Pre-Law Workshop

Career and Community Learning Center

College of Liberal Arts
University of Minnesota
Career and Community Learning Center

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The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This material is available in alternative formats upon request. Please contact the Career & Community Learning Center, 612-624-7577.
# Table of Contents

1  Do I want to be a lawyer? Should I go to Law School?

1  Self Reflection
   - The Wrong Reasons to Go to Law School
   - Self Assessment Questions
   - Further Self Exploration

4  Learn about the field of law and law school
   - Important Qualities and Skills
   - Important Basic Areas of Knowledge

5  Experiential Activities

5  Volunteer Opportunities

6  Application Process

7  The Basic Components of Your Application
   - Official Transcript
   - Law School Admissions Test (LSAT)
   - Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS)
   - Personal Statements
   - Letters of Recommendation
   - Dean’s Certification/Recommendation

7  Where Do I Send the Application Materials?

8  Resources

8  Career and Community Learning Center
   - Pre-Law Advisor
   - Books available in Resource Room

8  University of Minnesota Resources
   - Assessment and Achievement Center
   - Pre-Law Society
   - University Counseling and Consulting Services
   - University Student Legal Services

9  Law School and Law Career Related Websites
   - Pre-Law
   - LSAT Prep
   - Selecting Law Schools
   - Financial Aid
   - Minnesota Law Schools and Minnesota Bar Association
   - Paralegal Education

13  Training to be a Legal Assistant/Paralegal Training
Do I Want To Be A Lawyer? Should I go to Law School?

This is a difficult question to answer. Some people claim that they knew they wanted to be a lawyer from the time they were quite young, but most struggled with their decision up until the time they applied to law school. In fact, many law students and even recent graduates are still unsure of the answer to this question.

Self-Reflection

The Wrong Reasons to Go to Law School

I’m a liberal arts major, and I don’t know what else to do with my degree
My parents want me to go.
I have always wanted to go to law school/be a lawyer.
I have always been fascinated by the law. It’s intellectually stimulating.
I want to change the world.
I like to argue/debate.
Everyone else in my family is a lawyer.
I did well on the LSAT, so why not?
I want to make a lot of money.

Law school is so versatile. I can use it as a stepping stone to something else, like business.

The Right Reasons to Go to Law School

I want to be a lawyer. (If you don’t know what that means, go find out!)

The mistake many students make is that they focus on law school instead of on careers in the law. Law school can be a fun, intellectually challenging endeavor. It can also help you to please your parents and to postpone your career decision-making for a few more years. But ultimately, law school is just that—three years of schooling that prepares you for a career in the law. You are not even a lawyer when you graduate! You don’t know enough to be one. You’ll need to take and pass the bar before you can call yourself a lawyer, and you’ll need to gain experience before you’ll feel comfortable with that label.

Since law school prepares you to be a lawyer, you will need to find out as much as possible about what being a lawyer is all about before you decide to go to law school. That means at least the following:

Talk to lawyers. Ask them if they like their jobs and why. Find out what they do, and what they like and dislike about their daily activities. Find out if they are happy or stressed, challenged or bored. Ask them whether they’d do it again. Read legal journals and newspapers to find out about the advantages and disadvantages of the legal profession, current trends in hiring, current salary scales, and the like.

Most importantly, take a legal job of some sort. Spend a summer or even better, a year as a paralegal or legal intern in a law office, volunteer for a district attorney’s or public defender’s office, or assume some other legal undertaking. Nothing can substitute for this experience. Once you learn first hand what the practice of law is like, you’ll be much better prepared to decide whether or not it’s for you.

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1 “The Wrong Reasons to Go to Law School” and “The Right Reasons to Go to Law School” copied with permission from Kathleen Uradnik, Esq., Assistant Professor of Political Science and Coordinating Pre-Law Advisor, St. Cloud State University, St. Cloud, Minnesota
Self-Assessment Questions

One of the more meaningful ways of determining whether you want to be a lawyer is look at the types of skills that one must develop to be a competent lawyer.

Ask yourself the following questions:

Do I enjoy working closely with people regarding significant events or issues affecting their lives?

The practice of law is a “people business.” Lawyers do not work merely on “cases” or research interesting legal issues. A lawyer makes a living by helping people who have come for aid and advice regarding personal, criminal, social, or business related problems. A lawyer must enjoy working with people and must derive specific satisfaction from helping people work through difficult, threatening and significant events in their lives.

Can I empathize with a client’s situation; yet have the ability to objectively analyze the issues and their consequences in light of the existing law?

The main task of a lawyer is to solve a client’s problem. People come to a lawyer for help in solving their problems. A lawyer must be able to show both empathy and objectivity so that he/she can address the potential legal issues of the client. Then the lawyer must be able to formulate a plan to reach a result that is consistent with the client’s desires as well as the requirements of the law.

Do I enjoy educating or teaching a person about a subject about which he or she may be ignorant or have significant misconceptions?

We live in a very complex society that has required the development of very far-reaching, technical laws. Understandably, most clients are either wholly uninformed about the existing law or have significant misunderstandings of what the law prohibits or requires. A lawyer must be able to educate competently his or her clients. This teaching task is complicated by the fact that the “student” has a direct interest in the subject area. The degree of comprehension will be affected by the client’s vested interest, an unwillingness to hear the bad news, a strong disagreement about the goals of the law, etc. The need to educate is critical, though, so that a client can make an informed choice about how to proceed. Tact is required in telling a prospective client that his or her view of the applicable rules is incorrect.

Am I able to articulate in a clear and concise manner my analysis of a problem to others, whether it is verbally or in writing?

Two vital skills of a lawyer are the ability to speak and write in a clear, articulate manner. Since a lawyer’s job is to solve problems, the key to success is the ability to convince others of the correctness of one’s analysis of the factual problem, the requirements of the law, and the best result that can be reached for all concerned parties. A lawyer must be able to educate and convince his or her clients, other lawyers, juries, judges or mediators. He or she must be able to perform this task equally well by speaking or writing. The skill and art of verbal communication is an important key to success of becoming a competent lawyer.

Do I enjoy being an advocate? Can I argue both sides of the questions with enthusiasm?

A lawyer’s personal satisfaction must come from helping others achieve a desired result or avoid or ameliorate the consequences of a difficult situation. A lawyer must provide the client with sufficient information concerning all possible alternatives to allow the client to make an informed decision. The lawyer must be able to accept and advance the client’s decision, even if he or she would not have personally chosen the particular course of action, so long as the attorney stays within the ethical parameters of the Code of Professional Responsibility. Whether one is writing a will, negotiating a contract, litigating a lawsuit, or settling a divorce, a lawyer is advocating the personal needs, desires, and goals of the client.
Do I like detail work? Do I enjoy searching for the facts of a situation?

The practice of a law is a jungle filled with pockets of quicksand for the sloppy, lazy lawyer. The law has made great strides in eliminating unnecessary requirements of form to allow cases to be resolved on the merits rather than by one’s ability or failure to follow rules of procedure. However, rules of form, practice and procedure are necessary for the orderly conduct of business within the law. A lawyer must pay strict attention to facts and detail, for detail work is a significant aspect of the practice of law.

Do I like to read and study?

A lawyer never stops reading the law. From the day one enters law school until the last day before retirement, a lawyer must keep abreast of the ever-changing law. Whether it is statutes, agency rules and regulations, or court decisions, a lawyer may never assume the law remains static. Each and every competent lawyer must dedicate a significant number of hours on a regular basis to educating him or herself. This study time may be added on top of the many hours spent in the law library completing legal research on very specific issues of law pertaining to particular cases.

Further Self-Exploration

Deborah Aaron, author of “Why Good Lawyers are Getting out of the Legal Profession” and “What Can You Do with a Law Degree” has developed the following list of traits that satisfied lawyers have in common.

1. display a love of learning       7. are steady and stable
2. pay attention to details       8. are patient and persistent
3. respect the rules          9. are more realistic than idealistic
4. possess strong analytical abilities 10. are more conventional then innovative
5. are achievement oriented 11. are more dispassionate than emotional
6. are competitive           12. are thick-skinned

Additionally, you can take her personality preference quiz to add to the information you are learning about yourself before you make your decision of whether or not law practice is a good fit.

1. Do I like to get emotionally involved with my work?
2. Do I dislike or attempt to avoid conflict?
3. In resolving conflict, do I prefer to decide what’s fair based on the circumstances of each situation?
4. Do I like to create or start projects and let others finish or maintain them?
5. Do I dislike paying attention to details?
6. Do I prefer short-term projects?
7. Do I value efficiency?
8. Do I like to do things my own way, on my own schedule, and according to my own priorities?
9. Do I get more satisfaction being part of a team than being a solo act?
10. Do I want to change the world?

“If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, this should raise serious doubts about whether you would be happy in the practice of law. If you answered “yes” to more than one, you might want to engage in some serious self-assessment (consider taking a more comprehensive personality test, for example) to determine which career area are best suited to your personality.”

1 Adapted from “Should I Go To Law School? (Part II)”, hand out authored by Kathy Urudnik, Esq., Assistant Professor of Political Science and Coordinating Pre-Law Advisor, St. Cloud State University.
Learn about the field of law and law school

Important Qualities and Skills

The qualities needed for a successful legal career are dedication to justice and the public, integrity and high ethical standards, motivation, attention to detail, thoroughness of preparation, and respect for others and the system of law.

Other important abilities include a good vocabulary and sound reasoning skills; the ability to understand complex written material, as well as to write clearly and concisely; a good memory; the ability to communicate well orally; and skill in applying relevant law to the facts of each case. It’s also important to listen well.

Lawyers interested in a career in a courtroom rather than in an office also need the ability to think quickly on their feet, speak with ease and authority in public, pursue details, and understand courtroom strategy.

The skills and values essential include:
- Analytic and problem solving skills
- Critical thinking skills
- Critical reading abilities
- Writing skills
- General research skills
- Oral communication and listening abilities
- Task organization and management skills
- The values of serving faithfully and civilly the interest of others while also promoting justice

Important Basic Areas of Knowledge

This background will help you have a full appreciation of the legal system in general, understand how disputes might be resolved, and understand and apply various legal principles and standards. You get this background from:

- A broad understanding of history, particularly American history, and the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of our pluralistic society.
- A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory, and of the contemporary American political system.
- A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice.
- A basic knowledge in economics, particularly elementary micro-economic theory, and an understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy.
- Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data.
- A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction.
- An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.
Experiential Activities

There are a number of activities that can help you gain insight into whether a law degree is an appropriate choice for you. Some of the following activities will help you in making these difficult informed career decisions:

- Visit the Career and Community Learning Center in 135 Johnston and take the career assessments, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Strong Interests Inventory (SII)
- Conduct informational interviews with some practicing lawyers
- Visit some law schools- talk with admissions counselors and sit in on some law school classes
- Sit in on a criminal trial
- Get a mentor who is a lawyer through the Alumni Mentor Program; to sign up for the Alumni Mentor Program visit the web site at www.cla.umn.edu/alumni (for CLA Students) or consider the University Student Legal Services mentor program at http://www1.umn.edu/usls/
- Shadow your mentor or another lawyer at their place of work on an ordinary work day
- Join the pre-law society by e-mailing prelaw@umn.edu
- Search for an internship by visiting the CCLC-sponsored CLA Link web site: http://clalink.cla.umn.edu
- Visit the CCLC Resource Room in 135 Johnston Hall to read about careers in law through books and visit identified internet links relating to law schools, law career centers and sites that provide information about the field of law.

Volunteer Opportunities

Legal Aid Society of Minnesota
430 First Avenue North, Suite 300
Minneapolis, MN 55401
612-332-1441
http://www.mnlegalservices.org/mmla/lsmrec.shtml
Available experience: Intake-interviewer

WATCH
608 Second Avenue South, Suite 1001
Minneapolis, MN 55402
phone: 612-341-2747
fax: 612-339-1171
www.watchmn.org
watch@watchmn.org
Available experience: Court-Room Monitor (internships also available)

Community Empowerment Through Learning and Leadership
Career and Community Learning Center (University of Minnesota)
345 Fraser, 106 Pleasant St SE
Minneapolis, MN 55455
612-626-2044
http://www.cclc.umn.edu/students/cellmain.html
Available experience:
A peer advisor will help you connect with an organization that matches your interests.
## Application Process

### First & Second Year
- Join pre-law society
- Attend law school workshops presented by the Career and Community Learning Center (CCLC)
- Start developing rapport with professors who you may want to write recommendations in the future

### Junior Year
Or two years prior to intended start of law school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>Meet with pre-law advisor (CCLC, 135 Johnston Hall)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stop by CCLC in 135 Johnston for an LSAT/LSDAS Registration and Information Book</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>Obtain LSAT preparation materials or register for a preparation course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Attend the Graduate and Professional School Day at the U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>Begin researching law schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Register for the June LSAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Begin preparing for the LSAT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Approach professors, supervisors, etc. for letters of recommendation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Take the LSAT</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Senior Year
Or one year prior to intended start of law school

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>Request applications from the schools to which you plan to apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Start filling out your applications and working on your personal statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept</td>
<td>Register for LSDAS about six weeks before you send your applications off to law schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>September to November: Attend Law School Forums in various cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct</td>
<td>October LSAT*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Taking the October LSAT still leaves sufficient time to return law school applications early</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>Submit law school applications for early review process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec</td>
<td>December LSAT**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan</td>
<td>Fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and return after January 1 and prior to February 15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Wait for law school responses and visit the schools to which you were accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Basic Components of Your Application

1. **Official Transcript**
   Official transcripts can be obtained from the University of Minnesota Office of the Registrar at http://www.onestop.umn.edu/registrar/transcripts/index.html.

2. **Law School Admission Test (LSAT) Scores**
   Visit www.lsac.org for more information on LSAT test dates.

3. **Letters of Recommendation**
   Depending on the law school application requirements you will need 2–3 letters of recommendation. Admissions officials agree that the title of your letter writer is not what is important; it is the content of the letter.

4. **Your Personal Statement**

5. **Completed law school application form**
   Individual Law Schools generally begin dispensing their applications in the summer. Each application will be different and plenty of time should be set aside for completion. Many applications can be done online. If you are filling out several applications, you may want to consider purchasing the LSACD which is an electronic means of filling out applications. For more information on this product, visit http://www.lsac.org/LSAC.asp?url=lsac/lsacd-main.asp.

6. **Dean’s Certification/Recommendation**
   Some schools require a Dean’s Certification/Recommendation which is a form to be filled out by the Dean of your undergraduate college. For example, if you are a College of Liberal Arts graduate, you will need to send or bring your form to the Assistant Dean’s Office in 106 Johnston Hall.

Where Do I Send the Application Materials?

**to the Law School Data Assembly Service**

- Official Transcript
- Letters of Recommendation
- LSAT scores will be included in their report

**to the Law School**

- Application & Fee
- Personal Statement
Resources

Career and Community Learning Center, 135 Johnston Hall
www.cclc.umn.edu
http://clalink.cla.umn.edu

Pre-Law Advisor
Janelle M. Larson, jlarson@class.cla.umn.edu
Individual appointments available to further discuss law school as an option; gain information on the application process; resume and personal statement review.

Books Available in Resource Room

Law School information:
ABA/LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools
A Woman’s Guide to Law School
Financing Your Law School Education
Graduate Admissions Essay
How to Get Into the Right Law School
How to Get Into the Top Law Schools
Law School Admissions Advisor
Pre-Law Companion
The African American Pre-Law School Advice Guide
The NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School Lists
The Official Guide to Legal Specialties: An Insider’s Guide to Every Major Practice Area
What Can You Do With A Law Degree?

Law School bulletins from many ABA-approved law schools

Career information
Law Careers Binder
Opportunities in Law Careers
VGM Career Portraits: Law
Occupational Outlook Handbook
Vocational Biographies: Government and Law (Book 7)
Becoming a Mediator

University of Minnesota Resources

Pre-Law Society
Send e-mail to prelaw@umn.edu
Request to be placed on mailing list and you will receive information regarding meeting times and location. Membership dues are $10.00 a semester.

University Counseling and Consulting Services
109 Eddy Hall
612-624-3323

University Student Legal Services
http://www1.umn.edu/usls/
160 West Bank Skyway
612-624-1001
USLS offers a Mentor program which matches students interested in legal careers with professionals. Several off-campus site visits are scheduled each semester. A Careers in Law Fair also takes place in the spring semester.
Law School and Law Career Related Websites
Pre-Law

Law School Admission Council:
http://www.lsac.org/
The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) is the organization that creates and administers the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). You should become extremely familiar with this site because you can register online for LSAT, subscribe to the Law School Data Assembly Service, order LSAT study materials, and purchase the LSACD (software which may expedite your application process). You can also check on the status of your file from this website. You can also use this site as a springboard for researching law schools and utilize the free online version of the ABA/LSAC Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools to perform a LSAC Data search which will give you your likelihood for admission into all ABA approved law schools.

Council on Legal Education Opportunity
http://www.abanet.org/cleo/

Law Related Internships
http://www.4lawschool.com/internships.htm

Internet Legal Resource Guide
http://www.ilrg.com/

Hieros Gamos (Pre-Law Section)
http://hg.org (direct link: http://www.hg.org/students.html#pre)

St. Cloud State University Pre-Law Advising Website
http://web.stcloudstate.edu/prelaw/

LSAT Preparation

University of Minnesota Compleat Scholar
http://www.cce.umn.edu/scholars/

Princeton Review Web Site
http://www.review.com/

Kaplan Web Site
http://www.kaplan.com/

Law School Admissions Council
Purchase previously administered tests from the Law School Admissions Council. Taking timed, full-length tests is an ideal way to study for the LSAT.

Selecting Law Schools

Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools
http://officialguide.lsac.org/docs/cgi-bin/home.asp

Law School Ranking Game
http://monoborg.law.indiana.edu/LawRank/index.html
The Ranking Game allows you to use your personal preferences to rank law schools.
Boston College Law School Locator  
http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/carct/matrix.html

Frequently Asked Questions about American Bar Association Approval  
http://www.abanet.org/legaled/miscellaneous/faqs.html

Financial Aid
Access Group (Financial Aid Information)  
https://www1.accessgroup.org/index.htm

Law School Admissions Council  

U.S. Department of Education, Financial Aid Section  
http://studentaid.ed.gov

Legal Careers
National Association for Law Placement (NALP)  
http://www.nalp.org

American Bar Association  
http://www.abanet.org/

The Legal Employment Search Site  
www.legalemploy.com

Law Employment Center  
www.lawjobs.com

Lawyer Locator  
http://www.martindale.com/xp/Martindale/home.xml

Department of Justice  
www.usdoj.gov

Minnesota Law Schools and Minnesota Bar Association
University of Minnesota Law School  
http://www.law.umn.edu/  
Walter F. Mondale Hall  
229-19th Avenue South  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
Tel: 612-625-1000

William Mitchell School of Law  
http://www.wmitchell.edu/  
875 Summit Avenue  
St. Paul, Minnesota, 55105-3076  
Switchboard (651) 227-9171  
Toll-Free 1-888-WMCL-LAW (962-5529

Hamline University School of Law  
http://web.hamline.edu/law/  
Hamline University School of Law  
1536 Hewitt Avenue  
Saint Paul, Minnesota 55104  
651-523-2800
University of St. Thomas School of Law
http://www.stthomas.edu/lawschool/
Terrence Murphy Hall, Suite 440
1000 LaSalle Ave
Minneapolis, MN 55403-2005
Phone (651) 962-4892
Fax (651) 962-4881
lawschool@stthomas.edu

Minnesota Bar Association
http://www.mnbar.org

Paralegal Education
The National Federation of Paralegal Associations
www.paralegals.org

National Association of Legal Assistants
http://www.nala.org/

Training to be a Legal Assistant/Paralegal

Hamline University
4-year program (receive a BA degree as well as a legal assistant certificate)
American Bar Association Approved

Inver Hills Community College
2-year program

Minnesota Paralegal Institute
16-week program
American Bar Association Approved

North Hennepin Community College
2-year program
Law School Workshop Evaluation

Date: ____________ College (e.g. CLA, Carlson, IT): ____________ Year (e.g. Fresh, Soph.): ____________

How did you hear about our workshop? (Circle One):

- CCLC Staff Adviser
- CCLC Flyer Friend
- MN Daily Instructor
- Website Another U Office
- CCLC Email Other: __________________________

Please circle the appropriate response below with 1: Disagree to 5: Agree

1. The workshop covered the information that I expected it to cover. 1 2 3 4 5
2. This workshop was offered at a convenient time for me. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The workshop was the right length of time for the amount of material covered. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I learned valuable information from this workshop. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The information provided to me in this workshop was current/up-to-date. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I feel that I can confidently apply the information learned today to apply for law school. 1 2 3 4 5
7. The workshop presenter was knowledgeable. 1 2 3 4 5
8. The workshop presenter was engaging. 1 2 3 4 5
9. The presenter addressed my individual questions. 1 2 3 4 5 NA
10. The handouts were useful. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I am aware of other resources at the Career and Community Learning Center. 1 2 3 4 5
12. What would you add/change about this workshop to make it more valuable to students?

13. Do you have other suggestions for workshop topics or ways we can better promote our services?