

# Advising Guide: Law School

## What is Law School?

The study of law is unique. The graduate degree in law, a juris doctor (J.D.), is typically awarded upon completion of a three-year program of full time study. While the law degree is a doctoral degree, a master's degree is not a pre-requisite for admission to law school, and most students begin law school after earning their bachelor's degree.

The process of applying to law school is a long and difficult one. A student should begin actively researching and planning as soon as they know that they are interested in going to law school after graduation. Applicants should plan to take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) no later than December of the year before they will begin law school. While law schools typically set application receipt deadlines in the early spring (some as early as February 1st), students should send their applications in October or November of the year before they will start law school since law schools use "rolling admissions." This is a process where the law schools admissions committees begin reviewing applications and making offers of acceptance as soon as their application period opens.

Because this process is complex and extremely competitive it is advisable for students interested in applying to law school to talk with a pre-law advisor early and often. The application process requires significant time spent studying for the LSAT, writing the personal statement, completing applications, acquiring the necessary letters of recommendation and completing the necessary financial aid paperwork for each school to which they will apply. Finally, law school is a huge financial investment. In 2013 average tuition in public law schools was \$23,000 for residents and \$36,000 for non-residents and over \$40,000 per year for private law schools.

## Does completing law school make me a lawyer?

No. Completing law school is a huge step toward that goal, but law school graduates must pass their state bar examination in order to be licensed to practice

law. Every state's bar association is an independent entity and membership is not reciprocal (passing the California bar admits a person to practice law here, but not in another state). The requirements for admission differ by state, but generally involved passing an exam with both writing sections and standardized test questions.

## Tell me more about the kinds of jobs in the field of law . . .

Experts in all kinds of fields are necessary to assist with the many facets of law. Business lawyers help people register new businesses, and prepare contracts for their employers. Tax attorneys analyze the tax consequences of business transactions. Real estate attorneys handle transactions involving the buying, selling, or leasing of property. Estate lawyers assist with the disposition of property after a death. Attorneys in the field of entertainment and sports negotiate employment contracts for their clients. Intellectual property attorneys protect their clients from misuse of patent or copyright. These are just a sampling of the types of practices available.

## Are there other kinds of jobs for which law school will prepare me?

Yes. A law degree is extremely versatile. Careers in government and a wide range of business careers can be advanced significantly by earning a law degree.

## What skills would I need to pursue a law degree?

Law school is extremely challenging and only the best prepared students will be successful. Law admissions is focused on identifying applicants who are well equipped to handle the academic rigor of law



SACRAMENTO  
STATE

study. Undergraduate students should have at least a cumulative GPA of 3.0 in order to consider a future in law school. While there are exceptions to this rule, if a student has not earned at least a 3.0 GPA, they have not demonstrated that they have the academic skills necessary to succeed in law school.

Potential law students must take the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). The LSAT is a half-day standardized test that measures skills that predict success in law school.

**Reading Comprehension.** The ability to read complex materials with understanding and insight.

**Analytical Reasoning.** The ability to understand a structure of relationships and to draw logical conclusions about that structure. Complex analyses are a large of legal problem solving.

**Logical Reasoning.** The ability to analyze, critically evaluate, and complete arguments as they occur in ordinary language. These skills include drawing well-supported conclusions, reasoning by analogy, determining how additional evidence affects an argument, applying principles or rules, and identifying argument flaws.

### Other helpful items

- Extra-curricular activities
- Community activities

### Deal-Breakers

Evaluation of a law school application is a holistic process, and many factors are considered, but there are key concerns that indicate a potential candidate unsuitable for this path.

- Overall GPA less than 3.0
- A score of below 150 on LSAT examination
- Ethical misconduct (criminal or academic)

### Suggested Electives

The following is an excerpt. Consult the [Major Planning Worksheet](#) for the full list of electives.

#### Area I – Administration

CRJ 165 CRJ Planning  
CRJ 168 CRJ Information Systems  
CRJ 195 Internship

#### Area II - Investigations

CRJ 133 Fundamentals of Computer Crime  
CRJ 153 Advanced Criminal Investigation

#### Area IV – Offenses & Offenders

CRJ 114 Sexual Offenses & Offenders

#### Area V - Law

CRJ 126 Law of Evidence  
CRJ 127 Juvenile Law  
CRJ 176 Legal Environment of Corrections  
CRJ 191E Topics in Law

#### Area VI – Supporting Courses

GOVT 120A Constitutional Law  
GOVT 120B Constitutional Rights & Liberties  
HIST 162 Social History of the U.S.  
PHIL 101 Ethics & Social Issues  
PHIL 155 Philosophy of Law  
PHIL 160 Symbolic Logic  
PSYC 168 Abnormal Psychology

### What do I need to do right now?

Connect with the field. Look for opportunities to volunteer or ride-along at various agencies. Join professional societies and participate in your chosen field. Many positions in the field are earned via networking with hiring agencies.

Start a binder for future applications.

- Official Transcripts:
  - High School reflecting graduation
  - Colleges
- Syllabi from all college courses
- Records of any honors or awards
- Record of all extracurricular activity and community service
- List of potential references and any letters of reference
- Employment history:
  - Name, address, telephone numbers of all employers
  - Period employed
  - Any letters of reference from employers
- Residential history, addresses and dates
- Birth certificates, certified
- Military records, DD214

Remember the importance of integrity and honesty, not only in your personal and professional life, but in your academic career. Many agencies conduct extensive background checks which include interviews with an applicant's former college instructors. Incidences of cheating, plagiarism, rudeness (including use of cell phones during class) and any kind of offensive behavior, are occurrences that will be noted by your professors.

Be mindful of your digital footprint. Avoid engaging in questionable behavior in your social media presence. This will be an area explored as a part of your background process by a prospective employer. Meet with your major advisor every semester to make sure you are on track to graduate.