

**PRE-LAW
HANDBOOK
2016-2017**



I. Exploring Law School

The decision whether or not to attend law school is one that should be made with careful consideration. Law school is a unique and rewarding experience as well as excellent preparation for a variety of career paths. It is also a serious academic, financial and personal commitment. It is important to assess your own interests, goals, and specific circumstances in order to arrive at a well-informed decision.

Do Your Research

There are many ways to learn more about law school and the legal profession.

1. **Pre-Law Counseling**

The University of Miami Offices of Pre-Law Counseling offer services to assist you. These services complement the academic advising you receive in the department of your major. Our offices offer one-on-one advising appointments, free LSAT preparation workshops, pre-law list-serve emails, as well as many educational and informational events throughout the year. The LSAC Miami Law Forum and other numerous events sponsored by Miami Law will provide you with valuable information. (See “Pre-Law Events 2016 –2017” under Section VI below).

For an advising appointment, contact:

Edward Cruz

Director/Pre-Professional, [Toppel Career Center](#)
ecruz2@miami.edu

5225 Ponce De Leon Blvd; (305) 284 - 5023

* All undergraduate students

Eva Alonso

Director of Undergraduate Advising

[School of Communication](#)

Eva.alonso@miami.edu

2035 Wolfson; 305-284-5234

*Communications students only

Suzanne Thomas-Hall

Senior Adviser, Office of Student Academic Services

Ashe Building, Room 211

T: 305-284-4333, sthomash@miami.edu*Arts & Sciences students only

Elisah Lewis, Ph.D.

Associate Director of Undergraduate Research and Student Support Services:

[School of Business Administration](#)

eblewis@miami.edu

104 Merrick; (305) 284 – 4052

* Business students only

2. **Miami Law Office of Student Recruitment and Admissions**

The [University of Miami School of Law Office of Admissions and Student Recruitment](#) offers open house events, tours of the law school, class visits, and advice about applying to Miami Law. The School of Law's Office of Student Recruitment also maintains a [Pre-Law Headquarters](#) website and a [Prospective Students](#) website, which includes a wonderful resource, [29 Critical Questions](#) brochure.

To speak or have an advising session with a member of the University of Miami Law School Student Recruitment team contact: Therese Lambert, *Director*, Joe Matthews, *Associate Director*, or Humberto Duarte, *Assistant Director of Student Recruitment*, Room F-203; (305) 284 – 6746 <http://www.law.miami.edu/admissions>

3. **Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) & DiscoverLaw.org**

The [Law School Admissions Council](#) has many informative articles for prospective law students as well as detailed information regarding the application process, including a list of all ABA-accredited law schools, their application fees, and other admissions information.

[DiscoverLaw.org](#) is a campaign sponsored by LSAC to encourage racially and ethnically diverse students to discover career opportunities in law and choose a path in undergraduate school to help them succeed. With access to experts, inspiring stories about law school graduates, answers to frequently asked questions, and more, [DiscoverLaw.org](#) provides students with resources, tips, and tools on how to become a competitive law school applicant.

4. **Informational Interviews with Current Law Students and Lawyers**

There is no better way to learn about law school or the legal profession than to speak to current law students and those working in the field. An informational interview gives you an opportunity to obtain suggestions and advice regarding the best ways to achieve your goals while also providing an inside look at the law school experience and the legal profession. To learn more about informational interviews, contact the [Toppel Career Center](#) to set up a one-on-one advising appointment.

5. **Internship Experience**

Pursuing a legal internship is an invaluable way to learn more about the profession. Internships provide you with hands-on experience while allowing you to explore whether law-related work appeals to you.

For resources on securing a law related internship, create an account on [HireACane.com](#) and contact the Toppel Career Center.

II. Careers in the Law

Law school graduates pursue a vast array of careers in an endless number of fields and industries. Before applying to law school, it is important to educate yourself about the legal profession. Lawyers fill many different roles for their clients - sounding board, counselor, educator, quarterback, advocate, litigator, liaison and gatekeeper. Lawyers must also be acutely mindful of their professional and ethical responsibilities, and attentive to business and relationship development. The modern practice of law requires excellent communication skills, technological and cultural awareness, and heightened accessibility. For the vast majority of attorneys the job is not nine to five, though there are ways to maintain work-life balance and a successful career.

The happiest and most fulfilled lawyers take an active role in designing what they want their careers to look like. That process begins with self-assessment; taking inventory of your strengths, weaknesses, interests, values, and prior personal and professional experiences. Successful self-assessment results in a personally fulfilling career that integrates your work into your life and satisfies your financial requirements. Below is a sampling of areas in which lawyers practice:

Legal Specialties within the Law Include:

Administrative Law	Family Law
Antitrust Law	Health Care Law
Appellate Law	Immigration Law
Arbitration & Mediation	Insurance Law
Banking & Commercial Finance Law	Intellectual Property Law
Business Law	International Law
Child Advocacy	Labor & Employment Law
Civil Litigation	Medical Malpractice
Civil Rights Law	Military Law
Corporate Practice Law	Privacy Law
Constitutional Law	Personal Injury Law
Criminal Law	Property Law
Cyberspace Law	Real Estate Law
Disability Law	Regulatory Law
Elder Law	Securities Law
Entertainment, Arts & Sports Law	Tax Law
Environmental Law	Telecommunications Law
E-commerce Law	Trusts and Estates Law

Attorneys practice these and many more legal specialties within a variety of different settings. Listed below is a sampling of work settings in which lawyers practice:

Work Settings within the Law include:

Law Firms (varying sizes)
Businesses & Corporations
Academic Institutions
Associations (professional & trade)
Non-profit Organizations
Public Interest Organizations
Courts
Bar Associations
Government (municipal, county, state, and federal within various government branches)
Lobbying Firms

While working as a “practicing” attorney tends to be a common career path for law school graduates, there are also a variety of non-traditional ways to use a law degree. Some attorneys decide not to practice law in the traditional sense either from the onset of their career or at some point thereafter. “Nontraditional” legal jobs can be found in nearly any industry. Some areas where attorneys have found satisfying careers outside of traditional legal practice include:

Work Settings/Careers:

Academia	Insurance & Risk Management
Alternative Dispute Resolution	International Affairs
Bar Associations	Law Firm Recruiting
Banks	Legal & Non-Legal Search Firms
Business (including Executive Positions in many fields)	Legal/Professional Consulting
Courts	Legislative/Government Affairs
Criminal Justice and Law Enforcement	Litigation Management/Support
Entrepreneurship	Media, Arts and Entertainment
Foundations and Nonprofit Organizations	Politics
Healthcare	Trade and Investment
Human Resources	Writing and Editing

While an attorney’s career options are broad, the decision whether to attend law school should be given serious consideration in today’s economic climate. If you are contemplating going to law school you should first engage in a honest self-assessment to arrive at a clear understanding of what you hope to gain from the experience. With that being said, the law school experience is extremely rewarding and will equip you with the type of critical skills that will enable you to succeed not only in the legal profession but in every aspect of your life.

III. Preparing for Law School

In recruiting future lawyers, law schools look for talented, well-rounded, and interesting applicants who will enhance their communities. There is no single curriculum that is the ideal preparation for law school. Therefore, your undergraduate years are a time to become intellectually engaged in a rich variety of experiences. Rather than choosing courses that might be “good for law school,” you are far better advised to select rigorous courses in any discipline that will challenge you to think, write and expand the underlying critical skills required to succeed in law school.

These skills include analytical and problem solving skills, research and writing skills, oral communication and listening skills and effective time management skills. There is no better preparation for law school than taking tough undergraduate courses and doing well in them.

Tips for Preparing for Law School

1. **Select a major in an area that interests you and do well.** Do not focus exclusively on law-related courses. Use your undergraduate years as a time to acquire a well-rounded education. In the University of Miami School of Law’s 2016 entering class, there were 52 undergraduate majors represented. In particular, law school admissions officers look for students who have engaged in serious academic pursuits as undergrads. Accordingly, you should avail yourself of opportunities to challenge yourself (e.g., earning special honors, getting published, writing a thesis, engaging in writing competitions, etc.)
2. **Learn a foreign language or study abroad.** The practice of law is becoming increasingly global and complex. There is an ever-increasing demand for professionals able to operate within an international context. Studying a critical foreign language and gaining an international perspective is valuable and encouraged.
3. **Participate in extracurricular activities.** Whether or not you pursue the study of law, participating in extracurricular activities can help develop leadership, organizational, and communication skills while also making you a well-rounded individual. Do not participate in activities simply for the sake of a resume or application but rather to broaden your skill-set and depth of knowledge.

IV. Applying to Law School

Step 1: Where to Apply

In selecting a law school, you should examine your individual priorities and the following factors:

1. American Bar Association (ABA) Accreditation

- Choose an [ABA accredited law school](#). Many States require a J.D. from an ABA accredited law school to sit for their bar examination.

2. The Numbers: Undergraduate GPA and LSAT Score

- Your GPA and LSAT score are heavily evaluated in the admissions process. It is advisable to apply to a range of schools.

3. Cost of Attendance

- Attending law school is a serious financial commitment. In the most recent national survey (2013), the average yearly cost of tuition and fees at private and public (with in-state residency) law schools was \$41,985 and \$23,879, respectively. See the “Financing Your Legal Education” section of this handbook for specific financial aid information.

4. Geographic Location

- In considering where to attend law school, you should think about:
 - Where you plan to live/practice upon graduation.
 - Whether or not the law school has a national presence.
 - The legal market and community of the city in which the law school is located.

Step 2: When to Apply

Timetable for Pre-Law Students

Freshman Year (or whenever you decide to explore a career in the law):

- Register with Pre-Law Advising Offices.
- Begin building a record of academic achievement.
- Attend the annual fall and spring pre-law information sessions.

Sophomore Year:

- Volunteer or work in a legally related position.
- Take part in relevant extracurricular activities.
- Research law schools.

Junior Year:

- Decide when you will take the LSAT and begin preparing.
- Make an appointment with a Pre-Law Advisor.
- Attend pre-law events at the School of Law and the LSAC Miami Law Forum.
- Begin visiting and touring law schools; attend a class.
- Put recommenders on notice.

Summer before Senior Year:

- Sit for the June LSAT; obtain advice from your pre-law advisor or call schools directly to determine if you should re- test.
- Register for the CAS service at LSAC.org. Begin reviewing application procedures.

Senior Year:

- Complete and submit applications: confirm recommenders, draft personal statement, and request an official copy of your transcript.
- Take October or December LSAT (if not taken in June).
- Complete applications between October and early December. **Apply as early as possible for optimal consideration.**
- Fill out financial aid applications as soon as possible after October 1st, 2016.
- Follow up with law schools to ensure that your admission and financial aid file is complete and accurate.
- Visit law schools to which you are accepted that are your top choices.
- Send CAS a final transcript after you have graduated.

Step 3: How to Apply

LSAC, CAS and the LSAT

[The Law School Admission Council \(LSAC\)](#) facilitates the law school admissions process and is made up of American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law schools. Everything you need to know about law school admissions and access to online applications is available on the LSAC website.

[The LSAC's Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#) evaluates, organizes, analyzes and summarizes your academic information and reports this information along with your school specific application, undergraduate transcripts, LSAT score(s), and letters of recommendation to the law schools you are applying to. The Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) is a standardized test designed to evaluate the academic ability of applicants. LSAC member schools require the LSAT and use it as part of their evaluation process.

The LSAT is administered four times a year: June, late September/early October, December and February. It is advisable to take the test the summer before your senior year and/or the beginning of your senior year. This will enable you to submit your applications well in advance of deadlines, which will receive a more favorable reading at most law schools and may affect scholarship funds available to you.

Thorough preparation for the LSAT is essential. Although your highest score is important, all schools see all scores. Consult the individual school's website for their LSAT policy.

For detailed LSAT information including fees (and the fee waiver program), locations, and exam preparation information consult www.lsac.org. [Click here](#) for information about taking the LSAT under accommodated conditions. Should you need verification or contact with the University of Miami's [Office of Accommodation Services](#), they are located at Whitten UC-N201. OAS staff can be reached at 305-284-2800.

Application Checklist

The following checklist, prepared by LSAC, broadly illustrates the sequence of events in the law school application process. Applicants are responsible for monitoring their own files.

- [Create your secure LSAC.org account](#).
- Find the [prelaw advisor](#) at your undergraduate school and arrange a visit.
- Prepare for the LSAT. ([Download a free sample test](#) or [purchase official LSAT prep books](#).)
- Use LSAC's [searchable database](#) to research law schools, their admission requirements, and application deadlines.
- Sign up for a [Law School Forum](#), where you can meet face-to-face with more than 150 law school recruiters.
- Register for the [LSAT](#), print your ticket for test day, take the test, and receive your score by email. Taking the test early is advisable.
- Sign up for LSAC's [Credential Assembly Service \(CAS\)](#) to easily meet law school requirements for transcripts, recommendations, evaluations, and applications. You need not register for CAS at the same time you register for the LSAT, but you should register long before your first law school application deadline.
- Ask registrars to send your official transcripts to LSAC. Request forms are available from your LSAC.org account. Allow at least two weeks from the

time of receipt to process your US or Canadian transcripts, more if your transcripts are from outside the United States, its territories, or Canada.

- Contact your recommenders to request your letters. Allow two weeks from the time of receipt to process your letters of recommendation.
- Register with the [Candidate Referral Service \(CRS\)](#) so law schools can recruit YOU.
- View your Academic Summary Report in your LSAC.org account once all US/Canadian undergraduate transcripts have been summarized.
- Use your LSAC.org account to apply online to as many US law schools as you choose. You must pay for a law school report at the time you apply to each school.
- Keep track of the status of everything related to your law school admission through your LSAC.org account.

The Personal Statement

Most law schools require you to submit a personal statement with your application. The personal statement is important to admissions committees as it provides a sample of your writing skills and your ability to present ideas in a clear, coherent manner.

- Your essay should be concise and well-written.
- Know your audience: law schools are looking for evidence of your academic and professional ability and commitment to a legal education.
- Make it personal. Give the admissions committee a sense of your particular talents and individuality.
- Solicit feedback before submitting. Your statement should be well-edited with no errors.

Letters of Recommendation

LSAC's Letters of Recommendation (LOR) are submitted through the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). A letter discusses the qualities and characteristics of the applicant's ability, academic and otherwise, to study law. LOR may be submitted to CAS electronically or in hard copy.

Access to LSAC's LOR service is included in CAS registration. This service allows you to manage your letters of recommendation through your LSAC.org account. You get to assign which letters you want each law school to receive. LSAC will make copies of each assigned reference's original letter to include in your law school reports.

Law schools typically require between two and four Letters of Recommendation. Two from Professors are suggested. The others can be from employers, advisors, coaches, volunteer directors, or others who can speak to your candidacy.

Go to [LSAC.org](https://lsac.org) for detailed procedural information.

- Choose recommenders who can comment on your depth and breadth of knowledge, your ability to analyze, writing acumen, problem-solving ability, critical thinking and scholastic aptitude.
- An email will be sent to each of your recommenders requesting him or her to complete and upload a letter for you; or you may print the required recommender forms to give to your recommender if he or she would prefer to submit a paper LOR. Offer recommenders addressed stamped envelopes. If your recommender is submitting your letter of recommendation on paper, you must print the required LOR Form from your LSAC.org account and deliver it to your recommender. This form must accompany your letter of recommendation. Paper letters received without an accompanying LOR Form or without the recommender's signature will be returned to the recommender.
- Letters from non-faculty recommenders can discuss your non-academic ability such as communication style and interpersonal skills.

V. Financing Your Legal Education

Federal and institutional aid may be available and come in two main categories:

- 1) Federal Funding: Direct Unsubsidized and Graduate PLUS Loans** based on your Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA).
- 2) Institutional Aid:** Scholarships which may be merit and/or need based.

Deadline Dates

Deadline dates for federal aid and scholarships will vary by institution, so be sure to review each school's website to adhere to their deadlines. The [Free Application for Federal Student Aid \(FAFSA\)](#) is available after October 1, 2016. The FAFSA can be completed at <https://fafsa.ed.gov/> using estimated income information but you should update your application once your current year tax information is available.

Students working towards the completion of their graduate or professional degree are typically considered independent for purposes of federal financial aid. However, parental information may be required for some institutional scholarship opportunities. Please contact each school to determine how to successfully complete the scholarship process.

General Sources of Aid Available to Students

- 1. Federal Direct Unsubsidized Stafford Loan:** Students may borrow up to \$20,500 in Federal Unsubsidized Stafford Loans per academic year. Interest may either be paid by the student while in school or compounded. The loan has a 5.31% fixed interest rate. The interest is determined each year and begins with disbursements made on or after July 1. Interest begins to accumulate at the time the first disbursement is made. Repayment begins six months after graduation, if a student drops to less than half-time enrollment, or withdrawal from the program.
- 2. Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loan:** Students may borrow up to the cost of attendance minus any financial aid in Federal Direct Graduate PLUS Loans. The borrower must be creditworthy; any adverse credit could result in the loan being denied. The loan has a 4.276% fixed interest rate. The interest is determined each year and begins with disbursements made on or after July 1. Interest begins to accumulate at the time the first disbursement is made.
- 3. Private (Alternative) Education Loans:** There are private loans available from commercial lenders to help students meet living expenses and educational costs beyond tuition. They are based on credit-worthiness, which means a credit check will be done by the lender. Before applying for private loans, students should request a copy of their credit report to be sure that there are no errors and that all valid credit problems can be addressed ahead of time. UM provides a private loan lender list to potential applicants. You can view private loans that have been offered during the previous year at <http://www.elmselect.com/link/query?schoolid=485>.
- 4. Federal Work-study Program:** These funds can be an additional source of financial aid that do not have to be repaid. Funding for this program depends on an allotment of dollars the University receives and may not always be available for law students. Eligibility requirements

are based upon the results of the FAFSA. Most schools do not award work-study in the first year because of the intense curriculum and ABA recommendations. During the second and third years, a student is advised to work a maximum of 20 hours per week.

5. Scholarships: Scholarships to attend law school are available from a number of different sources based upon a variety of criteria. If a student is willing to do the research and leg work, you may find scholarship funds which are untapped because few people know about them.

a. Criteria – May include an applicant’s academic merit, race, gender, ethnicity, religious affiliation, veteran status, geographic location, etc.

b. Sources – May include bar associations, fraternal, religious, and social organizations, state groups and agencies, veteran organizations, social fraternities and sororities, and children and/or employees of certain companies, unions, or credit unions.

The terms and amounts of an applicant’s scholarship awards may vary at different schools. For more information regarding scholarship resources visit the [University of Miami Financial Aid Office](#) website.

Financial Aid Tips

- DO NOT WAIT FOR YOUR ADMISSION DECISION TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID. Each law school may have different financial aid deadlines so be aware of the deadline(s) and get your application completed as soon as possible. Financial aid resources can be limited and there is no guarantee of assistance for students who do not submit appropriate documentation by the deadline posted.
- Apply for a FSA ID from the Department of Education early:
<https://fsaid.ed.gov/npas/index.htm>
- Keep a checklist and copies of all forms submitted. Put your name and UM ID# on all forms submitted.
- Use your best estimates of 2016 income information when completing the FAFSA and PROFILE if your federal returns have not been completed by the application deadline. Submit your complete 2016 federal tax transcripts to our office by April 15, 2017. Financial preparation! Be aware of what the total cost of attendance will be: tuition, fees, books, supplies, room/board, moving costs, transportation, etc.
- Make a budget and adhere to it so that you are making smart financial decisions, whether it is budgeting or saving for your advanced degree. Since law schools encourage or require that you do not work during your first year of law school (full-time students), you should have adequate funds available prior to entry into your first year.

Law school is not for spectators. Applicants who show they are proactive in seeking and grabbing opportunities to develop intellectually, professionally and personally are ones we love to see. Prospective students should apply early to optimally position themselves for admission and scholarship consideration. My advice is to have your file completed by Thanksgiving to avoid the holiday rush and delays. – Therese Lambert, Director of Student Recruitment, University of Miami School of Law

VI. Resources

[Law School: 29 Critical Questions to Ask Today](#)

[Miami Law's Pre Law Headquarters](#)

[Miami Law Career Development Office](#)

[The American Bar Association](#)

[The National Association for Law Placement](#)

[The University of Miami School of Law Office of Admissions and Student Recruitment](#)

- Office: Room F-203, (Ph) 305-284-6746
- Website: <http://www.law.miami.edu/>
- Facebook: [Miami Law Admissions](#)
- Twitter: [@MiamilawAdm](#)
- Instagram: [@MiamiLawSchool](#)

2016 – 2017 Pre-Law Events

- [LSAC Miami Law Forum](#) - Saturday, October 1, 2016
- [University of Miami School of Law Events](#) – Watch for Open Houses, Mock Admissions and Law Student Panels. Arrange to sit-in on a law class and for a tour with a current law student.

Pre-Law Related Clubs at the University of Miami

- [Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Legal Fraternity](#)
- [Ethics Society & Ethics Debate Team](#)
- [Debate Club & Debate Team](#)
- [Model UN Club](#)