

West Chester University

Pre-Law Guide

2009-2010

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I. To Be or Not To Be (A Lawyer)

At WCU, and most universities, a "pre-law" major or degree does not exist. You can take certain affirmative steps, however, to build an academic record that will enhance your likelihood of being accepted into law school, should you decide to pursue a "juris doctor" degree or "J.D."

The purpose of this Pre-Law Guide, therefore, is to familiarize you with the process of applying to law school, the criteria for admission, and the financial implications of attending law school. It is our hope that by acquainting you with these issues early in your academic studies at WCU, you will be able to make those efforts which are necessary to maximize your chance of success. Please know that the Pre-law Advisor is available to meet with you individually to discuss any concerns that you may have. The Pre-Law Advisor is **Sandra M. Tomkowicz, J.D.**, who is located in **312D Anderson Hall**, and can be reached by telephone at **(610) 436-2365** or via e-mail at **stomkowicz@wcupa.edu**.

The process of applying to law school is rigorous. Do not underestimate the effort that you will need to expend if you truly want to study law. Just as you research courses each semester before registration, so too you should devote substantial time and effort to researching your desire to become a lawyer. Think about your reasons for wanting to attend law school. Take advantage of the many resources that are available that can give you a clearer understanding not only of the law school experience, but also of life after law school. Try to separate the reality of practicing law from the myth so that you can best determine whether your expectations are likely to be met by pursuing this career path.

Recognize that a law degree may afford you many opportunities; however, the pursuit of a law degree also will likely influence other life choices, both short and long-term, positively and negatively. Extending your education by another three years will tend to defer financial rewards and, therefore, probably will impact your standard of living in the short run. In addition, most students incur a substantial amount of debt to finance their legal education. The median tuition for private law schools in 2007 was \$32,000; the median tuition for public law schools (for residents) was \$14,000. Understand that in addition to tuition, you may need to finance your living expenses, such as housing and meals, which adds another layer of debt. The level of debt that you incur to finance your law school education, therefore, may dictate the type of law that you practice and the setting in which you practice. In short, the

more debt you incur, the more difficult it may be to accept, for example, a position with a public interest law group.

These financial considerations should be reviewed carefully, especially given the competitive market confronting new lawyers. Contrary to popular belief, most new lawyers do not earn salaries in excess of \$100,000. According to The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools, 2010 Edition, the national median starting salary for the class of 2007 was \$65,750, an increase of almost \$4,000 from 2006. Approximately 43% of the salaries reported were in excess of \$75,000. On the other hand, 38% of all salaries reported were \$55,000 or less.

On a non-economic note, you should expect that your social life may be constrained not only by your financial position but also by the amount of time demanded by your course work. By inference, the more time you must devote to your studies, the less time you will have available to pursue other interests. The intense demands placed upon your time dictate that you possess strong organizational skills and a high degree of self-motivation.

These points are mentioned not to dampen your enthusiasm or dissuade you from pursuing your dream. Rather, these considerations are simply some of the trade-offs that you may have to embrace if you truly want to be a lawyer. As the old adage says, nothing worthwhile comes easily (or cheaply, for that matter)!

II. Admissions Criteria: Quantitative v. Qualitative Measures

A. Quantitative measures

Law schools historically have relied heavily upon quantitative measures of academic accomplishments and potential for success in law school. Both your history of academic success (measured most pointedly by your **G.P.A.**) and your likelihood of success as a first year law student (measured by the **LSAT**) matter to the overwhelming majority of law schools. In other words, your G.P.A. and LSAT scores remain of paramount importance.

In addition, many law schools ask LSDAS to calculate an **Applicant Index**, which combines an applicant's G.P.A. and LSAT score with weighted constants to assist in the assessment and comparison of applicants.

B. Qualitative measures

In addition to the quantitative measures, admissions committees will consider an applicant's personal statement, letters of recommendation, and life or work experience. Each of these factors is discussed in detail in subsequent sections of this guide.

Some law schools consider the writing sample that is completed after the five multiple-choice sections of the LSAT. The writing sample is discussed in detail in section IX of this guide.

III. Building Your Academic Record

Law school admissions officers readily acknowledge that no one major will guarantee entrance into their schools, neither will a particular major *per se* exclude you from admission. On the other hand, admissions officers tend to view favorably those majors that traditionally have been perceived (by the admissions officers) as providing a foundation for the development of skills that will be necessary for the successful study and practice of law. In general, admissions officers are interested in discerning, among other things, whether your course work has required you to develop analytical skills, critical thinking skills, research skills, and effective oral and written communication skills. Historically, majors in the social sciences and humanities, such as Political Science, History, English, Philosophy and Economics, have been thought to promote these skills. However, you should NOT choose a major to please an admissions officer.

At the risk of sounding trite, it is most important that you choose a major that interests you. Your college preparation should afford you an opportunity to explore areas that peak your curiosity and that will engage you intellectually. Admissions officers will look beyond the raw G.P.A. to determine whether you have challenged yourself by completing progressively more difficult courses. They also will welcome a transcript that reflects course work that includes intensive research and writing. In the end, admissions officers need to be convinced that the intellectual rigor and motivation you have demonstrated in completing your undergraduate course work will be sustained throughout your legal education.

IV. Letters of Recommendation

Most law schools require you to submit at least two letters of recommendation. If no letters are required, you may choose to submit them if you think they will enhance your

admissions package. The golden rule here is to request letters of recommendation from individuals who know you and your work well.

In general, admissions officers prefer letters of recommendation from members of the academic community. Professors who have taught you in class or supervised your research should best be able to assess and discuss your academic performance and your potential for success in law school. Admissions officers particularly value letters that contain specific examples or instances of your strengths or skills. Also, letters that place you in the broader context of your class or your school tend to be most useful. If possible, a letter of recommendation from a professor in your major should be provided. On the contrary, letters of recommendation from individuals who are well-known, but who do not know you well, are not particularly helpful to admissions officers and will not receive much attention. Letters of recommendation from individuals who know you from outside experiences, such as extra-curricular activities or work experiences, may be helpful to the extent that these letters address personal characteristics and strengths.

Because letters of recommendation are an important part of your application package, you should take care in (1) selecting the individuals (preferably professors) from whom you will request a letter and (2) providing information that will assist the individual in preparing a letter that will enhance your application. Following are some suggestions that might assist you in your effort:

1. Choose a professor who knows you and your work well.

2. Schedule time to meet with the professor to inform her of your plans to attend law school. (It is inadvisable, and disrespectful, to simply thrust a reference form or request upon a professor as she is leaving class.)

3. Be respectful and direct in your request for a letter of recommendation. Explain briefly why you have chosen her to prepare a letter and discuss the relevant time frame for completing the letter. Ask the professor if she feels comfortable with your request. If the professor raises concerns about her ability to prepare a positive letter of recommendation or of meeting the time frame for completion, you should thank her for her consideration, and then choose another professor.

4. Provide the professor with as much information as reasonable to assist her in preparing the letter. Typically, a copy of your transcript, resume, and personal statement are

helpful. A copy of any papers or exams that you completed also might serve to refresh her memory of your work.

5. Provide the professor with the Letter of Recommendation Form from the LSAC Registration Book or directly from LSAC's Web site at www.lsac.org. Please complete all sections of the form (such as your name and social security number) that do not require her attention. Present all of the materials to her in a file folder that is labeled and well organized.

6. If the law schools to which you are applying require you to use the LSAC's Letter of Recommendation Service (LOR Service) provided through the Credential Assembly Service (LSDAS), follow the procedures specified by LSAC (as briefly described herein). To submit a letter, you must provide a prefilled Letter of Recommendation Form (obtained from the LSAC website) to each recommender. Each recommender must sign the Form, and send the completed Form along with her letter of recommendation to LSAC, which will forward the letter to each of the law schools you have indicated on your Registration Form. Each letter of recommendation must be received by LSAC at least two (2) weeks prior to a school's application deadline. Because many schools review completed application files on a rolling basis, you should seek to have your file, including the letters of recommendation, completed as early in the admissions process as possible. (You may wish to explain to each recommender the importance of submitting the letter of recommendation to the LSAC at her earliest convenience.) The LSAC will send an acknowledgement to the recommender. You can check the status of your letters of recommendation by reviewing your Monthly Activity Update report. Letters of recommendation to schools that do not use the LOR Service must be sent directly to the law schools. Please verify whether the individual schools to which you are applying require your letters of recommendation to be submitted through the LOR Service.

V. Personal Statement

Although most law schools continue to rely heavily on G.P.A.s and LSAT scores, your G.P.A. and LSAT score do not define who you are. Admissions committees also are interested in learning more about you as a person. Because interviews are given only in rare instances, the personal statement will allow you an opportunity to communicate something about yourself to the admissions committee that may not be evident from the information provided in other parts of your law school application. The personal statement, therefore, is your one shot (and perhaps your best shot) at helping the committee to see you as the unique

individual you are.

Although some schools will provide you with a specific question, most schools deliberately leave the topic open-ended. Because the personal statement, by definition, is unique to each applicant, no single model exists for what constitutes the "perfect personal statement." Your challenge, then, is to develop an essay that is well written and positive in tone.* Your statement should provide the committee with insight into your character, personality and motivation to attend law school. For example, you may choose to focus on a particular experience that has shaped your interest in law. Or, you may choose to reveal something about your personal qualities by discussing a particular talent or skill that you have developed and which demonstrates one of those qualities, and will positively impact your ability to succeed in law school and the practice law. Most importantly, you must be honest in your personal statement. At the end of your efforts, if you are confident that your personal statement reflects the "real you," then you will have met your challenge.

In addition to the content of your essay, admissions committees will pay close attention to the form of your essay. Some schools prescribe the length of the essay; most do not. Typically, personal statements are between one and two typed, double-spaced pages. You must ensure that your personal statement conforms to all the norms of good writing. Your statement must be well-organized and logically constructed. In addition, proper spelling, punctuation, and grammar are essential to a well-written essay. Like all good writing, you should allow sufficient time to revise and rewrite your statement. When you believe that you have completed the statement to your satisfaction, you should elicit feedback from at least one objective reader. Remember, your personal statement reflects you and should only be submitted when you are confident that it represents your best work.

* Avoid the temptation to use your personal statement as a vehicle for addressing weaknesses in your application. Any negative information that you feel compelled to address in your application should be discussed succinctly in an addendum to your application. This includes any concerns you may have that your LSAT score does not reflect accurately your intellectual potential and stands in sharp contrast to the G.P.A. you have earned at WCU. Please see the Pre-Law Advisor to discuss more specifically how you can address this issue in an addendum.

VI. Resumes

Admissions officers at many of the law schools have indicated an interest in receiving resumes in addition to the specifically requested application information. Some law schools now require a resume. The resume is an opportunity to reveal aspects of your life and work experience that can't be adequately addressed in your personal statement. Unlike a typical employment resume, a law school resume need not be confined to one page. If you do provide a resume, you nevertheless MUST complete the application form in detail. Do NOT simply refer the admissions committee to your resume in response to information requested on the application form. Your resume should be sufficiently detailed to allow an admission's officer to evaluate your life and work experiences as well as your particular strengths and accomplishments. Do not use your personal statement to merely restate your resume.

VII. Extra-Curricular Activities

Admissions officers are interested in applicants who are well-rounded. Extra-curricular activities that demonstrate positive character traits, such as perseverance, motivation or leadership are regarded with particular favor. You must make an effort, however, to maintain an appropriate balance between your academic studies and your extra-curricular activities. Pursuing outside activities at the expense of maintaining a solid G.P.A. likely will prove unwise in the admissions process.

VIII. LSAT

A. Rationale: The LSAT is designed to measure the intellectual abilities and skills that are deemed essential to the successful study of law. Based upon validity studies, the LSAT is considered to be a fairly reliable predictor of first year grades in law school. The correlation between the LSAT score and first year grades is measured in terms of a coefficient between 1.00 (an exact correlation) and zero (no correlation other than pure coincidence). Based on validity studies among 171 law schools, the median coefficient was .42. Although law school admissions officers acknowledge that the LSAT is far from a perfect predictor, none have been willing to forego the LSAT in favor of any other measure. The allegiance to the LSAT perhaps can be summed up in one phrase: It's not perfect, but it's the best we've got.

B. Dates given: The LSAT is administered four times each year: June; early fall (either September or October); December; and February. The June test is given on a Monday afternoon whereas the other tests are administered on a Saturday morning.

For those observing the Saturday Sabbath, special Monday administrations are available.

C. Registering for the LSAT: You may register for the LSAT by: (1) completing and mailing the registration form (included in the LSAT & LSDAS Registration Packet); (2) telephoning the LSDAS; or (3) accessing the LSAC website at www.LSAC.org. If registering by telephone, you must first complete the LSAT and LSDAS by Telephone-Worksheet that will assist you in gathering the information necessary for telephone registration. You also should register for the LSDAS (Credential Assembly Service) at the same time.

You must take the LSAT by no later than December of the year preceding the fall in which you wish to matriculate at a law school. For example, if you intend to begin law school in Fall 2010, you must take the LSAT by no later than December 2009. Although a few schools make an exception and accept scores from the February exam date, you should not rely upon this exception. **Optimally, you should take the LSAT either in June after completing your junior year courses or October of your senior year.** In either case, you should plan to submit your applications early in the fall of your senior year, preferably October or November. (See also Section XI. Application Strategy.)

D. LSAT accommodations for students with disabilities: If you have a documented disability (as defined by the Americans With Disabilities Act), and require accommodations to complete the LSAT, you **MUST** first register to complete the LSAT on a specific test date and submit a request for the accommodations by the registration deadline for that specific LSAT test date. Be sure to provide all of the requested documentation to LSAC. Requests for accommodations are reviewed by LSAC in the order in which they are received. Because of the large volume of requests received by LSAC, you should apply as early as possible before the designated test date deadline. By applying early, you will afford yourself ample time to respond to requests by LSAC for additional information, or to file a timely appeal with LSAC in the event of a denial or inadequate accommodations. All requests for reconsideration and supporting documentation must be received by the deadline for the specific LSAT test date for which you have registered. **PLEASE, PLAN AHEAD!**

E. Form of the LSAT

The LSAT consists of five multiple-choice sections plus a thirty-minute writing sample.

1. The *multiple-choice* section of the test is comprised of the following:

- a. Reading comprehension (one section of approximately 26-28 questions)
- b. Analytical reasoning (sometimes referred to as "Logic games") (one section of approximately 24 questions)
- c. Logical thinking (2 sections of approximately 24-28 questions each)
- d. One unscored section (consisting of questions from one of the three types of questions listed above)

2. The *writing sample* is administered separately at the completion of the five multiple-choice sections of the test. You will be afforded 35 minutes to complete the essay in a defined space. Do not exceed the space limit! The assignment will consist of one of two different writing prompts - decision or argument. If a decision prompt is assigned, you will be given a set of facts and decision-making criteria. Two alternative courses of action also will be presented. You will need to compose an argument in support of one course of action and against the other course of action. Alternatively, if you are assigned an argument prompt, you will be given an argument and then asked to analyze and evaluate the persuasiveness of the argument. In other words, you need to critique the author's line of reasoning and use of evidence in support of the argument. Because the writing sample is administered at the end of several intense hours of testing, no one (including admissions officers) expects that your essay will be a literary masterpiece. On the other hand, your essay should reflect the logical development of your position. In addition, you should pay special attention to grammar and spelling. The writing sample is unscored; however, it is forwarded to the law schools with your LSAT score and may be considered in the admission decision.

F. Scoring

The multiple choice sections of the test are scored based upon the number of correct answers given. No penalty is assessed for guessing. Therefore, never leave an answer blank -- guess!

G. Repeated tests

The LSAC permits applicants to sit for the LSAT a maximum of three (3) times during any two year period. You should not approach the LSAT, however, with a view that you can "just take it again" if you're not satisfied with the score from your first effort. Why not?

1. Absent unusual circumstances (such as illness during the test), you should not assume that you would gain a dramatic increase in your score simply by repeating the LSAT. A research report sponsored by the LSAC determined that on the 120-180 LSAT score scale, second-time takers earned, on average, about 2.7 points higher than their first scores, and third-time takers earned only 1.5 points higher than their second scores. (See *The Performance of Repeat Test Takers on the Law School Admission Test*, Deborah L. Schnipke, Lisa Anthony, and Lynda M. Reese.)

2. Law schools will be aware of each of your LSAT scores, and may chose to consider the highest score or an average of all scores reported. LSAC automatically reports the results of all LSATs in your file, including cancellations and absences, since June 1, 2004. The scores are averaged and also appear separately. If you wish to have older scores obtained between June 1, 2000 and June 1, 2004 placed on a current file, you may do so by sending a signed, dated request to LSAC. Law schools may be influenced by an LSAC-sponsored study which concluded that the average score better predicts first year law school grades than using either the highest or most recent score. See *The Validity of Law School Admission Test Scores for Repeaters: A Replication*, Susan P. Dalessandro and Lori D. McLeod.

In short, you should be prepared to take the LSAT once and perform to the best of your ability.

H. Test preparation

1. You would be ill-advised to take the LSAT without adequate preparation.

2. The LSAT is unlike any other test you have taken and requires some time to acquaint yourself with the types of questions posed. Although you cannot "study" for the LSAT in the same way in which you study for college exams, you can develop a familiarity with the form of test questions and develop a strategy for responding to the questions. In any event, it is very unlikely that you will perform well if you walk in "cold."

3. The LSAC makes available "past tests" that you can use to prepare for the LSAT. You can purchase a copy of these "past tests" from the LSDAS.

4. A number of commercial courses also exist to help you prepare for the exam. The cost of these courses can be substantial. As an alternative, some of the local colleges offer "prep courses" that tend to be less expensive and less time-

intensive than the commercial courses. You are NOT required to take an LSAT prep course!

5. The most important point to remember is that you take time to prepare for the LSAT, regardless of which method you choose. The golden rule when it comes to preparing for the LSAT is practice, practice, practice!

IX. Misconduct or Irregularities in the Application Process

Honesty and integrity are critical to the application process, just as they are critical to the successful practice of law. Misconduct or irregularities that occur in the context of applying to law school may result in severe sanctions, including referral to the LSAC for further investigation (and notification to all law schools to which you have applied if an unfavorable determination is made), revocation of admission or disciplinary action by the law school(s) to which you have been accepted, and denial of permission to practice law in the state in which you seek admission. In short, you must make every effort to ensure that honesty and integrity are maintained throughout every phase of the application process. Misconduct or irregularities that result from unintentional acts are NOT excused; intent in the commission of misconduct or an irregularity is NOT required. The best way to avoid an allegation of misconduct is to follow the rule of full disclosure.

Misconduct or irregularities are defined in Section 3 of the document entitled *LSAC Rules Governing Misconduct and Irregularities in the Admission Process*. Misconduct and irregularities include, but are not limited to, the following categories of behaviors:

1. *misconduct or irregularities relating to the application materials*, including:
 - a. submission of an altered or nonauthentic transcript;
 - b. submission of an application containing false or misleading information, including:
 - (1) misrepresentation of disciplinary actions, including academic and conduct sanctions;
 - (2) falsification of school attendance, honors, awards, or employment;
 - (3) misrepresentation of prior law school attendance;
 - c. submission of a fraudulent letter of recommendation;
 - d. submission of a personal statement that does not reflect your work product; and,

e. falsification of records for the purpose of applying to another law school;

2. *misconduct or irregularities relating to the LSAT, including:*

a. impersonation of another in taking the LSAT;
b. switching of LSAT answer sheets with another person;

c. taking the LSAT for purposes other than law school admission;

d. cheating (which you should assume is defined broadly) on the LSAT;

e. obtaining advance access to test materials;

f. theft of test materials; and,

g. violation of LSAT test center regulations;

3. *misconduct or irregularities relating to the communication of information to Law Services, including:*

a. submission of false information to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS);

b. false statements or omissions of information requested on the Law Services order form.

X. Application Strategy

As of Fall 2008, there were 199 ABA-approved law schools in the United States, including the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's School. Because of the increasingly intense competition for a relatively fixed number of seats, it is in your best interest to submit your applications as early as October of the year preceding the fall in which you wish to matriculate at a law school. In other words, if you want to begin your legal education in Fall 2010, you should apply in October 2009!

Choosing which law schools to apply to may appear, at first glance, to be a daunting task. It need not be. There is no single "best law school" to attend. Instead, there are a range of choices based upon the criteria that is most important to you, and the strength of your application package. Following is a proposed plan of action to assist you in narrowing your focus:

1. Define, as best you can, your criteria for a law school. Factors you may wish to consider initially include:

a. Geographical constraints. Are you willing to relocate to attend law school? If so, are you limited to only certain geographic areas, defined by either the section of the

U.S. (i.e., east coast, midwest, southwest) or the particular local location of the school (i.e., urban campus v. rural campus)? Schools with national reputations will tend to afford you the widest range of geographic opportunities upon graduation. On the other hand, regional or local schools may hold a particular appeal if you intend to practice in the same area after graduation. As a practical matter, approximately 75% of jobs reported nationally were accepted by graduates who had attended law school in that same geographic area. (The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools, 2010 Edition.)

b. Financial constraints. What is your present level of debt from your undergraduate education? How much debt are you willing, and is reasonable, to incur to finance your law school education? (See Section XIII for a discussion of financial aid.)

c. Strength of your application. You should focus your attention on those schools in which your application would appear to be competitive based upon your combined GPA and LSAT score. You should recognize, however, that falling within the G.P.A. and LSAT ranges for any particular school does not guarantee acceptance to that school. Reciprocally, you should recognize that your G.P.A. and LSAT score may not necessarily preclude you from acceptance into schools with G.P.A. and LSAT scores higher than yours. Therefore, you should consider a few schools outside of your competitive range, both above and below your G.P.A. & LSAT score. Two websites that allow you to experiment with G.P.A. and LSAT scores are as follows: <http://www.lsac.org> and <http://www.bc.edu/LawLocator>.

2. Compile a list of schools in which you might be interested based upon your criteria, as defined above. Narrow the list by evaluating the particular attributes of each school. The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools 20xx (published annually) contains basic information about each ABA-approved law school. The Pre-Law Advisor maintains a current copy of the Guide in her office. Some information that you might want to gather includes:

a. School environment. What type of an environment are you looking for? Are students from diverse or homogeneous backgrounds? Is the atmosphere among the students one of cooperation or competition? Are faculty members accessible to students? Does the faculty reflect a diversity of personal and professional backgrounds?

b. Academic offerings. What types of courses are offered? How often are the courses offered? Is the school well known for its strength in a particular area of the law?

c. Class size. What is the approximate size of the incoming class? How large are typical first year classes? How large are typical 2L and 3L classes?

d. Placement. What percentage of graduates are employed in law positions within 3 months of graduation? six months? What percentage of graduates are employed in large law firms? mid-sized law firms? small law firms? public interest organizations? What percentage of graduates obtain judicial clerkships?

3. Review The Book of Law School Lists (published annually), which is located in the office of the Pre-Law Advisor. The Book contains a wide range of information for all ABA-approved law schools, including academic and clinical programs, law school publications open to student participation, student organizations, scholarships, and other related topics.

4. Where possible, arrange to visit each school in which you are seriously interested. If you do visit a school, please send a "thank you" note to the law school representatives who facilitated your visit.

5. Except in rare instances, law schools do not grant interviews to applicants. Remember, however, that everything counts! Any contact you have, whether in person or by telephone, with any individual associated with a law school must be conducted in a professional, courteous, and respectful manner.

XI. Selected Internet Resources

- A. Many law schools have their own home pages, which can be accessed through <http://www.lisac.org>
- B. Boston College On-Line Law School Locator, which reflects GPA and LSAT ranges for each law school, can be found at <http://www.bc.edu/LawLocator>
- C. Information regarding part-time law school programs can be located at <http://www.bc.edu/offices/careers/gradschool/law/parttime.html>
- D. Equal Justice Works provides information about choosing the right law school, financing your legal education, and pursuing paths in public interest law, located at <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources>

- E. The Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund (PRLDEF), which offers programs, services and events to support all phases of your early law career – from "just thinking about" law school to landing your first job, can be located at <http://www.PRLDEF.org>
- F. The Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) offers programs that provide students from low-income, minority and economically disadvantaged communities with academic and financial support to gain access to law school, successfully matriculate and pass the bar examination, located at <http://www.cleoscholars.com>
- G. The National Association for Law Placement provides information on job placement and career trends in the law at <http://www.nalp.org>
- H. The American Bar Association provides information on legal careers, professional activities, publications as well as information on CLEO and ABA minority scholarships at <http://www.abanet.org>
- I. The Access Group, a non-profit organization that provides loans to graduate students, including law students, offers information relating to financial aid that can be accessed at www.accessgroup.org

XII. Financial Aid

A. Introduction

The cost of attending law school is not insignificant, and may be outright staggering depending upon the level of debt you incurred to finance your undergraduate education.

B. Sources of Financing

Various sources of funding are available to finance your legal education, including the following: federal loans and grants; private loans and scholarships; and scholarships, grants and fellowships awarded by law schools based on need or merit.

In addition, an increasing number of law schools have created programs that provide assistance to graduating students who may not be able to support fully the level of debt incurred to complete their law school education. These programs are generally referred to as Loan Repayment Assistance Programs (or LRAPs). Some of the programs provide assistance to graduating

students in the form of a grant (which represents "free money"), whereas others extend new loans to students (which may later be "forgiven" by the lending school).

Eligibility for LRAP monies varies by school. The criteria for awarding LRAP monies may include the type of job that a student has accepted, such as a position in a public interest law center, the level of income a student will earn (sometimes without regard to the position), and the length of time that a student must be employed in the position. Because there is no "uniform LRAP," you need to investigate each school's policy to determine whether an LRAP exists at that school and the eligibility criteria.

The College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 and the Higher Education Reauthorization and College Opportunity Act of 2008 also provide for a level of debt forgiveness or cancellation when you meet specific criteria that include, among other things, employment in certain types of jobs after graduation. See the Equal Justice Works website for more detailed information, at <http://www.equaljusticeworks.org/resources>

D. Loan Application Process

1. If you are interested in applying for federal loans, you must complete the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) form each year. The FAFSA form is the same for undergraduate and law school loans, and is available at fafsa.ed.gov.

2. The FAFSA form should be submitted as soon as possible after January 1 of the year in which you will enroll in law school. (For example, if you expect to attend law school in September 2010, then you should submit your FAFSA form as soon after January 1, 2010 as possible). Most law schools have their own deadlines.

3. The FAFSA form is used to determine federal financial aid for all schools. Each school, however, typically has its own forms for "need-based" aid. You may need to provide additional information to the school. You must check the website for each school to determine its calculation for need-based aid and the required documentation.

4. The FAFSA form takes time to complete. Therefore, gather financial data early. Complete your own tax returns as soon after January 1 of the year in which you intend to matriculate in law school.

XIII. D.T. Marrone Award

Each year, the Pre-Law Advisory Committee awards the D.T. Marrone Award of \$1,000 against tuition to an outstanding graduating senior who has been accepted by and will enroll in an ABA accredited law school. The funds for this award are made available through the West Chester University Alumni Association in honor of D.T. Marrone, a West Chester alumnus who is the retired President Judge of the Chester County Court.

The criteria for selection include: cumulative grade point average (G.P.A.) of at least 3.25 and a record of service to the University or community. The Selection Committee also may consider the personal statement that each applicant has submitted in connection with the law school application process. LSAT scores are not a criterion. Applications for the award are made during the spring semester and are available in the office of the Pre-Law Advisor.

XIV. Agreement between SSHE and the Widener University School of Law, Harrisburg Campus/Dixon Scholarships

The Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education (SSHE) and the Widener University School of Law-Harrisburg Campus entered into an agreement whereby students who have graduated or will graduate from a SSHE school, including West Chester University, are eligible to apply to the Widener-Harrisburg Campus through its Express Admission Program. This Program guarantees admission to Widener Law School's Harrisburg Campus if you meet the following criteria: (1) complete the application by April 1 of the calendar year in which you plan to enroll; (2) satisfy Widener's admission requirements relating to character and fitness; (3) rank in the top 50% of the graduating class; and, (4) score at or above the 50th percentile on the LSAT.

In addition to its Express Admission Program, the Widener Law School's Harrisburg Campus will award several Dixon Scholarships to successful applicants from West Chester University. The Scholarships will offset 30% of the annual tuition fee. You also will be eligible for other types of financial aid.

For further information regarding the Express Admission Program or the Dixon Scholarships, you should speak directly with the Pre-Law Advisor.

XV. Sooner Rather Than Later

* Establish relationships with at least a few of your undergraduate professors. Letters of recommendation from persons, such as professors, who know you and your potential for success in law school are important to the admissions process. Even if you decide not to ask each of these professors for a recommendation, it is hoped that you will have benefited from fostering each of those relationships.

* Investigate careers in the law by reading relevant publications and talking with lawyers.

* Gather financial data early. Complete your tax returns before January 31 of the year in which you intend to matriculate.

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