

PRE-LAW HANDBOOK



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Table of Contents

Deciding on a Career in Law	2
<i>Exploring Your Interest</i>	
Preparing For Law School	3
<i>Developing Skills</i>	
<i>Selecting A Major</i>	
<i>Extracurricular Activities</i>	
<i>Resources at the Case Western Reserve University School of Law</i>	
<i>Role of the Pre-Law Advisor in Undergraduate Studies</i>	
Determining Where to Apply	5
Checklist for Researching Law Schools	6
Applying to Law School	8
<i>How the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) Can Help You</i>	
Resources and Publications	10
A Pre-Law Timetable	11
Action Report Summary from LSAC	12
Heeding the Advice of Alumni	15

Deciding on a Career in Law

A JD, or Juris Doctor, can lead to a wide range of law-related fields and can open doors to careers in government, business, non-profits, and higher education. Law schools now specialize with concentrations in Intellectual Property, Entertainment Law, Immigration Law, Environmental Law, Health Law, International Law and many other branches. At the most basic level, “the possibility of effecting social change, setting legal precedent, and defending basic human rights” is indeed attractive to those who want to make an impact on the lives of clients they serve. The legal profession also holds out the promise of high salaries and professional prestige. However, the ground has shifted in the current legal market, and undergraduates need to understand the structural changes that are taking place. Positions for newly minted JDs have declined, especially in the large private firms. Students should pursue a legal career only if it is something they passionately want to do. Don’t go to law school out of default: because you couldn’t get into medical school or didn’t know what to do with a BA in English or history.

Exploring your interest

Here are some suggestions to help you decide if a legal career is right for you:

- Email Pre-Law Advisor Terri Mester at terri.mester@case.edu and ask to be included in the pre-law database and Blackboard so you will be informed of job opportunities, free LSAT practice tests, and upcoming information sessions.
- Attend the valuable sessions conducted by law school admissions and career office personnel, law professors, judges, prosecutors, and specialized practitioners.
- Take assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Strong Interest Inventory through Case Western Reserve’s [Career Center](#) to determine if your personality, values and interests match those required in the legal profession.
- Intern with a law firm or law-related organization in the summer like Legal Aid or the ACLU to gain exposure to the field.
- Shadow individual lawyers during winter and spring breaks.
- Conduct information interviews to learn about the legal profession. Talk with lawyers who are family members, family friends or Case Western Reserve alumni. Inquire about:
 - ⇒ What lawyers do in a typical day
 - ⇒ Personal attributes needed to be successful in a legal career
 - ⇒ Satisfactions and dissatisfactions of the field
 - ⇒ Impact of a legal career on personal lives

Preparing for Law School

Admissions committees look at a variety of factors and trends in your academic record in order to predict how well you will perform in law school. There is no pre-law major, and unlike medical school, there are no specific educational requirements for entrance into law school. So choose classes that challenge your ability to think and reason logically, that require you to research subjects thoroughly and write extensively, and that sharpen your ability to analyze material.

Developing skills

The following disciplines can help develop skills that are necessary in law school and will serve a future lawyer well:

- *Social sciences* offer insight into human behavior, social processes, and institutions. Courses which give you a better understanding of diverse cultures will help prepare you for a legal career.
- *English and communication* courses improve written and oral expression.
- *Mathematics and philosophy* classes provide background in logic and reasoning, as well as problem-solving skills.
- *Physical sciences* require systematic analysis of evidence and inductive reasoning.
- *Business* classes like management, accounting, and economics will provide invaluable entrepreneurial skills to help you manage a law practice.

Case Western Reserve also offers law-related courses like Introduction to Logic, Constitutional Law, Environmental Law, Philosophy of Law, Business Law, the Sociology of Law, and Law and Economics. Check with individual departments to find out which semesters these courses are available.

Selecting a major

Choose a major that interests you. We cannot stress that enough. However, there are specialized areas of law that you may want to prepare for as an undergraduate. For example, if you are considering a career in intellectual property, you may want to major in engineering or science. If you are thinking of environmental law, geology or biology would be appropriate majors. Learning languages and taking courses in international studies will help lay the groundwork for a career in international law. Courses in economics, management and accounting are useful for corporate and tax law. In the past, Case Western Reserve sent more engineering and science majors to law school than political science majors. The latter, though, is still the single most popular major nationally.

Extracurricular Activities

Admission committees are interested in students with well-rounded backgrounds. They seek candidates with activities in which you've played a strong leadership role and in which you have demonstrated the ability to work well with others. However, admissions people consider noteworthy the extent of your involvement and not your nominal association. Favorite prelaw activities include: the pre-law society (Phi Alpha Delta), Mock Trial, and student government. Also consider summer jobs, internships, and public service. However, do not devote so much time to extracurricular activities that your GPA suffers. Grade point averages and LSAT scores are the first things considered in the admission process.

The resources of the Case Western Reserve University School of Law

Undergraduates at Case Western Reserve have a wealth of prelaw resources available from the Case Western Reserve University School of Law. Those who undertake law-related research projects have access to an excellent law library and eager-to-help librarians. Several law professors teach courses in SAGES, history, philosophy, and political science. Both faculty and law students help coach the undergraduate Mock Trial team. Prewlaw students can also participate as jurors in mock trials held as part of the law school course in Trial Tactics. Some undergraduates are employed by the law school in part-time positions as library or office assistants or as actors portraying clients in courses that train law students to interview and counsel. Others take advantage of sitting in on a law school class or watching law students compete in moot court or mock trial programs.

The pre-law advisor in the Office of Undergraduate Studies

Undergraduates who have questions about prelaw education or opportunities at Case Western Reserve or who want more information about legal careers and the law school admissions process are invited to contact the Pre-Law Advisor, Dr. Terri Mester. She received a BA, MA, and PhD from Case Western Reserve and is an Adjunct Professor in SAGES. Her professional writing workshops for lawyers have been accredited with the American Bar Association.

Specifically, Dr. Mester can help you with:

- navigating the Law School Admission Council's [website](#)
- determining where to apply
- critiquing personal statement drafts and resumes
- negotiating scholarship offers
- locating shadowing and internship opportunities
- providing network opportunities with legal professionals during Community Hour sessions

Determining Where to Apply

Consider the following factors and determine which are important to you:

National/regional schools: Does the school attract students from across the country and abroad, or are most students from the region in which the school is located? Do most of the students want to work in the school's region following graduation or throughout the country?

Faculty: What are the academic and experiential backgrounds of faculty? How accessible are they? What is the faculty-student ratio, the number of full-time vs. adjunct faculty, and the number of minority faculty?

Student body: What is the size of the entering class? What does the admissions profile tell you about the quality of the student body? Where did students study as undergraduates and what are their geographic backgrounds? Is there diversity in interests and personal/cultural backgrounds? What is the overall atmosphere: Are students friendly or overly competitive? Is there much interaction with fellow students outside the classroom?

Special programs: What courses are available in specialized areas? What joint degree programs of interest to you are available? What are the opportunities for practical experience including clinics, internships, etc.? What specialized institutes, journals, or organizations exist in your areas of interest?

Career services: What advising and resources are available to help you find a job? Is career counseling available? How many employers recruit at the law school, and who are they? What percentage of the class has employment lined up at graduation? In what types of positions and geographic areas are they employed? What is the percentage of students holding judicial clerkships? What assistance is given to students not interested in working for law firms? What is the bar passage rate for recent graduates?

Student life: Is housing provided for first-year students? If not, does the school offer assistance in locating off-campus housing? Is the school located in a safe area? Is the location rural or urban? What is the cost of living? What cultural opportunities are there? Does the school provide recreational facilities like clubs and gyms?

Costs: What are tuition, housing, and transportation costs? Is financial aid exclusively need-based or are merit scholarships available?

Non-traditional alternatives: Some law schools offer alternatives to fall admission in a full-time law program. Evening divisions and part-time programs make it possible for students to work and study law simultaneously, earning a JD in four years. A few schools on the quarter system allow you to enter mid-year. And finally, some schools have created summer trial programs, which allow borderline applicants to prove themselves capable of law school in time for fall entrance.

Checklist for Researching Law Schools

	School #1	School #2
Name		
Regional/national		
Faculty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic backgrounds • Faculty/student ratio • Accessibility 		
Student body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of entering class • Geographical backgrounds • Diversity • Interaction beyond the classroom 		
Special programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses available in specialized areas • Joint degree programs • Clinics and internships • Specialized institutes/journals/organizations 		
Career services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of career counseling • % of graduating class with law-related employment • Types of positions • Judicial clerkships • Bar passage rate 		
Student life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural or urban location • Cost of living • Cultural opportunities • Recreational facilities on campus 		
Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition, transportation, housing • Financial aid: need- or merit-based • Expected debt load 		

Checklist for Researching Law Schools

	School #3	School #4
Name		
Regional/national		
Faculty <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic backgrounds • Faculty/student ratio • Accessibility 		
Student body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size of entering class • Geographical backgrounds • Diversity • Interaction beyond the classroom 		
Special programs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses available in specialized areas • Joint degree programs • Clinics and internships • Specialized institutes/journals/organizations 		
Career services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of career counseling • % of graduating class with law-related employment • Types of positions • Judicial clerkships • Bar passage rate 		
Student life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rural or urban location • Cost of living • Cultural opportunities • Recreational facilities on campus 		
Costs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tuition, transportation, housing • Financial aid: need- or merit-based • Expected debt load 		

Applying to Law School

On the [LSAC website](#) you can:

- learn about and register for the LSAT
- register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) in order to get your transcripts and recommendations processed
- complete your applications, submit them online, and track their progress
- sign up for the Candidate Referral Service, a free service that connects you to law schools
- apply for fee waivers and accommodated testing on the LSAT
- order LSAT study materials
- research law schools by using the [Official Guide to ABA-approved Law Schools](#)
- start to learn about how to finance your law school education

Almost all law schools require the following documents:

1. **APPLICATION FORM:** Law school application forms are pretty straightforward. Use LSAC's online application process. You only need to answer common questions once (e.g. name, address, undergraduate degree). Moreover, the service allows you to attach your personal statement and resume electronically. Most students find the service well worth the cost.
2. **TWO TO THREE LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:** Most law schools require two letters of recommendation. Some require three letters or a combination of letters and a quantitative evaluation form provided by LSAC. You can submit as many as four letters. Recommendations should include concrete examples of intellectual strength, analytical ability, research skills, maturity, judgment, motivation, leadership, and communication skills.

Letters from academics carry the most weight since they can address your success in an academic setting and your potential for law school. If you've been working for several years and out of academia, outside people can also write a letter, but you should have at least one academic. No matter whom you choose to ask, make sure that person knows you well. It is better to have an in-depth letter from a TA or lecturer than a famous professor who barely knows you and will probably write a formulaic letter.

Approach your potential letter writers way in advance of the application deadline. Ask them: Do you know my work well enough to write a positive letter on my behalf to law school? If the answer is yes, provide them with sufficient information on your background to assist them in writing a detailed and convincing letter:

- resume
 - draft of personal statement (if available)
 - copies of exams or papers written in his or her class
 - recommendation forms from [lsac.org](#)
3. **TRANSCRIPT(S):** Law schools will ask you to submit official transcripts from the University Registrar Office. Instruct the Registrar to send transcripts to the Credential Assembly Service. CAS will send your transcript(s) to the law schools where you've applied.
 4. **LSAT:** The Law School Admission Test is a standardized test required for admission to all law schools. Scored from 120-180, the test has three main sections: reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical reasoning. The actual test consists of five sections, each 35 minutes:

one reading comprehension, two logical reasoning, and one analytical reasoning, plus one experimental section, which doesn't count. Additionally, there is a writing section which does not factor into your score but is sent to law schools.

Timing issues: The best time to take the LSAT is when you have the best chance of doing well. You should take it when you have time to focus on preparing for the test and when you are not overwhelmed by other stresses in your life. The test is given four times a year: February, June, October, and December. Many students take the test in October of their senior year. They have more time to study for the test during the summer and usually the workload is not quite as intense in early October. However, there are advantages to taking the LSAT in June. You'll know your score in the summer and have a better basis to select where to apply. You can take the test in December and apply the same academic year. However, law schools will not be able to make a final decision about your candidacy until late in the application cycle. If you take the test in February most law schools will require you to wait until the following academic year to submit your application.

Test sites: You can register to take the test at Case Western Reserve. It is also offered at Kent State University and Akron University.

5. **PERSONAL STATEMENTS:** All law schools require you to submit a personal statement. It is your opportunity to show the school who you are. The statement is usually 500 words or two double-spaced pages.
 - **The personal statement should be *personal*.** You can highlight aspects of yourself which may not be apparent in any other place in your application. Do not, however, write a theoretical academic essay on a particular topic. Instead, tell a story about yourself.
 - **The personal statement should be easy to read and well written.** Write concretely and evoke the senses. Try starting the essay with a revealing anecdote. Use declarative sentences and active voice. Write several drafts and show them to people you trust to give feedback. The law schools are using this letter to gauge how good you are as a writer, so errors will harm your chance for admission. Use regular fonts and margins.
 - **The personal statement should be original.** Although you may want to directly answer the question "why I want to go to law school," remember that the individuals reading your personal statement have read hundreds of essays which answer this question. Your statement can address how your background and experiences have led you to apply to law school. Don't merely list the reasons you want to be a lawyer. Also, don't start or end with famous quotes or allude to Atticus Finch.
6. **DEAN CERTIFICATION LETTER:** These are forms sent to Undergraduate Studies verifying that you are (or were) a student at Case Western Reserve and in good academic standing. The dean or pre-law advisor must disclose whether you have ever been the subject of formal academic or disciplinary action at Case Western Reserve. The Office of Undergraduate Studies has its own form, which you must sign and hand to the pre-law advisor.

Resources and Publications

Helpful websites for picking law schools:

- top-law-schools.com
- lawschoolnumbers.com
- bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/research.html

Also see:

- americanbar.org – The American Bar Association’s website provides a valuable source of information on a broad range of legal topics.
- abalcc.org – ABA Legal Career Central was created to serve as the predominant reservoir of information and inspiration for pre-law, law students, and lawyers everywhere, dispensing advice through publications, postings and programming.
- ilrg.com/pre-law.html – Internet Legal Research Group has many links to pre-law websites, including several related to financial aid, law school rankings, and LSAT commercial prep programs.
- nalp.org – The National Association for Law Placement, Inc. is the premier source of data and other information about trends in legal employment. See especially their page of questions applicants should ask admissions officials.

Scholarships, Grants, Financial Aid

- [FAFSA](http://fafsa.gov)
- [Fastweb](http://fastweb.com)
- [FinAid](http://finaid.com)

Helpful Books:

- *The NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists* (Gerald Wilson, Edward Stern, 2014-2015 edition)
- *How to Get into the Top Law Schools* (Richard Montauk, 2003)
- *The Ivey Guide to Law School Admissions* (Anna Ivey, 2005)
- *U.S. News and World Report: Ultimate Guide to Law Schools* (Anne McGrath, 2010)

A Pre-Law Timetable

Freshmen and sophomore years

- Select a major in a field that both interests you and allows you to excel academically.
- Begin to form relationships with professors so they will know your work well enough to serve as recommenders in the future.
- Introduce yourself to the pre-law advisor in Undergraduate Studies.
- Explore your career interests by seeking a summer job or internship.
- Attend information sessions sponsored by Undergraduate Studies.

Junior year

- Meet with the pre-law advisor to assess your academic, extracurricular activities, and work experiences and to discuss the law school application process.
- Set up an account on lsac.org.
- Begin preparing for the LSAT. If you are ready, register for the June test.
- Secure a summer job or internship, if possible, in a law-related field.
- Research law schools and compile a list of tentative schools.

Senior year

- Complete all applications by Nov. 15.
- Register for the Credential Assembly Service.
- Have transcripts from all undergraduate institutions you have attended sent to the LSDAS after verifying their accuracy.
- Ask potential recommenders if they would be able to write letters on your behalf
- Take the LSAT in October if you did not do so in June.
- Begin drafting and revising your personal statement.
- Meet with your pre-law advisor who will help you assess the strength of your application in relation to schools you are considering. Request a critique of your personal statement draft.
- Take the LSAT in December if you did not take it previously or are retaking the test.
- Complete the FAFSA and other need-analysis forms as well as any institutional financial aid applications as soon after Jan. 1 as possible.
- Meet with your pre-law advisor in the spring to assess your options as schools respond to you.
- Take appropriate action on acceptances, wait-list status, and financial aid packages.

2016 Action Report Summary

Data provided by the Law School Admission Council for CWRU students (seniors and alums) who applied to law schools for admission in 2016.

	All graduates	Seniors	Grads 1-3 years	Grads >3 years
Total number of applicants	49 (39 in CAS)	17	13	4
Average LSAT score	158.2	156.8	159.0	159.0
Average GPA	3.43	3.51	3.46	3.25
Total number of applications	227	89	100	38
Average applications per applicant	8.97	8.09	10.71	9.60
Number of applicants accepted to one or more schools	35	17	9	9
Average admissions per applicant	3.84	4.53	3.40	3.40

The most popular law schools for CWRU students in 2016* (2017 rankings are in parentheses)

Law school	Applicants	Admitted	Matriculated	Average LSAT score of admitted applicants	Average GPA of CWRU applicants
University of Akron (136)	4	4	1	—	—
American University (78)	5	3	0	155.0	3.23
Baltimore School of Law (111)	1	0	0	—	—
Baylor University (55)	2	1	0	—	—
Boston College (30)	3	1	1	—	—
Boston University (20)	4	2	0	—	—
Brooklyn Law School	1	1	0	—	—
Buffalo/ SUNY	1	1	0	—	—
California Berkeley (8)	3	1	2	—	—
California Davis (36)	3	1	2	—	—
California Hastings (50)	1	0	1	—	—
California Irvine (28)	1	1	1	—	—
California Los Angeles (19)	3	0	2	—	—
Benjamin Cardozo (74)	3	1	0	—	—
Case Western Reserve (57)	16	14	5	156.7	3.32
Catholic University (103)	1	1	0	—	—
Charleston School of Law	1	1	0	—	—
University of Chicago (4)	9	1	0	162.3	3.48
Chicago Kent (86)	1	1	0	—	—
Cincinnati College of Law (60)	5	2	1	152.8	3.27
City College of New York Law (111)	1	1	0	—	—

Law school	Applicants	Admitted	Matriculated	Average LSAT score of admitted applicants	Average GPA of CWRU applicants
Cleveland State-Marshall (106)	5	5	1	155.4	3.27
Colorado School of Law (40)	3	2	1	—	—
Columbia (4)	10	1	1	163.2	3.48
Cornell (13)	7	2	0	166.4	3.69
Dayton	2	0	0	—	—
Denver School of Law (72)	2	2	0	—	—
DePaul (121)	1	1	0	—	—
District of Columbia	1	1	0	—	—
Duke (11)	9	3	0	165.6	3.69
Emory (22)	6	2	0	—	—
University of Florida (48)	4	0	0	—	—
Florida International (103)	1	1	1	—	—
Florida State	1	0	0	—	—
Fordham (37)	5	2	0	158.6	3.43
George Mason (45)	5	2	1	—	—
George Washington (25)	8	3	0	156.6	3.53
Georgetown (14)	12	3	0	160.3	3.60
University of Georgia (33)	2	0	0	—	—
Georgia State (57)	1	0	0	—	—
Harvard (2)	6	0	0	166.7	3.64
Houston Law Center (50)	3	0	0	—	—
University of Illinois (40)	4	2	0	—	—
Indiana Bloomington (25)	4	2	2	—	—
Iowa College of Law (20)	1	0	0	—	—
John Marshall	1	1	0	—	—
Lewis and Clark (92)	2	2	1	—	—
Loyola Chicago (72)	2	0	0	—	—
Marquette (123)	1	1	0	—	—
University of Maryland (48)	1	1	0	—	—
University of Miami (60)	3	2	1	—	—
University of Michigan (8)	11	4	1	163.4	3.68
Michigan State (87)	4	2	2	—	—
University of Minnesota (20)	3	0	0	165.8	3.46
University of Missouri (123)	1	0	0	—	—
New York University (6)	11	2	1	164.9	3.53
University of North Carolina	1	0	0	—	—
Northeastern (82)	1	1	1	—	—
Northwestern (12)	9	2	2	162.6	3.66

Law school	Applicants	Admitted	Matriculated	Average LSAT score of admitted applicants	Average GPA of CWRU applicants
Notre Dame (22)	3	1	1	—	—
Ohio State (30)	9	5	2	159.2	3.50
University of Pennsylvania (7)	7	2	0	166.9	3.71
Penn State (51)	1	0	0	—	—
Pepperdine (65)	1	0	0	—	—
University of Pittsburgh (78)	3	2	0	—	—
University of Richmond (55)	3	2	0	—	—
Rutgers (92)	2	1	0	—	—
University of South Carolina	2	2	1	—	—
University of Southern California (19)	5	1	0	158.4	3.63
Stanford (3)	5	0	0	168.8	3.65
Temple University	1	0	0	—	—
University of Texas at Austin (15)	5	1	0	162.6	3.55
University of Toledo (144)	3	3	0	—	—
Tulane University (50)	2	0	0	—	—
Vanderbilt (16)	4	2	0	162.6	3.17
Villanova (74)	1	1	0	—	—
University of Virginia (8)	10	3	3	162.3	3.66
Wake Forest (40)	1	1	0	—	—
University of Washington (24)	2	0	0	—	—
William and Mary (33)	7	2	0	157.1	3.55
University of Wisconsin (33)	2	1	0	—	—
Yale (1)	3	0	0	—	—

*CWRU students applied to 42 more law schools in 2016 than 2015. Average LSAT scores and GPAs are only given for schools with five or more CWRU applicants. The five most popular law schools for CWRU students were Case Western Reserve University, The Ohio State University, The University of Chicago, The George Washington University, and Georgetown University.

Heeding the Advice of Recent Case Western Reserve Graduates

“Take your undergraduate studies seriously, even if you don’t know why. ;-)”

“Attend the information sessions sponsored by Undergraduate Studies. It is very easy to get caught up in the less important things during undergrad and keep putting things off like applying, studying for the LSAT, and going to the sessions.”

“Start early. Talk to actual attorneys, and be aware of what you’re getting into.”

“Treat studying for the LSAT like a full-time job if you want to get your best possible score. The LSAT seems extremely important for schools, and you would hate for your GPA to be more impressive than your LSAT score in terms of percentiles. The GPA takes way longer to achieve and the LSAT is just one test. Don’t let that be your limiting factor between you and your favorite school option.”

“PREPARE FOR THE LSAT BEGINNING IN YOUR JUNIOR YEAR AND TAKE IT IN THE SUMMER. ALSO, APPLY TO YOUR SCHOOLS AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE.”

“I think it’s important to encourage students to explore. This is really the only time in our lives when we’ll be able to do so. A lot of students are hesitant [to take] a year off to explore because it doesn’t fit into their ‘plans.’ I was one of those students. Looking back, [taking a year off] has been a great experience. **Now I’m sure law is right for me.”**