

Leverett House Prelaw Student Handbook

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Part I. Leverett House's Role

1) Services Provided by the Leverett House Prelaw Committee

Leverett House's Prelaw Committee provides four main services to students and alumni:

a) Advising for Law School Applications

If you decide to apply to law school, Leverett House will assign you a tutor during the summer or early fall of the year in which you are applying. This tutor will serve as your primary advisor through the law school application process. In order to be assigned a prelaw advisor, email resident tutors Cristina Carapezza and Taylor Lane, who can be reached at leverettprelaw@gmail.com. Except for a few special cases, **all Leverett students and alumni/ae applying to law school must go through the House.**

Your prelaw advisor will be available to walk you through the application process. Perhaps the most important role of your prelaw advisor is to help you explore why you want to attend law school and help you determine which law schools may be the best fit for you.

Although you will be assigned a specific advisor when you are ready to apply to law school, you don't have to wait until senior year to access the Prelaw Committee. Attend our advising sessions and prelaw meetings (including the **Fall and Spring Introductory Prelaw Meetings, Prelaw Get-Togethers, and the Leverett House Academic Advising Meetings** in the dining hall each semester). Review the biographies of our prelaw tutor staff. Remember that in addition to our resident tutor staff, we have a wonderful nonresident staff with diverse interests and experiences. Find all of the tutors' email addresses on our website under "Prelaw Committee and Contact Information." Set up a meeting – perhaps over a meal in the dining hall – with a prelaw tutor who has interests similar to your own. Just remember that tutors often have very busy schedules, so please do not assume they will be able to meet with you immediately after you contact them.

b) Clearinghouse for Law School Application Materials

Law school applications are typically submitted to law schools through an application assembly service offered by the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) called the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS). While you are responsible for subscribing to this service when you apply to law school (or for submitting your application through another available option, if the schools to which you apply offer one), Leverett House can assist you in preparing some of the components of your application. Specifically, you can make arrangements to collect your recommendation letters and complete any required Dean's Certification Forms through Leverett House.

There are two options for submitting recommendation letters:

1. The first and fastest option is to have your professors submit letters directly to

LSDAS or the law schools themselves. In that case, you should supply them with the appropriate waiver forms from LSAC. You should also store a copy of the letter in the Leverett House Office. To do so, please ask your professors to send a **copy** of their letter to the House Office along with a copy of the LSAC waiver form. If you should need a House Letter later in the admissions process, we can use the recommendation letters on file as references.

2. The second option is to have the House Office submit your letters on your behalf. If you choose this option, **PLEASE LET US KNOW**. We will then collect the letters, in addition to the appropriate waiver forms, and mail them to LSDAS (or in some cases, the individual law schools) in stamped envelopes that you provide our office. We will send your materials to law schools **one month** after your House file is complete, so plan ahead. For instance, if you want law schools to receive your application by November 21st, your Leverett Prelaw file must be **complete** by October 21st. Because it is to your advantage to apply to law schools early in the admissions cycle, submit your materials well in advance of deadlines.

The Assistant to the Resident Dean (leverettassistant@fas.harvard.edu), manages the materials in your House file, including letters of recommendation, LSAC recommendation forms, Dean's Certification forms, and other relevant materials. **If you have questions about which of your materials are currently in your file (e.g., if a particular letter of recommendation has arrived, or if your transcript is in your file), check with the Assistant to the Resident Dean in the House Office.** Your prelaw advisor does not have direct access to your House file.

c) Advising for Legal Careers

In addition to guiding you through the requirements for your law school application, the Prelaw Committee also provides information to help you decide if you want to become a lawyer. This Handbook is the most comprehensive resource we offer. In addition, this year we expect to provide the following: panels and get-togethers in the House on law school and other relevant legal issues, email information about relevant law-related events at the College and Law School, and opportunities to attend law school classes with a prelaw advisor. See the website tab "Link to Other Resources" for additional resources including websites, books, and films.

2) Members of the Prelaw Advising Committee

For the names and profiles of this year's Leverett House Prelaw Advising Committee, see our website, "Prelaw Committee and Contact Information." Our Prelaw Committee is headed by Committee Chairs who live in the House. Each year, additional prelaw tutors may also live in the House. We have a wonderful staff of nonresident prelaw tutors (NRTs) who are also available to provide you guidance. Prelaw NRTs, who are often current Harvard Law School students or recent graduates, do not live in the House but have meal and other privileges. The Assistant to the Resident Dean provides a critical role in the law school application and will manage your Leverett House file. Bilal Malik, the Allston Burr Resident Dean, oversees the advising system. Only Bilal Malik, not the

resident and nonresident tutor staff, has access to information about any academic or disciplinary actions that may have been filed against you (e.g., if you have ever been on academic or disciplinary probation).

The Prelaw Committee can be reached at leverettprelaw@gmail.com.

Part II. The Decision-Making Process

1) Deciding Whether You Should Apply to Law School

How do I know if I should apply to law school?

There are a variety of ways to help determine if law school and practicing law makes sense for you, including:

- Talking to your prelaw tutors. Your prelaw tutors are a great resource for advice and information. Remember that the nonresident tutor staff is available to meet with you and answer your questions.
- Talking to current law students and practicing attorneys. You may have friends who graduated from Leverett House and are now in law school or practicing law. Talk to them about their experiences.
- Working in law-related internships or jobs. Many students believe they should work in a legal internship or job to get into law school. This is a myth. Law schools are interested in students from a variety of backgrounds and experiences. Many law school applicants have participated in legal internships, so having done so will not necessarily distinguish you. However, working in a law job may help you decide if the legal environment is the right fit for you.

Even if you do not get “substantive” work in your legal internship, it can still be a valuable experience. Use your internship to observe how attorneys spend their time. Observe how they interact with one another and with clients. Observe their moods and stress level. Think about whether you could see yourself in their job. Further details about finding a law-related internship are discussed in subsequent sections of this Handbook.

- Shadowing attorneys. You may not need to do a summer- or year-long internship to get a good sense of what an attorney in a particular type of practice does. Shadowing an attorney for a day or a week can be valuable. Find opportunities through Harvard’s Office of Career Services (OCS) and Center for Public Interest Careers (CPIC). Remember that there are a variety of types of lawyers and legal jobs; therefore, merely because you do not like one type of practice setting does not necessarily mean you will not like another type of legal job.
- Visiting law school classes. Ask your prelaw tutor if you can attend class with him or her. It’s important to keep in mind that the law school classroom environment is very different from the practice of law. Merely because you like or dislike a law class does not necessarily mean you will like or dislike the practice of law.
- Reviewing a case book. One way to figure out if you will enjoy law school is to review a case book. A significant amount of work in law school involves reading legal cases (i.e., legal decisions written by judges about specific controversies between parties). While

you likely will not be able to understand the substance of the case, you will be able to get a feel for the type of reading required in law school.

- Reading books and watching films about law school and the legal profession. Reading books and watching films about law school and the legal profession can be a good way to expose yourself to information which might otherwise not be available to you. Of course, be careful to distinguish between fact and fiction. Moreover, note when the book was written or when the movie was produced. While a book or film may be an accurate depiction of a particular law school in the 1970s, to our relief, the atmosphere of most law schools has dramatically changed since then. See the prelaw website section “Links to Other Resources.”
- Taking time off. One of the best ways to determine if you really want to go to law school is by taking time off. Taking time off can provide a much needed break for you. Then, when you actually enroll in law school, you will feel refreshed and eager to get back into the academic environment. Moreover, taking time off can help you determine if you are genuinely interested in attending law school and becoming an attorney.

Some students – who are wavering between law and business – take time off to work in a consulting or investment banking job. Some students, with personal and/or family financial obligations, choose to take time off and work before enrolling in law school so they will have a financial cushion. Other students have the flexibility to use time off to go on a travel fellowship or assume a low-paying job in the community.

I think I'll enjoy law school, but I don't think I want to be an attorney. Should I still go?
You may have heard that going to law school “keeps your options open.” Arguably, this is a myth. Most students who attend law school become attorneys, and many attorneys are dissatisfied with their jobs.

The most important question is not “will I enjoy law school?” Instead, it’s “do I want to be a lawyer?” Remember, law school is only three years; you will have the rest of your life to practice law. In a small number of cases, attending law school, knowing you do not want to practice law may make sense. But, most students who enter law school without the intention of practicing law wish they had spent those three years and thousands of dollars differently.

2) Planning Ahead – Using Your College Years to Prepare for Law School

Many students want information about how to plan their four years in college to prepare for law school. Unlike other graduate degrees where you have to meet specific requirements (such as for medical school), law school makes few, if any, requirements on applicants. So, the main thing we suggest is to enjoy your four years at Harvard! However, below we offer a few tips to help guide you.

What can I do to prepare for law school?

While there are few things you specifically need to do to get ready for law school, you can think about and/or do the following:

- 1) Focus on your academic work. It does not matter specifically what you focus on academically in college (there is no specific prelaw “concentration”), but it is important to do as well as you can in your coursework.
- 2) Collect letters of recommendation. Collect letters of recommendation from professors, TAs, summer employers, and extracurricular supervisors and keep them in your Leverett House file. If you already have a few letters in your file when you start the process of applying to law school, it will help make the application process go more smoothly. Moreover, a letter-writer is more likely to provide a specific, detailed recommendation letter if he writes it with you and your work “fresh” in his mind. So, it’s helpful to request the letter soon after you complete your work or class with him.
- 3) Decide when to take the LSAT. Figure out when it makes sense to take the LSAT and then register for the test. (More details about the LSAT are described in Part III of this Handbook.)
- 4) Consider getting a law-related summer internship or post-graduate job. We are *not* suggesting that a law-related summer internship or job will dramatically help your law school application. Instead, we advise students to consider law work to help them determine if they are genuinely interested in becoming attorneys.
- 5) Meet the Prelaw Tutors and attend Leverett and University-wide law events. Prelaw tutors are available to talk with you about law school. In particular, students rarely use one of the House’s most valuable resources – our nonresident prelaw tutors. As described elsewhere in this manual, feel free to contact nonresident tutors to get advice about law school and legal jobs. Additionally, Leverett holds prelaw advising events (including an introductory meeting each fall and spring) for students considering law school.
- 6) Decide when you want to apply. Think about whether you want to apply to law school – your senior year of college or after you graduate.

What should be my “concentration” if I want to go to law school?

You should not choose your college concentration because you think it will help you get into law school. There is no specific concentration which law schools prefer. In fact, law schools value having a diverse class, with students with a variety of academic interests. Many students who apply to law school concentrate in government, political science, or economics; but, again, you should not pursue these concentrations merely to help your law school application. Instead, we find students are most successful when they pursue concentrations and subjects that pique their curiosity and interests.

3) The Law School Experience

Law school is three years. While many students find the experience to be academically stimulating, challenging, and rewarding, others find it to be an emotionally, intellectually, and financially draining experience.

a) Cost of a Legal Education

Attending law school can be costly. A three year budget at many top law schools is \$245,700. A 2012 study by the American Bar Association showed that students typically leave private law schools over \$125,000 in debt, and public law schools over \$75,000 in debt.

b) First Year Experience

Although some law schools have begun experimenting with the first year curriculum, traditionally there are several required courses: civil procedure, torts, criminal law and procedure, property, contracts, and sometimes constitutional law. In addition, you will likely take a legal research and writing class. You will often be enrolled in three big classes each semester which meet for five hours per week. Some law students describe the experience as being reminiscent of high school: you have required courses, you attend class with the same group of students, and you may even have a locker.

c) The Socratic Method

During your first year, and in subsequent years as well, at least some of your professors will likely use the Socratic Method of teaching. Law professors will call on particular students at random and ask them questions about a legal case or line of cases. This dialogue may last for only a couple of minutes; or, the professor may choose to engage one student for an entire class period, continuing to press the student about the topics for the day. Therefore, unlike some of your lecture-style classes at the College, law students are compelled to always come prepared for class.

d) Extracurriculars in Law School

Unlike college where students often experiment with a variety of extracurricular activities, in law school most students are primarily involved in only a small number of activities. Some students work on law journals (i.e., journals that publish articles written on legal topics): law students check citations of submitted articles, select articles for publication, and sometimes even write their own articles for publication. Other students choose to spend time doing clinical work (i.e., representing low-income clients under the direction of more experienced attorneys). Some students are involved in law school students groups such as student government, student ethnic/cultural/religious associations, or student groups focused on specific issue areas (e.g., Women's Law Association, The Federalist Society, and Prison Legal Assistance Project).

4) The Legal Profession

The determining factor for most students considering whether or not to attend law school should be whether or not they want to practice law. Below is an outline of the main types of jobs law school graduates assume. Please note that these descriptions are not intended as an exhaustive

discussion of the legal profession but instead as a mere overview. The universe of possible legal jobs is typically divided into private sector jobs and public sector jobs.

a) Private Sector Jobs

Private Law Firms

Many law students work at private sector firms upon law school graduation. Firms can be categorized as follows:

Size: Big firms have between 200 and 500 attorneys; medium-sized firms have between 75 and 200 lawyers; small firms have fewer than 75 attorneys. Many large firms have multiple offices – with both domestic and international branches. A significant number of students from top tier schools work at large firms immediately or shortly after graduating.

Clients: Most of the large firms are considered “corporate firms;” their clients are primarily corporations. Some private firms (which are typically small firms) primarily represent individuals; for instance, plaintiffs firms may bring a lawsuit against a corporation on behalf of an individual.

Specialization: Within firms, especially large law firms, there are sub-specialties. Law firm work can be grouped into two main categories: transactional and litigation. Transactional attorneys are “business lawyers.” They help corporations with out-of-court transactions (such as helping two corporations merge, helping a corporation purchase real estate, helping draft a contract for a corporation). These attorneys rarely, if ever, enter the courtroom. Litigation attorneys represent clients when disputes arise that lead to court involvement. Large law firms typically have some combination of the following practice groups: antitrust, bankruptcy and business restructuring, corporate, environmental, intellectual property, international, labor and employment, litigation, real estate, tax, trusts and estates.

A common myth is that all lawyers spend a significant amount of time in the courtroom. In reality, many attorneys (such as transactional attorneys) are never in court. Most of their time is spent in an office, reviewing documents, talking on the phone, reading legal materials, and preparing legal or other documents. Even litigation attorneys at large firms only spend a relatively small proportion of their time in court.

Firms often have openings for students to work as “**paralegals.**” Because private firms are well-staffed (unlike many public sector organizations as described below), students sometimes feel they do not have exposure to substantive work as paralegals; instead, they spend their work days photocopying and reviewing documents. On the upside, firms pay paralegals decent salaries. Moreover, as paralegals, students get a window into law firm practice and often have the opportunity to interact with attorneys on a daily basis.

In-House Counsel

Many lawyers will spend several years at a law firm in order to gain experience in drafting legal documents, advising clients, and developing a specialty within a particular practice of law. Once they have gained this practical experience, a number of lawyers

will leave their law firm in order to join the legal department of a private or public company. This is what is frequently described as going “in-house” at a company. Lawyers that work within a company tend to work for the general counsel of the company and are responsible for a broad range of legal matters, including employment, financial reporting, intellectual property, and any lawsuits brought against the company. In contrast with working at a firm, lawyers tend to be less specialized in-house since there are significantly fewer lawyers at a typical company than at a law firm and these lawyers are responsible for managing a wide range of legal issues that the company faces. Lawyers who go in-house often are willing to trade in the opportunity to specialize for the opportunity to have a single client, the company, and to have more reasonable work hours.

b) Public Sector Jobs

When many students envision the job of a lawyer, they envision a person standing up in court for an individual in need. Only a small segment of the legal profession actually engages in this type of representation. Many of the jobs that are portrayed in books and films are public sector jobs, and actually a very particular type of public sector job. Four main types of public interest jobs include: nonprofit organizations, legal services offices, government, and private public interest firms. Depending on the nature of the job, public interest lawyers use a variety of methods (or combination of methods) to effect change including: individual client representation, impact litigation, policy reform, regulatory enforcement, lobbying, and community organizing and education.

Nonprofit Legal Organizations. Nonprofit legal organizations usually specialize in advocating for a particular client population or advocating around a particular issue. Some nonprofits are “client-oriented,” meaning the organization focuses on representing individual clients (e.g., the Disability Law Center, Centro Presente, and the DC Employment Justice Center). “Client-oriented” nonprofits vary greatly. However, as a summer or year-long intern you can reasonably expect exposure to clients, working directly with individual clients or on individual cases. If having client contact is important to you, clarify with your employer whether or not you will actually have that opportunity.

Other nonprofit organizations are “policy-oriented,” meaning the organization uses broad strategies to effect change such as impact litigation and class actions (e.g., The American Civil Liberties Union, The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law, the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, the National Consumer Law Center, the National Voting Rights Institute). As an intern with such an organization, you are less likely to have client contact but you will gain exposure to broader lawyering strategies to effect change. If the nonprofit has cases pending in court, you may get to observe legal hearings.

Legal Services Offices. Legal services organizations (also known as legal aid societies) provide free or reduced-fee civil legal representation to low-income clients. Legal services offices typically have the following units/divisions: family, domestic violence,

housing, health, government benefits, consumer, and employment. Most major cities have legal services offices (e.g., Greater Boston Legal Services Center, Atlanta Legal Aid Society) and many states have branches or separate offices that serve rural areas (e.g., Georgia Legal Services). Attorneys at legal services offices have high caseloads and daily contact with clients; therefore, as a summer or year-long intern, you would likely gain hands-on experience.

Government Attorneys. There are numerous types of attorneys and legal offices which are government funded including: public defender offices and prosecutor offices as well as other federal, state, and local government agencies.

Public defender offices represent indigent individuals in criminal cases. In general, public defender offices have high caseloads, limited staff, and few other resources. Therefore, if you are interested in exposure to trial practice (i.e., preparing for court hearings and watching trials), interning at a public defender office will provide you that opportunity. Some public defender offices have a well-structured intern program and give college students a great amount of responsibility (e.g., college students can work as investigators at the Public Defender Service for the District of Columbia).

Prosecutors work in a variety of offices including: district attorney offices (usually organized by county whereby attorneys prosecute individuals charged with crimes); state attorney general offices (which investigate and prosecute cases of statewide significance from criminal to environmental cases); the U.S. Department of Justice (charged with prosecuting federal crimes); U.S. Attorney Offices (charged with prosecuting federal crimes).

Attorneys also work at a variety of federal (e.g., Securities & Exchange Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services), state (e.g., Massachusetts Department of Education, Massachusetts Executive Office of Health & Human Services); and local (e.g., Cambridge Police Review & Advisory Board, Somerville Housing Authority) departments and agencies.

Private Public Interest Firms. Private public interest firms are not technically in the “public sector,” but are often categorized with other public interest jobs. Private public interest firms are organizations that tackle the same issues that nonprofits, legal services offices, and public defender offices typically address, but they operate in a firm environment. Although they are for-profit organizations, they dedicate a significant portion of their caseloads to work that has some broad social, economic, or political impact. Private public interest firms may work in the following areas: civil rights, disability law, education, anti-trust, labor law, environmental law, product liability, and insurance liability.

c) Academic Jobs

A career in legal academia is highly competitive due to the limited number of professorships that are open to law school graduates. For those interested in pursuing a

career in legal academia, we highly encourage you to speak with your resident or non-resident prelaw advisor. Your advisor will be best positioned to either bring you to law school classes or to have the opportunity to attend events at the law school in order to gain exposure to legal academia. In order to prepare for a career in legal academia, it is important to focus on your academics during undergraduate. Law schools primarily seek out candidates who have attended top-tier law schools. In addition, many candidates also pursue a separate graduate degree in government or political science in order to complement their law school education. After law school, it is common for law school graduates to work for a judge, which is known as clerking, and then to work within the Department of Justice of the US government. After gaining this experience, then graduates will typically be ready to go on the academic job market.

d) International Practice

International law is becoming an increasingly important field and is a unique area to consider for a future career in law. Although the field of international law is widely associated with human rights law, it encompasses a vast area of law and covers everything from international financial transactions to maritime law to foreign affairs law to criminal law.

Generally speaking, anything involving more than one country falls under the heading of international law – for example, a lawyer involved in the corporate merger of a few companies from two or more countries is engaged in the practice of international law. When law firms speak of their international law practices, these are often the types of transactions they have in mind.

International law, however, also covers a very different type of law based on treaties and conventions. Much of human rights and environmental law depends on the will of nation states who sign treaties pledging their allegiance to certain principles. Non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations, NATO, and the International Criminal Court all function within this realm of international law to work with countries in the crafting and enforcement of such treaties and conventions. International law can also make an appearance in less obvious ways - for example, a person from one country convicted of a crime in another country will be prosecuted according to the respective nations' extradition treaties, or a case brought in court involving a citizen of another nation will need to consider jurisdictional issues.

Just as the subtleties of international law are many, the practice of international law can be achieved in many ways. Many lawyers choose to work for non-governmental organizations either here or abroad, such as the UN or Human Rights Watch. Others choose to focus on international aspects of their respective areas of practice, such as in criminal law. There are also opportunities in academia, as well as in law firms that are increasingly expanding into foreign countries. While it is always a bonus to speak another language such as French, Spanish, or Chinese, most people find that it is not essential to their pursuit of a career in international law.

e) Business and Other Jobs

Consulting firms and investment banks hire a small number of law students each year. Increasingly, attorneys are accepting positions in other non-legal settings including academic administration, nonprofit management, and philanthropic foundations.

5) Finding and Funding a Legal Internship or Post-Graduate Job

There are numerous ways to find and fund a legal internship or post-graduate job. Described below are a few suggestions and tips. Please note that the information below is *not* intended as an exhaustive discussion of how to find a legal job, but rather a few notes to help you start your job search:

a) On-Campus Recruiting

The On-Campus Recruiting program run by the Office of Career Services creates a streamlined and centralized process for finding certain types of private sector jobs. Employers come to Harvard and there is a well-structured system in place to help you get matched with a potential summer or post-graduate employer. Take advantage of OCS and their resource guides; OCS has significant institutional knowledge, having helped hundreds of Harvard students find jobs.

b) Independent Job Searches

One of the more difficult, yet possibly best ways to find a rewarding job is through your own job search. You often have to use this method to find public interest and government jobs or jobs at small and medium sized law firms.

- Finding a Job at a Private Firm. Many law firms hire students – during the summers and after graduation – to serve as “**paralegals**.” All major law firms have websites, and many of their sites will describe how to apply for positions. See <http://www.nalpdirectory.com/search.asp> to search legal employers.

Many people in law school end up there after working for a year or two as paralegals in law firms. There is no evidence, however, that working as a paralegal bolsters your law school application in any significant way. The benefit of working as a paralegal is that you see life inside a firm and you gain a much clearer understanding of what you may be getting into if you decide to go to law school. The paralegal job is probably most beneficial to someone who is fairly sure he/she wants to be a lawyer at a corporate firm, and wants a better idea of what to expect. The down side to working as a paralegal is that you will work long hours, often do not work on substantive legal projects, and may have limited opportunities to observe attorneys or clients. On the other hand, remember that learning a legal practice is effectively an apprentice model. Although you might be doing a lot of copying and faxing, many attorneys will not trust you to handle

more substantive work until you have proved that you can master the entry level tasks.

- Finding a Job in the Public Sector. One great way to find a public interest job is by using the **Center for Public Interest Careers at Harvard (CPIC)**. CPIC “promotes and supports Harvard undergraduates whose career goals are focused on the public interest. By creating internships, fellowships, forums, workshops, and coordinating and mobilizing alumni/ae and campus resources, the Center will become a model for supporting the development of a new generation of graduates working for the public interest.” In particular, CPIC’s Internship and Fellowship program provides great opportunities for Harvard students seeking law-related jobs. CPIC has partnered with well-established employers; they have screened these employers so you can be reasonably assured that you will be placed in a high-caliber work environment.
 - Summer Internship Program. CPIC offers full-time, 10-12 week summer positions with a modest stipend:
<http://cpic.fas.harvard.edu/summer-internships>
 - Full-Year Fellowship Program. The Fellowship Program is for graduating seniors and recent alums and offers full-time, 10-12 month positions with a modest annual salary:
<http://cpic.fas.harvard.edu/post-grad-fellowships>

c) Fellowships, Scholarships, Grants, Stipends and Federal Work Study

If you want to work in the public sector, many legal employers cannot afford to pay you. Public interest organizations often have tight budgets, so even if they think you would be a valuable asset to their organization, they simply do not have the resources to hire you. Therefore, instead of merely looking for an existing law-related summer or post-graduate job at an organization, create your own. Apply for fellowships, scholarships, grants, stipends, or federal work study. Below are a few tips; you should do your own research as well.

- Leverett Fellowships Tutor. Leverett House is blessed to have an amazing Fellowships Tutor, Judy Murciano (murciano@fas.harvard.edu). She has helped literally hundreds of students win fellowships to pursue their passion. After doing your own research, feel free to “pick Judy’s brain” about your ideas.
- Specific Funding Sources. Below are possible funding sources for students interested in legal public interest jobs.
 - Center for Public Interest Careers
 - Institute of Politics Director’s Program
 - OCS Public Service Grants
 - Harvard Clubs Summer Community Service Fellowships
 - Arthur Liman Public Interest Law Summer Fellowship
 - Institute of Politics Summer Stipend

- Federal Work Study. A little known fact is that **you can get work-study wages for working at a public interest organization**, such as a legal nonprofit.

A few additional notes about funding your own legal internship or fellowship:

- Funding your own position or project is a time consuming process and takes significant coordination. Whenever you try to create and fund your own project or position, it becomes a time consuming process, requiring significant coordination and organization on your part. You will likely have to identify a legal employer where you want to work, identify a project at that organization, and develop a relationship with the organization. Moreover, you will likely need to get approval and an endorsement from your potential employer. You may need to get multiple recommendation letters and submit essays. After all of your hard work, you may not be awarded the fellowship, grant, or stipend, as some are highly competitive.
- Respect your potential employer's time. Even though you think you will be providing a great service to a potential employer (i.e., you know you are a hard worker and you are offering to provide free labor), be respectful of your potential employer's time. Do not assume the employer will want you, even if you are providing free labor. Many nonprofit organizations are so under-resourced that they do not have enough space, equipment (like an extra desk, computer, and telephone) or other resources to support you; and, more importantly, they might not have an attorney on staff who can take time to supervise and mentor you.

Part IV. The Law School Application Process

If you plan well and stay organized, applying to law school is a relatively easy process. Unlike other graduate programs, for law school there is typically no lengthy interview process and you do not have to draft multiple essays for different schools. Instead, you submit a written application which includes basic biographical information about yourself and one short essay.

1) Components of the Law School Application

What are the main components of my law school application?

Components of the Law School Application

Almost all law schools require the following:

- Application Form
- Letters of Recommendation
- GPA/Transcript
- LSAT
- Personal Statement

In the following section of this Handbook, please find details about additional materials you will need to provide Leverett House.

a) Application Form

Law school application forms are straightforward, usually requiring you to fill in basic biographic information about yourself and family as well as provide a list of your activities.

How do I get the law school's application forms?

There are two main ways to secure the application forms:

- Request the forms from the law schools directly. Most law schools have websites where you can download the application. Go to the “Links to Other Resources” page of the prelaw website to find links to websites for all the ABA-accredited law schools.
- Use the LSAC's on-line application process. LSAC provides detailed instructions (including video demonstrations) describing how to complete your law school applications on-line through LSAC. See www.lsac.org.

What are the benefits of using the electronic service provided by LSAC?

Although it's an additional cost, consider using the LSAC electronic service. Using the electronic application service can save you time, allowing you to answer common questions only once (e.g., your name, address, undergraduate degree). Moreover, the service allows you to attach your personal statement, resume, and other written information electronically. Most students find the service well worth the cost. Law schools are accustomed to receiving applications generated by the LSAC electronic service, which can be used to apply to all of the ABA-accredited law schools.

b) Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are a critical part of your law school application and are the most common reason for a delayed or missed submission. Remember that letters of recommendation are the only part of your application that is out of your control. Do not put off requesting or managing your letters of recommendation until the last minute. Letters typically do not arrive as early as students expect and there are frequently complications (e.g., a letter-writer is out of town, a letter-writer is on sabbatical). Often letter-writers have other commitments and cannot produce a letter as quickly as students would like. **Moreover, it is proper etiquette to give letter-writers at least ONE MONTH to draft your letter of recommendation.** Therefore, it is critical that you plan ahead, deciding well in advance whom you will ask to write your letter and then asking them. Below, we've outlined some tips to help ensure that this critical component of your application flows as smoothly as possible.

How to Ask Letter-Writers

How should I ask someone to write a letter of recommendation for me?

It's usually best to ask the potential letter-writer in person. If it's a professor, you can schedule an appointment during his regular office hours. Asking the potential letter-writer in person gives you and the individual the chance to discuss why you want to attend law school. Additionally, it provides you an opportunity to refresh the letter-writer's memory about who you are and update him or her about any developments in your life.

Provide the letter-writer an opportunity to state that he cannot write the letter for you; give him an "out" (e.g., say something like "I understand that you have a busy schedule and may not have time to draft a letter on my behalf."). If the potential letter-writer says he cannot write the letter, he is actually doing you a favor. It's better for you if he chooses not to write a letter than if he writes a mediocre or negative one.

Packets to Give Letter-Writers

What should I give my letter-writer when I ask him to write a letter for me?

Remember that it is time-consuming to write a compelling letter of recommendation, and your letter-writers are likely very busy people. Therefore, make the letter writing process as easy as possible for the letter-writer. If you provide him detailed, clear information, the letter-writer has more time to focus on the content of the letter (instead of trying to figure out whom it should be addressed to, where it should be sent, etc.). We suggest that you give the letter-writer a packet of information to help him draft the letter, including:

- Leverett Prelaw Committee Memorandum with Brief Guidelines for Recommenders. In order to avoid confusion and clarify the process for your letter-writer, you may wish to provide him the memorandum the Prelaw Committee prepared entitled "Guidelines for Submitting Law School Letters of Recommendation," which is posted on the prelaw website under the "Forms" tab. Regardless of whether or not you choose to use our form, you should be sure to explain the following to your recommender:

Addressee Information. Provide your letter-writer clear instructions about how to address the letter and where to send it. The letter should be addressed as follows:

"Dear Law School Admissions Committee" or
"To the Members of the Law School Admissions Committee" or
"To Whom It May Concern"

The letter-writer does not need to address a specific law school in the heading of the letter. (*Exception:* Some law school alumni – who have been out of school for many years – apply to only one school. In this case, when the applicant is absolutely certain that he is only applying to one school, he may want to ask the letter-writer to address the letter to that specific school.)

Mailing Information and Stamped Envelope. Your letter-writer should send his completed letter to **LSDAS** (unless you opt to send your letters through the House Office, as outlined above).

If you are sending your letters through the House Office, to avoid any mix-ups, **provide your letter-writer a stamped envelope, addressed as follows:**

Office of the Allston Burr Resident Dean
Leverett House
Attn: Prelaw Committee
Leverett F-5
Harvard University
Cambridge, MA 02138

This can be confusing for some letter-writers. As described above, the heading of the letter should be addressed “Dear Law School Admissions Committee” or something similar, but the letter should be mailed to Leverett House. However, Leverett House’s address should *not* be used in the heading or text of the letter. You can explain to your letter-writer that Leverett House merely holds the letter before sending a copy which will eventually go to law schools. (Leverett House stores copies of all of your letters of recommendation so that you can always access them, even after you apply to law school).

- Your updated resume. Be sure to edit your resume. It should be neat, well-organized, and easy to read.
- Statement about why you are applying to law school. Provide your letter-writer a brief written statement (one or two short paragraphs) about why you are interested in applying to law school.
- Copies of papers, paper comments, and grade received. Remind your letter-writer who you are and how you know the letter-writer. If you took a course or courses from the letter-writer, remind him which course(s) and your grade(s) as well as any comments he made about your written work and class participation. You can attach a copy of the papers you wrote and any comments the recommender may have made.
- A deadline. Clearly indicate when your letter needs to be completed. It is proper etiquette to give your letter-writer **at least one month** to complete your letter. This may seem like a long time to you, but remember your letter-writers are busy individuals with many commitments. They’ll be much happier with you, and more likely to write you a detailed, compelling letter, if you provide them ample time to draft it. Even if you do not actually need the letter right now (you just know you’ll

need it at some point in the future), it's best to set a specific date when you would like the letter completed.

- **Content of the Letter.** Tell your letter-writer that his letter should address attributes about you which will make you a good candidate for law school. Among other attributes, your letter-writer can comment about your: reliability, maturity, leadership skills, community work, writing skills, analytical skills, organizational skills, ability to think on your feet, and ability to work in groups. We advise you to ask your letter-writer to draft a general letter, which you can submit to all law schools. LSAC recently added a feature which enables you to send targeted letters to specific law schools; however, in general, we do not recommend this approach. Based on our experience, only in rare circumstances would such a targeted letter be necessary. If you think you need a targeted letter, please discuss the circumstances with your prelaw advisor.
- **Other materials.** Provide any other material you think would help your letter-writer draft the letter. However, do not overburden the letter-writer with unnecessary paperwork. If possible, summarize any documents or other materials you think are relevant.

Timing Issues for Letters of Recommendation

How long should I give my letter-writer to draft my letter?

You should provide your letter-writer **at least one month** to draft and submit your recommendation letter. Remember that you will likely want to set up an in-person meeting with your letter-writer to ask him to draft the letter. Therefore, factor that into your timing calculations.

How do I know if my letter has arrived in the House?

Check with the Assistant to the Resident Dean (leverettassistant@fas.harvard.edu) in the House Office to see if your letter has arrived. Your prelaw tutor does not have direct access to this information.

Number of Recommendation Letters

How many letters of recommendation do law schools require?

Most law schools require only two letters of recommendation; however, students often submit three letters.

If you are a current student or recent alumnus/a, you will likely want to submit two academic letters (written by professors, TAs, etc.). As detailed below, your third letter can be a non-academic letter.

If you are an alum applying years after graduating from college or other graduate program (approximately five years after graduating), your academic letters may no longer be particularly relevant. Rather than submitting two academic letters, you may choose to submit other types of letters, though some schools may still require at least one academic reference.

Whom to Ask to Write a Recommendation Letter

Whom should I ask to draft the letter?

For your two academic recommendation letters, you can ask professors and teaching fellows (TFs). For your non-academic letter, you can ask: an extracurricular supervisor, former employer, internship supervisor, or coach.

What makes a good letter of recommendation? I've taken a class from a famous professor; should I ask him to write a letter for me?

It is not to your advantage to submit a letter of recommendation from a famous individual who clearly does not know you as a person. Instead, law schools prefer detailed, specific letters which show that the letter-writer knows you well. Therefore, it is better to get a compelling letter from a TF than a letter that speaks about you in mere generalities from a famous professor. Sometimes students ask TFs and professors to co-sign their letter.

LSAC's Letter of Recommendation Form

What should I do with the LSAC Letter of Recommendation Form?

After you register for the LSDAS and create your online account at LSAC.org, you can indicate to LSDAS who will write your letters. After you indicate your letter-writers in this account, the forms will print out pre-populated with your writers' information and with your name. You need only sign the form to waive your right-to-access (optional, but recommended) and give a form to each writer. Despite what law schools indicate, your letter-writers do **NOT** need to fill out individual recommendation forms from each school; providing Leverett House a signed recommendation letter, with an LSAC Recommendation Form, will suffice. Therefore, you do **NOT** even need to give your letter-writer the law school-specific recommendation forms; just keep them in your room and recycle them away after you complete the application process.

LSAC's Letter of Recommendation Service

What does LSAC do with my letters of recommendation?

Visit the LSAC website (www.lsac.org) for details about how your letters of recommendation are processed by LSAC.

Waiving Your Right to Access the Recommendation Letter

Should I waive my right to access the recommendation letter?

Unless you have a particularly strong reason, in general, we recommend waiving your right to access your recommendation letters. If you are considering *not* waiving your right to access your recommendation letters, you should talk to your prelaw advisor about the “pros” and “cons” of this decision.

Selecting Letters of Recommendation

How should I choose which letters of recommendation to submit? Can my prelaw advisor help me pick the letters to send?

Unfortunately, your prelaw advisor cannot tell you which letters to submit. Stringent Harvard University guidelines on confidentiality prohibit prelaw advisors from picking letters for you. However, they can help you think about the “types” of letters which may

be appropriate. You should choose letters written by individuals who know you well and who you are confident will write a positive letter on your behalf.

Using General versus Targeted Recommendation Letters

LSAC has a relatively new feature which allows me to send “targeted” letters to law schools. Is this better than sending a general letter to the schools where I’m applying?
Generally, we do **NOT** recommend that you ask your letter-writers to draft targeted letters. In our experience, general letters of recommendation are sufficient. Having your letter-writer draft targeted letters is more time consuming for them, and it is more likely that your application will be delayed. Talk with your advisor if there are specific reasons you want to send a targeted letter to a particular law school.

Using Old Letters of Recommendation

Can I submit an old letter to law schools which I used previously for another purpose?
Many students have old letters of recommendation in their House File (e.g., a recommendation letter that they used for a fellowship application). It’s best to ask the letter-writer to modify and update the letter, so that the letter explicitly addresses your qualifications for law school. Feel free to ask the Assistant to the Resident Dean in the House Office to send the old letter to your letter-writer, asking them to revise it. However, you should also be in contact with the letter-writer. If you cannot get the letter-writer to update the letter, under certain circumstances, it may be appropriate to submit the existing letter.

c) GPA/Transcript

Your grade point average (GPA) is an important part of your law school application. Most law schools will ask you to calculate your GPA. Additionally, law schools will ask you to submit an official Harvard College transcript.

How do I get my transcript or grade report?

To obtain a copy of your official transcript, you must order it through the Harvard College Registrar. See <http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/certification-transcripts-student-records/order-transcript>. To obtain a copy of your student record, contact the Harvard College Registrar. See <http://www.registrar.fas.harvard.edu/certifications-transcripts-student-records/student-records>.

Where should I send my transcript or grade report?

Both LSDAS and your Leverett House prelaw tutor need a copy of your grades. LSDAS requires an official transcript. Leverett House merely requires a student record or unofficial transcript. Therefore, email a student record/unofficial transcript to your prelaw tutor and instruct the Harvard College Registrar to send an official transcript to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) at:

Law School Admission Council
662 Penn Street
P.O. Box 2000-M
Newtown, PA 18940-0993

Can I send my transcript directly to law schools?

In general, you should *not* send your transcript directly to law schools; instead, instruct the Harvard College Registrar to send your transcript to LSDAS, and LSDAS will send a report to the law schools. *Exception:* If you have not heard a response from a particular law school after you have received your senior year fall grades, you may choose to send an updated transcript directly to that school, assuming your fall grades will improve your overall application package.

d) LSAT

Background Information

What is the LSAT?

The Law School Admission Test (“LSAT”) is a standardized test required for admission to all law schools. It is an important component of your law school application. The test is an aptitude test; therefore, you do not have to study specific substantive material to prepare for the test. Scored from 120 – 180 (with 180 being a perfect score), the LSAT has three main types of sections: reading comprehension, logical reasoning (a.k.a., arguments), and analytic reasoning (a.k.a., logic games). The actual test consists of five sections (each 35 minutes): one reading comprehension, two logical reasoning, and one analytic reasoning, plus one experimental section (which does not count toward your score). Additionally, there is a thirty minute writing portion which does not factor into your LSAT score but is sent to law schools (though they don’t consider it an important component of the application).

Is the LSAT a good predictor of who will be a successful attorney?

Arguably, the LSAT is **not** a good predictor of who will become a successful attorney. Therefore, merely because you do not perform well on standardized tests in general or the LSAT in particular does *not* mean you will not be a great attorney.

Timing Issues for Taking the LSAT

In general, when should I take the LSAT?

The optimal time to take the LSAT is when you have the best chance of doing well. You should take the LSAT when you have time to focus on preparing for the test, and when you are not overwhelmed by other stresses in your life.

Is it best to take the LSAT when I’m still in college or can I wait until after I graduate?

It is best to take the exam when you have the most time to prepare. Some students find it easier to take the test during college; they are in the “test-taking mode,” accustomed to studying and taking tests under time constraints. On the other hand, some graduates have found it optimal to take the test while working. They find it more manageable to focus on the test without other academic pressures and find their jobs allow them ample study time.

How many times a year is the LSAT given?

The LSAT is generally given four times a year: in June, September/October, December and February (in some years the October test is given at the end of September). See the Prelaw Calendar on Leverett's website and the LSAC website at www.lsac.org for this year's specific test dates and registration deadlines.

What time of year should I take the LSAT – June, September/October, December or February?

Historically, most Harvard College students have taken the LSAT in September/October of the year in which they are applying. Remember that classes begin in early September, and coursework may have picked up by late September/early October when the test is given. Students should think about whether they have time to focus on LSAT test preparation in the weeks just before the test date, in light of their fall course load, extracurricular commitments, etc.

Taking the LSAT in June of the year in which you plan to apply has advantages; you will know your score in the summer and have a better basis to select where to apply. Students may decide to spend the second half of May focused on LSAT preparation and be ready to take the June test. If you are an alum and your work schedule permits it, taking the June LSAT may be optimal.

You can take the December LSAT and apply to law school during the same academic year. The disadvantage is that you will not know your score in advance of having to submit your applications. Additionally, your applications will not be complete until your LSAT score is submitted; therefore, law schools will not be able to make a final decision about your candidacy until late in the application cycle.

If you take the February LSAT, most law schools will require you to wait until the following academic year to submit your application.

What if I'm planning to apply for special scholarships or apply Early Action/Decision?

If you are planning to apply for special scholarships or apply Early Action/Decision to law schools, you may need to take the June or possibly October LSAT. Check the specific requirements for each school and program.

Registering for the LSAT

How do I register for the LSAT?

Register for the LSAT through the Law School Assembly Service at www.lsac.org. Check the website for details about when and how to register.

Test Sites

Where is the LSAT given?

The LSAT is not given at Harvard. It is given at a variety of sites in the Boston area, including Boston University, Suffolk Law School, University of Massachusetts Boston, and Roxbury Community College. Before the day of the test, familiarize yourself with the test site (e.g., directions to the site, building and room where the test is given).

Taking the LSAT Multiple Times and Canceling Your Score

Can I plan to take the LSAT multiple times?

The short answer is “no.” You should plan to take the LSAT only once. If you take the LSAT more than once, law schools generally average the two scores (although this practice may be changing with some schools beginning to look only at your highest score). Therefore, unless you feel confident that you can dramatically improve your LSAT by taking it a second time (for instance, if you are confident you can improve your score by ten or more points), it may not make sense to retake the test.

Under what circumstances would it make sense for me to take the LSAT a second time?

In general, students only significantly improve their score if either: (1) they were under-prepared the first time they took the test or (2) something went significantly wrong during the test (e.g., student got sick during the test, student just received some terrible news about a friend or relative, student filled in the wrong bubbles).

I'm considering canceling my LSAT score because I didn't perform as well as I had hoped. Should I?

In thinking about canceling your LSAT score, remember that LSAC will report the fact that you canceled your score and that you are limited to taking the LSAT three times within a two-year period. We do not think schools penalize students for canceling once, but we have no way of knowing for certain. If you plan on enrolling in the same year as your canceled score, however, you may end up being penalized because you will have to retake the test and apply later in the application cycle. Since most schools use rolling admissions, a later application could put you at a disadvantage in the pool. Generally, you should cancel your score only if you feel very sure that you did significantly worse than your performance on practice tests and will significantly harm your application prospects. Even then, we find that almost everyone thinks they did worse than they actually did!

Maximizing Your LSAT Score

Can I improve my score? Does practice help?

Most students find they can significantly improve their LSAT score by practicing. The LSAT is a timed test, so answering questions quickly and accurately is critical. Most students find that practicing the questions helps improve their speed.

How should I prepare for the LSAT? Should I enroll in a structured LSAT prep course, or should I study on my own?

One of the best ways to prepare for the LSAT is by taking actual LSAT tests which have been given in the past. You can order these tests from the LSAC website (see www.lsac.org).

Some students find it helpful to enroll in a test preparation course. The benefits of enrolling in such a course include: being provided a structured study schedule, being taught test strategies, and studying with other people (which some students find more fun and more motivating).

However, the test prep services are costly (sometimes over \$1000). And, some students find the courses to be repetitive and not targeted to their unique needs. If you are disciplined enough to study on your own – taking practice tests and learning strategy by reading test prep books – you may opt not to enroll in a prep class.

It's most important for you to be self-reflective and honest with yourself about your own study habits. If you like and need structure and outside motivation, it's best to take a course. If you prefer to study on your own, in a quiet environment, you may not need to take a prep class.

How much should I study for the LSAT?

There is no one answer to this question. Certainly, it depends on your goal score as well as your comfort level with standardized tests. If you find timed tests stressful, it's best to err on the side of studying more rather than less. We find most students study a few hours at a time, a few times a week, for several months.

If I have additional questions about the LSAT, what should I do?

The LSAC offers FAQs about the LSAT. See <http://www.lsac.org/>.

e) Personal Statement

All law schools require you to submit a written essay, commonly called the “personal statement.” The personal statement is your opportunity to provide law schools information about yourself which may not be apparent in the other components of your application or to highlight a particular theme in your application. Use the personal statement to help law schools develop an understanding of who you are as a person.

How long is the personal statement?

The personal statement is usually limited to 500 words or two double-spaced pages.

What is the topic of the personal statement?

Most schools provide broad instructions, stating that you should “write a statement about yourself” or “in two pages or less, tell us something about yourself.”

A small number of schools (such as Yale) require two statements and ask more specific questions. Additionally, if you are applying for special scholarships or awards, you may be required to submit additional essays on specific topics.

What are some “tips” about the personal statement? What are law schools looking for?

- **The personal statement should provide a clear narrative for your application.** The personal statement should address three key parts of your application narrative: What have I been doing? Where do I want to go? How is law school the only way to get from what I have been doing to where I want to be? The personal statement should synthesize your academic, professional, and extracurricular experiences and explain how those experiences have prepared you

for law school and to pursue your career. Then, explain where you see yourself after law school and what you plan to do with your law degree. Finally, demonstrate that law school is the only way for you to get from A to B.

- **The personal statement should be “personal.”** The personal statement is your opportunity to help law schools develop a better picture of who you are. You can highlight aspects of yourself which may not be apparent in any other place in your application. Do not, however, write a theoretical or academic essay on a particular topic (e.g., on the meaning of fairness and justice, on the history of legal thought, on the development of international law). Instead, tell a story about yourself. Use the personal statement to demonstrate to law schools what motivates you as a person.
- **The personal statement should be easy to read and well-written.** Do not try to impress the readers with an abstruse essay. Instead, write a clear, concise, and well-organized essay. To the extent possible, use declarative sentences in active voice. Edit the statement. The law schools are using this statement to gauge whether or not you are a good writer, so errors will harm your chance for admission. Use regular font and margins.
- **The personal statement should *not* be a list of your accomplishments and activities.** The law schools will already have your resume and transcript. Law schools use the personal statement to learn more about who you are as an individual – what motivates you, what you will add to the law school class and the legal profession.
- **The personal statement should be original.** Although you may want to directly answer the question “why I want to go to law school,” remember that the individuals reading your personal statement have read hundreds of essays which answer this question. Your statement can certainly address how your background and experiences have led you to apply to law school, but don’t merely list reasons why you want to be a lawyer.
- **Avoid making broad generalizations in your personal statement and instead provide personal anecdotes or examples.** Instead of making broad statements (like “I want to use the law to make a difference in people’s lives”), provide the reader specific information about how your background and experiences have shaped your attitudes and values. In short, “show, don’t tell.”

2) Materials to Submit to Leverett House

The above section explains what materials are required by law schools. See the “**Prelaw Checklist**” on prelaw website for **materials you should submit to Leverett House**. Leverett House is committed to getting your law school applications sent to law schools in a timely fashion. However, it is your responsibility to ensure that your Leverett House file is complete.

3) Packaging your Law School Application - The LSDAS

You cannot merely send all the components of your law school application directly to law schools; instead, you must use LSDAS.

What is LSDAS and which parts of my application go through them?

The Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) packages critical components of your application for law schools. Almost all law schools require their applicants to register with the LSDAS. After you register and pay a fee, LSDAS prepares and provides a report for each law school to which you apply. The LSDAS report includes the following information:

- An undergraduate academic summary
- Copies of all undergraduate and graduate school transcripts
- LSAT scores and writing sample copies
- Copies of letters of recommendation

Please note that you should NOT send your letters of recommendation directly to LSDAS. Instead, have your recommenders send their letters of recommendation to LSDAS or Leverett House. The Assistant to the Resident Dean in the House Office will send the letters to LSDAS for you.

What else should I know about LSDAS?

- **Register early for the LSDAS.** Once you decide you are applying to law school, register for LSDAS. Registration lasts for 5 years. See <http://www.lsac.org> for more information about LSDAS.
- **Send LSDAS your transcript as soon as possible.** It can take LSDAS several weeks to process your transcript.
- **Check your biographical information and transcript information carefully.** The LSDAS will send you a confirmation notice which contains all of the information that law schools will see. Check for accuracy. You can check the status of your LSDAS file online.

4) Admissions Criteria

How do law schools decide who is admitted?

Law schools use a variety of processes to select students. A candidate's GPA and LSAT score are important factors in admissions decisions. However, law schools also consider other factors, especially for applicants on the border of being admitted. Law schools want to select students who will help create a dynamic law school class as well as students who will make unique contributions to the legal profession.

Do law schools like applicants with work, travel, or other experience?

Increasingly, law schools value students with interesting employment, community, travel and other experiences. See the below section for more details about deferring versus applying in future years.

How important are my grades and LSAT score?

Your grades and LSAT score are important components of your application. What does that mean in terms of how you should spend your time in college? At Leverett House, we suggest you spend your time developing your interests and talents. Spend your time doing intellectual and extracurricular activities that you are passionate about. For most students, taking classes they find intrinsically interesting will help them maintain a good GPA. Law schools are not looking for students with a particular major/concentration; we recommend that you major in the field you find the most rewarding.

5) Timing Issues

a) General Timing Issues

When in the application cycle should I apply? Are my chances of getting in just as good if I apply in February as in early October?

In general, it's to your advantage to apply earlier rather than later in the application cycle. Most law schools make admissions decisions on a rolling basis. You should aim to submit your applications before Thanksgiving or at least by early December. At the latest, submit your applications by early January. Moreover, the sooner you apply, the sooner you will hear back from schools.

Do any schools allow you to apply early?

Yes. A few schools have non-binding early action programs. These deadlines are in early fall – with some schools as early as October 15th and others in early or mid- November. If you want to apply early, notify the Prelaw Committee Chairs as soon as possible. See the “Prelaw Calendar” section of the prelaw website for an **abbreviated** list of schools with early programs.

When are law school application deadlines?

The formal deadlines vary by school. Many schools deadlines are between February 1 and March 15. However, you should *not* use these deadlines to guide your application schedule. As previously noted, most schools admit students on a rolling basis; therefore, if you wait until the deadline to get in your application, your chances for admission may be harmed.

b) Prelaw Detailed Timetable

Included on the prelaw website is a schedule you can follow if you are considering applying to law school. For students applying this year, please also see the **Prelaw Calendar for this year's specific deadlines**; the Prelaw Calendar is posted on the Leverett website. You may also subscribe to the Prelaw Google calendar by emailing leverettprelaw@gmail.com. The Prelaw Timetable is relevant for all students, applying any year:

c) Taking Time Off Before Applying to Law School

Benefits of Taking Time Off

Why should I take time off between college and law school?

In general, if you are even considering taking time off between college and law school, we suggest that you choose to take time off for the following reasons:

- **Few people regret their decision to take time off.** In our experience, however, many students who attend law school immediately after college regret that decision.
- **Post-college experience may make you a more attractive law school applicant.** Increasingly, law schools value work, community, travel, and other experiences. Law schools think that not only will individuals who have taken time off provide interesting insights during classroom discussions, they may also make better attorneys.
- **Taking time off will help you enjoy and appreciate law school when you actually enroll.** Some students who go straight from college to law school find the experience draining. Tired from Harvard College exams and their thesis, some of these students find law school to be an arduous three years. On the other hand, students who have worked for some years start law school refreshed and excited. They tend to appreciate the academic environment, intellectual freedom, and flexible hours of law school. (Of course, these are generalizations; there is certainly individual variation in student attitudes about law school.)
- **Post-graduate work can help you ensure that law school is the right choice for you.** Law school is a significant time, financial, and emotional commitment. In your time off, you can explore other possible career options, or you can assume a legal job to help you decide for sure that you want to be an attorney. Students who take time off tend to be more confident with their ultimate decision to attend law school and are less likely to second guess themselves.
- **If you want to attend law school, you will, even if you take time off.** A popular misconception is “if I don’t apply to law school during college and attend the year after I graduate, I will never go.” Based on our experience at Leverett House, that is simply not the case. In recent years, approximately half the students we advise each year are alumni.

d) Deferrals

Many students know they want to take time off between college and law school but contemplate applying to law school during their Senior Year, hoping to defer admission until they are ready to go to law school.

I know I don’t want to attend law school next year. Should I apply now and defer or should I wait to apply later?

Our rule of thumb at Leverett House is that it is to your advantage to wait and apply only when you are ready to attend law school. As described above, in general, your application will only be enhanced by additional work, community, travel, and other experience; therefore, you will have a greater chance of being admitted to law school if you apply

later. Moreover, you will be more confident with your decision to apply if you are making the decision after spending time away from school, when you have a broader perspective.

The reason many students like to apply, even when they know they are not yet ready to attend law school, is for peace of mind. Moreover, many students fear that if they do not apply to law school during college, they will never apply. In our experience, students who are committed to attending law school, apply as alumni. In fact, in recent years, at least half of Leverett applicants have been alumni.

When determining when to apply, you should weigh all the competing factors and make a choice that is comfortable for you.

Won't it be harder for me to go through the House Prelaw Advising System as an alum? Shouldn't I apply now, while I'm still in the House, and petition for a deferral once I'm accepted into law school?

As described in various places throughout this Handbook, Leverett House provides the same services to alumni (who graduated in the past five years) as undergraduates. Proximity to the House should not be the determining factor in your decision about when to apply. For more details on specific considerations for alumni/ae, please see the prelaw website, "Applying to Law School as a Leverett Alum."

What are law school's policies on deferring?

Many schools will allow you to defer one, two, and sometimes even more years. You must petition the law school to get a deferral. Whether or not the law school grants your deferral depends on a variety of factors including: your proposed plan for how you will spend your time during the upcoming year; the law school's policy regarding deferrals that particular year (school policies may vary from year to year); the number of students who have accepted admission to the law school that year; the number of other students petitioning for deferral.

6) Cost of Applying to Law School

How much does it cost to apply to law school?

There is no one answer to this question – it depends on whether or not you enroll in a LSAT prep class, the number of schools you apply to, etc. Here are some of the costs associated with applying to law school:

- Taking the LSAT (required).
- Taking an LSAT prep class.
- Registering for LSDAS (required).
- Using an electronic application through LSDAS.
- Fees associated with applying to each individual school (required).

What if I don't think I can afford all of the costs associated with applying to law school?

Please do NOT decide you should not apply to law school because the costs associated with the application process seem too high. Almost all law schools will waive your application fees. Your

chance of being accepted to the law school should *not* be effected by your request to waive the application fee. Moreover, you can receive fee waivers through LSAC. See <http://www.lsac.org/>. You should feel free to talk about financial issues with your prelaw tutor.

7) Selection Criteria for Choosing Law Schools

Navigating through the technical aspects of applying to law school will take up some of your time. But, it is important to keep your focus on the overarching issue – finding the law school that is the best match for you. Therefore, try to honestly determine what your priorities are and then apply to schools that fit your criteria.

a) Number and Type

Should I apply to “safety” schools and “reach” schools?

Just like college, you should apply to both reach schools and safety schools. However, we also advise applying only to schools which you realistically think you would attend if admitted. There is no reason to waste time and money applying to a school that you have absolutely no intention of attending.

How many schools should I apply to?

In the past, most students have applied to 7 – 10 law schools. This translates into approximately three safety schools, three reach schools, and three others.

b) Prioritizing Selection Criteria

How do I select the schools to apply to?

There are many high-caliber law schools. It is important to find the right match for you. A variety of factors should be considered when selecting a school. We find many Leverett students focus exclusively on one factor – the perceived prestige of the law school. The school’s prestige or reputation is certainly a factor to be taken into account, but there are many factors that you will likely want to consider including: size, location, cost of school, atmosphere, diversity of the student body, diversity of the curriculum, faculty interests, and specialty areas (e.g., international law, public interest, law and economics, intellectual property). Moreover, you should consider your long-term career goals and try to find a school that lines up with those goals. If you look at prominent attorneys – who work in the White House, who are now politicians, who run state agencies – you’ll find they went to a variety of law schools.

How can I learn more about programs and specialty areas at specific law schools?

To learn more about each law school, visit the school’s website. Also, you can use on-line search engines to find more information about specific law school programs. (See FindLaw for Students at <http://stu.findlaw.com/schools/fulllist.html> and Thomson Peterson’s at <http://www.petersons.com/law/search.asp>).

I have a clear idea about what I want to do when I graduate. How should I use this to guide my law school selection process?

While many students enter law school with strong feelings about what they want to do when they graduate, few students leave law school doing what they initially thought they would. It is important to keep this in mind as you are choosing a law school. It is often wise to select a school that allows you to “keep your options open.” However, a small percentage of students actually do have a clear vision – based on research, previous experiences, and/or life circumstances – for what they want to do long-term.

- **Working in a Specific Geographic Location.** If you are certain you want to work in a specific geographic location, you should consider choosing a law school near that location. For instance, if you want to live in rural Alabama, you may want to attend an Alabama school to develop connections with that local legal community. You can likely save money on tuition and living costs by attending a state school or getting a scholarship to a private university which isn’t “top tier.” On the other hand, some individuals choose to attend a school outside the location they hope to ultimately reside, but work at summer jobs in that community and develop legal ties.
- **Going into Politics.** If you are certain you want to go into politics after law school, where you attend law school may be important to your political career.
- **Pursuing a Public Interest Job.** Public interest jobs are low-paying. Therefore, if you know you want to pursue public interest, you may want to consider lower cost schools. Additionally, some public interest employers favor individuals with strong ties to the community which they are serving. On the other hand, some public interest employers prefer students who graduate from top-tier law schools. (This issue is discussed in more detail in other parts of this Handbook as well as on the prelaw website in the section “Lawyering in the Public Interest.”)
- **Pursuing Academia.** If you know you want to be a law professor (which would be nearly impossible for you to know for sure before attending law school), the prestige of the law school you attend can be important.

c) Public Interest-Friendly Law Schools

I know I want to become a public interest attorney. Where should I apply and where should I go if accepted?

There are a variety of considerations if you want to pursue public interest after graduating from law school. To determine if the law school is a “friendly” environment for public interest students, consider the following:

- The school’s public interest advising and career counseling resources. Schools’ websites often describe resources offered to public interest-minded students.
- The background and interests of the school’s law professors. Check the biographies of law professors at various schools. Almost all law schools have websites with professor biographies. Determine their research and writing interests as well as community involvement.
- The school’s clinical legal education program. Through law school clinical legal education programs, students can receive academic credit for being trained to and then actually representing low-income clients. Learn about law schools’ clinical programs. How extensive are the programs? How many students participate? Can

all students who want to participate in a clinic have that opportunity or are there only a small number of coveted spots, whereby only some students are admitted after a competitive selection process? Does the school have in-house clinics (where law school instructors supervise students)? What type of externship placements does the school offer (where law students are placed at outside organizations)? What methods of advocacy will students have an opportunity to explore (direct serve, policy, and legislative)?

- Grants for summer public interest work. Does the school offer grants to students who want to pursue public interest during their summers? How many students are given grants each summer?
- Cost of school and financial incentives offered to public interest students and alumni/ae. Studies show that students typically graduate from law school with debt loads in excess of \$80,000. Moreover, there are wide disparities in the salaries between private sector and public interest attorneys. For more details on loan repayment programs, see <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources/student-debt-relief/law-school-loan-repayment-assistance-programs>. In light of these statistics, public interest minded students may want to consider the following questions: How expensive is the law school? Does the school have a loan repayment program (whereby the school helps relieve student debt if the student assumes a low-paying job upon graduation)? Does the school have special scholarships for public interest students? Does the school offer special grants or financial aid?
- Careers of students after graduation. One way to gauge the dedication of the public interest student community at a particular school is to consider the jobs students take upon graduation. What percentage of students assume public interest jobs their first year after graduating? Five years after graduation?

For additional information about choosing a law school and legal jobs in the public interest, see the Equal Justice Works at <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/>. For a more in depth discussion of public interest work, see the prelaw website, “Lawyering in the Public Interest.”

8) Deciding To Pursue a Joint Degree

Joint degree programs allow you to pursue law school and graduate degrees simultaneously. Only a small number of schools offer joint degree programs, and each school has different requirements for applying to and enrolling in these programs. Contact each school directly for specific information about academic requirements, length of the program, and program structure. The most popular combinations of joint programs include: JD/MBA, JD/MA, and JD/MPP. A smaller number of students pursue JD/PhDs.

What are the advantages of pursuing a joint degree?

There are a small number of jobs where having a joint degree may be advantageous. Moreover, pursuing a joint degree can be quicker than attending two programs separately (e.g., a JD/MBA takes four years instead of five years).

Why are the “cons” of pursuing a joint degree?

We advise you to think very carefully about pursuing a joint degree. You can get almost the same jobs with a JD as you can with a joint degree; the joint degree does not necessarily make you significantly more marketable. Assess whether the extra time and expense is actually worth the benefits. The application process itself can be time consuming. Although we can provide some support, Leverett House does not have full knowledge of all the joint degree programs, so you should be willing to do research and investigation on your own.

9) Waitlists & Reapplying

What if I’m waitlisted at a law school? What should I do?

If you are waitlisted at a law school that you would really like to attend, there are several strategies you can pursue. First, it is most important that you communicate to the law school that you would **immediately** accept if you received an offer of admission. Law schools want to increase their yields; they are more likely to give an offer of admission if they know it will be accepted. Probably the most effective statement is a simple paragraph on why you are prepared to drop everything and accept an offer of admission to the law school and how you would rearrange your plans accordingly. For instance, you might explain why you would be willing to move across the country at a moment’s notice if the law school accepted you. You might also explain why you think that the law school is a particularly good “fit” for you.

Second, you can send additional materials. These materials might include additional letters of recommendation, more recent grade reports (**only** if your grades have improved since you sent your initial application), and additional statements. In particular, you may ask your Prelaw Advisor to draft a “House Letter” on your behalf that summarizes your achievements and advocates for your admission.

Of course, if there are additional circumstances that might have affected your grades, LSAT scores, and/or reasons for attending law school that you did not communicate in your initial application, you can include this information in a short statement as well.

While the chances of getting off of waitlists are exceedingly slim, there is also always hope. If you use this opportunity to argue your case more forcefully to the law school, your odds will probably improve.

What if I want to reapply to law schools?

Take heart – if you didn’t get off the waitlist or didn’t get into the law school you wanted, you can always reapply. When making your decision to reapply, however, you should strongly consider how your application has improved or expanded since your first attempt. As described in further detail below, you may consider retaking the LSAT, taking extra classes, or gaining work experience. Waiting more than a year in order to bolster your resume will only add to the strength of your application.

When you do decide to reapply, emphasize what has changed in your application to make you a more competitive applicant – you are not at a disadvantage for applying twice, but you should acknowledge that it is your second application and highlight how your application has improved, since the admissions committees will take note that it's your second time around. Finally, in making your decision about where to apply, you might want to reevaluate the schools and consider new ones you hadn't considered before or point out why a particular school that you applied to before is well-suited to you.

- Recommendations. All of your letters of recommendation will remain on file with Leverett House. Depending on how many years elapse between your applications, you may want to have your letters updated. For letters of recommendation, the House office can send copies of the original letters to your recommenders for them to update.
- Transcripts. You may have to request new transcripts if you received additional grades since your original application.
- LSAT. If you are thinking about taking the LSAT again, there are a couple of things to keep in mind. (1) All your LSAT scores will show up on your applications. (2) Most law schools will average your LSAT scores. The decision to retake the test is both difficult and individual, depending on your score and the schools to which you are applying. You should speak to your advisor if you are considering retaking the LSAT, especially if you are thinking about retaking the September/October test in December, thereby delaying your applications. Although opinions vary, a good rule of thumb is to only retake the exam if you can achieve a marked improvement (which some would suggest means an 8-10 point improvement).
- Other. Whether to write a new personal statement, ask for more or different letters of recommendation, or apply to different schools are all things to consider when you reapply. However, because these are individual decisions, you should seek advice from your Prelaw Advisor early in the process.