

COLGATE UNIVERSITY
CENTER FOR CAREER SERVICES

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The Law School Application Process

Suggested Timeline

SPRING (before applying)

- Attend the Applying to Law School workshop
- Open an online account with the Law School Admission Council (www.lsac.org).
- Authorize the release of your LSAT score(s), biographical, academic, and application information to Colgate for advising support and services.
- Prepare for and register for the June LSAT
- Conduct research on law schools
- Register for LSAC's Credential Assembly Service
- Request letters of recommendation (in-person is preferred)
- Attend a Personal Statement workshop

SUMMER (before applying)

- Take the June LSAT or prepare for the October LSAT
- Register for LSAC's Credential Assembly Service
- Request official transcript(s) to be sent to the LSAC Credential Assembly Service
- Review law school websites for applications and brochures
- Research, visit, and select law schools
- Prepare personal statement
- Check-in with your letter of recommendation writers
- Request a Dean's Certification from the Office of the Dean of Undergraduate Students.

FALL (of application year)

- Attend the Applying to Law School and Personal Statement workshops (if did not attend in spring)
- Take October LSAT if necessary
- Request a Dean's Certification from your Administrative Advisor (if not yet requested)
- Attend the Law School Fair on campus
- Develop a well-balanced list of law schools
- Complete and submit your applications and all supporting materials by November 1st
- Take the December LSAT if necessary

WINTER (after application)

- Check to be sure application file is complete, including letters of recommendation and Dean's Certification
- File your financial aid applications
- Send an updated transcript with fall semester grades to LSAC or directly to law schools

SPRING (after application)

- Pay your seat deposit by law school deadline

Preparing for Law School

Begin your law school preparations as early as possible during your undergraduate career. The American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar has provided a statement on Pre-Law Preparation at www.abanet.org/legaled/prelaw/prep.html. Explore and examine both the profession and the law school experience. Carefully examine your interests, abilities and goals. Question your preconception about “the Law,” and weigh your aspirations against the realities of job opportunities and law school admissions. If these considerations do not yet confirm your commitment to a legal career, work a year or two before applying to law schools.

- Meet with the Pre-Law Advisor to help you clarify your career interests.
- Utilize Career Services’ Colgate Connection to identify alumni who may be contacted for advice and information about their career paths.
- Participate in the Pre-Law Society and other relevant student organizations.

Law School: Now or Later?

In recent years, the Colgate applicant pool has contained more recent graduates than graduating seniors. Many people apply with the expectation of deferring admission. While one-year deferments are sometimes granted after acceptance, they are not automatic nor can they usually be extended beyond one year (policies vary from school to school).

Many seniors consider the option of working a year or two before applying to law schools. They question what kind of employment will enhance their chances of admission to law school. Students are often concerned that they may lack the motivation to return to school after they have begun a working career. Recent history has shown that Colgate graduates do, in fact, return to school. Moreover, the overwhelming advice of alumni currently enrolled in law schools is to take time to work before attending.

Law school admissions officers encourage work experience. The goals of older applicants are generally more focused and, therefore, they are better prepared applicants. Colgate graduates have worked in any number of fields before applying, ranging from business and education to the media and the social services. For example, both teachers and paralegals apply to law school. Paralegal work can give an undecided candidate some experience in the field and help reinforce a career decision, but it is far from being an automatic, even desirable, route to admission.

If you apply as a senior and are not accepted, you can always reapply without prejudice. Plan to take at least two years to gain experience and knowledge in a job you enjoy. Develop some skills that will make your next application significantly different from your earlier ones. In general, unless you are very certain about a career in law and have a strong record going into senior year, our advice is to wait. Don't rush. A challenging job can be a good foundation for your postgraduate education. Feel free to discuss your questions or concerns with the Pre-Law Advisor in Career Services.

Applying to Law School

If you decide that you will apply to law school, you should begin the application process at least 18-24 months prior to your desired matriculation. Colgate's pre-law advisor can help you find the best fit between your interests, credentials, and the range of feasible alternatives. When choosing where to apply, use the many guides and other resources available in the Career Services library. Take the following factors into consideration:

Numerical Indicators: Undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and your score(s) on the LSAT are two important factors in the admissions process. Each of these numbers should be compared to the median at individual schools and to the grids in *The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* and the [Boston College](#)

[Online Law School Locator](#). Additionally, the law section in the pre-law advisor in Career Services has admissions statistics for Colgate's applicant pools.

The Academic Program: Many schools offer a wide variety of options for specialization and dual degree programs. Almost every combination is available at some institutions, the most popular being JD/MBA and JD/MA in areas such as history, international relations, economics, and government. Please note clinical programs, law journals, and study abroad options. The annual *NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists* (available in the Career Services) contains more information on special programs.

The Law School Environment: Every fall admissions representatives visit Colgate to share their programs at our annual law fair. Although interviews are usually not a part of the admissions process, you will find visits to law schools very informative. Make an appointment to sit in on a class. Discussions with law students and professors can help you assess the school. The number of excellent law schools is far greater than most people realize. If you are planning an academic career or a judicial clerkship, it is important to select schools which most commonly graduate students who become professors and judicial clerks. For applicants with specific professional objectives, looking at the schools' elective courses, clinical programs, and law journals can be useful. Most schools' web sites and catalogs contain profiles detailing percentages of graduates entering major law firms, corporations, law-related positions, the judiciary, federal and state government, and private practice. When you speak with current law students, ask about placement opportunities, including summer jobs available to first-year students. Consider carefully the following:

- Likelihood of admission
- Quality and accessibility of faculty
- Reputation
- Method of instruction
- Enrollment and class size
- Overall cost and the availability of financial aid
- Special programs and clinical opportunities
- Size and diversity of the student body
- Location, housing, and kinds of recreation available
- Facilities, especially the library
- Ambiance of the law school
- Extracurricular programs
- Career placement
- "Bar pass-rate" (percentage of graduates who pass the bar)

The competitiveness of the admissions process varies among schools. Rankings of schools are controversial, especially if the criteria are not defined. There is no optimum number of applications one should file. The application process is not only lengthy and time-consuming it is also costly. Please apply to a range of schools.

Application Procedures

Required Application Materials

Law School Admission Test (LSAT) - see *lsac.org*. Information is available on the web at www.LSAC.org.

- Law School Admission Council "Law School Report"
- Official Transcript(s)
- Law school applications (available online at lsac.org) & Personal Statement
- Letters of recommendation/evaluation
- Dean's certification (for some schools)

Law School Admission Test (LSAT)

The test is offered in June, October, December, and February. Most schools accept scores of tests taken up to five years before application, although some law schools may require more recent test scores. If you are taking the test in the academic year in which you are applying to law school, you should take the test no later than October. Taking the test the previous June, however, gives you the added advantage of knowing your score before the application process begins. It also allows you time to repeat the test in October if your score is

unsatisfactory. **Do not plan** to take the test more than once. Remember that all scores are reported to law schools, and many schools average multiple scores. We highly recommend you not take the test if you are not adequately prepared. The range of possible scores on the LSAT is 120-180.

We recommend using the official Law School Admission Council materials to prepare for the LSAT. Test-taking strategy and sample questions are available at www.lsac.org. Additional preparation materials may be ordered from the Law School Admission Council. Commercial test preparation courses are offered in most metropolitan areas. Before you enroll in a course, make sure you really need it. Study carefully the information, advice and sample questions at www.lsac.org and take a sample test. For best results, time yourself and do the entire test in one sitting. Learn from your mistakes and try one or more additional tests. If this strategy is **not successful**, *then* consider commercial preparation courses.

LSAC Law School Reports

Law schools require applicants to subscribe to the LSAC Credential Assembly Service. The LSAC prepares and provides a report for each law school to which you apply. The report contains information that schools use, along with your application, personal statement, and letters of recommendation to make a decision on your application. Information contained in the report includes: biographic information, a year-by-year, college-by-college summary of undergraduate grades and credits; photocopies of each transcript sent to LSAC; candidate's most recent LSAT results, including cancellations and absences, and an average LSAT score when more than one reportable score is on file; photocopies of LSAT writing samples; an admission index; copies of up to four letters of recommendation processed by LSAC; evaluations; a copy of the school's application, and more. Fees and services are explained at www.lsac.org.

Transcripts

Using the Credential Assembly Service **Transcript Request Form** available at www.lsac.org, ask the College Registrar (www.colgate.edu/registrar) to forward your transcript to LSAC. Transcripts must be ordered well in advance. You must order transcripts from **every academic institution** in which you have been enrolled.

Application Forms and Catalogs

Application materials are usually available from law schools near the end of the summer. If you want to begin your applications before fall semester, consult the law school web sites and sample applications from the previous year. Get a head start on the essay or personal statement section. The LSAC Credential Assembly Service registration fee includes access to electronic applications for all ABA-approved law schools. Note the application and financial aid deadlines so that you can organize your individual timetable.

Letters of Recommendation

Before requesting letters of recommendation, consult the law school web sites for specific instructions. Most schools require at least two academic recommendations. Applicants usually request one letter from a major professor and one from a professor in a second discipline. In addition, letters from employers are often relevant. There are no absolute rules, but as a guideline, three academic letters are not too many, provided they present different information and describe substantively your skills and accomplishments. More than five letters, however, may be excessive. Since recommendations are weighed heavily in the admissions decisions, make your choices carefully, gathering strong evaluations from persons who have had an opportunity to observe your academic strengths and your personal qualities.

Contact your professors early. Make an appointment with each of your recommenders to discuss your course work and other interests as well as your plans for law school. Many writers appreciate having a draft of your law school essay; some might like a copy of a paper you wrote for their class or a current resume. Specify a reasonable deadline; professors are busy, and they write letters out of interest in you and your future. It may

take more than one reminder and a longer time than you might expect, so allow at least four weeks from the time of request. Aim to have your recommendations complete by **November 1**.

LSAC's Letter of Recommendation Service (LOR)

LSAC offers the Letter of Recommendation (LOR) Service as a convenience to Credential Assembly Service registrants, recommendation letter writers, and LSAC-participating law schools. Be sure to check the letter of recommendation requirements for each law school. Any letter sent with an incomplete form, without a LOR form, or without the recommenders signature will be returned to the recommender.

LSAC's Evaluation Services

LSAC's Evaluation Service allows evaluators to provide important information about applicants to law schools regarding 30 individual attributes and skills in six categories, including: intellectual skills; personal qualities; integrity and honesty; communication; task management; and working with others. A single person can do both evaluations and letters of recommendation, but the applicant must determine, based on each law school's requirements, which service (LOR or Evaluation) to solicit and assign. The Evaluation Service is an entirely online process.

Dean's Certification

Several law schools require certification of the applicant's undergraduate record. At Colgate, your administrative advisor attests to the applicant's academic and personal record as part of the Dean's Certification. This certification will include notification of any major disciplinary sanctions (i.e. Conduct: Suspension or Separation; Academic: Probation, Suspension, or Separation); it is not College policy to report the specifics of the proceedings. When a law school requests a completed Dean's Certification, please send the form to your administrative advisor.

Personal Statements

Most applications include an open-ended question about your accomplishments and career goals. Even if not required, it is wise to provide one. You should limit your essays to two pages, double spaced. The essay is your opportunity to present your personal attributes, accomplishments, passions, and interests to the admissions committee, since interviews are not part of the process. A good essay might be the deciding factor in an admissions decision; an unconvincing or unremarkable essay can adversely affect your chances of admission. You are competing with hundreds of other applicants who have similar test scores and grades. The personal statement can be the factor that differentiates you from the other candidates. It gives the admissions committee a chance to get a glimpse of you as a person rather than as a set of numbers.

A personal statement is a very different kind of writing than the analytical writing required in many of your college courses. Your personality needs to emerge from the writing. Admissions Officers will evaluate your ability to communicate clearly and concisely. Since the essay is evidence of your writing ability it should be grammatically correct and error-free.

The most effective essays convey a personal dimension. They describe an individual, distinguished by intellectual motivation and accomplishment, social concerns and contributions, and personal values. You may want to develop the essay around an experience, an accomplishment or an interest. You want to leave the reader with a clear understanding of your interest in pursuing a legal education and motivation to potentially practice law. It may help to imagine yourself in an interview situation with the admissions officer, or simply talking to a good friend whom you have not seen for a while. What do you want the admissions officers to know about you? In general, avoid second-guessing what lawyers do or discussing legal issues unless pertinent to your experience. Above all, be sure your essay is interesting and well written.

Think about your life and why you are applying to graduate or professional schools. Ask yourself, "What do I want the admissions committee to know about me that is not already in my application?" To get started, you might want to ask yourself the following questions:

- What is important to me?
- What am I interested in?
- What am I proud of?
- What significant experiences have I had?
- What kinds of qualities are necessary for the professions I wish to pursue?
- Why do I think I possess these qualities?

After you have thought about your life and goals, think about the profession you are intending to enter. What are the skills and values of people in that particular profession? How do they match with yours? How can you highlight those values and skills in your personal statement?

Writing Your Personal Statement

- Start early, plan on writing and revising several drafts. Schedule specific times for this important and time consuming task.
- Understand the questions thoroughly.
- Brainstorm your achievements, career goals, leadership, and personal interests.
- Narrow your emphasis to one specific theme or point. Begin your essay with this theme and the following paragraphs should logically develop and illustrate it.
- Work towards a rough draft. Then revise it. Have others read it.
- Continue to revise the draft until you have a clear, concise, error-free essay.

Interesting and Distinctive Topics

- Significant travel, work or volunteer experience
- Personal triumph or achievement
- Overcoming or understanding a hardship
- Significant personal influence in your life
- Significant piece of learning

It should be clear why you want to enter the field, but avoid writing about why you want to be a lawyer unless specifically asked. In addition, do not waste space telling the admissions committee what the profession is like. Similarly, do not write your life story or concentrate on a high school or earlier experience. Avoid using your statement to provide a laundry list of your accomplishments; this should be found elsewhere in your application. In addition to the content of your personal statement, presentation is also important. Follow writing guidelines and use a font size that is easy to read!

Deadlines

Submit your applications by **November 1**, well ahead of the deadlines. Most admissions officers begin to read applications in November and schools with rolling admissions begin to announce their decisions in December or January. The earliest deadlines are usually between January 1 and February 1. When fall semester grades have been recorded, send an updated transcript to LSAC.

Misconduct and Irregularities in the Admissions Process

"Misconduct or irregularity in the admission process is a serious offense with serious consequences. Intent is not an element of a finding of misconduct or irregularity. Intent is not an element of a finding of misconduct or irregularity. This means that an "honest mistake" is not a defense to a charge of misconduct or irregularity.

Misconduct or irregularity is defined as the submission, as part of the law school admission process...of any information that is false, inconsistent, or misleading, or the omission of information that may result in a false or misleading conclusion, or the violation of any regulation governing the law school admission process, including any violation of LSAT test center regulations." -- Law School Admission Council

Applicants should be prepared to answer candidly and honestly questions about their background. Examples follow:

- *Have you ever been the subject of disciplinary proceedings, or been warned, placed on probation, or suspended for academic, nonacademic, or any other reasons by any of the colleges, universities, graduate schools, or professional schools you have attended, or are any such proceedings pending?*
- *Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime, including expunged offenses, other than a minor traffic violation, or are charges pending?*
- *Have you ever been placed on academic warning, academic probation or conduct probation, or been dismissed or subjected to any disciplinary action from any college, graduate or professional school, law school or professional licensing agency? Are you currently charged with (note: we are not inquiring about arrests) any violation of law other than minor traffic violations with a fine of less than \$100.00 per violation?*

Applicants who answer "yes" to any such question should meet with the pre-law advisor and include an addendum with their applications. This document should describe and take full responsibility for the incident. Failure to disclose is considered misconduct and can result in expulsion from law school, refusal of an application to take the bar exam, or even subsequent disbarment.

Admissions Decisions

By the beginning of April, you should know your status at most schools. If you are notified that your decision will be placed on "hold" or that you'll be placed on a "wait list", acknowledge the notification and send any relevant current information, such as an additional letter of recommendation and/or a brief account of your present academic work, especially if you are writing a thesis. "Hold" status implies that your application has been reviewed, and that the school has not made a decision. This may be because a school wants to see a larger percentage of the applicant pool before making a decision. "Wait list" status implies that the law school believes that you are qualified to be a member of the entering class, but that there were too many other candidates who were even more qualified. Many times students are admitted off the wait list through late in the spring and summer. If you find yourself on hold or on a wait list at a school, please discuss your options with a pre-law advisor.

Financial Aid

Most financial aid is administered through individual law schools, and most awards are based on financial need. Although most financial aid packets have a large loan component, some merit scholarships are offered. Read individual law school catalogs for procedures for applying for specific scholarships and for financial aid policies. Contact the financial aid officer at the law school if you need further information. Many schools have loan repayment assistance programs (LRAP) for graduates who choose to enter low paying or public-interest law firms.

If you wish to be considered for federal aid, you must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, available from the law school's financial aid office and online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. Individual institutions may require additional forms to be completed, please be sure to read the institution's financial aid literature carefully. If you are currently receiving federal financial aid, you should receive a FAFSA renewal form in November or December.

Information about fee waivers for LSAT and the Credential Assembly Services is available online at www.lsac.org. If you require a fee waiver for an application fee contact the admissions office at a law school of your choice to determine if the school participates in the fee waiver program and how it wants you to submit your application. Get an early start during spring or summer, well before you plan to apply. Procedures for requesting application fee waivers are described in the individual law school catalogs.

Pre-Law Resources

General Resources

- Law School Admission Council (<http://www.lsac.org/>)
- American Bar Association (<http://www.abanet.org/>)
- Association for Legal Career Professionals (<http://www.nalp.org/>) - Information on legal career planning and recruitment
- Equal Justice Works(<http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/>) - Information on law careers in public service

LSAT Preparation

- Law School Admission Council (<http://www.lsac.org/>)
- Kaplan (<http://www.kaptest.com/>)
- The Princeton Review (<http://www.princetonreview.com/>)

Selecting Law Schools

- Boston College's Law School Locator (<http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/lawlocator.html>)
- Boston College's Law School Range Finder (http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/meta-elements/pdf/2009_Range_Finder_co.pdf)
- U.S. News Law School Rankings (<http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools>)

Applicant Resources

- ABA's Commission on Women in the Profession (<http://www.abanet.org/women/home.html>)
- LSAC's Information for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgendered Applicants (<http://www.abanet.org/women/home.html>)
- LSAC's Diversity Initiatives (<http://www.lsac.org/SpecialInterests/minorities-in-legal-education.asp>)
- National Women Law Students' Association (<http://www.okcu.edu/law/NWLSA/index.asp>)

Financial Aid and Scholarship Sources

- The Access Group (<http://www.accessgroup.org/>)
- FastWeb.com
- FinAid (<http://www.finaid.org/>)
- Free Application for Federal Student Aid (<http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>)

Available in the Career Services Library

- Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools - American Bar Association and Law School Admission Council
- The Official Guide to Legal Specialties - National Association for Law Placement
- The NAPLA/SAPLA Law School Lists by Wilson & Stern - Contains information on academic programs, clinical programs, student publications, student organizations, and scholarships
- So You Want to Be a Lawyer: A practical guide to law as a career - Law School Admission Council
- The Ultimate Guide to Law School Admission by Carol L. Wright