at the University of Minnesota. LSAC takes every grade into account equally, even if you have repeated a course.
- **Letters of Recommendation** Most schools requires 2 recommendation letters, and one from a professor. Build relationships with professors early, and ask for recommendation letters well in advance of when you need them.
- **Personal Statement** This essay is typically 2-3 pages long (double-spaced) and should be customized based on each law school's application instructions.
- **Résumé** Résumés included in law school applications can be over a page long. There isn't a specific format you must follow, but you can include details about extracurricular activities, as well as academic projects, volunteer work, foreign language skills and more.
- **Character & Fitness Disclosures** Law school applications require you to disclose illegal activity and, in some cases, both formal and informal misconduct in which you've been involved.

Preparation Timeline

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Two years prior to beginning law school

- During the fall semester, meet with the pre-law advisor about preparing for the LSAT
- Research potential law schools and their career outcomes
- Approach professors, supervisors, etc. for recommendation letters in person
- Devote 4-6 months to studying for the LSAT
- Take the June LSAT to submit application in September
- Begin working on personal statement during the summer
- Consider taking ID 3205 - Law School Exploration

One year prior to beginning law school

- Finalize personal statement
- Fill out law school applications for early review processes
- Register for Credential Assembly Service (CAS) ~ 6 weeks prior to submitting applications
- Take the LSAT (if you haven't already)
 - October LSAT allows you to submit law school applications early
 - December LSAT allows you to apply to law schools at the standard time
- Fill out FAFSA materials

Financing Law School

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Attending law school is extremely expensive. Tuition at a private law school, plus living expenses and books, can run well over \$60,000 per year. Only a small percentage can afford to pay this amount as they go through three years of law school. Most law students have to borrow substantial amounts to finance their law school education.

The debt service on the average law student's loan of \$100,000 starts at about \$1,400 per month.

Merit-based scholarships are offered at law schools.

Scholarship amounts are often given at the time of admission decision, and increasingly, can be a point of negotiation with a school. The pre-law advisor can give more advice on how to handle merit-based scholarship negotiation for each individual circumstance.

The average debt for graduating law students is on the order of \$100,000; for students at many schools, it approaches \$150,000. These figures do not include debt from undergraduate schools.

Given these numbers, it's critical that you do two things:

- Before deciding to attend law school, you must first carefully consider whether law school is a good investment for you.
- If you decide to attend, make a plan for how you'll finance your education.

Increasingly, merit-based scholarships are offered at law schools, which are largely determined based on your GPA and LSAT score, and how they compare to the school's median scores. It is very important to research how scholarships are awarded at law schools, how they are renewed over the course of the three years at law school, and what your total cost of attendance will be when factoring in scholarships and living expenses.

Law School FAQs

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What should I major in if I know I want to go to law school?

There is no required, recommended or preferred major for law school. The best major is one that you enjoy, and will excel in. Your GPA is important for any graduate school application, and definitely for law school. Strong writing and analytical skills will help you succeed in law school and can be gained in any major, especially those in the liberal arts.

Should I take time off between undergrad and law school?

That is an individual choice, and there is no right answer. Two-thirds of law school applicants who come from the University of Minnesota take 1+ years between their undergrad and starting law school. Many choose to take time off to spend more time preparing for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) or to work in a law-related job to be certain they are ready to attend law school.

What does the LSAT measure?

Unlike the SAT, ACT, or other standardized tests you may have taken, the LSAT does not test your knowledge in a particular academic area such as English or math. The LSAT, as described by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), measures:

- Reading and comprehension of complex texts with accuracy and insight
- Organization and management of information and the ability to draw reasonable inferences
- The ability to think critically
- Analysis and evaluation of the reasoning and arguments of others

The LSAT also measures your ability to do all of these things in a time-sensitive environment.

What is the best way to prepare for the LSAT?

There is no one best way to prepare for the LSAT, but a good place to start is by taking a full-length, timed practice test. Typically, there is one proctored practice test offered on the U of M campus each semester, contact pre-law advising to find out more.

Once you get a feel for the test, you can determine the best way for you to prepare - whether that is on your own, with a prep course, or with an individual tutor. Because LSAT scores play such a large factor in admission and scholarship decisions, it is worth the investment of time and money to get assistance with preparing for the LSAT if you believe that will improve your score dramatically.

The pre-law advising office does not recommend a test prep strategy or company, as it will vary based on the individual's study style.

What are the best law schools?

As with everything in law, this largely depends on your career goals, where you want to practice law within the United States, and what type of law you are interested in.

Do not rely on rankings alone to make a determination of what law school to apply for or attend, as those rankings do not take into account your needs as an individual.

Researching specific programs, talking to current law students and alumni, touring the school and sitting in on a class, comparing career outcome data and bar passage rate, as well as financial aid can start to give a clear picture of what the right law school for you will be.

