

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION--QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR JUNIORS AND SENIORS

A. I HEARD YOU CANNOT STUDY FOR THE LSAT. IS THAT TRUE?

No! Although you cannot *substantively* study for the LSAT, you can and should prepare for the test by practicing and analyzing past LSAT exams and becoming familiar with format of the test itself. The more familiar you are with the types of questions the LSAT asks, the more likely you will score near your potential. It is important to develop strategies for tackling the questions *well before* test day. People who fail to prepare well are usually disappointed with their scores. HPPLC provides information to aid you in developing a preparation strategy, including past LSAT exams (which you may borrow at no charge), a low-cost 20 hour LSAT prep workshop, and various commercial prep books. You should plan on spending at least 8 to 10 weeks, or more, in serious, thorough preparation. Please register for the HPPLC prelaw email list to receive notice of LSAT preparation programs, classes, and LSAT updates from the Law School Admission Council.

B. I JUST CHECKED MY LSAT SCORE AND MY GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA) AGAINST THE MEDIANS FOR THE LAW SCHOOLS I WANT TO ATTEND, AND I'M OUT OF LUCK. WHAT CAN I DO?

The first things law schools want to know about you are your GPA and LSAT score. But, remember that admission is a competitive process, and while your GPA and LSAT may not be as high as you had hoped, your chances of gaining admission depend as much on the GPA and LSAT scores of other applicants in the pool as they do on your own "numbers."

You must remember that the median LSAT or GPA for a particular law school simply represents the numbers of the one student who is exactly in the middle of the class. Half the students have higher scores and half have lower. If your numbers are not quite at the median of the schools which you would like to attend, you should not be discouraged from applying until you have researched the numbers of the bottom half of the class. And keep in mind that one out of four admitted applicants scored *below* the 25th percentile LSAT score. Use *THE OFFICIAL GUIDE TO U.S. LAW SCHOOLS* for more specific information provided by the schools for admission odds for students with your exact numbers. If the law school has admitted several applicants with numbers not far from yours, then submitting an application is probably worthwhile. There are over 190 law schools in the United States; only a handful of applicants will be unable to obtain admission from any of them. Keep in mind that your personal statement, letters of recommendation, activities, and other qualifications may also play a major role in the admission decision. Ask schools in which you are interested and the Prelaw Advisors how to present your qualifications in the best light.

C. MY GPA IS TERRIBLE, BUT MY LSAT IS GREAT (OR VICE VERSA). WHAT SHOULD I DO?

If you have a high LSAT and below average GPA--or the reverse--you have some explaining to do. You should include a *separate* memo to the admission committee explaining why your GPA is low (i.e., illness, family problems, need to work, wrong major). Most law schools pay attention to trends in GPA's and regard a rising trend favorably. Students whose GPA is increasing should point this out to the admission committee.

For a relatively low LSAT score, information such as excessive anxiety, lack of preparation, illness, a history of poor performance on standardized tests, etc., can be useful to the school in interpreting your score (and especially multiple scores where one score is relatively higher). However, law schools will expect you to retake the exam if such circumstances truly prevented you from performing to your potential, so plan ahead. Read Section D below carefully.

If you want to address LSAT or GPA shortcomings, be sure to present information as an **explanation**, not as an **excuse**. Law schools will read information you send to them; but, they alone decide what weight to give it in the admission decision. **Please talk with an advisor for ideas about how to present this information.** It is generally recommended to discuss these issues in a separate letter of addendum, and NOT in your personal statement—but there are exceptions. As always, it is best to discuss such issues with a Prelaw Advisor.

D. I BOMBED THE LSAT. SHOULD I RETAKE IT?

Think about it carefully. While most law schools (but not all) give preference to the highest LSAT score you achieve, they will see all scores along with an average. The presence of a low LSAT score may well raise questions among some admissions officials; sometimes an explanation of same is advisable. Consult with a Prelaw Advisor if you have questions. Some schools will tend to disregard the first score if the second is 5 or more points higher; some favor the more recent score. The Prelaw Advisor has information on how specific schools use multiple scores. The LSAT, unlike some other standardized tests, is a very consistent exam; if you prepared for the test, did not experience any undue test anxiety, and were not sick on the day of the exam, that score may be representative for you, especially if it is within two or three points of your practice scores.

Especially if you can point to something specific (i.e., illness on test day or unusual and disconcerting test conditions) to indicate that performance on the first test was influenced by some factor unrelated to ability, then a retake might be in order. Another factor which might indicate that you should retake is lack of preparation. If you walked in "cold" or with only a few days spent in preparation, a retake would probably be advisable, particularly if you have a history of having done well on other standardized tests.

E. DO I HAVE TO PESTER MY PROFESSORS FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION?

In a word, yes. Law schools are interested in learning what kind of a law student you will be. Letters that address your intellectual abilities are the ones which are most helpful to admission committees. Typically, letters from faculty members are the most informative and useful kinds an applicant can provide. Faculty letters should address the kind of work done in the course, the type of students in the course (all juniors and seniors or mostly freshmen and sophomores), the relative rigor of the class, and how well you did compared to others in the course. Often at a large university like IU students do not seek out opportunities to work closely with a faculty member; students must then rely on recommenders who do not know them well. In that case, it is important that the faculty member describe the work done in the course in some detail, even though the faculty member may not remember you except as a name in a grade book. HPPLC has guidelines for letter-writers if they would like suggestions on what to include.

Professors (and AIs) often serve as recommenders for a number of students in any given semester. When you ask a professor to write for you, then be sure to provide as much information as possible in order to make their job easier. Professors often like to meet with students for a few minutes to reacquaint themselves with the person, to find out more about other things the student has done while at IU, and why the student is applying to law school. They may ask you for a transcript, a resume or short memo about your other accomplishments, a copy of a paper or project you did in that class, or a recent writing sample. Gather this information before you ask the professor to write for you.

Letters from "important" people such as senators, congressmen, clergy, or state legislators are usually of little value. Most letters from politicians only reflect the fact that you and your family are constituents whose votes the politician would like to keep. If you have worked for that person's office, then a letter might be valuable if it addresses the kind of work done and the abilities you demonstrated. Usually, though, your direct supervisor can write a more detailed letter.

Use employer/internship/volunteer recommendations only to supplement and in addition to faculty recommendations, not as a substitute. Occasionally an employer, etc., can write a letter which addresses an applicant's intellectual abilities. This will generally happen when the employment involved research or writing. More typically, an employer can only write about personal characteristics, because the nature of the employment did not require the applicant to demonstrate much beyond average intellectual ability. These letters are often less helpful.

You should submit no more and no fewer than the law school application specifies. For those schools which do not specify, you should submit three letters. When in doubt, simply call the admission office.

F. WHAT IN THE WORLD SHOULD I SAY IN MY PERSONAL STATEMENT?

The personal statement is your chance to tell the admission committee something about you that they can't see from the rest of the application. Use it as an opportunity to give them extra information about you, and to leave a lasting impression of you as a person who would be an asset to their next class.

Whatever you write, write it well. Have someone look over your statement; check it for organization, style, grammar, and typos (do NOT merely rely on a computer spell check!). Your application will likely be one in a stack of applications that a weary admission committee is wading through, so anything which makes you stand out is to your advantage. Some law schools tell you what they want you to write about; many do not give any hints. In general, though, law schools want to know about **you**. That is why it is called a **personal** statement.

Be concrete. It is not enough to say "I have leadership abilities" or "I have unique insight." Convince the reader of your abilities through specific examples. Tell a story, paint a picture of yourself. *Show* your readers who you are rather than *tell* them. Do not assume that an admission committee will know what your role in a particular activity, job or office entailed from a mere listing. Use the statement as a way to expand on activities you list on the application, showing why they are interesting or important to you.

For more information about writing your personal statement, please see *A WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT FOR LAW SCHOOL*, an information sheet available in the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. See also links on our website for online help.

G. I'M AN ORDINARY WHITE MALE AND LAW SCHOOLS ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN WOMEN AND MINORITIES/I'M A WOMAN, AND THE LEGAL PROFESSION IS DOMINATED BY MALES/I'M A MINORITY STUDENT AND THERE ARE VERY FEW MINORITY STUDENTS IN LAW SCHOOL. SO MY CHANCES OF ADMISSION ARE SLIM, RIGHT?

Walk into almost any law school and look at the people you see in the classroom. In 2003, 20.3% of law students were members of minority groups, and 49.4% were women. In 2005, at Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington, women comprised 39.2% percent of the student body and minorities comprised 16.1%. The numbers of males, females, and members of minority groups enrolled in law school is fairly representative of the composition of the national applicant pool.

Many law schools are committed to increasing the representation of minorities in the profession; law schools actively recruit minority students. Minority students should inquire about specific admissions policies or scholarship opportunities at particular schools since such policies and opportunities vary.

HPPLC has a Minority Prelaw Advisor who specializes in these issues. Call 812-855-1873 for an appointment.

H. I'VE BEEN THINKING ABOUT LAW SCHOOL, BUT IT IS EXPENSIVE, AND BESIDES, I HEAR THERE ARE TOO MANY LAWYERS ANYWAY.

Legal education is expensive. Costs differ among schools. Generally private law schools are more expensive than state schools, both for in-state and out-of-state residents. Schools offer more merit than need-based scholarships. You should contact the schools about what you might expect in the way of assistance. In addition, there are substantial loan packages available for you to consider.

There are a million people in the U.S. with a law degree. Not all of them practice law, but certainly there are quite a few lawyers in the country. This also means that a huge number of attorneys retire each year. Employment prospects remain very bright for attorneys nationwide. For the latest projections, consult the U.S. Department of Labor's Occupational Outlook Handbook at <http://stats.bls.gov/oco/ocos053.htm#outlook>

In the early 1990s the job market for new lawyers was depressed, and a few firms actually laid-off lawyers; but, like any profession, law follows the ebb and flow of the economy. As the economy recovered, so did the job market. In any year, regardless of economies, there will always be a place for well-trained, capable lawyers.

Additionally, you should track the growth of businesses and industries which seem hot at any given time. Any growing industry needs lawyers to handle the problems and maintenance which accompany growth. For example, health care and insurance, technology and the internet, patent and intellectual property, and international government and business relations are hot areas of law.

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 of 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.