



PRE-LAW ADVISORY PROGRAM HANDBOOK

2021-2022

Rivier University, Pre-Law Advisory Program Handbook

Table of Contents:

	Page:
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. DECIDING WHETHER TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL	1
A. Job Prospects for Law Graduates	1
B. Average Salaries for Legal Professionals	3
C. The Cost of Law School	4
III.	

locate and practice there. However, there are some exceptions. Vermont, which is mostly rural, has a relatively large concentrations of attorneys, with 5.8 lawyers per 1,000 residents. By comparison, Massachusetts has 6.2 per thousand and New Hampshire has approximately 2.7 per thousand.

The legal profession has not been immune to the economic ravages caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. In its *Profile of the Legal Profession in 2020*, the ABA notes that “the pandemic and recession have resulted in layoffs, furloughs and pay cuts,” and that circumstances “may be quite different a year from now,” let alone when those considering law school now will be graduating.

Despite the challenges facing the legal profession, the United States is a society based on law, and many areas of the law are becoming increasingly more complicated. Therefore, there will always be a need for well-trained legal professionals to help their clients understand and protect their legal rights. In the wake of the Great Recession of 2008, law school applications dropped dramatically, and law schools were forced to cut the number of new students that they admitted. The numbers have since recovered, but the decline in new attorneys entering the field for several years and the fact that a large number of attorneys are at or nearing retirement age means that current applicants to law school will likely face less competition in the job market upon graduation than they would have otherwise.

In the past, it was often assumed that a law degree prepares graduates not only to become lawyers, but for potential careers in a range of professions, including business, banking, and politics. Observers pointed to the number of law graduates in these and other professions as proof. Thus, law school was sometimes seen as an option for those who did not know what they wanted to do and

B. Average Salaries for Legal Professionals

A detailed discussion on lawyer wages can be found in the *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession, 2020*,² which reports that “the average lawyer salary in 2019 was \$145,300.” The ABA goes on to report that:

The average lawyer’s salary has increased slowly in recent years, at less than the rate of inflation for most years since 2010. For example, from 2018 to 2019, it rose 0.7%, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That’s less than half the 1.6% inflation rate for the same period. (Note: BLS statistics cover wages for all lawyers but do not include profits for law firm)

It is important to remember that attorney salaries vary greatly depending upon the area of law and the geographic location that one practices in, the clients one represents, and the firm or employer that one works for. For example, lawyer salaries are highest in metropolitan areas that also have the highest costs of living, such as Boston, Massachusetts, where the average salary is \$169,920. By comparison, the average salary in New Hampshire is \$99,289. Regarding areas of the law/types of positions, the ABA reports the following:

Position/Type of Office	Year	Median Salary³:
Public Interest Organizations	First year	\$50,300
Public Interest Organizations	11-15 years	\$80,500
Local Prosecutors	First year	\$56,200
Local Prosecutors	11-15 years	\$84,400
Public Defenders	First year	\$58,300
Public Defenders	11-15 years	\$96,400
Law Firms 50 or fewer employees	First year	\$115,00
Law Firms 50 or fewer employees	Eighth year	\$138,00
Law Firms 251 to 500 employees	First year	\$160,000
Law Firms 251 to 500 employees	Eighth	\$197,600
Law Firms over 700 employees	First year	\$180,000
Law Firms over 700 employees	Eighth	\$252,200

² The report is available for download at <https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf>

³ Median means that 50% fall below the given number and that 50% fall above the given number.

Areas of the law that many find most fulfilling personally, such as being a prosecutor, public defender, or working for a non-profit, tend to pay the least. These comparatively low salaries may be partially offset by various loan forgiveness programs that many law schools offer. However, even with such programs, those who decide to make a career in these fields will likely have to accept a lower standard of living than many people associate with the legal profession. The same is true for the majority of individuals who work as solo practitioners or in small law firms.

At the other extreme are those lawyers who earn substantially more than \$252,000 per year. Such positions are relatively few, usually with large law firms located in major cities, and involve representing corporate or wealthy individual clients in business and tax matters. The firms that pay such salaries tend to recruit only the top-ranked graduates from the most prestigious law schools. Associates and even partners of such firms usually work extremely long hours throughout their careers and often have to make themselves available to their clients 24/7.

The areas of the law that one intends and reasonably expects to enter after graduation should be a major consideration in deciding which law schools one applies to, and how much one is willing to spend (or go into debt) in order to attend law school.

C. The Cost of Law School

For years, law school tuition rates have increased faster than the rate of inflation. However, tuition is only one factor in the overall cost of attending law school, which also includes how much financial aid one receives and the cost of living in the area where the school is located. One should also factor in the lost-opportunity cost of attending school for three years, when one could otherwise be working full-time.

Law school tuition rates vary greatly, and are based on factors such as: (i) whether the institution

Whiche

encouraged to contact the author of this *Handbook*, Attorney Eric Gentes, at egentes@rivier.edu or 603 897 8266.

Rivier students who are considering going to law school need to maintain a high GPA and should challenge themselves by taking a range of 300 and 400 level courses,⁶ both in and outside their major. Students can further increase the likelihood that they will be

has taken the test more than once; (iv) the applicant's score band, which is an estimate of the applicant's proficiency in the skills tested; and (v) the applicant's percentile ranking. Law school admissions offices vary in what they consider when a student has taken the LSAT more than once. Some only consider the highest score, while others consider other scores to varying degrees.

The LSAC offers free sample LSAT questions and explanations on-line, and sells a variety of preparation materials (see <https://www.lsac.org/lsat/prep>). In addition, a number of companies offer LSAT prep courses and materials. Some individuals find that taking a private LSAT prep course helps them understand the material better, and just as important, provides them with the structure, discipline, and additional incentive to help them better prepare for the LSAT. Many applicants successfully prepare for the LSATs on their own.

The LSAC posts a "Checklist for the Law School Admission Process" online at: <http://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/overview>. **Students interested in law school should familiarize themselves with this checklist, and follow it.** In addition, the LSAC describes the type of questions contained in the LSAC and provides information on how to prepare for the exam at: <https://www.lsac.org/lsat/prep/types-lsat-questions> .

Law Schools. Their compliance is regularly monitored, and comprehensive reviews are conducted every tenth year. Provisionally approved schools, also considered "ABA-Approved," have been determined to be operating in substantial compliance with the ABA Standards for Approval of Law Schools. Prospective law students should consider a variety of factors in making their choice among schools.

There are 200 ABA-approved law schools in the United States that offer first degrees (the J.D. degree). A complete list, which includes links to descriptions for each school, is available at: <https://officialguide.lsac.org/Release/SchoolsABAData/SchoolsAndLocation.aspx> . A page that allows students search for particular schools based on such criteria as undergraduate GPA and LSAT scores is at https://officialguide.lsac.org/release/OfficialGuide_Default.aspx . Just as only you can decide whether to go to law school, only you can decide which law schools to apply to, and which school you should ultimately attend.

Given the investment in time and money needed to complete law school and the importance of finding a “good fit,

Report's provides other resources that prospective students will likely find helpful. To being your search, go to <https://www.usnews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law->

Torts [focusing on the Common law and Restatement (Second) of Torts]

Legal Reasoning, Research & Writing [sometimes broken up into two courses]

After their first year, students are able to choose most of their remaining courses. However, all students at ABA-accredited schools must complete a professional ethics course, and individual schools may have their own additional requirements.

Some schools are well-known and highly regarded for particular areas of study. For example, the University of New Hampshire School of Law has what is generally regarded to be among the finest intellectual property programs in the country. The same is true for Vermont Law School's environmental law program. Students interested in a particular area of the law should conduct research to learn which schools are particularly known for that field of study.

Nearly all law schools are placing a greater emphasis on hands-on training through clinics, in which students represent clients in actual legal cases under the supervision of a law school faculty member, and internships and externships, in which students gain experience with law firms and other outside employers, for which they sometimes receive salaries. For years, Northeastern University School of Law in Boston, Massachusetts, has been known for its "practical learning educational model" in which students participate in four three-month, full-time legal placements, comprising a full year of practical legal work before graduation.

D. Geography, Size and Cost

In deciding which law schools to apply to, and which school to ultimately attend, you should also consider each school's geographic area, including: (i) the area's cost of living; (ii) whether you want to live in a city or small town; (iii) whether you want to be close to family, which may be able to provide valuable economic and emotional support while you are in school; and (iv) where you ultimately want to practice law.⁹

A school's size is another important factor to consider, since it may influence students'

E. How Many Law Schools Should One Apply To?

Finally, there is the question of how many law schools prospective students should apply to. In some cases, a student's living situation, such as the unwillingness or inability to move to attend law school, may dictate this choice; there may be a limited number of schools, or even a single school that one may be able to attend.

For prospective students with more options, it is important to keep in mind that the investment in time (several hours) and cost (between \$0 to \$85 per school) of applying to individual law schools¹⁰ is extremely small when compared to the time and cost of actually attending school. Moreover, differences in how much aid schools are willing and able to provide can have a tremendous impact on whether a student is able to attend, and if so how much it will cost. Finally, finding the "right school" can be a difficult process that depends on multiple criteria, not all of which are easily explicable. The bottom line is that it does not make sense to try to save money by greatly limiting the number of schools one applies to.

One strategy that many applicants employ is to follow a tiered approach, in which they apply to a certain number of "dream schools" – those that they believe they are unlikely to be accepted by, but would love to attend. In deciding which schools to include on this list, students should be realistic and not apply to schools that they realistically have **no** chance of getting into. At the next level, these students apply to a similar number of schools that they are fairly confident will accept them. In some cases, students may decide that given the investment in time and money needed to complete law school, they are not willing to go below this second tier. However, if students are determined to go to law school, they should apply to several "sure-bets."

V. NEW ENGLAND LAW SCHOOLS

Below is a list of all law schools located in New England:

New Hampshire:

University of New Hampshire School of Law (public) - Concord.

Connecticut:

Quinnipiac University School of Law (private) - Hamden. Offers a part-time, evening program.

University of Connecticut School of Law (public) - Hartford. Offers a part-time, evening program.

Yale Law School (private) - New Haven.

¹⁰ If asked, the admissions offices of many law schools will waive the application fee.

Maine:

University of Maine School of Law (public) - Portland. Offers a “Flex Time” program allows students to complete their degree within four to seven years.

Massachusetts:

Boston College Law School (private) - Newton.

Boston University School of Law (private) - Boston.

Harvard Law School (private) - Cambridge.

New England School of Law (private) - Boston. Offers a part-time program that allows students to complete their degree in four years, taking courses either during the day or evening. Also offers a “Flexible Part-Time” program that allows students to complete their degree in six years.

Northeastern University School of Law (private) - Boston. Offers a part-time program that may be completed on-campus or online.

Suffolk University Law School (private) - Boston. Offers a part-time, evening program.

University of Massachusetts School of Law (public) - Dartmouth.

Western New

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/aba_approved_law_schools/

American Bar Association has a comprehensive website that provides statistics on law school graduate employment rates. Retrieved from

https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/statistics/ .

American Bar Association Profile of the Legal Profession, 2020. Retrieved from

<https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/news/2020/07/potlp2020.pdf>

American Bar Association, 2020 National Lawyer Population Survey. Retrieved from

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/market_research/national-lawyer-population-by-state-2020.pdf

American Bar Association. (no date given) Statement on Law School Rankings. Retrieved from

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/council_reports_and_resolutions/statement-on-law-school-rankings.pdf

Harvard Law School, Frequently Asked Questions, Harvard Law School. Retrieved from

<https://hls.harvard.edu/about/frequently-asked-questions/> .

Reeves, J. (2020, Sept. 16). There's one lawyer for every 240 U.S. Residents, *Byte of prevention blog, Lawyers mutual*. Retrieved from <https://www.lawyersmutualnc.com/blog/theres-one-lawyer-for-every-240-us->