

¹HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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What Law Schools Look For in an Applicant

There are about 200 ABA-approved law schools in the country, and each is free to select students based upon virtually whatever criteria they choose. A few base their admission decisions almost entirely on LSAT scores and GPA. Most look closely at other factors, and the process can seem quite subjective. However, the combination of LSAT score and GPA remains the best overall predictor of success. The HPPLC library and LSAC.org has admissions statistics for every U.S. law school. Please consult with a HPPLC Prelaw Advisor for guidance regarding your particular situation.

In general, all law schools consider the following elements:

1. LSAT. Your LSAT score is by far the single most important factor in the admissions process. If your score is too low for a given school, it is *extremely rare* that even a great GPA, activities, letters of recommendation, and/or other factors can compensate. Scores range from 120 to 180. The national average is 153. Preparation will improve your score. We recommend that you budget at least two to three months for serious preparation. HPPLC, Kaplan, and Princeton Review offer the only in-class preparation programs in Bloomington. Many students simply prepare on their own. Our Prelaw Advisors will be glad to discuss all preparation options available to you.

2. GPA. The range of possible *minimum* GPAs varies tremendously from school to school—from about 2.4 to 3.7. A relatively higher LSAT score may be needed to compensate for a lower GPA. It is important to take rigorous [e.g., upper level] courses. Any trend in grades will also receive close scrutiny, and should be communicated to the law schools in your application material (perhaps via a letter of addendum). A single bad semester or even year is not necessarily fatal, although it usually should be explained. HPPLC can help with such statements.

3. Personal statement. Normally, schools request a 2-3 page statement from the candidate that reveals something about them that cannot be gleaned from the application itself. It is a way applicants can draw attention to any special perspectives or qualities they would bring to an entering class. It is a crucial element of the application package. Our office will help students plan and revise this document, and we have sample statements from previous IUB applicants. See, the HPPLC section of the website, as well as handouts on the personal statement available online or from the HPPLC office. Read over this material now (to plant the seeds); then jot down any ideas you get over time in a computer folder for use later. This document may take a month or more to fully compose.

4. Resume. The personal statement and resume together function to communicate to the law school all the extras you will bring to their first-year class. They highlight your activities, interests, and life experiences (as described below). The resume you submit with law school applications can be longer and more detailed than a formal job-search resume. If appropriate, provide more elaboration on individual entries, and err on the side of more categories rather than fewer (to give the overworked admissions official who only has time to skim the document the impression that you have been involved in

a broad variety of activities). Include your interests and hobbies—one never knows what will catch the eye of a sympathetic reader. See, the HPPLC handout “Resumes for Law School Applications,” available online or from the HPPLC office. If you don’t have a resume, make an appointment with IU’s Career Development Center—they will give you a one-on-one appointment to help you create a great resume.

5. Letters of recommendation. Most schools request two or three, although many schools will read more. IUB-Law, for example, will read as many letters as you send. However, many law schools strictly limit the number they will accept. Truly great letters can make a difference—a poor letter may make admission difficult. Usually recommendations from professors or AIs are preferred. It is often wise to seek out smaller classes, and perhaps repeat a professor with whom one has been successful. HPPLC has a letters of recommendation service that will assist you in obtaining letters, and will forward them to the Credential Assembly Service (LSDAS) or directly to the schools when the time is right.

5. Activities and interests. These include internships, volunteer work, full or part-time employment, work in clubs and organizations, extra-curriculars, sports, etc. Law schools prefer evidence of commitment and leadership in one or two organizations to mere membership in a long list.

6. Life experience. Law schools look favorably upon mature candidates who have ventured into the “real world,” overcome hardships, endured challenges, and generally acquired some perspective on life. This includes work experience before, during, and/or after undergraduate studies, advanced degrees, parenting, travel, athletics, military, etc. Thus a delay between the undergraduate years and law school is often considered favorably. The average age of students at many law schools is 24 through 26.

In general, law schools want a diverse student body representing a wide variety of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives. For every issue that might arise in class discussion, their ideal situation would be to have one or two students who could comment on it from their actual life experiences. Specific legal training or experience is not necessary. Instead, they are looking for interesting and varied “raw material” to work with: well-rounded, thoughtful, involved, reflective, ethical, hard-working, passionate, intellectually curious, experienced, mature, motivated, focused, and interesting people who have done interesting things with their lives. While having a particular major is not important, admissions personnel do want to see academic evidence that a student can write well, think analytically, and can handle pressures comparable to those experienced during the intense first year of law school.

This document has been prepared for Indiana University - Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.

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