



IS LAW SCHOOL RIGHT FOR YOU?

Baylor Law.



Baylor University
SCHOOL OF LAW



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DECIDING ON LAW SCHOOL

Do you want to be a lawyer? This is a difficult question to answer. Some people claim they have known they wanted to be lawyers since they were quite young, but most struggle with the decision to apply to law school, particularly because of the recent changes in the legal market. In fact, many law students and even recent graduates are still unsure of the answer to this question.

While it is often not possible to be certain of an answer before entering law school, there is value in talking with practicing lawyers, attending criminal and civil trials, sitting in on law school classes, and working at law firms. These activities can provide insight into what lawyers do; however, they will provide somewhat superficial views of the legal profession, demonstrating excitement and overlooking the real complexity, difficulty, and demands of the job. Television shows dealing with lawyers have perfected this unrealistic portrayal of the legal profession.

The decision-making process is also complicated by the difficulty of defining exactly what a lawyer does on a day-to-day basis. There is no typical lawyer. The legal profession has embraced specialization to a significant extent. Depending upon lawyers' specializations, there are differences in workload, client contact, work environment, compensation, and overall quality of life. There are many "professions" within the profession of law.

One meaningful way to assess your compatibility with the legal profession is to look at the type of skills you need in order to be a competent lawyer in any area. Even though there are significant differences between the various practice areas of law, there are essential skills that are required of all lawyers.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. DO YOU 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. Necessarily, clients have concluded that they cannot solve the problems on their own. Clients know they can divulge personal or private facts to a lawyer. Usually, clients will not perceive their problems as merely ordinary but as personal or business crises. Lawyers must enjoy working with people and must derive satisfaction from helping people work through difficult, threatening, and significant events.

2. CAN YOU EMPATHIZE WITH A CLIENT YET OBJECTIVELY ANALYZE THE ISSUES AND THEIR CONSEQUENCES IN LIGHT OF EXISTING LAW?

Every lawyer's main task is to solve clients' problems. Lawyers must be empathetic in order to properly understand the needs and concerns of their clients, but lawyers must also develop analytical skills to identify the potential legal issues that must be addressed and to formulate plans to reach results that are consistent with the desires of the clients as well as the requirements of the law.

3. DO YOU ENJOY EDUCATING PEOPLE ABOUT SUBJECTS ABOUT WHICH THEY MAY BE IGNORANT OR HAVE SIGNIFICANT MISCONCEPTIONS?

America's complex society has required the development of far-reaching and often technical laws. Understandably, most clients are either wholly uninformed about many existing laws or have significant misunderstandings of what the laws prohibit or require. Lawyers must be able to competently educate their clients. This teaching task is complicated by the fact

that each student has a direct interest in the subject area. The degree of comprehension will be affected by the clients' subjective interests, unwillingness to hear bad news, or strong disagreements about the goals of the law. The need to educate is critical, so clients can make informed decisions about how to proceed. Tact is required in telling clients that their views of the applicable rules are incorrect.

4. ARE YOU ABLE TO ARTICULATE THE ANALYSIS OF A PROBLEM TO OTHERS IN A CLEAR AND CONCISE MANNER, WHETHER VERBALLY OR IN WRITING?

Two vital skills of lawyers are the ability to speak and the ability to write in a clear, articulate manner. Lawyers must be able to convince others of their analysis of the facts, the requirements of the law, and the best results that can be reached for all concerned parties. Lawyers must be able to educate their clients and persuade other lawyers, juries, judges, or mediators. They must perform these tasks equally well by speaking or writing. The art of communication is key to becoming a successful, competent lawyer.

5. DO YOU ENJOY BEING AN ADVOCATE? CAN YOU ARGUE BOTH SIDES OF AN ISSUE WITH ENTHUSIASM?

Lawyers' satisfaction must come from helping others achieve desired results or from helping them avoid or alleviate the consequences of difficult situations. To allow clients to make informed decisions, lawyers must provide them with sufficient information concerning all possible alternatives. Ultimately, clients must decide what is best. Attorneys must stay within the ethical parameters of the Code of Professional Responsibility and must be able to accept and advance the clients' decisions, even if those decisions are not the courses of action the lawyer recommends. Whether writing a will, negotiating a contract, litigating a lawsuit, or settling a divorce, a lawyer advocates for the personal needs, desires, and goals of his or her clients.

- 6. DO YOU LIKE DETAIL WORK?** The practice of law is a jungle, filled with pockets of quicksand for sloppy, lazy lawyers. Lawyers must pay strict attention to facts and details, because detail work is a significant aspect of the practice of law.
- 7. DO YOU LIKE TO READ AND STUDY?** Lawyers never stop reading the law. From their first days of law school until their first days of retirement, lawyers must keep abreast of ever-changing laws. Competent lawyers must dedicate a significant number of hours on a regular basis to continuing their legal educations. This study time is in addition to many hours spent researching specific issues of law for particular cases.

Did you answer “yes” to many of these questions? Were these answers enthusiastic or were you thinking, “If I have to do it, I will?” To be a competent lawyer, it is not necessary that you currently possess all of these skills or that you have developed them to a high degree. You will have plenty of time for that. However, utilizing these types of skills on a weekly, daily, or hourly basis is the life of a lawyer.

The practice of law is exciting, meaningful, and rewarding. Throughout your career, you will have the ability to make beneficial and significant contributions to the lives of many people. You will come into contact with a variety of people, events, and areas of knowledge that you may not otherwise have experienced within the confines of your personal life. The practice of law is a broadening educational experience that is both ongoing and demanding. In many fields of endeavor (e.g., medicine, science, education, and law), your attitude towards life and work is crucial. Simply put, you must enjoy learning and must strive to produce your best work.

ALUMNA PROFILE

AMANDA SANCHEZ

Amanda has always loved talking to people and trying to fix big problems, so she was sure she wanted to study science and become a doctor. She later came to realize that earning a law degree would be the most effective way for her to begin fixing those problems. Studying math, science, and anthropology taught Amanda how to think analytically, how to look at a problem from different angles, how to deal with ambiguity, and how to integrate new information. All of those skills enabled her to succeed in the JD/MBA program at Baylor Law. She is now a corporate attorney and tax consultant who works with teams of legal experts and professionals to help strengthen American businesses.



PREPARING FOR **LAW SCHOOL**

As you may have concluded from the previous discussion, well-prepared lawyers are ones who are well-rounded, broadly educated, and mature. That's because lawyers deal with clients from all segments of society and handle significant personal, social, and business problems.

A prospective applicant who has not yet completed his or her undergraduate work should consider a lawyer's life when planning a course of study. For example, a well-planned liberal arts education, in which the student intentionally attempts to gain the broadest knowledge possible while concurrently challenging himself or herself in a chosen major or area of study, can be a form of preparation for law school and the practice of law.

Law curricula are designed based on the assumption that the student has no specific knowledge of the law. Law schools are seeking mature individuals who demonstrate the aptitude to excel in legal analysis. Laws are a product of our history; our governmental structure; our social, religious, and political norms and policies; and our past and present technological developments. Therefore, broadly educated individuals with aptitudes for critical thinking and analysis are the students best prepared to appreciate and understand the functions of legal analysis, planning, and advocacy in our society.



CHOOSING A MAJOR AND DEGREE PLAN

The American Bar Association does not recommend any undergraduate major or group of courses that prepares a student for legal education. Students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. A sound legal education will build upon and further refine the skills, values, and knowledge that you already possess. Your choice of a major should be based on personal desires and needs. One approach is to select a major that would prepare you for an occupation other than the law. You can pursue an alternative career and simultaneously be preparing for law school. This choice will allow you the option of foregoing a legal education for whatever reason and will provide the opportunity to pursue an alternative career for a few years before law school in order to gain experience and maturity. For example, it is not uncommon

for students to choose majors in accounting, finance, economics, or business, with the intention of working for a few years before applying to law school.

Another approach is to select a major in one of the subject areas recommended by most law schools as areas in which each student should take at least one course sometime during his or her undergraduate education. Those subject areas include literature, history, political science, logic, philosophy, psychology, sociology, economics, and accounting. A background in history and political science is beneficial, because our laws are a product of our culture, our history, and our governmental structure. Psychology and sociology can give students understanding of human interactions. Economics and accounting may be helpful, because a large number of law courses address business transactions. Logic, philosophy, math, and natural science courses all train students in analytical thinking, the core skill of competent lawyers.

None of these subject areas is required for entrance to law school. A lack of knowledge or skill in any of these areas, however, may impede your ability to excel as a law student or lawyer. Thus, choosing any one of these areas for your major can be beneficial in law school.

The most important aspects of choosing a major are that you enjoy the discipline and that you believe that you can excel. A very important criterion for admission to law school is your undergraduate grade point average. If you select a major based on what someone else wants you to do, there is a high likelihood that you will be unhappy, and your grades will reflect that dissatisfaction.



THE ABILITY TO WRITE AND SPEAK

Law school preparation includes the development of verbal and written communication skills. Rigorous courses in English grammar and persuasive writing are highly encouraged. Students should also seek out courses that require essay exams or research papers. Law school grades frequently are based solely on one essay exam or research paper. The inability to write coherently under the time demands of an essay exam bodes poorly for success in law school.

Lawyers must be able to speak articulately and persuasively in the presence of one person, a small group of people, and a large audience. Students can develop these skills by electing to take speech courses or by participating in advocacy teams. The key is to seek out any opportunity to refine the ability to speak, for it is an ability that is improved by repetition.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

An integral aspect of well-rounded people is their involvement in social, religious, and service activities within their communities. You can develop empathy by working with people from various ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds in diverse settings within the community. You are encouraged to become a meaningful participant in and contributor to the community.

Extracurricular activities, however, are just one aspect of your life. Too much time spent on extracurricular activities, no matter how meaningful, will not make up or serve as an excuse for inadequate grades. Balance is necessary for proper development.



ADMISSION TO LAW SCHOOL

There is not a pressing need to think about admission to law school during your freshman and sophomore years. Study hard, become involved in university and community life, and enjoy the social activities of college. In your junior year, you should commence research to determine which law schools can fulfill your needs. You should evaluate qualities like reputation, curriculum, size, faculty availability, and cost. Pre-law societies, pre-law advisors, and other faculty members can be good sources of information. You can also gain insight by visiting law schools and attending law fairs at your school or within the community.

There is no set of criteria that all law schools follow when selecting students for admission. However, most law schools attempt to make selections based, in part, on objective criteria. The two most common criteria are an applicant's Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score and cumulative undergraduate grade point average (GPA). The common approach is to use the two scores to preliminarily compare different applicants.

Extracurricular activities, work experience, letters of recommendation, personal statements, and other criteria may impact a law school's admission decision, but the predominant factors are LSAT score and GPA.

You should avoid taking the LSAT until you have completed three academic years of college, because the exam is designed for students at that stage of their academic careers. There are study courses available to help you understand testing techniques and to allow you to become familiar with the type of questions presented during the exam. Contact your pre-law advisor for advice regarding study books and professional organizations that may be helpful to you in preparing for the exam.

Do not take the actual LSAT for practice (although you can take practice tests). All scores will be reported to every law school to which you apply for admission. Although most law schools consider only your highest score, they can see all scores.

STUDENT PROFILE

TIM BARHAM

Before law school, Tim Barham spent two years helping to build an e-commerce startup from the ground up. He focused on technical operations and on increasing efficiency. His company grew from 5 employees to more than 20. He uses those finely-tuned problem-solving skills on a daily basis in law school. One of his favorite things about Baylor Law is that "the professors are charismatic and passionate about what they teach." After he graduates, he hopes to use what he has learned in law school and combine that with his earlier interests as he continues to help others succeed.



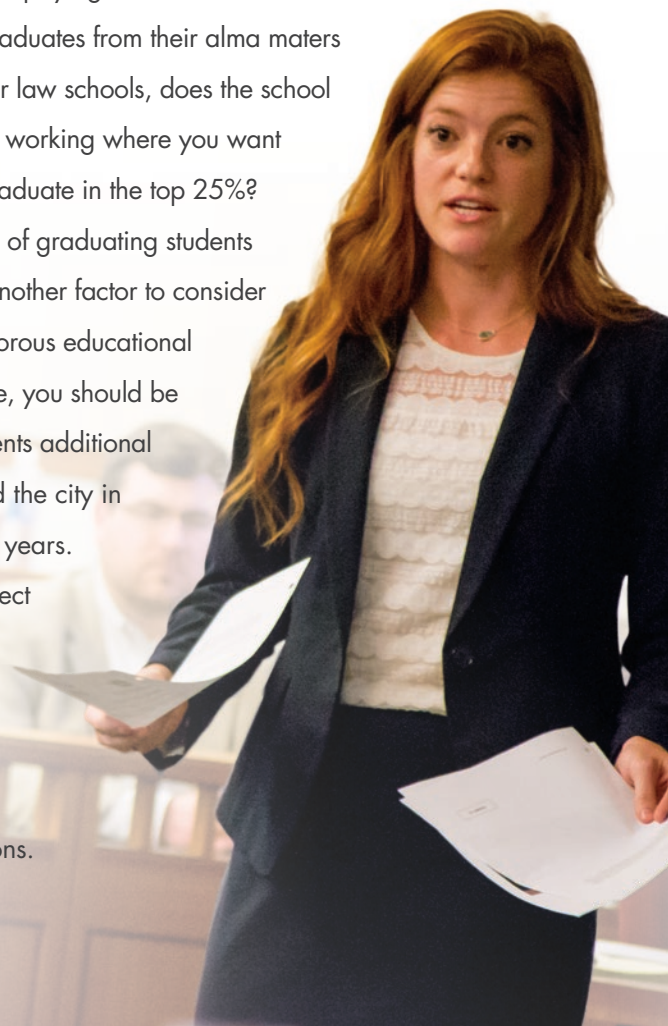
CHOOSING A LAW SCHOOL

When you choose a law school, one significant factor to keep in mind is the reputation of the school. Before society became so mobile, the rule of thumb was to go to the “best” law school that you could get into in the state where you wanted to practice law. Now, you should apply that rule to the place you want to live for the first three to five years after law school. What is the “best” law school? There is no simple answer.

Cost is an important factor. Some lawyers are well-paid, but most young lawyers begin with modest salaries. How quickly and how high their salaries climb is largely dependent upon the types of law they practice, the sizes of the communities where they work, and the sizes of their law firms. Before borrowing a large amount for law school, you should sit down and seriously consider the degree of difficulty you will face in paying back student loans.

Recognizing that lawyers tend first to hire graduates from their alma maters and then to hire the “best” graduates from other law schools, does the school that you want to attend have a lot of graduates working where you want to practice? If not, do you think that you can graduate in the top 25%? Additionally, does the school have a reputation of graduating students who have received quality legal educations? Another factor to consider is that law school will probably be the most rigorous educational training that you will ever experience. Therefore, you should be careful not to choose an environment that presents additional challenges to your success. The law school and the city in which it is located will be your home for three years. How well you succeed during this time will affect your career for a lifetime.

Once you are ready to visit law schools, you should prepare a list of questions to ask yourself and the schools: general questions, financial questions, and environmental questions.



GENERAL QUESTIONS

1. WHAT ARE THE CHANCES OF YOU GRADUATING IN THE TOP 25% OF YOUR CLASS AT A PARTICULAR SCHOOL?
2. WHAT IS THE SCHOOL'S BAR EXAM PASSAGE RATE, AND WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE SCHOOL'S GRADUATES ARE EMPLOYED WITHIN TEN MONTHS OF GRADUATION?
3. WHAT PORTION OF THE SCHOOL'S GRADUATES PRACTICE IN THE STATE WHERE YOU WANT TO LIVE?
4. FOR WHAT TYPE OF FIRMS DO THE SCHOOL'S GRADUATES WORK?
5. WHAT DO JUDGES AND LAWYERS WHO ARE GRADUATES OF OTHER SCHOOLS THINK ABOUT THE SCHOOL'S REPUTATION?
6. HOW ACTIVE ARE THE SCHOOL'S GRADUATES IN THE STATE BAR ASSOCIATION?
7. WHAT PERCENTAGE OF THE JUDGES IN THE STATE GRADUATED FROM THE SCHOOL?

FINANCIAL QUESTIONS

1. WHAT ARE YOUR EXISTING DEBTS?
2. WHAT SORT OF DEBT WOULD YOU INCUR DURING LAW SCHOOL?
3. WHAT TYPES OF CONTRIBUTIONS CAN YOU EXPECT FROM YOUR PARENTS, GRANDPARENTS, SPOUSE, AND OTHER SOURCES?
4. WHAT ARE YOUR EXISTING OR FUTURE FAMILY EXPENSES, IF ANY?
5. WHAT REPAYMENT PLANS WOULD BE AVAILABLE TO YOU?

ENVIRONMENTAL QUESTIONS

1. DO YOU THRIVE IN A SMALL OR LARGE SCHOOL ATMOSPHERE?
2. DO YOU NEED CONTACT WITH PROFESSORS, OR CAN YOU SUCCEED WITH THE SUPPORT OF YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS IN STUDY GROUPS?
3. DO YOU NEED GUIDANCE TO PLAN YOUR LEGAL EDUCATION, OR DO YOU WISH TO CHOOSE YOUR OWN COURSES?
4. DO YOU WANT A SCHOOL THAT TEACHES THE THEORETICAL VIEW OF THE LAW, OR DO YOU WANT A SCHOOL THAT ALSO TEACHES APPLICATION OF THE LAW TO REAL-LIFE SCENARIOS?
5. DO YOU LIKE LIVING WITH BIG-CITY ISSUES, SUCH AS SECURITY CONCERNS AND TRAFFIC JAMS, OR DO YOU WANT A SMALL-TOWN ATMOSPHERE WHERE DAILY LIFE CHALLENGES ARE AT A MINIMUM?

To find the answers to these questions, visit law schools, talk to students and professors, and read about the law school curriculum. You can then choose a school that will allow you to thrive.

ALUMNUS PROFILE

TRAVIS PLUMMER

Travis Plummer was the student body president at his undergraduate institution and was actively involved in student leadership and government. At Baylor Law, he stayed busy participating in student organizations, competition teams, and internships. Travis says he chose Baylor Law because of the “training it provides its students. Baylor Lawyers are successful because they work harder than most are willing to.” He now is a litigator and practices healthcare law.



LIFE AFTER LAW SCHOOL

Twenty years ago, all law school graduates' transcripts signified that the graduates had completed their educations in the law. Today, many law schools advertise that they offer specializations, so that a student can graduate with a label that signifies that he or she concentrated in a certain area of the law. Many applicants infer that these specializations are necessary in order to practice in certain areas of law or that they are necessary to get jobs with firms in particular areas. These perceptions are not true.

When you graduate from law school, you are highly knowledgeable of the law but are still a novice. You become a specialist by concentrating your practice in a certain area or areas after graduation and by ultimately becoming board-certified, if your state bar recognizes that particular specialty. Specializations simply give you added exposure to certain areas of the law. After you graduate and pass the bar, you can practice in any area of the law. The concentration simply gives you more knowledge than a recent graduate who did not complete that particular course of study.

Therefore, while the specializations or concentrations offered may be factors in your choice of a law school, they should not be the only factors. Until you study it, you won't know if you will actually enjoy a specific area of the law, and when you graduate, there may not be jobs available in a specific area. Most importantly, law school is the time in your career when you will have an opportunity to study the full breadth of the law. When you're in practice, you will be too busy. Don't waste the opportunity that law school affords by focusing to such a degree that you are unable to see the whole "forest" of law because you spent your law school education studying the details of one particular legal "tree."

ALUMNAE PROFILES

LAUREN AND RONNIE SEPULVEDA

Lauren Sepulveda didn't know that her sister Ronnie would be joining her just one short year after she began at Baylor Law, but the sisters were reunited when Ronnie decided to attend Baylor Law. Originally from the Texas Valley, the inseparable duo was actively involved in campus activities, and both were members of Diversity in Law. Lauren now practices criminal defense, and Ronnie works as a government attorney.



SPECIALTIES IN THE LAW

1. **ADMINISTRATIVE LAWYERS** handle issues related to the administration of industries or professions and to compliance with laws administered by governmental agencies at the federal, state, county, and local levels.
2. **BUSINESS LITIGATION LAWYERS** handle issues related to contracts, debts, antitrust, and other commercial transactions.
3. **CIVIL LITIGATION LAWYERS** handle issues related to personal injuries, gross negligence, strict liability, defective product liability, and malpractice.
4. **COMMERCIAL AND CORPORATE LAWYERS** handle issues related to business entities, mergers, torts, contracts, copyrights, trademarks, and property disputes.
5. **CRIMINAL LAWYERS** handle issues related to misdemeanors such as drunken driving arrests; to felonies such as assault, battery, rape, and murder; and to white collar crimes, where corporate executives face criminal prosecution for their conduct related to corporate activities.
6. **EMPLOYMENT LAWYERS** handle issues related to unions, compliance with discrimination laws, equal pay laws, and family leave.
7. **ENVIRONMENTAL LAWYERS** handle issues related to compliance with and litigation arising out of federal and state environmental laws.
8. **FAMILY LAWYERS** handle issues related to wills and estate planning, child custody, adoption, divorce, prenuptial contracts, and child support.
9. **HEALTHCARE LAWYERS** handle issues related to the administration of medical practices.
10. **IMMIGRATION LAWYERS** handle issues related to deportation, applying for entry, and the employment of illegal and/or legal residents.
11. **INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY LAWYERS** handle issues related to copyrights, trademarks, and patents.
12. **INTERNATIONAL LAWYERS** handle issues related to compliance with federal statutes and treaties.
13. **REAL ESTATE LAWYERS** handle issues related to the purchase, sale, use, and financing of property.
14. **TAX LAWYERS** handle issues related to compliance with tax laws and payment of taxes by individuals and other legal entities at the federal, state, county, and local levels.





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