

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

PRE-LAW GUIDE

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

CONTACT US: 518-580-5790
WWW.SKIDMORE.EDU/CAREER

Thinking about Going to Law School?

Getting a law degree takes a significant amount of time, energy and money. That's why it's crucial to consider [why you want to go to law school](#) before jumping in. It's not uncommon to attend law school immediately after or within a few years of graduating, but it is essential to understand your motivations and interests in getting a law degree. Although many successful people working in areas outside of the law may have a law degree, in general, it's recommended to go to law school **only if you intend to practice law!** Go if you are passionate about studying the law and need the degree to pursue what you want to do.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK: Researching Legal Careers and the Law School Process

The more you research and talk with practicing attorneys, the more comfortable you'll be with your decision to attend law school. Research both career opportunities in law as well as the law school application process. Read about the profession, education and career paths, talk to lawyers in different settings and try to gain experience working in a legal environment before applying to school. The best way to decide whether law school is the right path for you is to spend time networking with lawyers and gaining relevant experience!

General Information on Legal Careers:

[Occupational Outlook Handbook](#)
[National Association for Law Placement – Pre-law portal](#)
[American Bar Association Pre-Law Guide](#)

Networking to Gain Insight:

[Career Advisor Network](#) - a list of Skidmore alums and parents eager to share their career expertise! We have a number of career advisors who are willing to speak with students about their careers as well as experience in law school. Please make an appointment with the Career Development Center to discuss this resource and the protocols for its use.

Here is a sample outreach e-mail to get you started:

I'm in my junior year at Skidmore College and have an interest in pursuing a career in law. I found your contact information through the Career Advisor Network. I would very much like to learn more about your experiences in the field and any advice you would be willing to share with me. Would you be willing to speak with me for 15-20 minutes about your experiences at a time that's convenient for you? To give you a better sense of who I am, attached please find my resume. Thanks for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Name
Class of X
Skidmore College
Phone Number
E-mail

[LinkedIn](#): try connecting with Skidmore alums who are currently working as attorneys and with those who have attending a law school you're considering.

Pre-Law Advising at Skidmore:

Career Development Center (CDC)

Shannon Rodriguez, Interim Director, works with the pre-law population and can help you explore career opportunities as well as find relevant internship experience.

To arrange an appointment, please schedule via Handshake or call 518-580-5790. The office is located in Starbuck 204.

Pre-Law Advisor

Christine Kopec, Esq., Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Management & Business, ckopec@skidmore.edu. As an attorney, herself, she can share insights into a legal career.

The Skidmore Pre-Law Club

Attend information sessions and other events to gain more knowledge about legal careers.

To join the club, find them on SkidSync at:

<https://skidmore.campuslabs.com/engage/organization/pre-law-club>

Undergraduate Preparation for Law School

There is no required “pre-law” major for law school. According to the American Bar Association, students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. A liberal arts education is excellent preparation for a law school degree.

What law schools do care about is academic rigor and performance. Whatever major you choose, you are encouraged to pursue an area of study that interests and challenges you while developing your writing, research, and analytical skills to the highest degree possible. Taking a diverse range of difficult courses is excellent preparation for a legal education. You will want to develop some knowledge of law & government while enhancing your listening, speaking, critical thinking, reading comprehension, complex problem solving, decision making, writing, negotiating, persuasion, and active learning skills. Look for educational, extra-curricular, and work experiences that will help you develop and enhance these skills. Law school is challenging; pursuing a law degree without these core abilities will be exceedingly difficult.

What Law Schools Look for in Applicants

The **first two** are the most important criteria considered for top law schools:

1. **Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score (or the GRE General Test)**
2. **Undergraduate GPA**
3. Academic Rigor of undergraduate course of study
4. Personal statement and other essays
5. Work experience or other postgraduate experience
6. Letters of recommendation
7. Difficulties (financial, personal and physical) overcome

The Application Process:

STEP 1: Set Up Your Account with LSAC

Your first step is to set up an account with the Law School Admission Council, LSAC, at www.lsac.org. LSAC both administers the LSAT and processes law school applications through the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). Your account will help you track every step of your application to different law schools.

STEP 2: Prepare and Take The LSAT

What is the LSAT?

The Law School Admissions Test is the standardized test used by most law schools for admissions purposes. This test assesses key skills for success in law school: reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, logical reasoning and writing. According to the Law School Admission Council, the LSAT is the single best predictor of first-year law school performance, even better than undergraduate grade-point average.

Can I Take the GRE instead?

Over the past few years, some law schools have begun to accept the Graduate Records Exam (GRE) instead of the LSAT. If you're applying to multiple schools and/or other graduate programs, make sure you know what schools accept which tests. Use this site to see which law schools accept the GRE: https://www.ets.org/gre/institutions/accept/law/jd_programs/.

It is still recommended to take the LSAT since it's the ONLY test accepted by ALL law schools.

When should I take the LSAT?

The LSAT is offered nine times a year so you have plenty of test dates to choose from! However, many law schools want applicants to take the test by November or December for admission to the following fall's entering class. It's probably a good idea to take it earlier though...in June or September. Most important...**take the test when you know you have at least a FEW MONTHS to prepare for it!**

Should I repeat the LSAT?

Plan on taking the LSAT only once! Unlike the SAT, students often find that it **isn't worth the time or money to repeat the LSAT**. Students who take the LSAT multiple times often find that their score falls into a very narrow range. In addition, while your score may rise slightly, it may also drop. If you take the LSAT more than once, law schools tend to average your scores, rather than look at the highest score only.

- If you think you may want to repeat the test after getting your initial score, plan to take the LSAT first either in June after your junior year or October of your senior year. This will give you time to register again for the December exam.
- If you are planning on taking a prep course, you will need to take it during your junior year, while you are completing your other academic work, then sit for the LSAT in June OR you can take a prep course in the summer after your junior year and take the LSAT in early Fall of your senior year. You will either have to complete your test prep while you are completing coursework (June LSAT) or sit for the test while you are completing coursework (October LSAT).

How should I prepare for the LSAT?

PRACTICE!!! The best way to prepare is to take multiple practice exams under simulated testing conditions. You can find a variety of LSAT preparation materials, including full length practice tests at www.lsac.org. In addition, [Khan Academy](https://www.khanacademy.org) has interactive lessons, timed practice tests, strategies, and tips to help you prepare. Investing in a commercial LSAT preparation course is a matter of personal choice. There are a number of options available should you feel that working with an instructor in a classroom “setting” would be helpful.

STEP 3: Use the CAS (Credential Assembly Service)

Most ABA approved law schools require applicants to use the CAS and all ABA law school applications are available through CAS. CAS processes your law school application documents, such as your LSAT score(s), letters of recommendation, and transcripts so they only need to be sent once, to LSAC. In addition, they provide a “law school report” for each school you are applying to.

Transcripts:

- After you register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), you must have a separate transcript sent to LSAC directly from **EACH** undergraduate and graduate institution you attended in the United States, its territories, or Canada (i.e., study abroad, transferred credits, etc.).
- **Transcripts issued to you or sent by you will not be processed.**
- You must use LSAC's Transcript Request Forms for this purpose. **Your Transcript Request Forms will be available only after you sign up for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and enter your institution information.** Allow two weeks from the time of receipt for LSAC to process your transcripts.

STEP 4: Obtain Letters of Recommendation (LOR)

Although your undergraduate grades and LSAT scores are the most important determining criteria for law school admissions, your letters of recommendation could still have an impact on the admission process. Strong letters of recommendation can strengthen your application and, if there are deficiencies in your application, they can help to outweigh them.

Check each school’s website for the exact number of letters of recommendation required. If you have more letters than required, you can consider submitting an extra one if it is strong and provides new information about you not mentioned in other letters. On the other hand, you may want to save the letter in case you are waitlisted. The additional letter could lend further support to your candidacy.

Typically, two letters from faculty who can address your academic and intellectual abilities is preferred. However, letters from employers are also desirable, especially from applicants who received their undergraduate degree more than three years prior to applying.

The best letter writers are those who know you well and can provide an evaluation of your ability to perform and succeed at law school. Therefore, it is beneficial for you to establish meaningful relationships with your professors. Take every opportunity to get to know and talk with your professors: go to office hours, ask questions in class, seek advice about your career, do independent research or study with a professor whose recommendation you may want.

Law school admissions officials tell us the following make the best letter writers:

- someone who knows you well
- someone with the title of "Professor"
- someone who is a professor at the school granting your baccalaureate degree
- someone with an advanced degree who has supervised you in a meaningful job or internship
- someone who has academically evaluated you in an upper-division class
- Note: letters from family friends, political figures, judges, and the like usually are discouraged and may, in fact, be detrimental.

How do I approach potential letter writers?

First, make a list of professors and/or supervisors who will be your best advocates. Then, set up an appointment to discuss your request in person. Do not make the request via email. Be prepared to articulate your interest and reasons for attending law school. Letters of recommendation are written strictly on a voluntary basis; a faculty member or employer may decline to write them. The best approach is to **ask potential letter writers if they are willing to write you a strong letter**. If you sense reluctance or the answer is no, ask someone else.

When should I approach letter writers? What if I plan to take some time off before I go to law school?

A good time to approach letter writers is early fall of your senior year if you plan to attend law school immediately following graduation. If you plan to take some time off before going to law school, don't wait until you want to apply to law school to ask for letters. Your professors could be on sabbatical or you may not be fresh in their minds anymore. So, ask professors for a "general" letter of recommendation before you leave. When you are ready to apply to law school, contact professors again, and ask them to update your letters.

What information do my letter writers need to write good letters?

You can help your letter writers write strong letters by giving each of them a portfolio that includes:

- Information on how to get in touch with you in case they need to reach you
- What you would like emphasized in each letter
- A list of schools to which you are applying, and due dates, with the earliest due date at the top
- Your unofficial transcript (note courses you took with them)
- A draft of your personal statement
- A copy of your best work in the course (with instructor comments on it), lab evaluations, projects, publications, etc.
- Your resume

Open and close your note with thanks and acknowledgement that the letter writer's time is valuable and that this letter is important to your professional future.

Using the LSAC Letter of Recommendation Service:

The LOR service is included in the fee you pay for your Credential Assembly Service. Using this service will simplify the process for both you and your references. You can directly request letters of recommendation directly from your LSAC account and your references will only need to submit their letters once. In addition, you are able to manage which letters get sent to which schools you are applying to.

For more information, visit the LSAC site at <https://www.lsac.org/applying-law-school/jd-application-process/credential-assembly-service-cas/letters-recommendation>

You do NOT have to use LSAC's LOR service unless a law school states that you *must* do so. However, most ABA-approved law schools accept LSAC's LOR service. If you choose not to use it, contact the individual law school for their application requirements.

STEP 5: Identify Where to Apply

A number of factors can influence where you decide to attend law school – reputation, career opportunities, specialties, location, faculty, cost, etc. Think about what matters most to you when developing your list. The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, <https://www.lsac.org/choosing-law-school/find-law-school>, prepared by the American Bar Association and Law School Admissions Council, is probably the best starting point. You can search for schools by location, key word, undergraduate GPA, and LSAT score. In addition there are links to each school's most up-to-date information on admission requirements, tuition, special programs, physical facilities, and more.

Other sources to help determine where to apply:

Pre-Law Advisor - You should plan to meet with Skidmore's Pre-law Advisor, Christine Kopec, Esq.

NALP Directory of Law Schools (The Association for Legal Career Professionals) has some great search tools. <http://www.nalplawschoolsonline.org>

Just like when applying to college, your final list of law schools should include those that are reach, competitive and safety schools.

STEP 6: Writing Your Personal Statement

What constitutes a good personal statement?

A good personal statement conveys the root of your interest in law and shows your enthusiasm for the field. It's your chance to allow the reader to get to know you as an applicant.

Start building a pool of possible topics and points with some simple writing exercises:

- List all experiences related to law. Write for 1-2 minutes each. The one that you had the most to say about could be a topic of interest for your statement.
- Was there one time when you realized what you wanted to do? What is your ultimate goal? What do you want to do with this degree?
- Write 5-7 skills, come up with one example for each
- What is the most important concept you learned in college?
- What do you consider the most important book, article, play, or film you have ever read/seen, and how has it influenced you?

- Which writers and which particular articles in your field of study have had the greatest influence on the development of your thought?
- Who were your favorite professors in college, and why? How has each influenced you?

What Not to Do in Your Personal Statement:

- This essay is about YOU! Don't make it about what you want to study or what field of law you want to enter. Share something about yourself.
- Don't address low grades or low scores. Emphasize your strengths and be positive. Tell a story which emphasizes your best characteristics.
- Don't use gimmicks or try to be funny.

Getting Feedback on Your Essays

Skidmore has several ways to receive assistance with revising your graduate admissions essays including: Faculty, The Career Development Center, and the Writing Center.

As you begin the process of writing your personal statement, please allow enough time to write 3-6 drafts, which could take about 2-3 months. We are happy to work with students and alumni at any stage of the writing process. However, working on drafts that are immediately due encourages "quick fixes" and is contrary to our goal of approaching writing as a process.

Here is a rough outline of the writing process:

- 1) Identify the question you need to answer and the character/word limit that you must follow.
- 2) Start an outline and create your first draft. Worry about the character limit later.
- 3) Make an appointment for a critique. Send your personal statement via e-mail as a Word document by the day before the appointment. Feedback will be shared with you during the appointment.
- 4) Revise your document. Read the paper to see if it flows from one topic to another, determine if the organization is logical, check to see if the paper fits the actual assignment. Consider rewriting paragraphs to make them sound better and to support the claims you have made.
- 5) Schedule a 2nd appointment and continue revising until you have a final draft.
- 6) Once you have a more final draft, have it reviewed by two other people – possibly a lawyer, a faculty member who knows you well, or the Writing Center.

How the CDC Can Help:

- Assist students in developing critical reading and writing strategies, including breaking down prompts, formulating ideas and brainstorming, evaluating argumentation and analysis, and structuring and organizing ideas
- Dialogue, exchange ideas, establish goals and expectations
- Offer grammar help

What We Do Not Do:

- The editing process targets grammar problems, while the revision process focuses on readability, logic, and clarity. We are not a proofreading/editing service. We can, however, show students effective ways to edit and proofread their own writing.

Timeline of Actions

If you know you want to go to law school immediately upon graduation, here's a suggested timeline:

1st Year:

- Join the pre-law society
- Update your resume from a high school resume to a college resume
- Set goals to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be a successful law school applicant
- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center for:
 - A resume critique
 - To learn how to use Handshake and the Career Advisor Network

Sophomore Year:

- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center
 - Learn how to write a cover letter and have your letter critiqued
 - Apply for summer internships
- Bring business casual clothing to campus and attend Career Jam; speak to volunteers in law

Junior Year:

- Attend any law related workshops
- Attend Career Jam, meet any law related volunteers
- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center
 - Secure a summer internship (it doesn't have to be in a law office)
 - Consider applying for and attending one or more of the Career and Internship Consortium (CIC) events
- Consider attending Law School Admission Council (LSAC) events in your area
- Talk to career advisors that attended law schools of interest
- Start to identify and/or develop relationships with potential letter of recommendation writers
- Prepare for the LSAT

Summer between Junior/Senior Year:

- Potentially take June LSAT
- Create account for LSAC's online application service, www.lsac.org
 - If you have an LSAC account, you will automatically receive your LSAT score by e-mail approximately three weeks after taking the test. Make sure you schedule your LSAT date so that you will have plenty of time to obtain your score before any of your law school applications are due.
- Draft your personal statement, have it critiqued by 3 people
- Consider attending information sessions, visit law schools of interest, select law schools

Senior Year:

- Consider taking the LSAT in October, deadline to register is early Sept.
- Transcripts: sign up for Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and use LSAC's transcript request form to submit transcripts from EACH institution you have attended
- Letters of Recommendation/Evaluation: Provide the names and contact information of all your recommenders/evaluators in your account, indicate the number of letters/evaluations each recommender/evaluator will submit and describe them, select your law schools and specify the letters/evaluations that should be sent to each one using the ID numbers. Submit your requests for letters and confirm they were received.
- The earlier you submit your application in the application cycle, the more seats are available. The longer you wait, the more seats fill, and the process becomes more competitive.
- If seeking federal financial aid, complete FAFSA in Jan/Feb; the deadline is June

- Attend Career Jam, meet any law related volunteers
- Consider applying for and attending one or more of the Career and Internship Consortium (CIC) events
- Consider attending Law School Admission Council (LSAC) events in your area
- Meet with or talk to career advisors that attended law schools of interest

Winter: Check your LSAC account and/or law schools to confirm that your application materials are complete, if you have not received email or written confirmation.

Spring: Acceptances and rejections begin to arrive.

Financing Law School

First consider how this degree will benefit your future career. Next, calculate your potential earnings against any debt you might incur as a student. In addition, you may want to evaluate some of the following options: public law schools, scholarships, part-time programs, or working for a couple of years.

Public Law Schools

Public law schools can offer a reputable degree at a reasonable price. Please be sure to check out the residency requirements first. Generally, you have to live in that state for at least one year prior to when you would attend law school. In addition, you will have to submit documentation to verify that you are a resident – such as a copy of a lease, utility bill, copy of your driver's license, etc. Please research the specific requirements as they do vary by state. This article from About.com is a good reference: http://testprep.about.com/od/the/sat/tp/Top_LawSchools.htm

Scholarship/Loan Forgiveness:

There are a multitude of places to look for scholarship money for law school. Check out this page, <https://www.lsac.org/choosing-law-school/paying-law-school/financial-aid-options> for an overview of how to pay for law school.

Career One Stop Scholarship Search has more than 7,000 scholarships, fellowships, loans, and other financial aid opportunities for a wide variety of disciplines, levels of education, and locations. www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch

FastWeb is a large, searchable general database of scholarships. www.fastweb.com

Part-time Programs:

These programs can lead to good opportunities, but could also limit you from others. Generally speaking, part-time law programs will not have the same recognition as top-tier full-time law school programs.

Gaining Experience:

If you decide to work a couple of years in order to save money to pay for law school, be sure to weigh your potential savings (based on earnings with a bachelor's degree) versus the compensation you could receive if you completed your JD sooner. If you plan to work in the field as a legal assistant, document specialist, or paralegal, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) has some useful resources.

Working after graduation can be a great way to earn money and gain experience. While many law schools focus on your GPA and LSAT score, future employers will want to know about how you performed in law school, where you went to school, AND about your experience. For example, if you graduate from law school and begin a career in corporate law, having some time working for a corporation before law school could be beneficial.