

Printable on Law School Advising and Resources

This document contains the following information:

- UAR Advising and Resources
- UAR and other mailing lists
- Deciding on Law School
- Preparation and academic advising
- Selecting the right school for you
- The graduate school application
- Should I take a year off before graduate school?
- What are the possibilities of getting a master's degree at Stanford?
- Paying for graduate school

UAR Advising and Resources for Law School

- Prelaw Advisors: academic planning, help with the application process and with the essay/personal statement; quarterly workshops; go to the UAR Sweet Hall, 1st Floor, or make an appointment by using our online appointment request web form at uar.stanford.edu.
- Law applicants: If you would like a UAR advisor to review your personal statement, please email the draft to kwright@stanford.edu. Your essay will be returned with remarks and suggestions.
- Sign up to receive pre-law tips and workshop notices. Go to <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SPLS/index.html> and subscribe to the mailing list.
- Annual pre-law conference. The UAR sponsors an annual pre-law conference in November, to which law schools send representatives who are eager to inform you about the special qualities of a particular school. Notices of these programs are sent to the UAR pre-law email lists.
- Quarterly workshops/programs: The UAR and the pre-law societies offer programs each quarter designed to help students with the decision to attend law school. Deans of Admission visit to share their insights regarding admissions; the Stanford Pre-Law Society organizes visits to law school classes and mock LSAT tests. Derechos, the Latino pre-law society has quarterly meetings and a mentoring program with volunteers from Stanford Law School. The Black pre-law society has workshops and programs each quarter. Notices of these programs are sent to the UAR pre-law email lists.
- In the library of the UAR, you will find surveys of alumni currently in law school, including their recommendations regarding Stanford courses they found particularly helpful in preparing for law school.

You will also find

- The Official Guide to US Law Schools
- Catalogs of various law schools
- Handouts, guides for students interested in law

Additional Resources:

- Join the Stanford Prelaw Society at <http://www.stanford.edu/group/SPLS/>
- Stanford Pre-Law society offers a list of undergraduate courses which are related to law on their web site
- CDC: Recommendations Service, internship listings, shadow program
- Alumni Association: Career Network at <https://www.stanfordalumni.org/career/scn/home.html>
- For complete discussion of the decision to apply and the application process, go to the following web site: <http://www.LSAC.org>
- Additional web sites:
<http://www.hg.org/schools.html>
<http://www.abanet.org/legaled/home.html>

Should You Apply to Law School?

To many juniors and seniors, law school seems like a natural extension of their college life. Some of their thoughts sound like these:

- I'm a junior already and don't know what to do after I graduate.
- I don't know what I am going to do with my life, so I'll stay in school.
- Parents (and others) start asking what I plan to do after I graduate. I don't have a good answer for them.
- I don't want people to think that, after a lifetime of overachievement, I've suddenly careened off track.
- I've been successful in academics for 17 years. If I stay in school, I'll probably do well and be happy.
- Whatever lawyers do, they sure don't have trouble finding jobs and making money. It can't be that bad. Anyway, what are the alternatives?

Does any of this sound familiar? If so, you should be forewarned. There are many good reasons to go to law school, but these thoughts don't touch on any of them.

Five Good Reasons for Applying to Law School

1. You admire someone who is a lawyer, or has received a legal education, and their legal training was important to achieving whatever it is that you admire.

ADVICE: Talk to lawyers -- find friends of your family or professors and ask them if they thought law school was worthwhile and what they learned. What did they get out of it? Was it useful to their careers?

2. You have worked with a lawyer on a project or in a law office and you really like the work, the intellectual challenge, the people, and the atmosphere. You don't necessarily know that you want to practice law, but the issues and the law intrigued you.

REASSURING ADVICE: It's OK to go to law school but not want to practice law, or be a lawyer. The degree is a useful credential for journalism, business, politics, teaching, social work, etc.

3. You have worked in an organization or government office or been involved in politics on a local or school level and think a law degree would help you pursue a career in those areas.
4. You really love school and want to spend three more years reading, researching, and studying in the library when the sun is shining.
OBSERVATION: Law school takes lots of time. The readings are fascinating or deadly dull. There's lots of it. The papers are long and full of footnotes.
5. People have always told you, "You'd make a good lawyer."
ADVICE: Listen to people when they make observations about you. Sometimes they can see you more clearly than you can yourself. Ask why they think you would make a good lawyer.

Academic Advice

There is no formal pre-law major at Stanford, and no preference is given by law schools for students from any specific major. Most schools recommend that students perfect their skills in analytical reasoning, and the importance of strong verbal and written communication skills cannot be overestimated. Words are the tools of the lawyer, and students who can express themselves with confidence and clarity will be well-prepared for law school. Courses are available across the curriculum at Stanford that afford you opportunities to hone these essential skills.

Ten Tips for Pre-Law Students

1. This cannot be overstated: test your interest in the field of law through internships, talking with lawyers, observing lawyers through shadow programs, or through a mentor, **BEFORE YOU MAKE THE DECISION TO APPLY TO LAW SCHOOL.**
3. Take some time off before applying to law school. You will be a stronger candidate after even a year or two of work/other experience. You will be able to concentrate your effort on your senior year achievements, in and out of the classroom. You will be better able to plan and pay for the LSAT and law school.

4. Major in the field that interests you most, while simultaneously developing your ability to write, read, and think critically.
5. Grades are important. However, a less than spectacular year is overcome by steady improvement and a strong senior year that reflects your scholarship and leadership.
6. Recommendations are important; cultivate genuine, collaborative relationships with teachers early and often. The Stanford Career Development Center will forward recommendations to the LSAC service--go to the CDC for more information.
7. A strong LSAT is indicative of potential academic success in the first year of law school. Do not take the test before you are prepared. Take a practice test either on your own or through a test preparation service. The LSAT is a very important factor in admissions, but other factors include: strong performance in Stanford classes, extraordinary recommendations from teachers, work experience, and other evidence of your potential.
8. Law schools value research or other independent projects in collaboration with faculty. The topic need not be obviously related to law.
9. Extracurricular activities are important in developing "people skills" --and in providing opportunities to develop leadership experience.
10. Do not fasten all your hopes on one or two law schools: apply to one or two safety schools-- many Stanford alums have successful careers after attending regional law schools.

Shadowing/ What do lawyers do?

The [Career Development Center](#) offers opportunities to shadow alumni who are lawyers, through which you will be able to see first-hand what the legal practice entails. The Stanford Alumni Association manages a database of alumni who have agreed to be contacted for informational interviews. See:

<https://www.stanfordalumni.org/career/scn/home.html>. We strongly recommend that students avail themselves of these important contacts, which test your interest in the law, and which lead to informed decisions on your part.

Minority Candidates

Law schools seek diversity among law school students, and have made a commitment to alleviate the historic shortage of minority lawyers. The Stanford community (including staff from the law school, the community centers, the UAR, and the pre law societies, offer workshops and programs throughout the year to encourage and inform minority students interested in attending law school. Minority candidates are encouraged to review resources and information on the LSAC.org web site, which offers important links to programs specifically for them: CLEO: Council on Legal Education Opportunity (see <http://www.cleoscholars.com/>).

You will find a discussion of minority issues, and information about MILE, Minorities in Legal Education (see <http://lsac.org/LSAC.asp?url=lsac/minorities-in-legal-education.asp>). Primarily designed for college freshmen and sophomores, MILE offers information that can help you prepare for law school, including the MILE Markers newsletter and email access to advice regarding the law school admission process, and preparation for the LSAT.

Registration is free at the web site listed below:

https://os.lsac.org/Release/mile/mile_logon.aspx or <http://www.lsac.org>

Getting to Know your Professors

It is important to cultivate relationships with faculty members to be in a position to ask them for law school recommendations. Too many students fail to initiate any faculty relationships during college, considering it poor form to speak in class or visit a professor during office hours. This is a mistake, not only because during senior year you will have no faculty member you can turn to with confidence, but also because of the missed opportunity to work collegially with intellectual mentors, and to form lasting relationships with them.

Faculty recommendations are important to the admissions process. Law professors comprise each law school's admissions committee. The faculty recommendation is one way of ensuring that admissions committees know about your academic potential, as law professors highly regard the opinions of other faculty.

Don't be shy about asking a professor to write a letter on your behalf. Give them a resume, a paper or an exam written for the relevant class, and a copy of your personal statement, even if it is a rough draft. Provide instructions on what the professor should do after completing the recommendation; and provide a stamped, addressed envelope if you are asking that the recommendation be forwarded by mail.

Application Process and Timeline

Criteria Considered by Law Schools

While there are common criteria considered by most law schools, there are also criteria unique to particular schools, which you discover by direct contact with the school. Criteria that are considered important by most Law School Admission Committees include:

- Undergraduate GPA
- LSAT score
- Undergraduate course of study
- Graduate Work
- College attended
- Improvement in grades
- College curricular and extracurricular activities
- Ethnic/racial background
- Letters of recommendation
- Personal statement or essay
- Work experience or other postgraduate experiences

- Community activities
- Difficulties (financial, personal, physical) overcome
- Proven leadership
- Each student's unique character and background

Deciding Where to Apply

Deciding where to apply is up to you. Remember that each November the UAR sponsors the Pacific Pre-Law Conference on campus where you can meet representatives from more than 50 national schools. Collect catalogs and applications at the conference, or, if you already have those, meet with the representatives and ask specific questions. The two most important criteria for admission to law school are undergraduate GPA and LSAT score. The more competitive and prestigious the law school, the more likely these two factors will be higher for the average accepted applicant.

Be wary about advice you are given from your parents' friends. They may not know what is best for you and their knowledge about schools may be outdated. Listen politely and judge for yourself.

As more and more people are applying to law school, it makes sense to apply to between 8-12 schools. Law school education is still pretty standard across the country--wherever you are, you'll be studying Contracts, Torts, Property, Criminal Law, Constitutional Law, etc. So apply to as many schools as you want. Ten is a nice number. It's a totally subjective number, and you can apply to fewer or more if you want. Law school applications are pretty standard (like law school curricula), and usually there are no interviews. So once you've done one application, you can fill in the rest pretty quickly.

Once you've applied and been accepted, an excellent plan is to visit the schools that have accepted you and meet with students there. As much as possible, you want to ensure a fit between you and the school. Sit in on classes, examine the school's bulletin boards, try to go out and eat with students, anything to help make your decision easier. Come to Stanford Law School and talk with students who are sitting outside. They've just gone through the application process and might have thoughts on different schools.

It is impossible to answer the question of which law school is best without knowing something about the person asking the question. Two important things to consider, however, are size of class and location. Briefly, law schools with less than 200 students per class are considered small. Location is either urban or non-urban. The purpose of this exercise is to get you thinking about important law school characteristics that differ from school to school.

Size of school is perhaps the most important variable of all. Large schools simply have more resources to offer, such as a variety of advanced courses beyond the standard fare. They also offer them more frequently. Small schools can't compete here, often offering classes only one semester a year or, in extreme cases, once every other year.

Small schools do have advantages, however. A generous student/faculty ratio is an oft-cited advantage. Perhaps more important is the cooperative nature that seems to

accompany more intimate surroundings. Large schools often have a diffusion of responsibility that can lead to "cut-throat" behavior. It is assumed to be easier, for example, to hide books from a classmate that you've never met than it is to hide books from someone you sit next to everyday. The sense of community in smaller law schools can include cooperative ventures such as note-pools, where note taking responsibilities for the semester are divided up among the members of the class. Large law schools are not necessarily superior to small schools or vice versa. Rather, you should decide what is most important to you and make your decision accordingly.

Another important consideration is the location of the law school. Rural schools generally provide a more relaxed place to study law. Urban schools tend to offer more opportunities to engage in work for judges and pro bono work (legal aid for free - usually serving the poor). Again, you must decide what is important to you.

Taking Time off Before Applying

Are you ready for law school?

- The median age of people entering law school is 25. Though students do enter law school right out of college, most benefit from gaining professional experience. Law schools value candidates with professional backgrounds because they enhance classroom discussions.
- Do you need a break from school? The first year of law school is intense. After 16 years (or more) of life as a student, does life in the "real" world appeal to you? It's a personal decision, but alumni report that a break from school is healthy, enabling students to further develop skills and to return to school with enthusiasm and commitment.
- You will be a stronger candidate after you have finished your senior year. Law Schools are interested in what you have accomplished, not what you plan to do. They appreciate having four years of academic experience to review. It's more impressive to describe a finished honors project, and faculty are better positioned to write strong letters of recommendation for a completed project.
- Keeping your options open. It is recommended that you not apply with a deferment in mind. It's distracting and can represent a premature commitment.

If you take time off. . .

- You will gain valuable experience through many jobs that are not related to law. Law schools do not give more weight to experience in legal fields. Teaching, consulting, business, industry, sales, marketing - all give you the opportunity to develop applicable skills. Find a job that is challenging and interesting and you will enhance your candidacy.
- Lawyers spend their time in research, communicating with clients and colleagues, negotiating, writing, and arguing cases. You will need strong skills in writing, analytical analysis, and communication.
- When to take the LSAT? If you plan to take some time off, you can take the LSAT in February (or later) of your senior year when you can focus on the test. Do not rush to take the LSAT.

Financial Aid

Don't refrain from applying to law school because you are worried about money. Once you're accepted, many schools will go out of their way to help you financially. But DON'T come to law school for the money you expect to earn when you graduate. You may have read numerous articles on starting salaries that make it sound like law students win the lottery after they graduate. We have found that these articles are quite exaggerated. The starting salaries are indeed quite good if you work for large firms in big cities. But these firms also demand that you work very long hours--working until 9 or 10 at night is routine, as is coming in at least two week-ends a month. If you work that hard, you'll indeed be paid well. The average salary for U.S. lawyers in 2004 was \$50,000. The cost of a law education can be \$50,000 per year.

Recent studies indicate that there is a large turnover for associates at large firms, which may indicate that there is a lot of unhappiness that accompanies the big bucks. After five years, many people move on to government, teaching, or consulting. So don't use the idea of being well-paid in a large law firm as your dream when you apply to law school. You may not like it.

Many people also think that finding work is a snap. Law firms come to campus, interview students and sometimes make offers on the spot. Students with strong grades and good interviewing skills may have little trouble finding a job. Students with weak grades may have LOTS of trouble finding jobs. Just because you're in a good law school doesn't mean you're on Easy Street; the competition is tough.

Having issued this caveat, let's get back to talking about paying for law school. If you think you'll be applying for financial aid, be sure to request information and financial aid applications at the same time that you request admissions applications. Most law schools make financial aid decisions soon after they admit a student, so you should apply for aid at the same time that you submit your admission application. Because financial aid policies differ from school to school, the financial aid office at the school(s) to which you are applying is the best source of information on financing your legal education. Talk to someone in that office first if you have questions regarding the types of aid available, your eligibility or other related questions.

Financial aid for law school comes in three forms: scholarships and grants, work-study, and loans.

Scholarships and Grants

Scholarships and grants are financial awards that do not require repayment. Unlike those available for your undergraduate education, scholarships and grants for law school are few and far between. Individual law schools are usually the source of most legal scholarships and grants, and, therefore, they usually establish the awards' criteria. But remember also to look for awards offered by local bar associations, social clubs, religious or business organizations, veteran's groups, and your or your parents' previous or present employers. Women, ethnic minorities and students with disabilities may also be eligible for scholarships from organizations comprising members of that group. You can schedule an

appointment with a UAR advisor to talk about the few national fellowships that support legal studies. Make an appointment using our online appointment request form [at uar.stanford.edu](http://uar.stanford.edu).

Federal Work-Study

Work-study is a federal program that rewards you for working part-time during the school year. Usually, a portion of your work-study funds are applied directly to your tuition bill as a tuition credit and another portion is paid directly to you. Work-study jobs can be in a variety of locations and offices, and many times the experience you gain through your work-study job can serve as a springboard for finding summer or full-time employment. Work-study awards are usually limited in number and usually go to students with the highest demonstrated need; check with your law school's financial aid office for eligibility requirements.

Loans

Loans represent the most readily-accessible type of financial aid available to most law students. The government and private lending sources provide a variety of loans at low and moderate interest rates which they make available to students based on financial need and on the typical student budget as determined by the financial aid office at that student's law school. Federal law mandates that all graduate and professional school students be considered independent from parental support for the purposes of borrowing through the federal loan programs. Law schools may still require, however, parental income information for scholarships, grants and loans that the schools themselves award because the schools may determine independent status in a manner distinct from the way the government does.

Government loans

The federal government's student loan programs include three types of loans:

1. **Subsidized Stafford Loan.** Under this program, you may borrow up to \$8,500 a year if you meet the need criteria. The government pays interest on the loan while you are enrolled in school at least half time. You must begin repaying the loan six months after you graduate withdraw, or drop below half time.
2. **Unsubsidized Stafford Loan.** This program allows you to borrow up to \$18,500 in subsidized and unsubsidized loans. You either pay the interest or allow the interest to accrue while you're in law school.
3. **Perkins Federal Loan.** Only students with demonstrated need are eligible for this program, and, if you qualify, your school determines the amount of the loan, usually an amount between \$500 and \$2000.

Private loans

Many law students supplement government loans with private loans from lenders such as Law Access, LAWLOANS, and The Education Resource Institute. The terms and options of these programs are explained in loan application brochures available from the financial aid office of any ABA-approved law school.

Determining Eligibility

To qualify for some loans and scholarship programs you must demonstrate financial need. Your financial need is the difference between your resources and the total cost of attending your law school. Your unmet financial need is determined by subtracting the amount you are able to contribute toward your legal education--i.e. amounts saved from employment, amounts your parents agree to pay for you--as well as any scholarships you receive, from the total cost of attendance. The student budget used for determining need includes tuition, books, and supplies as well as living expenses, transportation, recreation, and personal expenses. The budget is set by the law school after considering your particular circumstances. Consumer debt (credit cards, etc.) is not included in your student budget when a need analysis is prepared; it is to your advantage, therefore, to rid yourself of outstanding credit card debt before you enter law school. Finally, a good credit history will be important when you apply for loans. Attempt to clean up your credit report before enrolling in law school.

Special note for International Students

International students do not qualify for federal loan programs because those loans are available only to U.S. citizens. Private lenders like Sallie Mae, however, may extend credit to international students who have a U.S. citizen co-sign the loan application. International students may still qualify for loans or grants funded directly by individual law schools. Information on these resources is available from the schools to which you apply.

Applying for Financial Aid

Federal Aid. To apply for financial aid from the federal government follow these steps: First, prepare your federal income tax returns as early as possible after the first of the year. Second, get a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) from you college or university financial aid office or from the law school to which you are applying. Fill it out, remembering to designate the names of all law schools that are to receive the report and remembering to answer "yes" to the question, "Will you be a graduate or professional student for the upcoming year?" The FAFSA requires information that is derived directly from your tax return.

LSAT (Law School Admissions Test)

The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is designed to measure skills that are considered essential for success in law school. It is an important factor in admissions, but still, it is only one factor among numerous criteria that schools use to evaluate candidates. It is strongly advised that students take numerous practice tests before actually sitting for this examination, and that you meet with a UAR advisor to discuss strategies for preparing for the LSAT.

When is the best time to take the LSAT? If you plan to take some time off, you can take the LSAT in February (or later) of your senior year when you can focus on the test. Do

not rush to take the LSAT. If you plan law school immediately following your graduation from Stanford, you should take the test no later than December of your senior year.

The score scale for the LSAT is 120–180. The average LSAT score for Stanford alumni hovers at 164. See “Statistics” in this handout.

Scored part of the test:

- Reading Comprehension questions test your ability to read and understand lengthy and complex materials similar to those encountered in law school
- Analytical Reasoning questions are measure your ability to understand a structure of relationships and to draw logical conclusions about that structure.
- Logical Reasoning questions evaluate your ability to understand, analyze, criticize, and complete a variety of arguments. There are two sections on logical reasoning on the LSAT.

Unscored Section:

- Writing samples: A 30-minute writing sample is administered at the end of the test. It is not scored by LSAC but copies are sent to all law schools to which you apply.
- An unscored section of the test is used to pretest new test items. The placement of this section varies for different administrations of the test.

Times/Locations

The test is administered four times a year:

1. June
2. October
3. December
4. February

Test registration is available online at LSAG.org. Stanford is not a designated site for administration of the LSAT. You are advised to register well in advance of the published deadline. For the October LSAT, a June registration is recommended.

Statistics: Stanford Applicants

Students are generally very interested in statistics related to law school applicants, and the chart below will satisfy most of your curiosity about numbers. However, a word to the wise. While numbers, particularly GRE and LSAT are important criteria for admission, law schools make exceptions each year for students who may not have the highest scores, but who have shown in other ways their potential to succeed in law school and/or have demonstrated great leadership potential.

The online edition of the Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools has a searchable data base of all ABA schools that details statistics on accepted candidates:
<http://officialguide.lisac.org/search/cgi-bin/results.asp>

LSAT Median Scores for Stanford Students:

The median LSAT score for Stanford students over the past 4 examinations (October 2002, December 2002, February 2003, June 2003) is: 164.2

Graduating Seniors Stanford University 1998-2002

	2002	2001	2000	1999	1998
Number of Applicants	337	255	256	283	281
Number of Applicants Accepted	281	230	218	244	238
Acceptance Rate	83%	90%	85%	86%	84%
Average LSAT Score for Acceptances	163.5	163.5	163.6	163.6	163.0
Average GPA for Acceptances	3.48	3.49	3.49	3.47	3.47
Average Number of Applications for all Applicants	7.66	6.58	6.45	6.40	6.72
Average Number of Acceptances	2.98	2.98	2.84	2.85	3.08
Number Matriculated	217	176	181	182	188

Timeline

The application process begins about a year before your intended date to begin law school. We encourage all Stanford students, including freshmen and sophomores but particularly juniors and seniors, to come to the UAR to discuss your plan to attend law school.

SPRING of Junior Year

- Pick up the LSAT/LSDAS information book in the UAR. Read it carefully and sign up for LSAT and LSDAS (Law School Data Admission Service). It is generally not a good idea to take the June test. The October test is generally best for Stanford Undergraduates. PLEASE CHECK THE BOX ON THE LSDAS THAT ENABLES THE STANFORD PRELAW ADVISOR TO RECEIVE RESULTS. This information is invaluable to pre law advising, and is absolutely confidential.
- Begin to review possible law schools to which you wish to apply. Check out law school web pages; review the UAR law alumni surveys; visit law schools; talk with friends currently attending. Develop a list of 15 or so schools that you will pare to 8-10 in Autumn.
- Visit an advisor in the UAR.

SUMMER before Senior Year

- Prepare for the LSAT examination. You can prepare on your own or take an expensive prep course. You must take at least 7 practice tests to familiarize yourself with the format and type of questions, and it is recommended that you take several practice tests. Plan to take the actual LSAT only once.
- Write to law schools for application materials. Most schools prefer that you send a postcard or email request (rather than a letter.)
- Begin to formulate a personal statement. You can send a rough draft to Kathy Wright by email at kwright@stanford.edu; the draft will be returned, usually within two days, with comments.
- Make sure you have an up-to-date resume to send to law schools.
- In mid-August, look into application software, online options (LSAC.org) and decide which application format you will use.
- Ask recommenders for letters. You will need two. Provide them with resume, transcript, and rough draft of your essay, and deadline.

AUTUMN of Senior Year

- Take the LSAT in October. The December date is acceptable for most schools but not all, so check web site for details. The February test is too late for admission next September.
- Make arrangements with Stanford (and any other college or university you have attended) to forward transcripts to the LSDAS. There is a form in the LSDAS brochure that must accompany the request(s).
- Secure recommendations (usually 2). Confirm that already requested recommendation have been sent. Write thank you notes to your recommenders.
- Request Dean's Appraisal form, if required, from the Dean of Student's Office, 2nd Floor, Tresidder (650-723-2733). See "Dean's Certification" at <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/DOS/certification.shtml>.
- Make an appointment to see a UAR pre law advisor after the first two weeks of the quarter to review your list of schools, go over your personal statement, and discuss any questions.
- Attend pre Law programs in Autumn including presentations by law school deans of admission (usually Stanford, Harvard, NYU, Cornell, UC Berkeley and UChicago, USC and others).
- Attend the Pacific Pre Law Conference in Tresidder in November.
- Develop your final list: criteria usually includes: academic interests, student body size, geographical preference, financial aid, faculty profile, and personal criteria.
- File your application by first week in December. Check periodically with law schools to make sure your application is complete.

Personal Statement

You can't do much about your LSAT score and GPA after a certain point, but the excellence of your personal statement is one thing that you can control. Show your statement to someone you respect, carefully consider his or her criticisms, and re-write the

statement if necessary. Pre-law advisors at the UAR can review your statement for you and offer feedback, too. Email it to Kathy Wright at kwright@stanford.edu.

TWO PAGES is the typical length for a personal statement, and it should be neatly typed. It should be PERSONAL, that is, an essay only you could have written, not your brother or sister or anyone else. Your statement should respond to any specific essay instructions which may be given on the application. To the extent that the content of the essay is left open-ended, your statement should be as concrete as possible, making reference to and explaining any significant (positive) factors in your background. If you have specific ideas about your future career in law, do not hesitate to discuss them. It is not necessary, however, to have a legal specialty in mind before you go to law school, and, in any event, it is most important to devote your available space to a coherent, convincing and interesting description of yourself and your past experiences.

Do something interesting with your application. Defining interesting is impossible. The point is that you need to differentiate yourself somehow from the undifferentiated mass of applicants. Some tips follow:

Engage the reader on some level. Sorry to disillusion you, but in all probability you are competing with children and a nightly news show for the reader's attention. Humor works, obviously, but most pre-law applicants are too risk averse to try it for fear of offending someone. Dialogue and anecdotes work, too. What doesn't work is an extended discussion of your life's achievements to date. Remember that part of this process is for the law school to observe how you prioritize what's important to you.

Qualified applicants don't feel compelled to use their personal statements "to explain the blemishes" in their application. This operates as a signal to the law schools that the applicant has it all together.

Let your creative juices flow and see what happens. As a litmus test, ask yourself the following question: "Would anyone, other than members of my family, be interested enough to pick this essay up and read it if there were no magazines in a doctor's office?"

Letters of Recommendation

Most law schools request two letters of recommendation. At least one letter should be from a professor or teacher who is in a position to evaluate the student's academic performance and to assess the applicant's potential for law school. The letters may be put on file at the Stanford CDC, who will forward up to three letters to the LSDAS for distribution. You may send the letters directly to the schools. Or you may forward your letters of recommendation to the LSDAS, which will include up to three letters in their report to schools to which you have applied.

Provide your reference with:

- i. An unofficial transcript

2. A personal resume, including a clear statement of your intent to go to law school.
3. A list of courses you have taken with the reference, including grades you made and any outstanding work you completed for the class (copies of term papers, essays, tests).
4. The recommendation form downloaded from LSAC.org and signed by the applicant.
5. A stamped envelope addressed to the LSAC.

Guidelines for the Recommender

- Be specific about the student's coursework. Was the course a demanding one? How well did the student perform both oral and written assignments? Did the student produce work that particularly stands out in your mind; e.g. did the student write a term paper or essay which you considered superior? Note the student's potential for intellectual development. Letters which simply observe that the student was above-average and performed very well in your class are of little help to admissions committees.
- Indicate how long and in what capacity you have known the student. Note if you are familiar with the student's non-academic achievements that indicate leadership potential or strong character. Do note background characteristics which may be useful in separating the student from other applicants (e.g. work experiences, a student who is first in their family to attend college).
- Please return letters by the agreed upon deadline. Every year a few otherwise well-qualified students are not accepted because a late recommendation resulted in an incomplete file which was not reviewed in a timely way. If you are too busy to fulfill this obligation, please tell the student that and allow them to ask someone else for the recommendation.

Interviews

Most law schools do not offer interviews, due to the overwhelming number of applicants. However, there are some schools who offer informational or evaluative interviews: check at the web site of a particular school in which you are interested to ascertain whether interviews are available.

If You are Rejected...

If you're rejected, call and ask why. Don't take rejection as any kind of judgment of your character. Don't let the application process crush your confidence in yourself and your abilities.

Many schools will keep your applications on file and you can re-apply the next year. (They'll already have your transcripts, your letters, your LSAT; you can just update the application, and perhaps retake the LSAT.) Re-applying to the same school shows perseverance, interest, and diligence. There are many students who got in the second time they applied and benefited from one more year in the working world, and were much happier to go back to school.

If you don't get in, it's an opportunity to do something else. If you do get in, you were very lucky. Do something meaningful with the education and the doors a law degree will open for you. As Ralph Nader put it, "Law school is like a pencil sharpener. It makes you sharper, but it also makes you narrower." Try not to let it narrow you so much that you can't remember the wide-ranging interests that brought you to law school in the first place.