

Law School Resource Guide for Undocumented Students: Getting to Law School



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Introduction

As state policies have made higher education more accessible and affordable for undocumented students, many have gone on to pursue graduate and professional degrees. One such option is a law degree, also known as the Juris Doctor (J.D.), which typically takes three years to complete.

After graduating from law school, graduates must be licensed to practice law in a certain state. Because some states impose immigration restrictions on being admitted to the bar and because you cannot be legally employed without work authorization, there are some limitations on what you can do with a law degree as an undocumented person.

Nonetheless, a law degree can open up opportunities in the legal field and beyond. Depending on what state you reside in, you can work as an independent contractor, start your own law practice, or seek employment abroad. Deferred Action for Childhood Arrival (DACA) recipients or immigrants with temporary work authorization can work at private law firms, non-profit organizations, and government sectors in any state that allows those without citizenship or permanent residency to practice law.

About This Resource Guide

There is very little information about the law school application process for undocumented students. This resource guide sheds light on the application and financial aid process, focusing on immigration-specific considerations. Whenever possible, we have included external resources so you can continue learning more about the law school application process. Use this resource guide to supplement other valuable resources you may already have access to. We hope this guide helps you in your journey towards becoming a lawyer.

This resource guide is the product of the shared experiences and knowledge of many immigrant and first-generation students, many of whom are undocumented and DACAmented. Thank you to everyone who has helped bring this resource to life.

Pathways to a J.D. or Bar Admission

Type of Program	Cost	Time it takes to complete
Full-time	\$53,034 ¹	3 years
Part-time	\$10,958 - \$67,792 ²	3 ½ - 4 years
Apprenticeship	Depends on the state ³	Depends on the state ³

1 This is the average cost of a full-time J.D. program based on an article published by U.S. News & World Report that was updated in March 2022 to reflect ranks and data from the 2023 U.S. News Best Law Schools rankings. The full report can be found [here](#).

2 This range is based on a list of the 2023-2024 best part-time JD programs compiled by U.S. News & World Report. The full list can be found [here](#).

3 Four states have laws that allow people to be admitted to the bar without having to attend law school first. Those states are California, Vermont, Virginia, and Washington. Each of these states has its own rules and requirements for admission. Read the breakdown of each state's requirements and their associated costs here. [here](#).

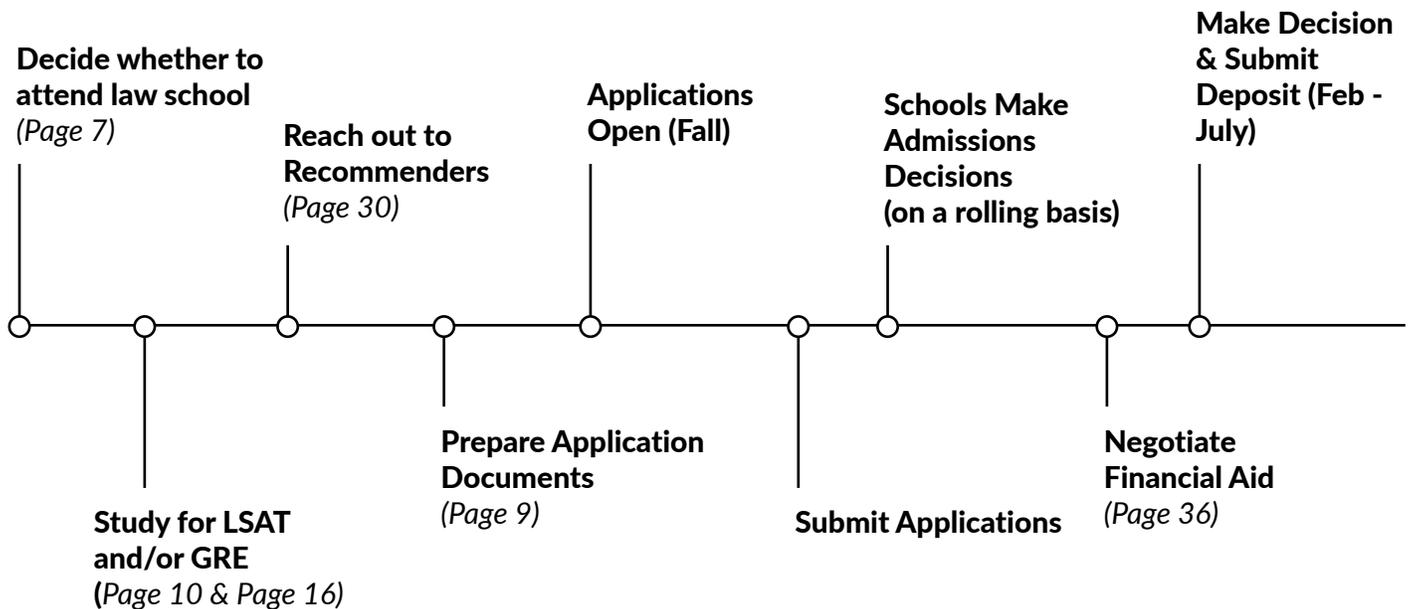
Overview of the Application Process

Law school applications generally open in the Fall of each year. Depending on the school, applications close as early as February and as late as July. Applications are processed on a rolling basis, which generally means that the earlier you apply, the earlier your application gets reviewed (although this is not always the case; sometimes admissions committees will hold on to your application until they get a better sense of the application pool for that year).

All accredited law school applications are processed through the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), which also administers the Law School Admission Test (LSAT).

Because applications are generally reviewed on a rolling basis, decisions are released throughout the application period. If you have been accepted to a law school, you can reserve your spot by putting down a deposit by a given deadline, usually in May or June. If you have been waitlisted, you can remain on the waitlist while maintaining a reserved spot at another school. It is important to note that if you stay on a waitlist, it is possible to be admitted from the waitlist as late as the week that classes start for the Fall!

Most law schools offer merit-based scholarships, which are awarded primarily on the merits of your application, LSAT or GRE scores, and undergraduate academic record, as well as other factors such as community involvement, leadership activities, and personal background. It is also possible to receive need-based aid, although this process varies by school.



Frequently Asked Questions

Are undocumented/DACAmented students considered international applicants?

Yes, you will be considered an applicant from the country where you hold citizenship.

Do law schools perceive lack of legal status as a negative factor?

There is scarce information about how being undocumented affects admissions prospects. The best we can do is look at data on whether or not and how being considered an international student affects admissions prospects.

Some schools accept very few international students. These schools might be hesitant because international students may have a more difficult time finding employment post-graduation, which reflects negatively on the school's employment prospects. Schools, especially those that have a relatively small student body, might not be willing to take that risk.

Another possible factor might be that schools are hesitant to accept international students who do not have a reportable GPA, as this would make it difficult for them to compare such applicants to students with reportable GPAs. Thus, as undocumented students, having an undergraduate GPA (UGPA) from a U.S. school overrides some of the qualms schools might have about international applicants who do not have a reportable GPA.

Learn more: [What Affects Your Chances of Getting Into Law School?](#) by 7Sage

Can I or should I disclose my immigration status in law school applications?

Law schools generally do not require applicants to explicitly disclose their immigration status, unless specifically required to disclose any pending immigration cases as part of a [character or fitness statement](#). However, the vast majority of law schools ask applicants for their country of citizenship, the country/state where they are currently residing, and, if applicable, their visa status. Therefore, to avoid any confusion, it might make sense for you to disclose your immigration status. You can do so in a meaningful way by, for example, mentioning it in your personal or any other essays or materials. You can discuss how your status has shaped your life experiences, perspectives, or even your decision to pursue a legal career.

Note: As of June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a pair of decisions that overturned race-conscious admissions policies, forcing law schools to overhaul how they ask about diversity in their applications. Some law schools no longer include the diversity statement as an application component starting with the 2024 application cycle. As a result, according to [U.S. News](#), some law schools have introduced an identity statement, a statement of challenge or adversity, or other variations.

Do law schools perceive lack of legal status as a positive factor (i.e. adding to the school diversity)?

Your status can be a positive factor. How you frame your immigration narrative can be powerful, especially in your personal statement. However, lack of legal status in itself is likely not a boost in admissions, but it is a unique and unusual life circumstance that can be discussed in a compelling way.

Deciding Whether To Attend Law School

A law degree can open up many rewarding and lucrative opportunities in the private sector, policy and government, non-profit organizations, and more. However, it is also a time-consuming and emotionally and financially taxing endeavor. Additionally, as with any other field, if you do not have work authorization, your employment options will be restricted. Before embarking on this journey, make sure you are fully confident in your decision to pursue law school.

Here are some questions to consider:

What are the bar admission requirements for the state where I'd like to work?

Each state has varying policies on allowing undocumented and DACAmented individuals to practice law. In California, for example, all 56 professional and occupational licenses, including law, are open to undocumented immigrants as long as they meet all other requirements. Illinois and Nevada have similar laws, while other states restrict eligibility only to DACA recipients or immigrants with work authorization.

[Click here](#) for more information on bar eligibility requirements by state.

What career options are available to me?

Without work authorization, you cannot be employed by a law firm or organization. However, with flexibility, creativity, networking, and an entrepreneurial mindset, you can create opportunities for yourself as a lawyer, including by working as an independent contractor, starting your own law firm, joining or starting a workers' cooperative with other lawyers, or participating in paid fellowships, among other options.

You can learn more about entrepreneurship opportunities on Immigrants Rising's [Entrepreneurship](#) page.

Is law school worth the financial investment?

Law school can be very expensive, and many law students graduate with significant debt. In fact, the average law student graduates with around [\\$130,000 of debt](#). However, it is possible to receive substantial scholarship awards – all the way to full tuition – if your LSAT or GRE score and GPA are competitive for the schools you are applying to.

If you do have to take out loans, make sure to thoroughly explore your options, as undocumented students are ineligible for federal loans. Although private loans are available to some undocumented people, some lenders require you to have DACA, a valid student visa (since undocumented students are considered international students), or U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident cosigners. Private loans also have significantly higher interest rates than federal loans.

See more information about financial aid and loans in the [Financial Aid and Scholarships](#) section.

Are there alternatives to law school that I should consider?

There are other graduate or professional degrees you can pursue instead of a law degree to reach your professional goals. You may be interested in a career in fields related to the law (such as public policy, academia, or business) that suit your career objectives but do not require you to be a licensed attorney. As [most law schools are beginning to accept the GRE](#) as a standardized test for admissions, this can offer the flexibility to apply to other graduate programs.

Immigrant Law Student Perspectives

“I spent a lot of time trying to figure out whether law school or even a legal career was the right decision for me. I was worried about taking on significant debt, about not being able to pay it back, about not having employment opportunities, and more generally not having any guidance towards the path to a legal career as an immigrant.

Ultimately, I decided it was worth the investment because I want to be able to provide legal services to other immigrants like me and my family, who have struggled for so long to access adequate legal resources due to cultural, language, and financial barriers. My desire to represent my community is much stronger than my fears and doubts.”

— Arabi Hassan, Harvard Law School ‘23



Application Components

Law schools consider a wide range of numerical and non-numerical factors when reviewing your application. These include:

- The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) or Graduate Record Examinations (GRE)
- A reportable GPA from all undergraduate institutions attended (if you obtained your undergraduate degree in the U.S.)
- Personal and adversity statements (if any)
- Professional and extracurricular experiences
- Recommendation letters
- If applicable:
 - Character and fitness statement
 - Additional addenda to explain extenuating circumstances that affected your LSAT/GRE score or GPA
- Whether you are a first-generation college student
- The time you submit your application (the earlier the better!)
- Whether you applied Early or Regular Decision

Think of each component as a piece of a puzzle. Each part of the application intends to highlight a different aspect of your candidacy, and law schools will evaluate your entire application when making a decision.

The remainder of this resource guide will break down each requirement, provide detailed guidance, and refer to additional resources.

Application Checklist

Have an LSAT or GRE score (with additional writing portion) on file

Send LSAC transcripts from all institutions attended

Purchase and set up Credential Assembly Service (CAS)

Have recommenders upload or send their letters to LSAC

Complete application for each law school on CAS

Fill out application

Upload personal statement

Upload resume

Upload optional statements:

Adversity statement (or any variation)

Character and fitness statement

Additional addenda to explain anything not mentioned elsewhere in the application

LSAT

The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is a standardized exam administered by the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC). Most law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) require applicants to take the LSAT.

The LSAT is offered nine times per year and costs \$222 per exam (as of 2024). It is a digital exam that you may take at 1) a test center with a tablet or 2) an online remotely proctored exam. See [LSAC](#) for more information.

If you are a DACA recipient, you might qualify for a need-based fee waiver that allows you to take the exam twice for free, along with a year-long subscription to LSAC's test prep material. See more information about the waiver in the [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\) and Application Fees](#) section.

How is the LSAT considered for law school admissions?

The standardized exam score, in this case, the LSAT, is one of the two most important components of your law school application (the other being your undergraduate GPA). Law schools use your LSAT score to assess your ability to succeed in your first year of law school. The LSAT is also used to determine how much scholarship money you can receive.

Most law schools use an "index formula" to give each applicant a single index number, which is used to determine an applicant's objective strength compared to other applicants. The index is calculated based on your standardized test score and undergraduate cumulative GPA, with the LSAT given more weight most of the time. You can learn more about the index formula [here](#).

How is the LSAT scored?

The LSAT is scored on a 120-180 scale, with the average (or median) score at around 150-151. Per [LSAC](#), LSAT will continue to have three scored sections – logical reasoning, analytical reasoning, and reading comprehension. Starting with the August 2024 administration, there will be a change to the three scored sections, which will include two sections of logical reasoning and one section of reading comprehension. Regardless of when you're taking the test, the LSAT will include a fourth, unscored variable section. You can learn more about LSAT scoring [here](#).

Essay Component

The LSAT also includes a separate writing component. The LSAT Writing section is an online, remotely proctored exam taken separately from the multiple-choice portion. The essay is not scored and does not factor into your LSAT score, but it demonstrates your persuasive writing skills. It is required by many schools, including most top law schools, and evaluated as a writing sample.

What LSAT score do I need?

Your target LSAT score will depend on which law schools you hope to gain acceptance to and their median LSAT scores. Having an LSAT score at or above a law school's median score can make you more competitive for admissions. However, because law school admission is a holistic process, a high LSAT score does not guarantee admission, and alternatively, being below a school's LSAT median does not mean rejection. A strong GPA, substantial work and extracurricular activities, and personal statements can offset a low LSAT score.

You can view LSAT score ranges for all law schools at [U.S. News law school rankings](#).

When should I take the LSAT or General GRE Test?

You should take the LSAT or General GRE Test as early as possible. Because law school admissions is a rolling cycle process, submitting your application early (which means taking the LSAT/GRE early) can give you an advantage, as more seats are available earlier on in the cycle than later.

Each school has its own policy regarding the latest exam you can take. Many law schools require that applicants take the LSAT/GRE by December of the year they are applying to be considered for admission.

If you plan on retaking the LSAT/GRE, it is even more pertinent you take the exam early so you have enough time to prepare for the retake.

Should I retake the LSAT/GRE if I did not get the score I wanted?

Increasing your score by even a few points can improve your chances of being accepted. It can also help you increase your scholarship award. Although law schools can see all your scores from the past five years and pay attention to any scoring trends, they will ultimately only consider the highest score when reviewing your application.

You might consider retaking the LSAT/GRE if:

- You are still improving your score in the few weeks leading up to your exam date (and you think you can improve with more preparation).
- You were scoring significantly higher on your practice tests than on the actual exam.

- Something happened during the day of the exam that prevented you from doing your best (sickness, unexpected news, issues with the testing center).
- You are willing to put in the time and effort to get your score up for the retake.

Note: Consecutively scoring lower on each retake might raise concerns from law school admissions committees. On the other hand, some schools consider only your highest standardized test score. We encourage you to be strategic in your retakes and do your research on what each law school asks for.

Learn more: [Should you retake the LSAT?](#) by PowerScore

Immigrant Law Student Perspectives

“The LSAT is only one flawed, imperfect standardized test that has little to no relation to the type of law student or lawyer one will be. But, as it stands, it’s also one of the most important pieces of the law school application. The LSAT is, in my opinion, two things. First, it’s a testament to perseverance as it’s a test that people can improve on, but it takes time and effort. It’s not fair to everyone as some people are better geared and better positioned to prepare for it, while others have so many obstacles and challenges to juggle. But the bottom line is that people can improve on the test over time. Secondly, and more importantly, it means money and law school access. Scoring better on the LSAT not only means you have better shots at more schools, but for low-income students, it also means less debt. For folks who are undocumented with more constraints on financial means, the LSAT is effectively a ‘hack’ to afford law school.”

— Yongbin Chang, UC Berkeley Law ‘22



Where can I learn more about the LSAT?

We encourage you to keep learning more about the LSAT. You can learn more about the LSAT, sign up to preview your score, find out how many times you can attempt the exam, and more on LSAC’s website [here](#).

How can I study for the LSAT?

Studying for the LSAT is a highly individualized process. You must find out what study methods work best for you and implement them during your practice. This might mean combining your own studying strategies with those found in test prep books, courses, and other resources. Below are some free and paid studying resources to get you started.

Free

- **Official LSAT Prep by Khan Academy:** The LSAC has partnered with Khan Academy to provide free LSAT prep, available at KhanAcademy.org. You can take diagnostic exams to identify strengths and weaknesses, create your personalized study schedule, and watch videos breaking down concepts and types of questions. This is a useful tool for those looking to self-study for the exam.

- **Official LSAT PrepSM by the Law School Admission Council:** The LSAC's Official LSAT PrepSM includes two full official tests, the ability to use the digital interface used during the actual test administrations, instant scoring feedback, and more.
- **Free resources online:** There are many free online resources available that provide valuable studying materials for the LSAT. Some test prep companies offer free podcasts, webinars, question explanations, discussions, practice tests, and study plans.

Here is a sampling of free resources available online:

- Powerscore: [Free LSAT Help Area](#)
- Magoosh: [Free resources](#)
- AlphaScore: [Free resources and guides](#)
- Kaplan: [Free on demand practice test](#)

Paid

- **Test prep books:** Test prep books allow you to study for the exam at your own pace. There are a lot of options out there, so do your research to find the best prep books for you. Some test prep books include:
 - The Official LSAT SuperPrep II™ - the Law School Admission Council
 - The LSAT Trainer
 - PowerScore LSAT Bibles
 - Manhattan Prep LSAT Reading Comprehension
- **Official LSAT Prep PlusSM by the Law School Admission Council (\$99):** The LSAC's Official LSAT PrepSM includes 1-year access to 60+ full official tests, the ability to practice with the digital interface used during the actual test administrations, instant scoring feedback, and more.
- **Test preparation courses:** There are a number of companies that offer LSAT test preparation courses. Formats include in-person classes, online classes, and hybrid classes, as well as large-group, small-group, and private sessions. Prices vary depending on the company and format of the class.

Some test preparation companies include:

- Blueprint
- PowerScore
- LSATMax
- Alpha Score
- Princeton Review
- Kaplan
- Magoosh
- 7Sage
- [Click here](#) for a full list of companies that use official LSAT exams and questions.

Tips for Choosing a Class

- Do your research and make sure the company has good reviews and that classes are taught by instructors who have done well on the LSAT themselves.
- Ensure the company uses official LSAT content, which means they use questions from real LSAT exams. You can view a comprehensive list of companies that use [official LSAT content here](#).

- Look for classes that allow you to take practice exams online, as the real LSAT is administered digitally on a tablet. These online platforms should provide instant scoring feedback and a detailed analysis of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Lastly, review the class' teaching methods and reflect on how they align with how you learn best. For example, some courses focus more on live instruction instead of pre-recorded sessions.

Discounts and Fee Waivers

- Check with your university to see if they offer any special discounts on LSAT test preparation courses.
- Some test prep companies might offer discounts or free access to their services if you are approved for LSAC's need-based fee waiver. [Click here](#) to see which test prep companies offer a fee waiver to LSAC fee waiver recipients
- See the [Pre-Law Programs Open to Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status](#) section for a list of programs that might cover LSAT prep and/or exam fees.

GRE

The Graduate Record Examination (GRE) is a standardized exam administered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). Many law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) have begun accepting a [GRE General Test](#) score for admission. See which [law schools accept the GRE scores for their JD programs](#).

The computer-based or online GRE General Test dates are available all year round, seven days a week, and cost \$220. Like the LSAT, the GRE General Test is a digital exam and can be taken at: 1) a testing location or 2) an online remotely proctored exam. See [ETS](#) for more information.

Undocumented individuals connected with TheDream.US or other listed organizations serving underrepresented groups might qualify for a need-based voucher that covers \$100 in registration fees for the GRE General Test and will receive free GRE test prep materials. See more information about the voucher in the [GRE Fee Reduction Program](#) section.

How is the GRE considered for law school admissions?

As some law schools begin to accept the GRE General Exam for admission consideration, students now think about taking either the LSAT or the GRE. The GRE General Test is flexible in that it allows applicants to use the score for law school applications and other graduate program applications. This is a good option if you have already taken the LSAT and do not see your score improving or if you are thinking of applying to a joint degree program. Law schools and other graduate programs use the GRE to assess your verbal reasoning, quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills.

How is the GRE General Test scored?

The range scores for the Verbal Reasoning and Quantitative Reasoning sections of the GRE General Test are scored in a range of 130 to 170. The range of scores for the Analytical Writing section is 0 to 6. You can learn more about how the GRE General Test is scored [here](#). You may also see [Understanding Your GRE General Test Scores](#) for more information.

What is the GRE General Test Structure?

Starting September 2023, the General GRE Test overall test time is about 1 hour and 58 minutes. There are five sections: Analytical Writing (one section), Verbal Reasoning (two sections), and Quantitative Reasoning (two sections). You can learn more about the [test structure here](#).

Where can I learn more about the General GRE Test?

We encourage you to keep learning more about the General GRE Test, especially as more schools are accepting it for admissions. You can learn more about the GRE on the [ETS website](#).

How can I study for the GRE?

Like the LSAT, studying for the GRE is an individualized process. You must find out what study methods work best for you and implement them during your practice. This might mean combining your own studying strategies with those found in test prep books, courses, and other resources. Below are some free and paid studying resources to get you started.

Free

- [POWERPREP® Practice Test](#) by ETS: This is a free software offered through the ETS website. It's a great resource to get a realistic testing experience. It has two full-length, timed GRE practice tests, and several additional practice questions for all Verbal and Quant question types.
- [GRE Vocabulary Flashcards](#) by Magoosh: This is a phone app you can download to practice your vocabulary to improve your Verbal Reasoning score.
- [Manhattan GRE Practice Test](#) by Manhattan Prep: This is a great option if you are looking to have more test-taking practice.
- [GRE Test Prep Video Presentations](#) by ETS: If you're a visual learner, this is a great way to learn about the GRE Prep process.
- **Free resources online:** There are many free online resources available that provide valuable studying materials for the GRE. Some test prep companies offer free podcasts, webinars, question explanations, discussions, practice tests, and study plans.

Here is a sampling of free resources available online:

- Powerscore: [Free GRE Help Area](#)
- Magoosh: [Free resources](#)
- Kaplan: [Free on-demand practice test](#)

Paid

- **Test prep books:** Test prep books allow you to study for the exam at your own pace. There are a lot of options out there, so do your research to find the best prep books for you. Some test prep books include:
 - The Official Guide to the GRE® General Test, Third Edition - ETS
 - Kaplan's GRE Prep Plus 2024
 - Manhattan Prep- 5 lb Book of GRE Practice Problems
 - The Princeton Review's GRE Premium Prep
 - GRE Prep by Magoosh

- **Test preparation courses:** There are a number of companies that offer LSAT test preparation courses. Formats include in-person classes, online classes, and hybrid classes, as well as large-group, small-group, and private sessions. Prices vary depending on the company and format of the class.

Some test preparation companies include:

- Magoosh
- Princeton Review
- Kaplan
- Manhattan Prep
- PrepScholar
- The Economist
- And many more

Tips for Choosing a Class

- Do your research and make sure the company has good reviews and that classes are taught by instructors who have done well on the GRE themselves.
- Look for classes that allow you to take practice exams online, as the real GRE is administered digitally. These online platforms should provide instant scoring feedback and a detailed analysis of your strengths and weaknesses.
- Lastly, review the class' teaching methods and reflect on how they align with how you learn best. For example, some courses focus more on live instruction instead of pre-recorded sessions.

Discounts and Fee Waivers

- Check with your university to see if they offer any special discounts on GRE test preparation courses.
- Some test prep companies might offer discounts or free access to their services if you are approved for the GRE General Test voucher. Learn more about this voucher in the [GRE Fee Reduction Program](#) section or the [Fees for GRE Tests and Related Services](#) section.

See the [Pre-Law Programs Open to Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status](#) section for a list of programs that might cover GRE prep and/or exam fees.

GPA and Undergraduate Major

Your undergraduate GPA is one of the two most important components of your law school application (the other being your LSAT/GRE score). LSAC requires you to submit transcripts from all undergraduate institutions attended, including community college, to calculate your LSAC GPA. See more information under "LSAC GPA" below.

If you have or are currently working towards a graduate degree, your graduate degree GPA is not calculated into your LSAC GPA.

Because there are no course requirements prior to law school admissions, you can major in any subject during college. Popular majors among law school applicants include political science, philosophy, and English.

Transferring from a community college to a four-year institution does not reflect negatively on your application. Law schools consider your cumulative GPA from all undergraduate institutions attended (even those classes you might have taken at community college while you were in high school).

How is GPA considered for law school admissions?

Most law schools use an “index formula” to give each applicant a single index number, which is used to determine an applicant’s objective strength compared to other applicants. The index is calculated based on your LSAT/GRE score and undergraduate cumulative GPA, with the LSAT/GRE given more weight most of the time. You can learn more about the index formula [here](#).

What GPA do I need?

If you are in college, you should try to maintain as high of a GPA as possible. Having a GPA that is at or above a law school’s median score can make you more competitive for admissions. However, because law school admissions is a holistic process, a high GPA does not guarantee admission, and alternatively, being below a school’s GPA median does not mean rejection. A high LSAT/GRE score, substantial work and extracurricular activities, and personal statements can offset a low GPA.

You can view LSAT score ranges for all law schools at [U.S. News law school rankings](#).

How does LSAC determine my law school GPA?

Before applying to law schools, you must submit official transcripts from all undergraduate institutions attended to LSAC through a system called Credential Assembly Service (CAS). You can learn more about CAS in the [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\) and Application Fees](#) section.

Once you have submitted your transcripts, CAS will convert your grades to a standard 4.0 system to standardize GPA across all applicants. This is the GPA law school will consider as your official GPA. Your CAS GPA does not include grades from every class you have ever taken. [Here](#) is a list of all grades that are excluded from consideration.

When converting grades to a standard 4.0 system, the maximum possible GPA is 4.33. This is because the CAS GPA factors in +s and -s as part of the GPA, even if your undergraduate institution did not. Thus, an A+ will hold more weight than an A. If your undergraduate did not give out +s and -s, then the maximum GPA can be a 4.0.

Personal and Adversity Statements

Law school personal and diversity statements allow law schools to get to know you beyond your LSAT/GRE score, undergraduate GPA, and resume. It is a chance for you to explain what brought you to law, elaborate on any life experience or achievements that significantly impacted your life, describe any challenges or obstacles you have faced, and how you will contribute to the law school community and the legal profession broadly. The goal is to write a clear and compelling narrative for why you are a strong candidate for law school and why you want to be a lawyer.

Most law schools’ personal and adversity statement prompts are very broad, so you have the flexibility to choose a theme and topic that best highlights you as a candidate. Different law schools have varying guidelines for page limits, font sizes, page margins, etc. You can view all prompts and requirements for each law school at [Application Requirements for Top Schools](#) by 7Sage.

Note: As of June 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a pair of decisions that overturned race-conscious admissions policies, forcing law schools to overhaul how they ask about diversity in their applications. Some law schools no longer include the diversity statement as an application component starting with the 2024 application cycle. As a result, according to [U.S. News](#), some law schools have introduced an identity statement, a statement of challenge or adversity, or other variations of the theme.

Personal Statement vs. Adversity Statement

Personal statements are mandatory for most law schools, while adversity statements are optional. An adversity statement is sometimes introduced as an optional component in law school applications. It is an opportunity for you to highlight any life experiences that will contribute to how you will engage in the law school community and the legal profession. Your life experiences, regardless of adversity, can be interpreted broadly and can include:

- Ethnic or racial background
- Being a first-generation college student
- Socioeconomic background
- Sexual orientation
- Gender identity
- Being an immigrant
- Unique work experience

Your personal and adversity statements should not be about the same topic. For example, if your personal statement centers around your experiences as an immigrant, that should not also be the central theme of your adversity statement, and vice versa. Instead, consider writing about another aspect of your life, such as your educational trajectory, socioeconomic background, or anything else you believe will bring a diverse perspective to the law school community.

If you are debating whether you should write an adversity statement, ask yourself whether it will allow you to expand on an aspect of your life that is not evident from other parts of your application.

The following worksheet is created to help you brainstorm your personal and adversity statements.

Worksheet: Writing Your Personal and Adversity Statements for Law School

A well-written personal and adversity statement can help you stand out from thousands of other applicants. Do not wait until the last minute to start writing your personal statement! We encourage you to start working on it months in advance.

Use this resource guide to help you brainstorm topics and start writing your personal and/or adversity statements.

Step 1: Brainstorm Topics

The first step to writing a personal or adversity statement is to brainstorm ideas for topics and themes. Here are some ideas for generating topics:

- When was the first time you knew you wanted to be a lawyer/study law?
- Make a list of traits and strengths that you want to highlight.
- Make a list of specific memorable stories and experiences that have shaped your desire to study law and/or be a lawyer.
- What do you want the admissions committee to know about you?
 - Fill in the blank: My application will be incomplete if the admissions committee doesn't know that _____.
- What aspects of your life, background, or perspective will allow you to make significant contributions to the law school community and the legal profession?
- What kind of essay are you hoping to write? What is the theme? What is the overarching narrative? What is it going to focus on?

Step 2: Create an Outline

Using the topics generated from Step 1, plan how you want to structure your essay and draft your outline.

Here is an example essay structure:



Step 3: Fill in the Details

Build on your outline by adding additional details, transitional sentences, and reflections.

Essays About Work Experience/Extracurricular Activities

If you are describing any work or extracurricular activities, make sure you are not simply repeating your resume. Remember, the goal of the personal statement is to highlight the aspects of your life that your resume does not, so avoid summarizing what has already been stated elsewhere. If you are elaborating on specific work or extracurricular experiences, focus on these questions instead:

- What did I get out of this experience?
- What specific skills did I learn?
- What has this experience taught me about the law or the legal field?
- How has this experience confirmed, strengthened, or clarified my decision to go to law school?

Essays About Influential Figures

If you are writing about an influential figure (family member, mentor, professor, famous person) who has shaped your decision to be a lawyer, be careful not to make your personal statement about them. The personal statement is about why you are qualified to go to law school, not about someone who has inspired you. If writing about someone who has inspired you, consider these questions:

- How has this person shaped me?
- What have I learned from this person?
- How has this person shaped the way I think about the law?
- How has this person helped me explore the legal field?
- How has this person inspired me to be a lawyer?

Essays That Start With a Story

Starting your essay with a specific story or moment in time can make your essay stand out and hook the reader. But be careful not to spend too much space writing about a specific story. Make sure to leave enough space to connect the story to why you want to be a lawyer.

Essays About Hardships or Obstacles Faced

Essays about the challenges you have faced in life can make for a powerful narrative. If you are writing an essay about this, here are some things to keep in mind:

1. Make sure your essay does not conflate disappointment with a hardship or obstacle. Hardships and obstacles can include circumstances such as experiencing poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, being discriminated against, being undocumented, serious injuries, divorce, abuse, mental health issues, and lack of access to important resources. Disappointments, on the other hand, are experiences such as performing poorly on an exam, losing a sports game, or losing a student organization election.
2. Make sure your essay does not just focus on the hardship or obstacle itself, but also on what steps you have taken to succeed and improve yourself despite the obstacle. This does not mean you have to write about “overcoming” your obstacle – there are obstacles that might be beyond your control and not possible to overcome – but the key is to reflect on how you have been shaped by it. Here are some questions to focus on:
 - What have I learned from facing this obstacle?
 - How has facing this obstacle shaped my view of the law or the legal field?
 - How has facing this obstacle shaped my desire to be a lawyer?
 - What have I done to make the most of my circumstances despite facing this obstacle?
 - How has this obstacle shaped my work experience or extracurricular activities?
 - What have I done/what do I hope to do to help others facing this obstacle?

Step 4: Proofread, Proofread, and Proofread Some More

Once you have a draft of your essay ready, get feedback from others. Show your essay to people you trust who can:

- Point out any missing information
- Point out if anything in your essay is confusing or needs more elaboration
- Comment on whether the essay “flows” – if the structure of the essay makes sense, and whether you have strong transitional sentences
- Point out grammatical and structural errors – if your sentences make sense, if you have too many adverbs or adjectives, or if anything needs to be cut down or rewritten.

Your personal statement should be treated as a professional writing sample. A powerfully written and error-free essay will convey that you have the skills necessary to be a successful law school student and lawyer.

Learn more: [Law School Personal Statement: The Ultimate Guide \(Examples Included\)](#) by Shemmassian Consulting

Additional Questions

Can I submit the same personal and adversity statements for all law schools?

You can use the same general personal and diversity statements for all law schools, but you might have to adjust the length, font size, and margins based on each school's requirements.

You can view all prompts and requirements for each law school at [Application Requirements](#) by 7Sage.

If you choose, you can have a few paragraphs in your essays specific to each school you are applying for. In this paragraph, you can elaborate on why you would like to be a student at that specific school and why you might be a good fit there. Double-check to make sure you submit the correct essay to the right school!

How long should my personal statement be?

The general rule of thumb is to write a two-page essay with no less than 11-point font size. Follow each law school's instructions for how long your essay can be.

Can I write about my immigration status or about being undocumented on my personal statement?

Yes, you can. If your immigration status played a role in your decision to become a lawyer, you can write about it in your personal or diversity statement. Focus on how you have been shaped or impacted by your immigration status. What did you learn from it? How has it shaped your work experience or extracurricular activities? How has it affected the way you perceive the world or legal systems?

Being able to communicate your immigration narrative in a meaningful way can help you stand out as an applicant. You can also discuss your immigration narrative in a separate diversity or hardship statement.

Resume, Work and Extracurricular Activities

Most law schools require a professional resume as part of your application. Law school application resumes are different from job application resumes in a few key ways:

- They are more comprehensive and detailed than regular resumes. Your law school resume can include everything you have done before college (if you worked before starting college), during college, and post-graduation (if you took time off before starting law school).
- Your resume can include:
 - Jobs
 - Internships
 - Fellowships

- Independent/freelancing experience
 - Volunteering experience
 - Research experience
 - Speaking engagements
 - Pre-law/pipeline programs
 - Educational experiences
 - Awards and honors
 - Hobbies and interests
- Because it is a comprehensive overview of all your activities, it can be longer than one page. However, we recommend limiting your resume to two pages.

Here are some sample resumes:

- [Sample Resume #1](#) by Stanford Law School
- [Sample Resume #2](#) by Annotated resume from US News and World Report
- [Sample Resume #3](#) by 7Sage

How important is a well-written resume?

Along with your personal statement, your resume is another opportunity to differentiate yourself from other applicants. It can demonstrate your extensive involvement in a certain field or subject matter, highlight your commitment to public service, and show that you have the skills necessary to succeed in law school.

How important are extracurricular activities for admissions?

Extracurricular activities are considered “soft” factors. They are important but not to the same extent as your LSAT/GRE and GPA. Law schools expect you to have been involved in something outside of classes, and it does not have to be law-related. Extracurricular and work experience demonstrates that you can juggle multiple responsibilities, take initiative, and have critical thinking or other skills that will help you succeed in law school.

There is no set definition of “extracurricular activities” for law school admissions. Extracurricular activities are interpreted broadly as anything you do outside of classes and can include:

- Jobs (part-time and full-time)
- Internships (paid and unpaid)
- Fellowships
- Independent projects
- Freelance/independent contracting positions
- Volunteering experience
- Research experience
- Publications/published works
- Pre-law/pipeline programs
- Educational experiences

- Awards and honors
- Hobbies

Your resume can help you tell a story about who you are and what you care about. Effective law school applications tell a story – for example, an applicant demonstrating her passion for immigrants’ rights through her personal statement, having research, legal, or community service experience related to immigration, and getting recommendation letters from those who can vouch for her public service commitment.

Your resume and personal/diversity statement should complement each other. If you choose to discuss your work or extracurricular experiences in either of your statements, pick one or two of the most significant experiences from your resume and elaborate on how they have shaped your aspirations to be a lawyer.

Check out the tips below for writing an effective law school resume.

Additional Questions

What if I don’t have any work experience?

Having work experience can help you, but not having any work experience will likely not hurt you, as many applicants are still in college or recently graduated when they apply to law schools. You can make up for your lack of work experience by having other types of experiences, such as being involved with student government, clubs, internships, fellowships, research positions, etc.

What if I don’t have any internships or club involvements because I spent most of my time in college working?

Internships and clubs are some examples of extracurricular activities. Having a job, even if it is just to pay the bills, is also considered an extracurricular activity. Admissions committees will understand that you have to work to support yourself. One possible way to frame your work experience as a “positive” factor is by writing about your work experiences or financial circumstances in your personal or diversity statement. A narrative about having to support yourself financially while juggling academic responsibilities can be very compelling.

How do I know which experiences to highlight on my resume? What if I can’t keep my resume under two pages?

Focus on the experiences that will give the admissions committee a clear picture of who you are, what you care about, and what will allow you to be successful in law school. These do not necessarily have to be academic or legal experiences but ones that are meaningful to you or from which you have gained significant skills that will help you in law school.

Tips for Writing an Effective Law School Resume

- **Keep your formatting consistent.** For example:
 - If you are using abbreviated months, make sure all of your months are abbreviated. Don’t use Aug. in one place and August in another.
 - If you are ending each bullet point statement with a period, make sure all bullet points end with a period.
 - Make sure all alignments are consistent.

- **Use bullet points.** Although not necessary, using bullet points to describe your experience breaks up what would otherwise be a block of text, creating more white space and making it easier to read.
- **Not every experience requires a lengthy description.** Focus your lengthier descriptions on your most significant experiences. A part-time position as a server at a restaurant can be briefly explained using one bullet point.
- **Begin each bullet sentence with an action verb** like “analyzed,” “coordinated,” “researched,” etc.
 - Don’t repeat action verbs for multiple sentences.
- **Focus on your main accomplishments and quantify your results.**
 - For example, how many students did you tutor? How many clients did you work with?
- **Create sections.** At the bare minimum, your resume should have two sections: Education and Experience. Depending on what types of experiences you have, you can also include additional sections such as:
 - Interests and Hobbies
 - Skills
 - Volunteer Experience
 - Publications
- **Be clear and concise.** Your description for each position should paint a clear picture of your main responsibilities and achievements. Avoid vague sentences that do not provide meaningful details about your work.
 - Vague sentence: “Provided legal services to clients at a legal aid.”
 - Descriptive sentence: “Worked one-on-one with over 20 low-income and elderly clients to find solutions to identity theft, consumer scams, and bankruptcy cases, resulting in the cancellation of over \$30,000 of debt.”
- **Emphasize skills that will help you succeed in law school.** Law schools are academic institutions. Thus, your resume should focus on skills that illustrate your potential as a law school student, even if your experiences are not necessarily academic in nature.
- **Skip the summary/objectives section.** You are submitting your resume as part of your law school application. You do not have to state that you are applying to law school.
- **Skip the references section.** You are already providing letters of recommendation.

Letters of Recommendation

Most law schools require at least one recommendation letter, while many of them ask for two or more. Because a J.D. is an academic program, you should try to get at least one letter from an academic reference (a professor, research supervisor, or teaching assistant) who can vouch for your academic or research achievements and skills. Other letters can come from employers, supervisors, mentors, or anyone else who can describe your work, academic or otherwise.

Recommendation letters serve as supporting evidence that helps to provide more context to the rest of the application. While a strong letter on its own is likely not enough to get you accepted, a negative reference

can be a red flag for law schools. Make sure to get letters from people who can confidently speak to why you would be a successful law school student.

Sending Recommendation Letters

The most convenient way to process recommendation letters is for your references to upload them on the LSAC website. After creating your LSAC account, you can enter the name and email of each of your recommenders and request a letter. Your recommenders will receive an email from LSAC with an upload link, which they will use to upload your letter.

Additional Tips

- Build connections early and maintain them! It is never too early to establish connections with professors, advisors, supervisors, and others who can later write you recommendation letters for law schools and scholarships. Keep in touch with your potential recommenders and occasionally update them so they are more willing and able to write you a strong recommendation.
- Law schools are looking for students who will be a good fit at their school. Beyond vouching for your academic qualities and the skills you have demonstrated in the classroom or work settings, choose recommenders who can also vouch for your character and describe why you would be a great fit for law school and the legal profession.
- Provide your recommenders with your law school resume and a list of “writing points.” This list will serve as a reminder of the work you have done, highlight significant projects or assignments, and provide personal context to your academic or professional accomplishments.

Additional Resources

- [Letters of Recommendation](#) by The Law School Admission Council
- [How to Get a Strong Law School Recommendation](#) by U.S. News & World Report
- [Law School - Letters of Recommendation](#) by UC Berkeley Career Center

Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and Application Fees

Most ABA-approved law schools (and some non-ABA-approved schools) require applicants to submit applications through LSAC’s Credential Assembly Service (CAS). Learn more about CAS at [Credential Assembly Service](#) by The Law School Admission Council.

How does CAS work?

You have to pay a \$200 fee to register for CAS. Once you are registered, you can use the service to apply to law schools. LSAC will send a report to every school you apply to for \$45 for each report. You can learn more about CAS and law school reports at [Law School Reports](#) by The Law School Admission Council.

How can I get law school application fees waived?

In addition to paying for CAS (\$200 one-time fee) and for LSAC to send law school reports to each school (\$45 per report), law schools also charge an application, which can range from \$50 to \$90. A little over half

of law schools charge an application fee. However, many law schools offer fee waivers, so you do not have to pay this fee. Below are some ways to receive fee waivers for law school applications.

Unsolicited Fee Waivers

Sign up for LSAC's [Candidate Referral Service](#). Different law schools will email you fee waivers, which can be based on various criteria such as your undergraduate GPA, LSAT/GRE score, race or ethnicity, geographic background, age, or country of citizenship/residency.

Learn more: [Unsolicited Fee Waivers](#) by Spivey Consulting

Solicited Fee Waivers

You can apply for or request fee waivers from individual law schools. Law schools have varying processes for offering fee waivers; some might require you to fill out a fee waiver request form, while others might ask you to email them requesting a fee waiver code. Inquire with each law school you are applying to for more information. Be sure to request fee waivers as early as possible because it might take time for your request to be processed.

Learn more: [Soliciting Fee Waivers](#) by Spivey Consulting

Need-Based Fee Waivers

- **Option 1: LSAC's Need-Based Fee Waiver**

LSAC offers its own fee waiver for applicants with "extreme need." Although there is no single criteria for meeting this requirement, this can include applicants at or around the poverty line, receiving public assistance or need-based financial aid, etc.

In addition to the financial need requirement, applicants must also fall into one of several immigration categories. Undocumented applicants must be current DACA recipients or have applied for DACA.

The LSAC need-based fee waiver covers:

- Two LSATs
- One LSAT Writing
- CAS Registration
- Six CAS Law School Reports
- One-year subscription to LSAC's [LawHub Advantage](#)

If you were initially rejected for the LSAC need-based fee waiver, you can appeal the decision by providing additional details and documents demonstrating your financial need.

The LSAC need-based fee waiver is valid for two years, so it will be helpful for you to plan out your application timeline in advance to align with the two-year limit.

Be sure to request fee waivers as early as possible! Processing time for requests may vary and can take significant time.

Learn More: [Fee Waivers for the LSAT & Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#) by The Law School Admission Council

- **Option 2: Law School's Need-Based Fee Waivers**

Law schools sometimes offer need-based fee waivers, but this process varies by school, and there is no single set of criteria. Unlike LSAC's fee waiver, law schools might not have any citizenship/immigration requirements, so it is worth applying if you think you might qualify. Be sure to request fee waivers as early as possible to ensure your request is processed on time.

Learn more: [Need-Based Fee Waivers](#) by Spivey Consulting

Automatic Fee Waivers

Application fees are waived for all applicants. You can check if application fees have been waived by opening a specific law school's application portal on the CAS website.

Character and Fitness Statements

Law schools require applicants to disclose information about any disciplinary actions taken against them for violating any laws (criminal disclosures) or their university's rules of conduct or academic disclosures. These questions appear under the "Character and Fitness" section of the application. These questions are meant to emulate the background check applicants go through when taking the bar exam. It evaluates whether you have the "good moral character" to practice law.

Character and fitness questions vary by school, so it is important to carefully read the questions for each school you are applying to to ensure you are answering them completely and accurately.

Possible Immigration Disclosures

A few law schools ask applicants to disclose civil (noncriminal) legal proceedings, which might include immigration cases. For example, Washington University Law in St. Louis asks the following question: "Have you been a party to any noncriminal legal proceeding, including but not limited to any civil, administrative, family court, or domestic abuse proceeding or any arbitration?"

Immigration cases might be considered civil administrative proceedings, so any applicants who have been or are currently involved in any immigration case (for example, if you have been party to an asylum case) would have to disclose this information for this question.

You can write a brief statement describing your immigration case and providing any relevant details. If you are unsure whether your specific circumstances require you to respond to this question, contact the admissions office to clarify what they are looking for. You should not let this discourage you from applying, as it is likely not a significant factor (if at all) in whether you will be admitted.

When it comes to character and fitness statements, admissions committees are mostly seeking information on any issues that might arise when you take the bar exam. It is best to address any issues directly with a clear and concise statement.

Learn more:

- [Address Academic, Criminal Mistakes With a Law Application Addendum](#) by US News

- [Character & Fitness Addendum: Criminal and Disciplinary Disclosures on Law School Applications](#) by Anna Ivey Consulting
- [Character & Fitness Addenda: What Are They & What Should I Disclose?](#) by 7Sage

Optional GPA/LSAT Addendum

You can submit optional additional information to give more context to your application. This can include a GPA or LSAT/GRE addendum, which you might consider including if any extenuating circumstances affected your academic performance or ability to perform well on the LSAT/GRE. These circumstances can include:

- Difficulty performing well on standardized tests in the past (you might have to show proof of this, such as your SAT/ACT results from high school).
- Having to work significant hours while in college or studying for the LSAT/GRE.
- Having to take care of family members.
- Illness.
- Unexpected events during the testing day, such as illness or technical difficulties in the testing center.
- If your LSAT/GRE scores vary significantly.

Write an addendum if you have any circumstances that have not been addressed elsewhere on your application. Keep your statement brief, concise, and to the point.

Learn more:

[When, How to Write a Law School Addendum](#) by US News

Financial Aid and Scholarships

Most law school students finance their legal education through a combination of loans, scholarships, and grants. We will break down each type of aid and whether undocumented students qualify for them. Because the financial aid process varies by school, it is important to speak with a financial aid officer at the schools you are considering to see what aid is available to you.

Merit-Based Scholarships

Most law schools award scholarships based on merit and to a lesser extent, need. This means you will receive scholarships based on your LSAT/GRE, GPA, and additional factors such as work/extracurricular activities, community service, and personal background. The LSAT/GRE is extremely important in this process – generally, higher LSAT/GRE scores yield increased scholarship amounts. It is possible to receive full-tuition scholarships.

Most law schools' merit scholarships do not have any citizenship/immigration status requirement, which means undocumented students qualify for them.

There are different types of merit-based scholarships. For most law schools, your application will automatically be considered for merit scholarships. However, many law schools also offer named scholarships

(including full-tuition scholarships) that might require additional essays and recommendation letters. Some of these scholarships include:

- NYU Law - AnBryce Scholarship
- Berkeley Law - Berkeley Law Opportunity Scholarship (BLOS); Graduate Diversity Program (GDP)
- UCLA Law - Achievement Fellowship
- UC Irvine Law - Public Service Scholarship
- Boston University School of Law - Public Interest Scholarship
- UC Hastings Law - Legal Education Opportunity Program (LEOP)

These are just a handful of scholarships that require additional materials. Look through the financial aid and scholarships page for each law school you are applying to for information on any scholarship opportunities.

Because the scholarship process varies by school, it is important to start your research early so you have time to acquire any additional materials needed for scholarships.

Note: Yale, Stanford, and Harvard do not offer any merit-based scholarships. They only offer need-based grants.

Conditional Scholarships

A handful of law schools award merit scholarships that are “conditional,” which the ABA defines as “any financial aid award, the retention of which is dependent upon the student maintaining a minimum grade point average or class standing, other than that ordinarily required to remain in good academic standing.” You can view conditional scholarship data on ABA’s website [here](#).

Conditional scholarships can be risky because they require students to maintain a certain GPA or risk losing their scholarship or having it reduced. Because first-year law school classes (and many 2L and 3L classes) are graded on a curve (a set number of A+s, As, A-s, B+s, etc. will be given out), it can be difficult to predict what grades you will receive and thus whether you will be able to maintain the minimum GPA required to retain the scholarship.

Be extremely careful with conditional scholarships because having your funding reduced or eliminated can mean graduating with significant debt or not graduating at all. Try to leverage your acceptance or scholarship offer from a similar or higher-ranked school to change or eliminate the conditions of your scholarship. You can also consider retaking the LSAT/GRE, as a higher score might allow you to negotiate away the conditions of your scholarship.

Learn more:

- [Analyzing and Understanding Conditional Scholarships](#) by Spivey Consulting
- [Law School Conditional Scholarships](#) by LST Data Dashboard gives a detailed breakdown of which law schools gave out conditional scholarships and how many students in each school lost their scholarships.

Negotiating Scholarships

It is possible to negotiate with law schools to increase your scholarship offers. Some possible leverages for negotiations include:

- Having an acceptance offer from a similarly or higher-ranked law school

- Having a scholarship offer from a similarly or higher-ranked law school
- Retaking the LSAT/GRE for a higher score

Even if you have no offer to leverage with, it does not hurt to (respectfully) ask the law school for more aid. The worst that can happen is they say no.

Learn more: [5 Scholarship Negotiation Necessities](#) by Spivey Consulting

Need-Based Scholarships/Grants

Some law schools will award need-based scholarships based on individual and family income and assets. These scholarships are usually given in addition to, or with a combination of, merit-based scholarships. Most law schools do not offer full-tuition need-based scholarships.

Yale, Stanford, and Harvard only offer need-based grants. However, their aid will not cover your full cost of attendance; it usually only covers a portion of the total cost of attendance.

Immigrant Law Student Perspectives

“I realized that I am not alone on this journey. So many other undocumented folks also want to become lawyers.”

— Stephanie Medina, Immigrants Rising’s Pre-Law Fund Grantee



Loans

Federal loans: Federal graduate loans, which are accessible through applying for FAFSA, are restricted to U.S. citizens and legal permanent residents. Undocumented students do not qualify for any federal loans.

State loans: In California, students who qualify for AB 540 (see whether you qualify [here](#)) and demonstrate financial need are offered a maximum of \$4,000 in loans per year at the UC law schools (Berkeley, Davis, Hastings, Irvine, UCLA).

Private loans: Some private lenders provide loans to international students, which include undocumented students. These include:

- College Ave
- Citizens Bank
- Sallie Mae
- LendKey
- Discover
- Stilt

Note: Immigrants Rising does not endorse any lenders. We encourage you to do your own research to find the best option for you.

When considering private loans, do your research on eligibility criteria, interest rates, and terms and conditions of repayment. These loans might have requirements such as:

- Having a U.S. citizen or lawful permanent resident co-signer to guarantee your loans
- Having a valid DACA status
- Having a valid student visa or other type of visa

Institutional loans: Yale, Stanford, and Harvard provide institutional loans to students who need them, including undocumented students. This does not mean only these law schools offer institutional loans. Because so few undocumented students attend law schools, we do not know if other law schools can offer institutional loans. In general, private law schools are more likely to have the financial resources to offer loans. You should explain your immigration circumstances to the law schools you are accepted to and ask if they can offer you institutional loans.

External or Private Scholarships

Many private scholarships have citizenship or permanent residency requirements, which prevent undocumented students from being eligible. However, some scholarships do not exclude undocumented students from applying. See a list of graduate scholarships open to undocumented graduate students [here](#).

Other Ways of Financing Legal Education

Crowdfunding

Many students also use crowdfunding as a way to raise money. Denia Perez is an Immigrants Rising alumna who used GoFundMe to raise funds for law school. Her [GoFundMe](#) page has since closed, but you can view the video she used for her fundraiser [here](#). Some other crowdfunding websites you can use are [YouCaring.com](#) and [JustGiving](#). Each website has its own set of restrictions and fees, so it is up to you to find a platform that works best for you.

Lending Circles

Family and friends lend each other money all the time, especially when banks are not an option. Now, lending circles have become more mainstream and available to people interested in community loans to finance their education. This “social loan” is when a group of people come together, formally or informally, and decide on the amount for their group loan. To learn more about lending circles, you can check out the [Mission Asset Fund](#).

Independent Contracting

With or without DACA, you can offer a skill or service and generate income as an independent contractor. We encourage you to check out Illiana Perez's materials (including recorded and live webinars) on the Immigrants Rising [Entrepreneurship & Freelancing](#) resource page and the [Life After College Guide](#). You may skip to pages 29-36 to learn how you can work for yourself or start a Limited Liability Company as a Worker Cooperative.

Choosing Which Law Schools to Apply To (And Attend)

Your application list should include schools that are considered your “safety,” “target,” and “reach” based on your LSAT/GRE and GPA. Because so many other factors are considered, such as your personal statements, work experience, and personal background, no particular LSAT/GRE or GPA, no matter how high, will guarantee an acceptance. You should apply broadly to any schools you are interested in attending.

Safety schools: These are schools where your LSAT/GRE score and undergraduate GPA exceed the school median and where you are likely to receive merit scholarship offers, which you might be able to use to negotiate aid from a higher-ranked school. For this reason, applying to safety schools is important even if you do not plan on attending.

Target schools: These are schools where your undergraduate GPA and LSAT/GRE are at or around the school’s median. These are also schools where you are likely to receive merit scholarship offers, which you might be able to use to negotiate aid from a higher-ranked school.

Reach schools: These are schools where your LSAT/GRE and undergraduate GPA are below the school median. A school can also be considered a reach if your LSAT/GRE score is below the school’s 25th percentile. In addition, T-14 schools (the top 14 law schools as ranked by the US News and World Ranking) are generally considered reach schools due to how competitive and unpredictable admissions can be.

Ultimately, if you can afford the application fees, apply to whichever schools you are interested in attending. You never know where you might be accepted!

Tools to help you create your safety, target, and reach list:

- [UGPA and LSAT Score Search](#): Created by the Law School Admission Council, this tool uses data for the Fall 2021 full-time entering class to represent a 95% probability that an applicant in Fall 2021 would have an actual chance of admission to a particular school.
- [Law School Predictor](#): Created by 7Sage, this tool uses self-reported data to “predict” your chances of being accepted to a particular school. Because the data used is self-reported, it cannot accurately reflect actual chances and thus should be used only as a reference point.
- [Law School Numbers](#): A self-reporting website where applicants post their LSAT and GPAs, what schools they applied to, and where they were accepted, denied, or waitlisted. Users can filter applicants by GPA and LSAT to view their results.
- [Law School Data](#): Similar to Law School Numbers, Law School Data is a self-reporting website that allows applicants to post their LSAT and GPAs, what schools they applied to, and where they were accepted, denied, or waitlisted. The website offers visual graphs to show when applicants received interviews or decisions.

Learn more:

- [How Law School Applicants Can Choose Safety Schools](#) by US News & World Report
- [How Many Law Schools Should You Apply to?](#) by Magoosh
- [Reach, Target, and Safety Schools](#) by 7Sage

Immigration-Specific and Employment Considerations

As you are putting together your list of schools and ultimately choosing a school to attend, here are some immigration-specific questions to consider:

If it is a public law school in another state, will I qualify for in-state tuition?

Georgia and Indiana explicitly prohibit in-state tuition rates for undocumented students. If the difference between in-state and out-of-state tuition is marginal, then this might not be a big deal. However, beyond financial considerations, another factor to consider is whether you will feel supported in a school that places such restrictions on those without legal status.

Does the school prohibit undocumented students from applying or enrolling?

South Carolina and Alabama prohibit undocumented students from enrolling at any public postsecondary institution.

Even if the school does not explicitly prohibit undocumented students from applying, they might have roadblocks in place that make it difficult for undocumented students to apply, enroll, or even take advantage of resources while there. You should contact the admissions office directly and openly discuss with them what resources and opportunities are available for undocumented and DACAmented students.

Will I be allowed to take the bar in the state where my school is located? Do I have to move to a state where I am allowed to take the bar?

Each state has varying policies on allowing undocumented and DACAmented individuals to practice law. In California, for example, all 56 professional and occupational licenses (including law) are open to undocumented immigrants as long as they meet all other requirements. Illinois and Nevada have similar laws. Other states restrict eligibility only to DACA recipients or immigrants with work authorization. [Click here](#) for more information on bar eligibility requirements by state.

Are there any restrictions on undocumented students being awarded scholarships at that school?

Most law schools award merit-based scholarships to accepted students regardless of immigration status or country of citizenship. However, it might be helpful to contact the admissions office and specifically ask about their policy of awarding scholarships to undocumented students.

What are my career goals and will this school help me get there?

Many law schools are regional, which means they might place most of their students in job markets within the city, state, or geographic region where they are located. Think about where you would like to work after graduation and whether the law school can provide you with opportunities to work in your desired city, state, or region.

As you are researching law schools, also look into whether they offer post-graduate fellowships, which are short-term (usually one to two year) paid placements at various organizations. Fellowships without immigration restrictions can be valuable for immigrants without work authorization to gain paid work experience. Contact the schools you are looking into and ask whether their fellowship opportunities are open to undocumented immigrants.

What is their bar passage rate? What is the school's employment rate?

As you consider whether to apply to and attend a particular school, do not just consider rankings; research the school's job placement statistics, bar passage rates, and even what states graduates take the bar in after

graduation. Whether applying to or choosing a law school to attend, it is important to find schools that will help you achieve your professional goals.

You can find employment and bar passage rates using tools such as:

- [ABA 509 reports](#): The American Bar Association requires all ABA-accredited law schools to report employment and bar passage data.
- [Law School Transparency](#): Breaks down data from ABA reports into visual and user-friendly graphs and charts.

Pre-Law Programs Open to Individuals Regardless of Immigration Status

Pre-Law Resources

[For People of Color, Inc, Guide to the Law School Admissions Process](#): An electronic resource that outlines the law school admission process and tips for submitting a strong application. For People of Color, Inc. also hosts Pre-Law Conferences to empower people of color to enter law school and become attorneys.

[Council on Legal Education Opportunity, Inc. \(CLEO Inc.\)](#): CLEO, Inc. is dedicated to expanding opportunities for minority and low-income students to attend law school. They have a host of resources about the law school admissions process and pre-law programs.

[Law School Resources for Prospective Applicants](#): This electronic resource was compiled by First Class at Harvard Law School for future law school students. This is a great resource for individuals interested in learning about pre-law programs, resources, and fellowships open to undocumented students.

[UC Davis School of Law's Navigating Law School for Undocumented Students](#): An electronic resource created by UC Davis School of Law outlining the steps to applying to law school. It can be a useful resource for individuals interested in applying to UC Davis School of Law.

Pre-Law Programs

The following is a non-comprehensive list of programs dedicated to supporting underrepresented communities to prepare for the law school application process and/or be successful in law school. These programs are open to students regardless of immigration status.

Law School Pre-Law Programs

- [Florida State College of Law Summer for Undergraduates Program](#)
- [Harvard-NYU Training and Recruitment Initiative for Admission to Leading Law Schools \(TRIALS\)](#)
- [IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law Pre-Law Undergraduate Scholars \(PLUS\) Program](#)
- [St. John's University School of Law Prep Program for College Students](#)
- [University of Akron School of Law Prelaw Undergraduate Scholars \(PLUS\) Program](#)
- [UC Davis - King Hall Outreach Program \(KHOP\)](#)
- [UC Irvine Law Pre-Law Outreach Program](#)

- [UCLA Law Fellows](#)
- [University of Houston Law Center Pre-Law Pipeline Program](#)

Law Firm Pre-Law Programs

- [MTO Fellows Program](#)
- [Sidley Prelaw Scholars Program](#)

Other Pre-Law Programs

- [Council on Legal Education Opportunity \(CLEO\), Inc. - PreLaw Summer Institute](#)
- [For People of Color Inc.](#)
- [Immigrants Rising's Pre-Law Fund](#)
- [LAWbound®](#)
- [LevelBar](#)

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About Us

Founded in 2006, Immigrants Rising transforms individuals and fuels broader changes. With resources and support, undocumented young people are able to get an education, pursue careers, and build a brighter future for themselves and their community. For more information, visit immigrantsrising.org. For inquiries regarding this resource, please contact Jesus Flores, Career Services Lead, at jesus@immigrantsrising.org.