

MIAMI LAW

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI SCHOOL OF LAW

PRE-LAW HANDBOOK 2020-2021



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I. EXPLORING LAW SCHOOL

The decision whether or not to attend law school is one that should be made with careful consideration. Law school is a unique and rewarding experience as well as excellent preparation for a variety of career paths. It is also a serious academic, financial and personal commitment. It is important to assess your own interests, goals, and specific circumstances in order to arrive at a well-informed decision.

Do Your Research

There are many ways to learn more about law school and the legal profession.

1. Pre-Law Counseling

The University of Miami Offices of Pre-Law Counseling offer services to assist you. These services complement the academic advising you receive in the department of your major. Our offices provide one-on-one advising appointments, free LSAT preparation workshops, pre-law list-serve emails, as well as many educational and informational events throughout the year. The LSAC Miami Law Forum and other numerous events sponsored by Miami Law will provide you with valuable information. (See “Pre-Law Events 2020 –2021” under Section VI).

For an advising appointment, please contact:

Ismaris Ocasio, Assistant Director, [Toppel Career Center](#)

5225 Ponce De Leon Blvd; (Phone) 305-284-1808; (Email Address) iko4@miami.edu

*** All undergraduate students**

College of Arts & Sciences

College of Arts & Sciences has academic advisors who can meet your academic advising needs as you explore pre-law options. Please contact:

Office of Student Academic Services, Ashe Building, Room 200; (Phone) 305-284-4333

*** College of Arts & Sciences majors only**

2. Miami Law Office of Admissions and Student Recruitment

The University of Miami School of Law’s [Office of Admissions](#) offers open house events, tours of the law school, class visits, and advice about applying to Miami Law. The Office Admissions also maintains a [Pre-Law Information Headquarters](#) website, [Prospective Students](#) website, and [29 Critical Questions to Ask About Law School](#) guide, which includes answers to commonly asked questions (or questions prospective students should be asking).

To arrange a tour/class visit/session with a member of the Admissions team, email admissions@law.miami.edu or call 305-284-6746.

3. Law School Admission Council (LSAC) & DiscoverLaw.org

The [Law School Admissions Council](#) has excellent information for prospective law students about the application process, [LSAC CAS](#), a free [Khan Academy LSAT Prep](#), a list of all ABA-accredited law schools, [financial aid information](#), and ample other useful resources.

[DiscoverLaw.org](#) is a program sponsored by LSAC to promote diversity in the legal profession

by encouraging students to discover career opportunities in law and choose a path in undergraduate school to help them succeed. With access to experts, inspiring stories about law school graduates, answers to frequently asked questions, and more, DiscoverLaw.org provides students with resources, tips, and tools on how to become a competitive law school applicant.

4. Informational Interviews with Current Law Students and Lawyers

There is no better way to learn about law school or the legal profession than to speak to current law students and those working in the field. An informational interview gives you an opportunity to obtain suggestions and advice regarding the best ways to achieve your goals while also providing an inside look at the law school experience and the legal profession. To learn more about informational interviews, contact the [Toppel Career Center](#) to set up an advising appointment.

5. Internship Experience

Pursuing a legal internship is an invaluable way to learn more about the profession. Internships provide you with hands-on experience while allowing you to explore whether law-related work appeals to you.

For resources on securing a law related internship, visit the [Toppel Career Center](#) and [create an account](#).

II. CAREERS IN THE LAW

Law school graduates pursue a vast array of careers in an endless number of fields and industries. Before applying to law school, it is important to educate yourself about the legal profession. Lawyers fill many different roles for their clients - sounding board, counselor, educator, quarterback, advocate, litigator, liaison, and gatekeeper. Lawyers must also be acutely mindful of their professional and ethical responsibilities, and attentive to business and relationship development. The modern practice of law requires excellent communication skills, technological and cultural awareness, and heightened accessibility. For the vast majority of attorneys, the job is not nine to five, though there are ways to maintain work-life balance and a successful career.

The happiest and most fulfilled lawyers take an active role in designing what they want their careers to look like. That process begins with self-assessment—taking inventory of your strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, and prior personal and professional experiences. Successful self-assessment results in a personally fulfilling career that integrates your work into your life and satisfies your financial requirements. Below is a sampling of areas in which lawyers practice:

Legal Specialties include but are not limited to:

| | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Administrative Law | Family Law |
| Antitrust Law | Health Care Law |
| Appellate Law | Immigration Law |
| Arbitration & Mediation | Insurance Law |
| Banking & Commercial Finance Law | Intellectual Property Law |
| Business Law | International Law |
| Child Advocacy | Labor & Employment Law |

Civil Litigation
Civil Rights Law
Corporate Practice Law
Constitutional Law
Criminal Law
Cyberspace Law
Disability Law
Elder Law
Entertainment, Arts & Sports Law
Environmental Law
E-commerce Law

Medical Malpractice
Military Law
Privacy Law
Personal Injury Law
Property Law
Real Estate Law
Regulatory Law
Securities Law
Tax Law
Telecommunications Law
Trusts and Estates Law

Attorneys practice these and many more legal specialties within a variety of different settings. Listed below is a sampling of work settings in which lawyers practice:

Work Settings within the Law include:

Law Firms (varying sizes) Businesses & Corporations Academic Institutions
Associations (professional & trade)
Non-Profit Organizations
Public Interest Organizations Courts
Bar Associations
Government (municipal, county, state, and federal within various government branches)
Lobbying Firms

While working as a practicing attorney tends to be a common career path for law school graduates, there are also a variety of non-traditional ways to use a law degree. Some attorneys decide not to practice law in the traditional sense either from the onset of their career or at some point thereafter. Non-traditional legal jobs can be found in nearly any industry. Some areas where attorneys have found satisfying careers outside of traditional legal practice include:

Work Settings/Careers:

Academia
Alternative Dispute Resolution
Banks
Bar Associations
Business (including executive positions in many fields)
Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement
Entrepreneurship
Foundations and Nonprofit Organizations
Healthcare

Human Resources
Insurance & Risk Management
International Affairs
Law Firm Recruiting
Legal & Non-Legal Search Firms
Legal/Professional Consulting Courts
Legislative/Government Affairs
Media, Arts and Entertainment
Politics
Trade and Investment
Writing and Editing

While an attorney's career options are broad, the decision whether to attend law school should be given serious consideration. If you are contemplating going to law school, you should first engage in an honest self-assessment to arrive at a clear understanding of what you hope to gain

from the experience. With that being said, the law school experience is extremely rewarding and will equip you with the type of critical skills that will enable you to succeed not only in the legal profession but in every aspect of your life.

III. PREPARING FOR LAW SCHOOL

In recruiting future lawyers, law schools look for talented, well-rounded, and interesting applicants who will enhance their communities. There is no single curriculum that is the ideal preparation for law school. Therefore, your undergraduate years are a time to become intellectually engaged in a rich variety of experiences. Rather than choosing courses that might be “good for law school,” you are far better advised to select rigorous courses in any discipline that will challenge you to think, write and expand the underlying critical thinking skills required to succeed in law school.

These skills include analytical and problem-solving skills, research and writing skills, oral communication and listening skills, and effective time management skills. There is no better preparation for law school than taking tough undergraduate courses and doing well in them.

Tips for Preparing for Law School

1. Select a major in an area that interests you and do well. Do not focus exclusively on law-related courses. Use your undergraduate years as a time to acquire a well-rounded education. In the University of Miami School of Law’s 2020 entering class, there were 72 undergraduate majors represented. Law school admissions officers look for students who have engaged in serious academic pursuits as undergrads. Accordingly, you should avail yourself of opportunities to challenge yourself (e.g., earning special honors, getting published, writing a thesis, engaging in writing competitions, debate, etc.)

2. Learn a foreign language or study abroad. The practice of law is becoming increasingly global and complex. There is a growing demand for professionals able to operate within an international context. Studying a foreign language and gaining an international perspective is valuable and encouraged.

3. Participate in extracurricular activities. Whether or not you pursue the study of law, participating in extracurricular activities can help develop leadership, organizational, and communication skills while also making you a well-rounded individual. Do not participate in activities simply for the sake of a resume or application but rather to broaden your skills and depth of knowledge. It is better to have leadership roles in one or two organizations than be just a member of many.

IV. APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL

Step 1: Where to Apply

In selecting a law school, you should examine your individual priorities and the following factors:

1. American Bar Association (Accreditation)

Choose an [ABA accredited law school](#). Most states require a J.D. from an ABA accredited law school to sit for their bar examination.

2. The Numbers: Undergraduate GPA and LSAT Score

Your GPA and LSAT score are heavily evaluated in the admissions process. It is advisable to apply to a range of schools.

3. Cost of Attendance

Attending law school is a serious financial commitment. According to U.S. News (2020), the **average annual cost** of a **public**, out-of-state **law school** is \$41,726, compared to a much higher **private school** at \$49,548 and **public** in-state at \$28,264. See the “Financing Your Legal Education” section of this handbook for specific financial aid information.

4. Geographic Location

In considering where to attend law school, you should think about:

- Where you plan to live/practice upon graduation.
- Whether or not the law school has a national presence.
- The legal market and community of the city in which the law school is located.

Step 2: When to Apply

Timetable for Pre-Law Students

Freshman Year (or whenever you decide to explore a career in the law):

- Register with Pre-Law Advising Offices.
- Begin building a record of academic achievement.
- Attend fall and spring pre-law information sessions.

Sophomore Year:

- Volunteer or work in a legally related position.
- Take part in relevant extracurricular activities.
- Research law schools.

Junior Year:

- Decide when you will take the LSAT and begin preparing.
- Make an appointment with a Pre-Law Advisor.
- Attend pre-law events at the School of Law and the [LSAC Miami Law Forum](#).
- Begin visiting and touring law schools; attend a class.
- Put recommenders on notice.

Summer before Senior Year or Earlier:

- Prepare fully and sit for the LSAT; obtain advice from your pre-law advisor or call schools directly to determine if you should re-test.
- Register for the CAS service at [LSAC.org](https://lsac.org). Begin reviewing application procedures.

Senior Year:

- Complete and submit applications: confirm recommenders, draft personal statement, and request an official copy of your transcript.
- Take one of LSATs offered early in the fall semester (if not taken earlier in the summer).
- Complete applications between September and end of the year. **Apply as early as possible for optimal admission and scholarship consideration.**
- Fill out financial aid applications as soon as possible after October 1.
- Follow up with law schools to ensure that your admission and financial aid file is complete and accurate.
- Visit your top choice law schools to which you are admitted.
- Send the law school where you are attending a final transcript after you have graduated.

Step 3: How to Apply

LSAC, CAS and the LSAT

The [Law School Admission Council](https://lsac.org) (LSAC) facilitates the law school admissions process and is made up of American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law schools. Everything you need to know about law school admissions and access to online applications is available on the LSAC website.

The [LSAC's Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](https://lsac.org/cas) evaluates, organizes, analyzes and summarizes your academic information and reports this information along with your school specific application, undergraduate transcripts, LSAT score(s), and letters of recommendation to the law schools you are applying to. The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is a standardized test designed to evaluate the academic ability of applicants. LSAC member schools require the LSAT and use it as part of their evaluation process.

The LSAT is administered numerous times during the application cycle. Test dates may be accessed [here](#). It is advisable to take the test early (the summer before your senior year or earlier) so that if you decide to retake it, you have adequate time to regroup and earn a more competitive score. This will enable you to submit your applications well in advance of deadlines, which will receive a more favorable reading at most law schools and may affect scholarship funds available to you.

Thorough preparation for the LSAT is essential. Many schools will take your highest LSAT score but all scores (within five years) will be on your CAS report. A [free LSAT preparation](#) course (through the Khan Academy) and other materials are offered through [LSAC.org](https://lsac.org).

For detailed LSAT information, including fees (and the fee waiver program), locations, and exam preparation information, please [visit LSAC.org](https://lsac.org). For information about taking the LSAT under accommodated conditions, please [click here](#). Should you need verification or contact with the University of Miami's Office of Disability Services, they are located at 1307 Stanford Drive,

Student Services Building, Second Floor. OAS staff can be reached at 305-284-2800. Requests for accommodations may be made online at <https://camnercenter.miami.edu/disability-services/request-services/index.html>. Another resource is the School of Law's [Office of Student Accessibility and Inclusion](#) (305-284-9907, access@law.miami.edu, 1311 Miller Drive, Suite A212) for specific questions about the School of Law policies and resources.

V. APPLICATION CHECKLIST

The following checklist, prepared by LSAC, broadly illustrates the sequence of events in the law school application process. Applicants are responsible for monitoring their own files.

- [Create your secure LSAC.org account.](#)
- Register with the [Candidate Referral Service \(CRS\)](#) so law schools can recruit YOU.
- Find the [prelaw advisor](#) at your undergraduate school and arrange a call or visit.
- Prepare for the LSAT. ([Download a free sample test](#) or [purchase official LSAT prep books](#).) Free official LSAT test prep is available through the [Khan Academy](#).
- Use LSAC's [searchable database](#) to research law schools, their admission requirements, and application deadlines.
- Sign up for a [Law School Forum](#), where you can meet with many of the law school admissions experts from ABA-approved law schools.
- Register for the [LSAT](#). Taking the test early is advised. Prepare fully for the first LSAT but build into your game plan time to regroup and retake the LSAT should that be needed.
- Sign up for LSAC's [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#) to easily meet law school requirements for transcripts, recommendations, evaluations, and applications. You need not register for CAS at the same time you register for the LSAT, but you should register long before your first law school application deadline.
- Arrange for registrars to send your official transcripts to LSAC. Request forms are available from your LSAC.org account. Allow at least two weeks from the time of receipt to process your U.S. or Canadian transcripts. More time will be needed if your transcripts are from outside the United States, its territories, or Canada.
- Contact, and if possible, meet with your recommenders to request your letters. Allow two weeks from the time of receipt to process your letters of recommendation.
- View your Academic Summary Report in your LSAC.org account once all U.S./Canadian undergraduate transcripts have been summarized.
- Use your LSAC.org account to apply online to as many U.S. law schools as you choose. You must pay for a law school report at the time you apply to each school.
- Keep track of the status of everything related to your law school admission through your LSAC.org account.

1. Personal Statement

Most law schools require you to submit a personal statement with your application. The personal statement is important to admissions committees as it provides a sample of your writing skills and your ability to present ideas in a clear, coherent manner.

- Your essay should be concise and well-written.
- Know your audience: law schools are looking for evidence of your academic and

- professional ability and commitment to a legal education.
- Make it personal. Give the admissions committee a sense of your talents, skills and characteristics.
- Solicit feedback before submitting. Your statement should be well-edited with no errors.

2. Letters of Recommendation

LSAC's Letters of Recommendation (LOR) are submitted through the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). A letter discusses the qualities and characteristics of the applicant's ability, academic and otherwise, to study law. LORs may be submitted to CAS electronically or in hard copy. If you use LSAC's LOR service, your references will only need to submit their letters of recommendation once to LSAC—even if you intend to include these letters in every one of your law school applications. LSAC will make copies of each reference's original letter to include in your [law school reports](#).

Access to LSAC's LOR service is included in CAS registration. This service allows you to manage your letters of recommendation through your LSAC.org account. You get to assign which letters you want each law school to receive. LSAC will make copies of each assigned reference's original letter to include in your law school reports.

Law schools typically require between two and four Letters of Recommendation. Two from professors who know you well are suggested. The others can be from employers, advisors, coaches, volunteer directors, or others who can speak to your candidacy.

Go to [LSAC's LOR Site](#) for detailed procedural information.

- Choose recommenders who can comment on your depth and breadth of knowledge, your ability to analyze, writing acumen, problem-solving ability, critical thinking and scholastic aptitude. Most schools do not consider general, unreservedly praiseworthy letters helpful.
- An email will be sent to each of your recommenders requesting him or her to complete and upload a letter for you; or you may print the required recommender forms to give to your recommenders if they would prefer to submit a paper LOR. Offer recommenders addressed stamped envelopes. If your recommender is submitting your letter of recommendation on paper, you must print the required LOR Form from your LSAC.org account and deliver it to your recommender. This form must accompany your letter of recommendation. Paper letters received without an accompanying LOR Form or without the recommender's signature will be returned to the recommender.
- Letters from non-faculty recommenders can discuss your non-academic ability such as communication style and interpersonal skills.

V. FINANCING YOUR LEGAL EDUCATION

Federal and institutional aid may be available and come in two main categories:

1. Federal Funding: Direct Unsubsidized and Graduate PLUS Loans based on your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).

2. Institutional Aid: Scholarships which may be merit and/or need based.

Deadline Dates

Deadline dates for federal aid and scholarships will vary by institution; therefore, be sure to review each school's website to adhere to their deadlines. The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is available as early as October 1 every year and more details about deadlines may be [found here](#). The FAFSA can be completed at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/> using estimated income information but you should update your application once your current year tax information is available.

Students working toward the completion of their graduate or professional degree are typically considered independent for purposes of federal financial aid. However, parental information may be required for some institutional scholarship opportunities. Please contact each school to determine how to successfully complete the scholarship process.

General Sources of Aid Available to Law Students

1. [Federal Direct Unsubsidized Loan](#): Students may borrow up to \$20,500 in Federal Unsubsidized Loans per academic year. Interest begins to accumulate at the time the first disbursement is made. Repayment begins six months after graduation, if a student drops to less than half-time enrollment, or withdrawal from the program.

2. [Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loan](#): Visit this website for further details.

3. Private (Alternative) Education Loans: For credit-worthy students who are not eligible for federal loans, there are private loans available from commercial lenders to help students meet living expenses and educational costs. As a credit check will be done by the lender, students should request a copy of their credit report to be sure that there are no errors and that all valid credit problems can be addressed ahead of time.

4. Scholarships: Scholarships to attend law school are available from a number of different sources based upon a variety of criteria. If you are willing to do the research and leg work, you may find scholarship funds which are untapped because few people know about them. There are various search engines to get information about external scholarships and some may be found [here](#).

- Criteria – May include an applicant's academic merit, race, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, veteran status, geographic location, etc.
- Sources – May include bar associations, fraternal, religious, and social organizations, state groups and agencies, veteran organizations, social fraternities and sororities, and children and/or employees of certain companies, unions, or credit unions.

The terms and amounts of applicants' scholarship awards may vary at different schools. The LSAC website includes a webpage on [Financial Aid Options](#) and additional information about

financing your legal education. The University of Miami School of Law website also includes important information about scholarships and loans: [Financing Your Legal Education](#); [Tuition/Cost of Attendance](#); [Scholarships from Miami Law](#); and [Scholarships from External Organizations](#).

Financial Aid Tips

- DO NOT WAIT FOR YOUR ADMISSION DECISION TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID. Each law school may have different financial aid deadlines so be aware of the deadline(s) and get your application completed as soon as possible. Financial aid resources can be limited and there is no guarantee of assistance for students who do not submit appropriate documentation by the deadline posted.
- Apply for a FSA ID from the Department of Education early: <https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>
- Keep a checklist and copies of all forms submitted. Put your name and UM ID# on all forms submitted.
- Use your most recent 1040 Tax Returns when completing FAFSA. The application becomes available in October.
- Make a budget and adhere to it so that you are making smart financial decisions, whether it is budgeting or saving for your advanced degree. Since law schools encourage or require that you do not work during your first year of law school (full- time students), you should have adequate funds available prior to entry into your first year.

Law school is not for spectators. Applicants who show they are proactive in seeking and grabbing opportunities to develop intellectually, professionally, and personally are ones we love to see. Prospective students should apply early to optimally position themselves for admission and scholarship consideration. Have your file submitted by Thanksgiving to avoid the holiday rush and delays. – Joseph Matthews at Miami Law.

VI. Resources

[Law School: 29 Critical Questions to Ask Today](#)

[Miami Law's Pre-Law Headquarters](#)

[The American Bar Association](#)

[The National Association for Law Placement](#)

[The University of Miami School of Law Office of Admissions](#)

- Office: Room F-203
- Phone: 305-284-6746
- Email: admissions@law.miami.edu
- Website: <http://www.law.miami.edu/JointheU>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/MiamiLawSchool/>
- Twitter: @MiamiLawSchool
- Instagram: @MiamiLaw School
- Podcast: [Miami Law Explainer](#)

2020-2021 Pre-Law Events

- [LSAC Law School Forums](#)
- [University of Miami School of Law Events](#) – Find out about Open Houses, Mock Admissions and Law Student Panels. Arrange to sit-in on a law class and tour with a current law student.
- [Upcoming and Archived Webinars](#)

Pre-Law Related Clubs at the University of Miami

- [Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Legal Fraternity](#)
- [Above the Bar](#) – A multicultural organization for University of Miami pre-law students to ensure their successful matriculation into law school.
- [Debate Club & Debate Team](#)
- [Model United Nations Team](#)

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

SCHOOL of LAW

