

SKIDMORE COLLEGE

PRE-LAW GUIDE

CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTER

CONTACT US: 518-580-5790
WWW.SKIDMORE.EDU/CAREER

Skidmore offers several resources to students interested in law school including:

Career Development Center (CDC)

- Shannon Rodriguez, Associate Director for Pre-Professional and Graduate Studies, works with the pre-law population. To arrange an appointment, please call 518-580-5790. The office is located in Starbuck.

Pre-Law Advisor

- Christine Kopec, Esq., Visiting Assistant Professor, Department of Management & Business, ckopec@skidmore.edu

The Skidmore Pre-Law Society

- To join the pre-law society, send an e-mail to skidmoreprelaw@gmail.com.
- Follow them on twitter @skidmoreprelaw
- Check their website: www.skidmoreprelaw.wordpress.com

What can I expect to do as an attorney?

The Department of Labor has a database called O*Net, where you can very easily research occupations. Here are some of the typical tasks:

- Represent clients in court or before government agencies.
- Present evidence to defend clients or prosecute defendants in criminal or civil litigation.
- Select jurors, argue motions, meet with judges, and question witnesses during the course of a trial.
- Study Constitution, statutes, decisions, regulations, and ordinances of quasi-judicial bodies to determine ramifications for cases.
- Interpret laws, rulings, and regulations for individuals and businesses.
- Present and summarize cases to judges and juries.
- Prepare legal briefs and opinions, and file appeals in state and federal courts of appeal.
- Analyze the probable outcomes of cases, using knowledge of legal precedents.
- Examine legal data to determine advisability of defending or prosecuting lawsuits.
- Evaluate findings, and develop strategies and arguments in preparation for presentation of cases.

-Department of Labor: <http://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/23-1011.00>

In addition to the profile for lawyers, there is also a profile for legal assistant and paralegal. If you are thinking of working in a law office in some capacity before law school, those profiles may help you to tailor your approach. The O*Net can be accessed at www.onetonline.org. In the "find occupations" box (top right), simply type in the occupation of interest.

Which classes will help prepare me for law school?

All of them! According to the American Bar Association, there isn't one undergraduate major or group of courses to prepare for a legal education; students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. A liberal arts education is excellent preparation for a law school degree.

Whatever major you choose, you are encouraged to pursue an area of study that interests and challenges you while developing your writing, research, and analytical skills to the highest degree possible. Taking a diverse range of difficult courses is excellent preparation for a legal education. You will want to develop knowledge of law & government while enhancing your listening, speaking, critical thinking, reading comprehension, complex problem solving, decision making, writing, negotiating, persuasion, and active learning skills.

How much do I need to know about legal specialties?

Some students who decide on a legal specialty before law school end up changing their minds once they gain more experience. However, if you are confident that you are going to pursue a particular specialty, it can influence which law school you attend. The Official Guide to Legal Specialties (2000) by Lisa Abrams provides an overview of 30 practice areas. It's about \$25. More information can be found here: www.nalp.org/productDetail/?productID=69

You can also use NALP Directory of Law Schools to search for law schools based on their specialty. Use the "advanced search" button. www.nalplawschoolsonline.org/index.asp

How do I express my interest in law?

Students can convey their interest in a variety of ways including:

- They can enter their pre-professional interests during the summer advising period prior to their arrival on campus.
- If you join the Pre-Law Society, you will receive announcements related to pre-law events, opportunities, and information.

Is law school worth the cost and how am I going to pay for it?

First consider how this degree will benefit your future career. Next, calculate your potential earnings against any debt you might incur as a student. In addition, you may want to evaluate some of the following options: public law schools, scholarships, part-time programs, or working for a couple of years.

Public Law Schools

Public law schools can offer a reputable degree at a reasonable price. Please be sure to check out the residency requirements first. Generally, you have to live in that state for at least one year prior to when you would attend law school. In addition, you will have to submit documentation to verify that you are a resident – such as a copy of a lease, utility bill, copy of your driver's license, etc. Please research the specific requirements as they do vary by state. This article from About.com is a good reference: http://testprep.about.com/od/the/sat/tp/Top_LawSchools.htm

Scholarship/Loan Forgiveness:

There are a multitude of places to look for scholarship money for law school. Here's an initial list to get you started with your research:

Career One Stop Scholarship Search has more than 7,000 scholarships, fellowships, loans, and other financial aid opportunities for a wide variety of disciplines, levels of education, and locations. www.careerinfonet.org/scholarshipsearch

FastWeb is a large, searchable general database of scholarships. www.fastweb.com

The ABA Legal Opportunity Scholarship Fund provides 20 incoming diverse students with \$15,000 in aid over the course of their three years in law school.

www.americanbar.org/groups/departments_offices/fund_justice_education.html

The John Marshall Law School maintains a listing on scholarships. If you aren't interested in their program, see the "External Scholarship Opportunities" heading.

www.jmls.edu/students/scholarships/listings.php#JMLS-incoming

Public Service Loan Forgiveness can be a good option for lawyers that have a high amount of debt and a relatively low amount of income who work in public service for 10 years or more.

<http://studentaid.ed.gov/PORTALSWebApp/students/english/PSF.jsp>

Part-time Programs:

These programs can lead to good opportunities, but could also limit you from others. Generally speaking, part-time law programs will not have the same recognition as top-tier full-time law school programs.

Gaining Experience:

Working after graduation can be a great way to earn money and gain experience. While many law schools focus on your GPA and LSAT score, future employers will want to know about how you performed in law school, where you went to school, AND about your experience. For example, if you graduate from law school and begin a career in corporate law, having some time working for a corporation before law school could be beneficial.

If you decide to work a couple of years in the hope to save money to pay for law school, be sure to weigh your potential savings (based on earnings with a bachelor's degree) versus the compensation you could receive if you completed your JD sooner. If you plan to work in the field as a legal assistant, document specialist, or paralegal, the National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) has some useful resources.

Skidmore's Career Development Center offers a number of networking and recruiting events. These events only happen once a year, so pay close attention to application procedures and deadlines.

Here's an initial list for review:

Event	Description	Time of Year	Class Year
Career Jam	On-campus networking event with alumni and parents	October	All Class Years
Graduate School Expo	On-campus fair during the day with admission reps and workshops in the evening	October	All Class Years
Career & Internship Connections (CIC)	Off-campus career fair/interview day in New York City, Boston, Chicago, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles.; applications must be submitted for each position of interest	Events are in January, Deadline is early Dec.	All Class Years
Transitions & Transformations	Off-campus networking event in NYC and Boston	January/March	Juniors/Seniors ONLY
Eastern College Career Days (ECCD)	Off-campus interview day; applications must be submitted for each position of interest	Event is in March, Deadline is early Feb.	Seniors ONLY

What do I need to know about the LSAT?

- The LSAT is offered four times a year – February, June, October, and December. Many law schools have requested that applicants take the test by December for admission in the following fall's entering class.

Sign up here: <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/us-june-2013-dates.asp>

- *Should I take the test again?*

Unlike the SATs, students often find that it isn't worth the time or money to repeat the LSAT. Students who take the LSAT multiple times often find that their score falls into a very narrow range. In addition, while your score may rise slightly, it may also drop.

"You should also notify law schools of any facts relevant to the interpretation of your test results, such as illness or extenuating circumstances. If there is no reason to believe that one score represents a truer estimate of an applicant's ability, schools are advised that the average score is probably the best estimate of ability—especially if the tests were taken over a short period of time. Law schools must have access to your complete test record, not just the highest score; therefore, LSAC will not honor requests for partial score reports."

-Law School Admission Council (LSAC)

- If you think you may want to repeat the test after getting your initial score, plan to take the LSAT first either in June after your junior year or October of your senior year. This will give you time to register again for the December exam.
- If you are planning on taking a prep course, you will need to take it during your junior year, while you are completing your other academic work, then sit for the LSAT in June OR you can take a prep course in the summer after your junior year and take the LSAT in October of your senior year. You will either have to complete your test prep while you are completing coursework (June LSAT) or sit for the test while you are completing coursework (October LSAT).
- The closest test centers to campus are SUNY-Albany or Albany Law School. For a more complete list, please visit: <http://www.lsac.org/jd/pdfs/testcentercodes.pdf>

Letters of Recommendation (LOR) and Evaluation Services

Usually grades and LSAT scores factor in the most heavily; however, your letters of recommendation could be the deciding factor in the admission process. Strong letters of recommendation can strengthen your application and, if there are deficiencies in your application, they can help to outweigh them.

Each institution will let you know how many letters it requires-usually two to three. If you have more letters than required, you can consider submitting an extra one if it is strong and provides new information about you not mentioned in other letters. On the other hand, you may want to save the letter in case you are waitlisted. The additional letter could lend further support to your candidacy.

Typically, two letters from faculty who can address your academic and intellectual abilities is preferred. However, letters from employers are also desirable, especially from applicants who received their undergraduate degree more than three years prior.

The best letter writers are those who know you well and can provide an evaluation of your ability to perform and succeed at law school. Therefore, it is beneficial for you to establish meaningful relationships with your professors. Take every opportunity to get to know and talk with your professors: go to office hours, ask questions in class, seek advice about your career, do independent research or study with a professor whose recommendation you may want.

Law school admissions officials tell us the following make the best letter writers:

- someone who knows you well
- someone with the title of "Professor"
- someone who is a professor at the school granting your baccalaureate degree
- someone with an advanced degree who has supervised you in a meaningful job or internship
- someone who has academically evaluated you in an upper-division class
- Note: letters from family friends, political figures, judges, and the like usually are discouraged and may, in fact, be detrimental.

Evaluations

An evaluation rates attributes and skills that have been identified as important to success in law school such as intellectual skills, personal qualities, integrity and honesty, communication, task management, and working with others. The evaluation uses a rating scale that represents degrees of a particular characteristic. Most law schools prefer the letters of recommendation as opposed to the evaluations, but it's recommended that research your particular schools of interest to confirm. Each law school has their own requirements and preferences.

How do I approach potential letter writers?

First, make a list of professors and/or supervisors who will be your best advocates. Then, set up an appointment to discuss your request in person. Do not make the request via email. Be prepared to articulate your interest and reasons for attending law school. Letters of recommendation are written strictly on a voluntary basis; a faculty member or employer may decline to write them. The best approach is to ask potential letter writers if they are willing to write you a strong letter. If you sense reluctance or the answer is no, ask someone else.

When should I approach letter writers? What if I plan to take some time off before I go to law school?

A good time to approach letter writers is early fall of your senior year if you plan to attend law school immediately following graduation. If you plan to take some time off before going to law school, don't wait until you want to apply to law school to ask for letters. Your professors could be

on sabbatical or you may not be fresh in their minds anymore. So, ask professors for a "general" letter of recommendation before you leave. When you are ready to apply to law school, contact professors again, and ask them to update your letters.

What information do my letter writers need to write good letters?

You can help your letter writers write strong letters by giving each of them a portfolio that includes:

- Information on how to get in touch with you in case they need to reach you
- What you would like emphasized in each letter
- A list of schools to which you are applying, and due dates, with the earliest due date at the top
- Your unofficial transcript (note courses you took with them)
- A draft of your personal statement
- A copy of your best work in the course (with instructor comments on it), lab evaluations, projects, publications, etc.
- Your resume

Open and close your note with thanks and acknowledgement that the letter writer's time is valuable and that this letter is important to your professional future.

If you are using a centralized application service, LSAC, please complete the form and e-mail will be sent to each of your recommenders requesting him or her to complete and upload a letter for you. Don't forget to assign your letters as either general or for specific schools. NOTE: Letters are matched to your file by the "L" number on the form, not by the description. If your recommenders are sending more than one letter for you, please be sure to emphasize the importance of attaching the correct form to the corresponding letter. For example, a form that names a specific law school must be attached to the letter addressed to that school; a form for a letter described as "general" must be attached to a letter that does not refer to any specific law school. Law schools receive both the LOR form and the letter, so write your descriptions carefully.

For more information, visit the LSAC site at <http://www.lsac.org/jd/apply/cas-lor-evaluations.asp>

Transcripts

- After you register for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), you must have a separate transcript sent to LSAC directly from **EACH** undergraduate and graduate institution you attended in the United States, its territories, or Canada (i.e., study abroad, transferred credits, etc.).
- **Transcripts issued to you or sent by you will not be processed.**
- You must use LSAC's Transcript Request Forms for this purpose. **Your Transcript Request Forms will be available only after you sign up for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and enter your institution information.** Allow two weeks from the time of receipt for LSAC to process your transcripts.
<http://www.lsac.org/jd/apply/cas-requesting-transcripts.asp>

How do I decide where to submit an application?

A number of factors can influence where you decide to attend law school – reputation, career opportunities, specialties, location, faculty, etc.

Grad School Matrix

If you log-in to your CDC Account (select Forgot Password if you haven't logged in recently, then check your e-mail and follow the prompts), you will find a document called Grad School Matrix under the Resources tab. This chart will help you to organize the information you find during your research.

Pre-Law Advisor

You should plan to meet with Skidmore's Pre-law Advisor, Christine Kopec, Esq. As an attorney, herself, she can share her insight into a legal career. We also have several other faculty and staff members who have been to law school.

NALP Directory of Law Schools (The Association for Legal Career Professionals) has some great search tools. <http://www.nalplawschoolsonline.org>

Boston College Law School Locator can help you identify schools where your scores and grades are most competitive for admission and help you gauge your chance of admission at a particular school. The chart is useful in evaluating law school choices but cannot determine where you should or should not apply. www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/lawlocator.html

Career Advisor Network (CAN)

We have a number of career advisors who are willing to speak with students about their experience with law schools and their careers. Please make an appointment with the Career Development Center to discuss this resource and the protocols for its use.

<http://www.skidmore.edu/career/network/index.php>

Password: Contact Career Development Center at 518-580-5790

(access if for students and alumni ONLY)

Here is a sample outreach e-mail to get you started:

I'm in my junior year at Skidmore College and have an interest in pursuing a career in law. I found your contact information through the Career Advisor Network. I would very much like to learn more about your experiences in the field and any advice you would be willing to share with me. Would you be willing to speak with me for 15-20 minutes about your experiences at a time that's convenient for you? To give you a better sense of who I am, attached please find my resume. Thanks for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Name
Class of X
Skidmore College
Phone Number
E-mail

Personal Statement/Narrative

What constitutes a good personal statement?

A good personal statement conveys the root of your interest in law and shows your enthusiasm for the field. It's your chance to allow the reader to get to know you as an applicant.

Skidmore has several ways to receive assistance with revising your graduate admissions essays including: Faculty, The Career Development Center, and the Writing Center.

As you begin the process of writing your personal statement, please allow enough time to write 3-6 drafts, which could take about 2-3 months. We are happy to work with students and alumni at any stage of the writing process. However, working on drafts that are immediately due encourages "quick fixes" and is contrary to our goal of approaching writing as a process.

Start building a pool of possible topics and points with some simple writing exercises:

- List all experiences related to law. Write for 1-2 minutes each. The one that you had the most to say about could be a topic of interest for your statement.
- Was there one time when you realized what you wanted to do? What is your ultimate goal? What do you want to do with this degree?
- Write 5-7 skills, come up with one example for each
- What is the most important concept you learned in college?
- What do you consider the most important book, article, play, or film you have ever read/seen, and how has it influenced you?
- Which writers and which particular articles in your field of study have had the greatest influence on the development of your thought?
- Who were your favorite professors in college, and why? How has each influenced you?

There are a number of authors who write on the subject including Don Asher and Joe Schall.

Here is a rough outline of the process:

- 1) Identify the question you need to answer and the character/word limit that you must follow.
- 2) Log-in to your My CDC Account and review the one page handout on the Do's and Don'ts on Writing Personal Statements. Also, consider reviewing some of the other materials listed above and completing the writing exercises.
- 3) Start an outline and create your first draft. Worry about the character limit later.
- 4) Make an appointment for a critique. Send your personal statement via e-mail as a Word document by the day before the appointment. Feedback will be shared with you during the appointment.
- 5) Revise your document. Read the paper to see if it flows from one topic to another, determine if the organization is logical, check to see if the paper fits the actual assignment. Consider rewriting paragraphs to make them sound better and to support the claims you have made.
- 6) Schedule a 2nd appointment and continue revising until you have a final draft.
- 7) Once you have a more final draft, have it reviewed by two other people – possibly a lawyer, a faculty member who knows you well, or the Writing Center.

What We Can Do:

- Assist students in developing critical reading and writing strategies, including breaking down prompts, formulating ideas and brainstorming, evaluating argumentation and analysis, and structuring and organizing ideas
- Dialogue, exchange ideas, establish goals and expectations
- Offer grammar help

What We Do Not Do:

- The editing process targets grammar problems, while the revision process focuses on readability, logic, and clarity. We are not a proofreading/editing service. We can, however, show students effective ways to edit and proofread their own writing.

Timeline

If you know you want to go to law school immediately upon graduation, here's a suggested timeline:

1st Year:

- Join the pre-law society
- Update your resume from a high school resume to a college resume
- Set goals to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to be a successful law school applicant
- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center for:
 - A resume critique
 - To learn how to use My CDC Account and the Career Advisor Network

Sophomore Year:

- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center
 - Learn how to write a cover letter and have your letter critiqued
 - Consider applying for and attending one of the Career and Internship Connections events in your area; apply for summer internships
- Bring business casual clothing to campus and attend Career Jam; speak to volunteers in law

Junior Year:

- Attend the Graduate School Expo, attend any law related workshops
- Attend Career Jam, meet any law related volunteers
- Make an appointment with the Career Development Center
 - Secure a summer internship (it doesn't have to be in a law office)
 - Consider applying for and attending one or more of the Career and Internship Consortium (CIC) events
 - Consider attending a Transitions and Transformations networking event in New York City or Boston *advanced registration required
- Consider attending Law School Admission Council (LSAC) events in your area
- Talk to career advisors that attended law schools of interest
- Start to identify and/or develop relationships with potential letter writers
- Prepare for the LSAT, deadline to register for June LSAT is in early May
 - <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/us-june-2013-dates.asp>

Summer between Junior/Senior Year:

- Potentially take June LSAT
- Create account for LSAC's online application service, www.lsac.org
 - If you have an LSAC account, you will automatically receive your LSAT score by e-mail approximately three weeks after taking the test. Make sure you schedule your LSAT date so that you will have plenty of time to obtain your score before any of your law school applications are due.
- Draft your personal statement, have it critiqued by 3 people
- Consider attending information sessions, visit law schools of interest, select law schools

Senior Year:

- Consider taking the LSAT in October, deadline to register is early Sept.
- Transcripts: sign up for Credential Assembly Service (CAS) and use LSAC's transcript request form to submit transcripts from EACH institution you have attended
- Letters of Recommendation/Evaluation: Provide the names and contact information of all your recommenders/evaluators in your account, indicate the number of letters/evaluations each recommender/evaluator will submit and describe them, select your law schools and specify the letters/evaluations that should be sent to each one

using the ID numbers. You must assign letters/evaluations or they will not be sent. Submit your requests for letters and confirm they were received.

- The earlier you submit your application in the application cycle, the more seats are available. The longer you wait, the more seats fill, and the process becomes more competitive.
- If seeking federal financial aid, complete FAFSA in Jan/Feb; the deadline is June

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- Meet with or talk to career advisors that attended law schools of interest