



LAW SCHOOL GUIDE

Hamilton
CAREER CENTER

FIND YOUR FUTURE
KNOW THYSELF EXPLORE COMMUNICATE CONNECT

This guide is intended for those who want to continue directly into law school after graduation as well as those who choose to take time off first. The law school at which you enroll will depend heavily on a number of factors, both quantitative and qualitative. Most notably, the two quantifiable factors, LSAT (or in some cases, GRE) score, and undergraduate GPA, are of crucial importance. While many qualitative factors will play into the equation, the most vital are the personal statement and letters of recommendation.

Looking for individual guidance? Contact lawcareer@hamilton.edu to set up an appointment.

General Resources:

Law School Admission Council (LSAC)
US News & World Report Rankings
American Bar Association (ABA)
National Association of Legal Professions
First Hand (free access via the Career Center website)
OnNet Online
Bureau of Labor Statistics

The Admissions Process

When it comes to the actual application process, take this simple advice: **START EARLY**. Consider the sheer amount of time the law school admissions process will demand: in addition to 200+ hours of LSAT preparation, a single application might take several hours when you take great care with it. Be very diligent with every step of the application process to maximize your chances of getting into the law school of your choice.

Aside from LSAT scores and GPAs, what do law schools actually look for in applicants? Most law school admissions committees attempt to balance their emphasis on cold hard numbers with a good-faith effort to understand the minds of thousands of applicants. Thoughtful consideration is given to what sort of human beings they admit - so use your personal statement, optional essays, letters of recommendation, and cover letters to show who you are.

Law School Preparation Timeline

First and Second-Year Students

As a first-year or sophomore, you should:

- Engage in self-assessment and career exploration to make certain that the law industry suits your personality and interests. Talk to your career advisor about how to learn more.
- Explore careers in law, as well as alternative career paths potentially enhanced by the JD
- Conduct informational interviews with several attorneys. It is essential to begin informational interviews long before you sign up for the LSAT or start looking at law school applications in order to know if a career in the law industry is right for you. Hamilton Connect is a great resource for connecting with Alumni attorneys willing to support your decision process.
- Research different areas of law you find interesting and contact alumni who work in those fields (Refer to the *Networking Guide* on the Career Center's website).
- Your advisor at the Career Center can explain how you can get started meeting with alumni in positions that appeal to you.
- Write exploratory emails to alumni attorneys and follow up with informational interviews in person or on Zoom.
- Be sure to send thank-you notes to anyone you speak with.

After you have spoken to attorneys and have decided you would like to pursue a career in law, speak with current law students about their experiences, and take a campus/program tour.

A note on Law-Related CREs (career-related experiences) and Internships: Internships at law firms are somewhat rare for undergrads. Many of the opportunities are reserved for law school students. However, do not let this deter you from finding an internship or CRE. Remember that all industries and all parts of society are touched by laws and the law. Keep an open mind, and do things that are genuinely interesting to you, regardless of if you feel they are "law-related". It is not important to law school admission counselors that you have any "law-related" experience. They like diversity in both concentrations and experiences.

Develop the specific skills necessary to succeed in law school:

Analytical and problem-solving: Take classes that involve critical thinking about important issues and evaluating arguments.

TO DO: Consider classes with a focus on critical reasoning.

Critical reading: Develop reading and critical analysis skills.

TO DO: As a law student, you will be required to read and understand large amounts of information and you will particularly need these skills on the LSAT.

Writing: Lawyers must be able to express themselves well, clearly, and concisely.

Plan to take courses that require rigorous and analytical writing. Be able to write both long and short pieces well.

TO DO: Take writing-intensive and literature and creative writing courses. Also, use the Writing Center!

Oral communication: Learn how to speak clearly, confidently, and persuasively.

TO DO: Public speaking during class and participation on the Mock Trial team and in Debate Club are good practice.

Interpersonal/listening: You will need these skills to be able to interact well with clients and peers.

TO DO: Clubs and sports teams will help develop these skills.

General research: Law school classes require extensive research.

TO DO: Take upper-level courses in any department that includes a major research paper. Theses and Senior Projects necessitate in-depth research, analysis, and writing.

Above all, take classes that you enjoy and *FEEL THAT YOU CAN EXCEL AT*. In the end, your GPA will play a larger role than the content.

Organization/Time management: Law school and a career as an attorney are demanding, so try to acquire good time management skills early.

TO DO: Balancing a busy schedule of extracurriculars and jobs with schoolwork will provide good practice.

Serving the public good and promoting justice: Those who are applying to law school are particularly expected to uphold civic duty and be active in the community.

Juniors & Seniors

Junior Fall

- Keep your GPA high
- Register for a free account at LSAC.org, which will facilitate virtually every aspect of your admissions process, and LSAC LawHub® account which allows students to access resources, including the LawHub webinar series and prep tools. Begin researching for LSAT dates. Take several practice tests, and which date(s) will work well for your admissions process, as well as your life outside of the admissions process. Tests are now typically offered 8 times/year.
 - See if you qualify for a [fee waiver](#), valid for 2 years
 - It is best to begin studying six to three months before the test
- Develop a list of law schools that you are interested in. Research them and visit if convenient. An appropriate time to visit schools in less convenient locations, is after admission
 - Tools:
 - <https://www.lawschooltransparency.com/>
 - <https://www.lsac.org/choosing-law-school>
- If you are from a “minoritized group underrepresented in the legal profession” and are one year away from law school application time, look into the LSAC [Pre Law Undergraduate Scholars Program \(PLUS\)](#) or organizations like [Dear Future Colleague](#)

Junior Spring

Prepare to take the LSAT (or in some cases, GRE):

- You should begin/continue studying on your own or take a class. Many people like the structure the classes give, as well as the strategies it provides.
- If you are planning on applying to law school in the Fall of your senior year, register to take the LSAT in the summer of your junior year or early senior year. (If you choose to take a prep course you should take it in the spring semester or over the summer).
- Prepare as though you will take the test once, but do not let stress get the best of you. Since the vast majority of schools now pay the most attention to the highest LSAT score, you can always retake the exam.
- **GRE:** Law schools implemented the use of the GRE primarily as an access tool to make the law school admissions process more accessible and less cost prohibitive to applicants that have either a) already taken the GRE for another program or b) are very uncertain about which type of graduate degree they will pursue. That said, the LSAT is still the heavily recommended test, as it provides the most options for applying and is already a tested and proven indicator of first-year and bar passage success.
- **PLEASE NOTE:** If you take an LSAT and receive a score, that score is reported regardless of whether you have taken a GRE, and law schools will have to weigh that score with more weight than any GRE score. If, however, you take the GRE and receive a score, that score is only reported if you opt to report it.
- GREs will be evaluated by comparing the PERCENTILES of each section to the percentiles for the median, etc. that a particular school has attained for LSATs.
- Research and obtain practice materials
 - **It is best to begin studying six to three months before the test**

- Register with [LSAC's Credential Assembly Service](#) to centralize and send your law school applications
- Look for summer opportunities to help strengthen skills (see above list) which will enhance your application.

Register for LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service provided by LSAC) to which most law schools require you to subscribe.

- This is where you will have your transcript and letters of recommendation sent. LSDAS will compile them into an electronic “report” to send to each law school.
- Do this early as processing at LSDAS slows down due to volume starting in October.
- In early September, request that a transcript be sent to LSDAS from the Registrar’s Office.

Write addenda, when appropriate. If your LSAT score or cumulative GPA hides something important, you may want to point it out on a separate sheet attached to your application.

- For instance, if one particularly bad semester or course lowered your GPA and if you can argue plausibly that those low grades should be viewed as anomalies, do so.
- If your GPA for your course major is significantly higher than your overall average, you might highlight that.
- Even better, if your GPA masks an upward trend in your performance, make certain to call attention to your improvement.
- If you feel that your LSAT score is inconsistent with your ability to handle rigorous work, you may want to point it out.
- Also, use an addendum to explain any extenuating circumstances that may have impacted either your academic performance or LSAT score. Some examples include: death in the family during a particular time period, need for full or part-time work while in college, illness prior to the LSAT exam, consuming illness during a particular semester, etc. Admissions offices benefit from background information like this.

Senior Year

- Complete FAFSA
- Take LSAT and LSAT Writing, or in limited cases, the GRE, if you have not already done so
- Complete your personal statements and other application materials for each school to which you are applying.
- Reach out to faculty about reference letters
- Request and send in your [transcript](#).
- Apply in the fall or early winter if you plan to attend the next fall. The earlier you apply, the more likely you are to be accepted.

Start to brainstorm your personal statement between taking the LSAT and getting your score back.

Think of the personal statement as your interview on paper, particularly since the vast majority of law schools do not have the time or resources to interview applicants. Tell a story that demonstrates something that schools cannot glean from the rest of your application.

- Typically, you can tweak your primary essay slightly to fit the majority of your applications. However, each law school may have different prompts. Check each application carefully.
- Your primary task in writing your statement will be to demonstrate your writing skills. Law school performance depends heavily on your ability to communicate in a clear and

sophisticated manner, and law schools want to be sure you are up to the task. Admissions committees will see innumerable applications from bright candidates with good grades and high LSAT scores. The personal statement presents you with an opportunity to put your intellectual ability into context and distinguish yourself from all other applicants.

- Your essay needs to convey what kind of thinking, and feeling person you are. Clarity, conciseness, and candor are essential. Your writing must be well-organized and highlight your strengths and abilities. A thoughtful, illuminating essay that offers true insight will stand out and be remembered.
- Read, revise, and have several others who know you well critique it, including your professors and the Director of the Jurisprudence, Law, and Justice Studies Program.
- Do NOT address weaknesses in your application via the personal statement. If you wish to address a grade, lower GPA, LSAT score, etc., utilize an addendum.

Ask two or three professors or professionals who know you well to write letters of recommendation for you.

- Whether academic or professional, letters of recommendation should come from individuals who know you well enough to present a truly informed assessment of your abilities. At least one letter of recommendation *MUST* be academic in nature. If you plan to attend law school within three years of college graduation, at least two letters should be academic. Remember, above all, law schools are evaluating you as a potential law student.
- Assume that it will take each recommender about a month to complete their letter, so the sooner you ask the better. This also holds true if you plan to take a year or more off before enrolling in law school, as this is the time when professors know you the best and when your coursework is most fresh in their minds.
- Provide your recommenders with an updated copy of your resume and perhaps your personal statement, if available. You may also want to guide them on specific things you would like them to mention in the letter so that each recommender writes on different areas of your skills and accomplishments. The better your recommenders understand why you want to go to law school, the better their letters will contribute to your application. If possible, make an appointment to meet with your recommender to ask for the letter face to face. This will give you the opportunity to discuss your plans and highlight the parts of your application that are most important to you. It will also allow you to gauge your professor's attitude toward your work. The best recommendations will fit neatly with the picture you present of yourself in your personal essay. An effective law school application will compile a cohesive picture of who you are and why that law school should admit you.

What should letters of recommendation include?

- Your ability to excel in the rigorous academic environment of law school.
- Enthusiastic endorsement from a professor in your major.
- Specific reference to your work in a particular course or on a particular project. (Provide your professors with copies of work you have done in order to help them).
- Writing, research, organization, and analytical skills.
- Indication of who you are as a person.
- Extracurricular involvement (especially community service) because law schools value applicants who show long-standing commitment.

Dean's Certificate

A Dean's Certificate is a form that some schools require in order to verify you are or were in good standing at your academic institution(s). It is presently requested by only a handful of law schools, and many only require the document if there is an academic or non-academic violation on record. The form can be found in a law school's application. With most law schools requiring candidates to apply through the LSAC application process, candidates need to look for the Dean's Certificate under the "Supplemental Materials" link which is in most cases directly under the link to the law school's primary application.

Develop a resume specific to the law school application process. If you have had some legal experience in the form of jobs or internships, you may want to incorporate a "legal experience" or "related experience" section. If not, just be sure to highlight substantive experiences. (Peer advisors and career advisors can help you with this). What sort of work experience you have had is not as important as what you have learned through that experience, particularly if you can show that you gained skills that will help you succeed in law school (ie writing, communication, interpersonal skills, analysis, etc.).

Send in your applications by December to guarantee them being read in the first round and increase your likelihood of being accepted. Do note, however, that many schools do accept applications throughout the spring. While it may not be the optimal time to apply, this provides you with the opportunity to add schools in certain ranges depending on earlier outcomes.

Want to gauge where your application might fall compared to other applicants? Using a law school predictor site like [7 Sage](#).

Working Prior to Law School

If you choose to work for a year or more before law school, the process will be somewhat different. You will go through the job search process during your senior year and complete the law school application process while you are working.

Consider the variety of places in which you can work:

- Large, medium, or small private law firms in metropolitan areas.
- Legislative, lobbying, and federal government opportunities in Washington, DC or state and local government offices.
- Nonprofit organizations
- Programs such as Peace Corps or Teach For America
- Postgraduate fellowships in any field.

The LSAT or GRE

Consider the best time for you to take the exam. Do you have a lighter course load senior spring that would lend itself to exam study? Will you have a period of time over the summer before starting work that you can devote to exam prep? Will your job have a set schedule that will allow for study time in the evenings?

Applicants that have taken some time to work prior to law school may be more likely to have taken a GRE at some point. As previously addressed, law schools implemented the use of the GRE primarily as an access tool to make the law school admissions process more accessible and less cost prohibitive to applicants that have either a) already taken the GRE for another program or b) are very uncertain about which type of graduate degree they will pursue. That said, the LSAT is still the heavily recommended test, as it provides the most options for applying and is already a tested and proven indicator of first-year and bar passage success.

Personal Statement

The time you spend working after graduation may provide inspiration for your personal statement, or at least part of it. Law schools will want to hear about what you have done and how you have succeeded in the past year or two.

Letters of Recommendation

- Take care of your academic letters of recommendation while you are still at Hamilton while you, as well as your achievements, are still fresh in your professors' minds.
- You may ask a supervisor from your job to write a letter. They would be able to attest to what you have accomplished since college that pertains to law school.

LSDAS

- Register for LSDAS by August or September of the fall if you wish to apply to law school.
- Ask the Registrar to forward a copy of your transcript to LSDAS.

Applications

- Complete applications online when they are available in September.
- Update your resume and send a copy with your application.