

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. It is important to develop strategies for tackling the questions *well before* test day. We recommend that you reserve 3-4 months for serious preparation. 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 a list of recommended LSAT prep resources. Please register for the HPPLC prelaw email list to receive notice of LSAT preparation programs, classes, and updates from the Law School Admission Council (LSAC).

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?

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 for 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* (available at www.lsac.org) 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. Keep in mind that your personal statement, letters of recommendation, activities, and other qualifications may also play a major role in the admission decision.

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). 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. The LSAT, unlike some other standardized tests, is a very consistent exam; if you prepared for the test, did not experience undue test anxiety or other complications, that score may be representative for you, especially if it is within two or three points of your practice scores.

However, if you can point to something specific (i.e., illness on test day or unusual 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.

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. 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. HPPLC has guidelines for letter-writers if they would like suggestions as to 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. If you have worked for that person's office, then a letter might be valuable. Usually, though, your direct supervisor can write a more detailed letter than the famous person with whom you had little actual contact. 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.

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!).

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 anything about 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, please see the comprehensive prelaw "Personal Statement" section of the HPPLC website.

G. LAW SCHOOL IS EXPENSIVE---AND 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. You rarely pay the "sticker price."

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 any year, regardless of the economy, 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.

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.

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