

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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APPLICATION GUIDE FOR LAW SCHOOL

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

1. Read carefully. These materials cover only the most essential information, so don't skip any parts.
2. The guide is divided in two parts. Part I describes generally the main steps necessary to successfully navigate the law school application process. Part II consists of a Calendar-Checklist that serves as a map to outline the timing of the different steps. Do not be misled by the terms "Junior" or "Senior." They are merely meant as road marks. Junior refers to "two years before expected starting date," while senior equates to "one year before expected starting date."
3. After reading through the guide, make an appointment to review your steps and timing with a Prelaw Advisor at the Health Professions and Prelaw Center (HPPLC). You can do so by calling 855-1873. Advisors are available year round and are ready to help you with any question relating to pursuing a legal career. The advisors are experienced in dealing with the LSAT, LSDAS, law school admissions officers, the legal profession, and other sources of interest or confusion for law school applicants. Get on the HPPLC Prelaw Listserve to receive notices of events and reminders of important deadlines. Go to www.hpplc.indiana.edu and click on the "Email Lists" link.
4. Double-check everything you hear or read about law school admission. Distinguish rumor from fact by using the information available at the Center, including current copies of *THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO U.S. LAW SCHOOLS* and the *MIDWEST ASSOCIATION OF PRELAW ADVISORS (MAPLA) LAW SCHOOL PROFILES*.

I. STEPS IN APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL

Your complete admission package, ready for processing by a law school admission committee, contains four units of information:

A. LSAT SCORE

B. LSDAS REPORT

C. COMPLETED LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION (this includes your personal statement)

D. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Make sure each law school to which you apply receives these four units **by late October/mid-November** in the fall of the year immediately preceding that in which you wish to enroll. Nearly every law school has a rolling admission policy, which means they may have already nearly filled their class by their posted application deadline. Don't panic if you fall behind the suggested schedule—but do come in to see us. We can help. Remember that applying early in the fall semester can be extremely helpful, and that seeing a Prelaw Advisor and using HPPLC's services at any point can save a great deal of time and worry.

A. THE LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST (LSAT SCORE)

The LSAT is a standardized exam designed to measure certain abilities important to the study of law. All law schools require the LSAT for admission. The LSAT tests neither legal nor non-legal **knowledge**; rather, it attempts to test **how you think**, specifically in the areas of reading and comprehending complex texts, managing and organizing information, and processing that information to reach conclusions. Law school admission committees use LSAT scores in conjunction with other credentials to determine the acceptability of law school applicants.

You can and should prepare for the LSAT. There is no best way to prepare, but familiarity with the wording and structure of the different questions, the way of thinking of the exam writers, time-saving techniques, and exploring solution methods will definitely improve your score. Taking and analyzing actual past exams under timed conditions, most of which are available at HPPLC free of charge, is an inexpensive and effective way to prepare. Another excellent way to prepare is by using commercial preparation books. We do not recommend one particular book above others. There is free and commercial help available online, and HPPLC's website has links to several of these. A Prelaw Advisor can help you develop a plan of attack which suits your particular strengths and weaknesses. HPPLC offers a preparation workshop, as do private companies such as Kaplan or Princeton Review. Some review courses for the test start 2-3 months before the test date. If your skills at taking this type of test need development, an early start is highly recommended.

The LSAT is offered at test centers throughout the world in June, October, December, and February. Test registration packets are available at HPPLC each March, and online at www.lsac.org. You should carefully read the registration materials, complete them and register at least one month before the exam registration date. Be aware of the regular and late registration deadlines.

Because law school applications are usually submitted during the fall preceding the year you want to begin law school, the June or October test dates offer the best opportunities for timely application. The June exam also offers three strategic advantages over the October exam: (1) although the exam should be approached as a one-time-only test, if you need to repeat the exam you can do so in the fall and still apply early; (2) you will receive your score by early July and can match your law school search to your scores and grade point average (GPA); and (3) most students benefit from the increase in available study time in the month between spring finals and the exam date; however, the October test date is still timely for admission purposes. The December exam is acceptable, although your application would not have the advantage of being early. Waiting until February of your senior year to take the LSAT may preclude your chances for admission to many schools.

Test scores will be reported for five years; however, some schools honor scores for only three. Be sure to check with each school if this may be an issue for you—and schools can make exceptions. If you take the exam more than once, the LSDAS sends the average score, as well as each individual score, to every school to which you apply. Law schools normally use only the averaged score (again, with exceptions—Indianapolis, for example, will use only your highest score); therefore, you should retake the exam only if you are relatively certain of **substantially** improving your score. This may be the case, for example, if you were ill during the exam, excessively nervous, or were not prepared. In 2004-2005, 76.3% of law applicants took the LSAT only once, 19.7% took it twice, and approximately 4% took it more than twice. There is an LSAT repeater table in the LSAT registration materials to help guide the decision whether to take it again. You may normally take the exam only three times in two years.

B. LAW SCHOOL DATA ASSEMBLY SERVICE (LSDAS REPORT)

Every law school in this country requires you to register for and use the LSDAS. This service compiles in one report most of the information the law schools need: your LSAT score, your LSAT writing sample, a copy of your academic transcript(s), a summary that standardizes your undergraduate transcript so that it may be compared to applicants from other schools, and copies of your letters of recommendation. You must register and pay for this service, then make sure to arrange to send the LSDAS all the material it needs. Nothing will

be forwarded to them automatically except your LSAT score. You must arrange to have everything else sent to them. Please be aware that it may take them two weeks or more to process your material after receipt.

You may register for the LSAT and LSDAS at the same time, but you need not. However, it is a good idea to have your file with the LSDAS completed at the latest about 6 weeks before you submit applications. LSDAS registration now lasts for five years. The cost of the LSAT exam is \$118. The LSDAS service costs \$109, with an additional charge of \$12 for each report that is sent to a law school. At the time you subscribe to the service, you do not specify the schools to which you plan to apply—the LSDAS relies on being contacted directly by the law schools, which will happen after your application is received. You may apply electronically to all law schools through the LSAC website after you are registered for the LSDAS.

Law Services may award fee waivers to students in financial need. You may request a waiver application from HPPLC, any law school admissions office, or find information online or from the LSAT/LSDAS Registration book. Be aware that students requesting a waiver face much earlier registration deadlines; if you plan to apply for a waiver, apply for everything at least **two months** before the test date—and earlier is better.

Students may request special accommodations for disabilities; but, again, *much earlier deadlines apply* and you should consult the above sources of information for details, and/or see a HPPLC Prelaw Advisor. Be prepared for your request to be sent back for additional information at least once, with the final request from you still due at the original deadline. Accommodated scores are absolutely **NOT** looked upon negatively by the schools! If you qualify for accommodations, you should not hesitate to request them.

After you have registered with the LSDAS, you will need to send a complete official transcript from **every** undergraduate college or university you have attended. All IU campuses fall under one central transcript. The only exceptions are courses taken at Indiana/Purdue campuses through Purdue University. For overseas study, you need only obtain a transcript from the domestic sponsoring institution. Before sending the transcript, examine it carefully. Do not send it until you have removed any Incompletes or errors. Your LSDAS file will not be considered complete until all transcripts have been received. Note that they will not accept transcripts sent directly from students. You will need to access your LSDAS account, print out a “Transcript Request Form,” and give it to all schools that you have attended. For IUB, the transcript should be sent by the Registrar in Franklin Hall 100. The Registrar’s Web site allows students to arrange for transcripts to be sent even if you are out of town.

LSDAS will send you a copy of your completed report; be sure to check it and notify the service of any errors. Law schools request a copy of your report from LSDAS when they receive your application. LSDAS will send you an Activity Update each month, so you will know when law schools access your report. Your LSDAS GPA can be higher or lower than your IU GPA, because LSDAS uses different criteria to compute grades. The main differences between their formula and IUB’s are that LSDAS counts an “A+” as 4.33, and for repeated courses they will count both grades.

C. LAW SCHOOL APPLICATIONS

You can write or call schools to request application materials, and most now have applications online. You can also apply electronically through the LSAC website if you have an LSDAS account.

Once you have received your applications, decide to which schools you will apply and fill out their applications **accurately, neatly, and completely**. Electronic submissions are preferred, and you should avoid filling out applications by hand. Many law schools view such applications as unprofessional. Be sure to proofread the entire application, and **DO NOT RELY ON SPELLCHECK**. A single typo may result in a denial.

Be sure to make and keep copies of everything you send to each law school. You may need these for future reference.

Most law schools ask for a personal statement in addition to the routine background information. The personal statement provides an opportunity for you to demonstrate your writing skills and to present information that the application itself did not highlight. It can be a crucial component of your application materials.

BASIC GUIDELINES FOR COMPOSING AND WRITING YOUR PERSONAL STATEMENT:

1. Remember that first and foremost the personal statement is a sample of your writing. Impress the admission committee with your clarity and organization. Do not use long, complicated sentences, legalese, or “big” words only to create an impression of a large vocabulary. Write clearly and cogently. Writing Tutorial Services can help with these elements.
2. Respond to the directions given in **each** application. It is a good idea to personalize to some extent an otherwise generic statement. If you personalize the statement, make sure you give **specific** references to each school. A general statement, unsupported, such as, "I'm looking forward to a quality legal education at Acme Law School," rings with insincerity.
3. Consult guides and explore options for writing the statement BEFORE you begin! Speak to a Prelaw Advisor and research the many books and websites that offer advice. HPPLC has several resources for your use, including several dozen actual statements by IUB applicants.
4. Outline the statement, write it, and then rewrite it several times. It is usually better to develop one or two themes that you would like the admission committee members to remember rather than to touch on numerous points.
5. If the instructions specify the amount of space or limit the number of words you are to use, follow those specifications carefully. Unless otherwise noted, a good length for a personal statement is around 500 to 700 words, or two to three double-spaced typed pages. If you feel you *really* need to say more, call the admission offices and make sure this is acceptable before submitting the statement. Make sure that the typeface, the margins, and the paragraphing make the statement attractive and inviting.
6. Proofread carefully—do not rely solely on spellcheck! Any lapse in grammar or syntax will create doubt about your ability to use the English language well. Any errors in typing or spelling will be a poor reflection on your attention to detail and your sincerity in applying.

Bring a draft of your statement to the Center for feedback from a Prelaw Advisor. For more information, pick up the publication on "WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT" from the Health Professions and Prelaw Center office. We also have sample essays for your perusal, and addresses for several web-based guides.

Before sending your application, be sure you have included all information the school has requested, including your personal statement, any additional forms specific to that school, and your application fee (or waiver). Additionally, authorize HPPLC to forward your letters of recommendation. Keep in mind that at the busiest times it can take HPPLC and the LSDAS two weeks each to process your material!

D. LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Most law schools require letters of recommendation from persons who can evaluate your potential. If they are optional it is still preferable to submit them. The importance of these letters varies from school to school, but generally the following statements apply:

1. Recommendations are most influential when the applicant's grades and test scores are borderline for the particular school or the student is an average applicant, neither an automatic accept or reject. Additionally, at extremely competitive schools, recommendations can play a major role.
2. The instructions as to how many letters each school wants (typically 3) and from whom (typically faculty members) vary, but can be found on the school's application form. What they generally do NOT find useful are letters from persons with whom you have not had some kind of professional relationship (e.g., family friends who may be attorneys, local politicians, clergy, or other “character references.”)

- Do not waste your recommendations with useless name-dropping! A very general recommendation from a well-known person who barely knows you carries little weight, especially when compared to a detailed, specific letter from an experienced teacher or AI who knows you well in a small class and who can compare you to other students known from several years of teaching. Faculty evaluations are usually more helpful than recommendations from employers; talk with the Prelaw Advisor to see if an employer recommendation is advisable in your case.

Before sending recommendations of any type to a school, be sure that you have studied that school's recommendation policy in its bulletin and application materials. Some schools accept only a limited number of letters. Make sure you follow the directions for each school. When a school does not specify how many recommendations it will accept, it is usually advisable to send three recommendations that discuss different aspects of your credentials. The LSDAS will accept up to four generic letters. They will send the number requested by each school in the order they are received from you, *unless* you specify otherwise online.

The Center offers a **Recommendation Service** for Indiana University students. The service allows applicants to collect recommendations over several years from professors as they go through undergraduate courses and places the letters in their file. Then, at the applicant's request, the Center forwards the letters to law schools or LSDAS. For more detailed information, read the *GUIDE TO THE RECOMMENDATION SERVICE*, a booklet available in the Center and *WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HPPLC'S RECOMMENDATION SERVICE*.

Advance planning can make getting letters of recommendation much easier. Open your file with the Center early, in your sophomore or early junior year if possible. The most valuable recommendations come from those recommenders who are very familiar with your particular strengths and weaknesses. These are difficult to obtain if you go through college anonymously. Taking small, discussion-oriented classes, participating actively in all classes, and visiting instructors during office hours are a few ways to develop the academic and personal relationships necessary to get informative recommendations. See an advisor at the Center if you are anxious or unsure of yourself in asking for the letters.

II. CHECK LIST CALENDAR

ACTION SUGGESTED	SUGGESTED TIME
DOUBLE-CHECK THE APPLICATIONS YOU HAVE COMPLETED (including instructions on deadlines, recommendations, and personal statement); then mail them. Keep photocopies of everything you send.	OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER. It is becoming increasingly important to submit an application early . Set a personal deadline of mid-November to have everything completed.
REQUEST THAT HPPLC SEND THE RECOMMENDATIONS you designate to the addresses you provide, including the LSDAS. This request must be in writing.	SHORTLY BEFORE OR AFTER APPLICATIONS ARE SENT. Note that some schools do not consider your application to be complete until it contains a minimum number of letters, while for others letters are optional.
MAKE SURE THAT YOUR FILE IS COMPLETE AT THE LSDAS AND AT EACH LAW SCHOOL TO WHICH YOU APPLIED. Some schools will send confirmation that your file is complete; others will not. You should get independent confirmation from each school.	SHORTLY AFTER YOUR MATERIAL HAS BEEN SENT. The LSDAS often makes mistakes. It is your responsibility to see to it that each school and LSDAS have actually received and sent all necessary materials. This is absolutely essential!!
FILL OUT ALL FINANCIAL AID FORMS for each school, and a FAFSA form. Note that some loans require information from the current year's income tax forms—so do your taxes early!	DECEMBER AND JANUARY. Don't wait until you've been accepted. Most financial aid deadlines are in February and March. After that, they may be out of money! File a FAFSA form by the deadline (around March 1).

<p>TRY TO RELAX AND UPDATE YOUR APPLICATIONS. Be prompt and businesslike. Show them that you are professional in your attention to detail. Always be extremely courteous on the telephone.</p>	<p>JANUARY-APRIL. Send each school your fall semester grades, and don't be shy about telling them about honors or accomplishments you achieve after your application has been sent. Talk with an advisor for follow-up strategies.</p>
<p>INFORM THE CENTER TO WHICH SCHOOLS YOU HAVE BEEN ADMITTED AND/OR WAITLISTED. If waitlisted, send a letter of continuing interest after consulting with a Prelaw Advisor. The advisor can also provide information that can help you choose between schools.</p>	<p>APRIL-AUGUST. Remember, no school should ask for a non-refundable seat deposit before April 1. Schools often wait until this time before deciding upon waitlist admissions. But some students on waitlists may not receive a final decision until the first day of classes.</p>
<p>MAKE YOUR FINAL DECISION. Remember to send in your admission deposit and to notify other schools, thus freeing up your spot for another anxious student. Donate your LSAT prep books and other helpful material to the Center. Fill out an evaluation form. Your evaluation of our services is important to us!</p>	<p>AS SOON AS YOU HAVE ALL THE RESULTS. If a school wants a deposit or a binding decision from you before you have heard from all of your schools, request an extension. When granted, these are usually for one week at a time.</p>

III. CONCLUSION

The Health Professions and Prelaw Center is eager to assist you in your pursuit of a legal education. Although the initiative must be yours and you are responsible for all details and decisions, the Center's staff stands ready and willing to assist you. Please feel free to drop by the Center to look around, or call 855-1873 to make an appointment to get started. The only dumb questions are the ones you don't ask. Good luck!

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We encourage you to use e-mail to ask questions, check your recommendations, and to communicate with our Prelaw Advisors. Send e-mail to an individual Prelaw Advisor or to udivhpp@indiana.edu. Please check the HPPLC Web site for notices about upcoming meetings, campus visits by admission representatives, and other items of interest.

This document has been prepared for Indiana University--Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.