HANDBOOK
FOR
PRE-LAW
STUDENTS

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PREFACE

As university pre-law advisor, I have received training in advising students interested in a career in law. Periodically, I attend conferences of the Southern Association of Pre-Law Advisors where I exchange information and ideas with other pre-law advisors as well as law-school deans and admissions officers and lawyers. While my work as pre-law advisor is only relatively small part of my job at Radford, I do have a knowledge base and tools that can be useful to pre-law
students. The same can be said of my colleague, Dr. Jack Call. Students and graduates should feel free to consult with either of us at any time. We can help you----but only if you ask!

Other good sources of information for pre-law students include the Career Services Center on campus, other professors with an interest or background in the area, lawyers (and especially lawyers who graduated from Radford), current law-school students (especially our own graduates), and the law schools themselves. All of these sources can be accessed over the internet, which has greatly increased the amount of information which is readily available to pre-law students. This handbook includes a number of web-site addresses, as well as suggestions for further reading in the print media. However, students should be aware that while the web can significantly facilitate the search for information, it can also facilitate bad advice. The ancient Roman admonition caveat emptor (“let the buyer beware”) remains apt. In this sense, the importance of a quality program of pre-law advising like that of Radford University has never been greater.

Robert M. Gill

INTRODUCTION

This handbook is intended to provide general information which should prove useful to Radford University pre-law students during their time here, and to Radford graduates interested in applying to law school. While it is not designed to answer every question you may have, it does suggest web sites and further readings where more detailed information can be found.

The handbook is divided into two parts. Part One contains two chapters. Chapter One helps answer the question “Should I Consider a Career in Law?” by briefly considering some of the aptitudes and personality traits often associated with successful lawyers, and describing what law school and the legal profession are like. Chapter Two offers guidance on appropriate undergraduate preparation for law school and the legal profession and preparation for the LSAT.

Part Two consists of four chapters. Chapter Three considers the question “How do I decide where to apply?” Chapter Four focuses on the law-school admission process, including the LSAT. Chapter Five offers a few, basic suggestions on the availability of financial assistance and Chapter Six briefly describe some of the opportunities available to minority pre-law students.

Pre-law students should consider this handbook as a departure point in their pursuit of a legal career. Use its suggestions for further readings and internet research, and feel free to consult the pre-law advisors as needed.

PART
CHAPTER ONE

“SHOULD I CONSIDER A CAREER IN LAW?”
(THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND THE LAW-SCHOOL EXPERIENCE)

“I went to law school because I like to read, I like to do research, and I like to work with people.” – a Roanoke attorney

“A good lawyer likes to prevail at games.” – another Roanoke attorney

In order to decide if a legal career might be right for you, it is important to reflect on the particular talents, personality traits, and personal characteristics of successful lawyers as they compare to your own. It is also important to know a little about the legal profession and the law-school experience. By exploring these topics, this chapter should help you decide whether to pursue a career in law.

I. Talents and Personality Traits of Successful Lawyers

The insight that we tend to like the things we are good at can serve as a starting point for a brief consideration of the talents and personal characteristics that seem to characterize successful lawyers. By themselves, these talents and characteristics may not ensure success in the law-school admission process, in law school, and in the legal profession. Nevertheless, a person who does not possess many of the characteristics is unlikely to enjoy (and thus, to be good at it) the study and practice of the law. Some of the traits of successful lawyers, listed in no particular order, are considered in the following paragraphs.

As the first quotation at the beginning of this chapter suggests, successful lawyers are good at and, thus, enjoy reading, studying, and doing research. For most, these skills are an avocation as well as a vocation. Thus, while legal education and the practice of law involve extensive reading, studying, and research, many lawyers find themselves engaged in these activities in their spare time as well, often on subjects far removed from the law. Partly as a result of their reading and research skills, good lawyers communicate effectively in both written and spoken English, and enjoy doing so. Without the ability to
convey information and ideas to others, the other skills characteristic of good lawyers would be of little use.

Like most people who enjoy research, successful lawyers are “detail-oriented” in the sense that they can read and absorb large amounts of material while retaining the details. Moreover, like most people who do what they are good at (and who therefore enjoy doing it), successful lawyers are comfortable working long hours.

Successful lawyers enjoy dealing with ambiguity. Since the law is seldom “black and white,” a person who is uncomfortable dealing with “gray matter” is unlikely to enjoy (thus, to be good at) the study or practice of the law. A good lawyer recognizes that in the law, there is seldom a clearly “right” or “wrong” argument, thought there is always such a thing as a “good” or a “bad” argument. In this sense, successful lawyers are able to argue both sides of an issue. Indeed, they enjoy doing so!

In this sense, a person who tends to see things strictly in “black and white” would be unlikely to enjoy (or be good at) a career in law. For instance, a student who enjoys and actively participates in a class discussion of different interpretations of Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw* might have the makings of a good lawyer. A student who demands to know which interpretation is “right” might be happier (and thus, better) in another profession.

As the second quotation at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, successful lawyers are naturally competitive. Thus, while good lawyers enjoy dealing with “gray matter,” they also enjoy being advocates for one side or another of an issue. In part, of course, successfully defending one side involves being able to anticipate arguments for the other. In this sense, successful lawyers tend to like problem-solving.

A person could have all the characteristics listed above and still not succeed at the study and practice of the law if she or he lacked one additional characteristic. As the first quotation at the beginning of the chapter makes clear, successful lawyers genuinely enjoy working with people. Good lawyers are empathetic; they can put themselves in the shoes of the defendant, the plaintiff, the defense attorney, the prosecuting attorney, the jury member, and others. They enjoy working with clients and explaining the law to them. Perhaps most important of all, they enjoy helping people. No matter how skilled in other ways, a loner who lacks these characteristic would not enjoy (or be good at) the law!

Every student considering a career in law should seriously and honestly ponder the characteristics associated with successful lawyers. If you feel that you do not possess these characteristics, it is likely that the legal procession would be a bad choice for you since you would be unlikely to enjoy or do well at it. If you feel that you do possess these traits, a career in law might well be a good choice for you. In either case, you should consider taking the Myers-Briggs Indicator test, which identifies an individual’s personality characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses and suggests appropriate career options. The Myers-Briggs Indicator is offered through the university’s Center for Counseling and Student Development.

If you determine that you do possess the skills and personal characteristics associated with successful lawyers, you should work to develop them further both inside the classroom and beyond. Take courses that require serious study and extensive reading, research, writing, and speaking. Develop the habit of reading for pleasure. Work to build your vocabulary by reading good books, listening to good speakers, and perhaps by working crossword puzzles. Get used to working long hours to achieve your goals, and
remember that we tend to like the things we’re good at. (If you don’t enjoy much of the work, it may be that your goals are inappropriate for you.) Work to develop your problem-solving skills by taking appropriate classes and even by buying (and using!) the logical-puzzle books sold at supermarket check-outs. Strive to be able to see (and, where appropriate, to argue) both sides of an issue even while being an advocate (and striving to win) for one. Writing a column for The Tartan or getting involved in the campus judicial system are two of the many possible ways of doing this. Take advantage of every opportunity to develop your “people skills.” Choose your memberships with care, be an active participant in the communities you are a part of, and seek out opportunities for leadership.

II. The Legal Profession

Initially, many students consider a career in law because of the way the procession is depicted in a favorite movie or television show, or because of their interaction with a lawyer they happen to know. Such students usually know little about the profession as a whole. It is important to understand that law-school graduates hold a variety of jobs. Most bear little resemblance to the images projected by the media or to the particular lawyer you may happen to know. In this section, we will consider briefly the various types of work that lawyers do, in order to help you understand the profession as a whole. As a result, you will be better able to make an informed decision as to whether a legal career is an option you want to pursue further.

In a typical year, around 55% of all law-school graduates go to work in the private sector. Of these, some go to work for companies as diverse as banks, accounting firms, and publishing houses, or as in-house corporate counsel. Others either “hangs up their shingle” and establish a solo practice or (more commonly) accept employment in private law firm. Initially, new lawyers in the second category are hired as “associates” (employees). Most hope that after a probationary period of several years, they will be chosen as “partners” of the firm. While the largest firms offer a variety of legal services, most firms are more specialized, focusing on particular types of practice.

Typically, lawyers working in the private sector earn more than those employed in the public sector. Starting salaries for associates in major firms in large cities begin around $60,000 and can reach $85,000, while starting salaries for associates in smaller firms located in smaller cities and towns begin around $30,000 and can reach $65,000. Starting salaries for in-house counsel for large and small corporations are generally comparable. Of course, lawyers in “solo practice” charges what the market will bear, and earns whatever is left after their expenses are covered.

Many lawyers in the private sector, including most in-house counsel as well as many associates and partners in private firms, are specialists in corporate law, which consists of transactional law and litigation. Transactional lawyers deal with issues involving corporate finance, contracts, acquisitions, and bankruptcy. Litigators deal with such issues as breaches of contract, embezzlement, class-action suits. Private sector litigators also specialize in such areas as real estate, family law, tax law, intellectual property law, international law, health environmental law, and communications law.
Apart from business law, private-sector lawyers also specialize in such areas as personal injury, malpractice, social security, disability, and criminal law.

In a typical year, over 25% of all law-school graduates go to work for the federal, state, or local government. Government law includes such specialties as antitrust law, military and admiralty law, civil rights, community relations, trade regulation, taxation and finance, labor law, communications regulation, international law, energy law, patent law, public utilities regulation, criminal and constitutional law, and many others. Lawyers work in a wide variety of government agencies, including (on the federal level) the U.S. Department of Justice, the Securities and Exchange Commission and other regulatory agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service. Of course, each year a number of exceptionally qualified recent law-school graduates are hired to assist judges for a specified period of time as law clerks. Typically, starting salaries for government positions requiring a law degree are an average of around $38,000, and around $39,000 for a judicial clerkship.

On average, in any given year something under 10% of all law-school graduates is employed in the area of public-interest law. Public-interest lawyers work with (and often, for) public-advocacy organizations to provide legal representation to various groups including visible minorities, the elderly, the poor, children, and immigrants, and environmentalists. Because the budgets of public-advocacy organizations are limited, these organizations are able to hire only a small percentage of those who apply for jobs. Accordingly, competition for public-interest positions is often quite keen despite the relatively low monetary rewards they offer. Public-interest lawyers generally earn significantly less than lawyers in other areas. While there is a wide range of salaries in public-interest law, the average starting salary is around $33,000. Students interested in a career in public-interest law should be aware that some law schools (most of them private) have loan-forgiveness programs for graduates working in this area. Typically, under these programs lawyers working in public-advocacy law have their loans reduced by a certain amount for each year of their employment.

A number of law-school graduates are employed in a variety of positions in academia, many of which require advanced degrees in addition to a degree in law. These include both administrative positions, such as university counsel and law librarian, and teaching positions in law schools and in a variety of academic disciplines (most commonly business, political science, and criminal justice).

In recent years, an increasingly significant minority of pre-law students have indicated that they do not intend to practice law, but that they view their legal education as useful training for a non-traditional career. Such careers are as diverse as banking, insurance, real estate, lobbying, law enforcement, and intergovernmental relations.

Students considering a career in law should be aware that not to many law-school graduates end up in the “dream job” they anticipated when they entered law school. Indeed, some find it hard to get a job at all. In a typical year, about 10% of all law-school graduates remain unemployed six months after their graduation. While some of these new lawyers undoubtedly failed to pass their state bar exam, and while others may have had unrealistic expectations, the fact remains that a law degree is not a guarantee of employment.

Students wishing further information on careers in law should consult the American Bar Association’s booklet *A Life in the Law* (PC#235-0036, $2.50; order at 1-
III. The Law-School Experience

Just as students often have mistaken notions about the legal profession, many lack a realistic understanding of the nature of legal studies. Of course, such an understanding is essential if you are to make an informed decision on whether to pursue a legal career. This section is designed to provide the sort of information you need to consider in reaching your decision.

As in the previous section, students should apply the maxim that we tend to be good at the things that we like (and vice-versa). Some aspects of legal education are grueling, and most students reading this section will find themselves “turned off” by something in it. Nevertheless, if you are not “turned on” by many of the challenges described, it is likely that the law is not an appropriate career choice for you.

Most law-school students find law school to be quite different from college. Law-school students worked hard as undergraduates or they wouldn’t have made it to law school. Nevertheless, most find that law school is much more time-consuming. This is especially true during the first year, when students have only partially made the transition from undergraduate school. In most first-year courses, 95% of the work involves case material drawn from casebooks. “Hornbooks,” narrative outlines of the law in a particular field, are also “recommended” (i.e., required!) in many courses. The American Bar Association strongly recommends that students not hold any sort of outside employment in their first year of full-time law school.

In all three years of law school, most students find that their studies require much more time than was the case during their undergraduate years. In addition, the type of studying is different. Even the best undergraduates tend to study in spurts—cramming for a big test on assigned material they haven’t previously read, or writing a paper in a marathon “all-nighter.” Successful law students study continuously.

Moreover, in law school quizzes and tests are not spaced throughout the term to serve as a “prod.” Typically, grades in a first-year course are based on the results of one exam at the end of the semester (or, in a few cases at the end of the year), while grades in the second and third years are based on one or two exams per course. Since exams are designed to test students’ ability to apply what they know, “knowing the material” is only the first step in preparing. Given the large amounts of reading and other work assigned, a student must understand that taking a night of in September could spell disaster on the exam in December or, in the case of year-long courses, in May. The sort of continuous
study required for success in law school requires large measures of maturity, independence, self-motivation, and self-discipline.

Legal education also requires a definite skill base. The first section of this chapter discussed the aptitudes and personal characteristics of successful lawyers, and Chapter Two will further discuss how to develop the necessary skills during your undergraduate career. For now, three specific skills should be noted as essential for success in law school: The ability to read and absorb large amounts of material, the capacity to communicate effectively in both written and spoken English; and the ability to think critically and analytically.

Law-school education is also characterized by enormous attention to detail. Reading a long assignment is not enough; students must remember the details in order to participate in class discussions.

One of the most important lessons of legal education is that different interpretations of the law are always possible. Many students find the overwhelming emphasis on “gray matter,” and the paucity of “black-and-white,” “yes-or-no” issues frustrating. In the law, there is seldom a “right” or a “wrong” argument or interpretation. Rather, legal education is designed to help students develop the ability to distinguish between “good” and “bad” arguments and interpretations. Moreover, the focus is primarily on abstract ideas and concepts, an emphasis many students also find difficult.

In comparison to undergraduate school, legal education (like other graduate programs) involves a significant narrowing of interests. An undergraduate who doesn’t like his or her political science class can always look forward to the biology class he or she enjoys. In law school, every class is focused on some aspect of the law, and every class is designed to develop similar skills. Many law students find the narrower focus frustrating, especially since so many come to law school from a liberal-arts background which encouraged the pursuit of broad and varied interests. Of course, others find the narrow focus on subjects they love to be intellectually stimulating.

Most students find law school to be highly competitive – in most cases, much more so than was true of their undergraduate colleges. Consider that most law-school students ranked near the top of their undergraduate classes and were involved in various campus activities, often in leadership positions. In undergraduate school, such students can often achieve respectable grades without working to their potential, since many of their fellow students are less capable. In law school, where every student is “exceptional,” a student who does less than his or her best is unlikely to do even marginally well. Moreover, the current emphasis on grades in job placement has heightened the competition further.

As is true in American graduate education in general, student populations in law schools are changing. While a significant majority of lawyers is male, women now account for a majority of law-school applicants and students. The percentage of minority students has increased significantly. Further, at many law schools the average student is well over thirty years old. In some cases, entering students have already obtained
advanced degrees in other fields. Some have had other careers. Many did not enter law school directly from undergraduate school.

Most law schools have encouraged the trend among recent college graduates entering law school to have taken a year or more “off” between undergraduate school and law school. Law schools are well aware that it is precisely the type of they want who is most likely to be “burned out” (whether he or she knows it or not) by the time the student graduates from college. Moreover, students who do not go directly from undergraduate school to law school bring a variety of skills and life experiences to the classroom when they do enroll. In light of these considerations, law schools seldom frown on an applicant who has taken time off. Commonly cited reasons include trying to develop the necessary skills (whether by an extensive individual program of reading and study or by additional coursework or earning and advanced degree); overcoming “burn-out”; working to raise money to help pay for law school; taking time for personal fulfillment (by teaching skiing in the Rockies, riding a bicycle across the country, or whatever), or a combination of these (or other) reasons.

Indeed, once a student has determined that he or she wants to become a lawyer, the next question to consider is when. Of course, many students will decide to begin law school in the fall following their graduation. Those who decide to wait will not be penalized for their decision when they apply to law school.

Many law schools give their students the option of enrolling in joint-degree programs. Students successfully completing a joint-degree program are awarded a law degree and an additional degree such as a Masters of Business Administration, Public Administration, or Social Work, or an advanced degree in one of the disciplines comprising the humanities or social sciences. Students enrolled in these programs usually devote their first year to full-time-law-school study, and then divide their time between law school and the other academic department involved in their program. Joint-degree programs generally require more than the three years of full-time study normally required for law-school degree. Although joint-degree programs are widely publicized, relatively few students enroll in these programs, and fewer complete the requirements for both degrees. In general, a student should not choose a saw school primarily on the basis of the availability of a joint-degree program, thought its availability could be a legitimate factor in the student’s decision.

Students wanting additional information on the law-school experience (and also on selecting a law school, a topic we will address in Chapter Three) should access the home page of the Law School Admission Council (www.lsac.org). Additional information can be found in the publications listed in the “Pre-Law Readings: Books of Interest” section of The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools.
**IV. Questions to Ask Yourself**

The information provided in this chapter should help you as you consider whether a legal career is an option you wish to pursue further. After reading the chapter, you are in a better position to ask yourself the following questions as you try to reach a decision. Clear answers to some may come only in time, while even many beginning law students do not have clear answers to others. Nevertheless, anyone thinking about attending law school should ponder these questions.

First, why do you want to go to law school? Do you have a positive reason, or are you being “pushed” by your family, boyfriend or girlfriend, peer pressure, or the lack of anything more appealing?

Second, when should you go? Should you begin law school in the fall following your graduation, or should you take a year (or more) off? If you decide to take time off, how will you spend the time?

Third, do you have the time, the motivation, and the money for law school? While you can get the money to finance a law school education, most financial-aid packages are based primarily on loans. (See Chapter Five). Are you willing to incur the debts you will most likely have when you graduate?

Fourth, can your personal, family, and financial life survive three years of law school? Do you have the psychological temperament and the personal characteristic needed for success in law school?

Fifth, what are your strengths and weaknesses as a person and as a student? Do you have the requisite intellectual skills and abilities? What are your realistic chances of admission to law school? (Chapter Three helps you address the last question.)

Sixth, how is attending law school related to your overall career goals? What is your realistic assessment of the job market for law-school graduates, and how does this relate to your goals?

In closing this chapter, it should be noted that few entering law-school students are totally sure that they have made the correct choice. It may be that we have raised more questions that have answers. Nevertheless, in the end a healthy awareness of the issues involved will help you decide whether to pursue a legal career.
CHAPTER TWO

UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION FOR LAW SCHOOL AND BEYOND

“Tell them to take advantage of all the opportunities at Radford.” – A Radford alumnus and law-school graduate

So you want to go to law school. Having already read Chapter One, you had made an informed choice. For you, the next question is: How should I go about preparing myself for law school during my undergraduate career at Radford? How can I use my time here to maximize my chances of acceptance to law school and to ensure that I do well both in law school and in the legal profession? This chapter is designed to help you answer these questions by considering the choice of a major and appropriate elective courses, opportunities for relevant experiential learning, extracurricular activities to strengthen your credentials, and preparation for the LSAT.

Choosing a Major

Many students enter the pre-law advising program expecting to be told that a particular major (most commonly, political science) and a particular set of “pre-law” courses are essential for acceptance to law school. This is a misconception. Students should consult the statement of the Pre-Law Committee of the American Bar Association’s Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar entitled “Preparation for Legal Education” which is available in hard copy in the Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools or from the pre-law advisors, and on-line at the American Bar Association web site (www.abanet.org).

The statement on “Preparation for Law School” makes clear that while certain skills are needed for success on the LSAT’s and in law school and beyond, these skills can be acquired with virtually any major. Therefore, no specific background is prescribed as to undergraduate major or courses. It is for this than a “pre-law major”. If you have friends at other institutions who tell you that they are majoring in “pre-law”, question...
them further. Chances are that they actually have regular academic majors, fleshed out by courses suggested by the pre-law advisor to develop the skills-base needed for law school. If this is not the case, refer your friends to the A.B.A. statement!

The A.B.A. statement makes it clear that the development of an appropriate skills-base is more important than a student’s choice of major per se, though you should take the skills into account in choosing a major and, perhaps more important in choosing courses within the major. The skills needed for success on the LSAT and in law school and beyond are discussed in detail in the A.B.A. statement. They can be grouped into three broad categories: 1) a facility in comprehension and expression in words (reading, writing, and speaking); 2) the ability to think critically; and 3) the ability to reason, to think logically, and to draw conclusions.

Pre-law students should choose a major that helps them develop that broad base of skills necessary for success in law school, taking into account their own particular strengths and interests. In general, they should avoid majors that offer primarily narrow professional training, since such courses are unlikely to be well-suited to the development of the needed skills. Equally important, they should choose a major that genuinely interests them since, as we have seen, we tend to do well at things that we like. This last point is crucial since a minimum of a “B” average (a 3.0 G.P.A.) is generally expected for admission to most law schools, and 3.5 averages or better is often expected at the more selective ones. Of course, in selecting a major, students should also consider what they might want to do in the event that they eventually decide to pursue a career other than law.

Like most freedoms, the freedom to choose your own major comes at a cost. Some pre-law students wish that a pre-law major existed, since it would obviate their responsibility for selecting a major themselves. Nevertheless, pre-law students actually live in the best possible worlds. As a pre-law student, you can choose a major you love, work hard at it and enjoy doing so, and thereby do well in it. Students in other undergraduate and pre-professional programs should be so lucky!

Since a broad educational background in the liberal arts and sciences is helpful in developing the requisite skills-base, a majority of pre-law students major in subjects in these areas. In a recent, unscientific poll, professors at several law schools in our region were asked what undergraduate majors their best current student had had. History and English tied for first place, with classics (Latin and/or Greek), philosophy, and the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, and geology) close behind. The professors noted that the political science majors, those with a background in political philosophy tended significantly to out-perform those with backgrounds in other areas. Of course, other majors could also provide a good preparation for law school.

More generally, the law school professors surveyed were in agreement on the importance of honors courses and programs and of upper-class seminars. Asked to cite “glaring omissions” in undergraduate preparation, an overwhelming majority specified inadequate writing skills. As for “other general advice” for pre-law students, most urged
undergraduates to develop the habits of reading broadly for pleasure and of keeping up with current events by reading major news magazines and daily newspapers like *The Wall Street Journal, the New York Times,* and *The Washington Post,* and of discussing politics and business with friends outside the classroom. A number also urged undergraduates to build their vocabularies by working cross-word puzzles (specifically, those in *The New York Times*) and to develop their logical-thinking skills by using the sort of logical puzzle books published by Dell and others and commonly available at supermarket check-outs.

Choosing Elective Courses

Since the development of an appropriate skills-base is the goal, selecting appropriate electives is as important as the selection of a major. Virtually any course that requires you to read extensively, to think logically, critically, and analytically, and to share your thoughts and ideas in both written and spoken English, will help you in this regard. In this sense, you would probably be well advised to take precisely the sort of courses the student grapevine says to avoid! You should include among your electives extensive selections from the humanities (English, speech, foreign language, history, philosophy, logic, and others), the social sciences (political science, economics, geography, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and criminal justice), mathematics and computer science, and the natural sciences (biology, chemistry, physics, and geology).

More specifically, there are three broad categories of courses that are especially useful in developing the necessary skills for law school. The first category consists of courses dealing with the historical background of the development of the Anglo-Saxon jurisprudence, as would the introductory American government course and the advanced constitutional law courses on civil liberties and governmental powers in the political science department.

The second category includes courses that develop the sort of analytical skills needed in the law. The business law courses offered in the College of Business and Economics would fall into this category, as would courses in economics and the courses in introductory accounting and income tax accounting. Additionally, a basic background in economics and accounting perse is essential in law school. Courses in computer science, mathematics, and chemistry would also be included in this category. Liberal-arts courses that develop analytical skills include English courses with a focus on literary analysis and criticism, philosophy courses (especially courses in logical thinking), and the political philosophy courses offered by the political science department.

The third category includes courses that emphasize reading and communication (both oral and written), and the development of a traditional writing and speaking style. Among such courses are the classics course in etymology for vocabulary-building; the persuasion, public speaking and other courses offered by the relevant in this regard are
literature courses offered by the English department and other departments that emphasize the analysis and criticism of literary texts, and English courses in analytical writing, expository writing, and technical writing.

Finally, while knowledge of a language other than English is not required for law-school admission, the advanced study of a foreign language is quite useful in developing a facility in all aspect of English. Additionally, foreign-language study requires the sort of continuous study necessary in legal education. If possible, pre-law students should plan to graduate with a B.A. and continue their foreign-language study beyond the minimum hours required for that degree. Moreover, when feasible pre-law students should incorporate a summer, semester, or year-long program of foreign study (including additional study of or in the language) into their programs of study. Students interested in pursuing some aspect of international law or any other area of the law in which knowledge of a modern foreign language would be useful or essential should incorporate a modern language into their curriculum. Students who are primarily interested in honing their grammatical and logical-thinking skills as these pertain to English should seriously consider Latin.

Regardless of their majors and electives, all pre-law students should try to develop a relationship with at least one academic mentor in a field you enjoy (not necessarily your major), and take as many courses as possible from their mentor(s). Such a relationship will not only enrich your undergraduate education, but it will also ensure that you have at least one letter of recommendation from a professor who really knows you, your talents and your abilities.

CHAPTER THREE
DECIDING WHERE TO APPLY

“Forget about finding the ‘best’ law school, and find the law school that’s best for you.” – A law-school dean

By the second semester of their junior year, pre-law students should begin to seriously consider which law schools they want to apply to. This chapter should help you in reaching your decision.

Finding the Appropriate “Fit” and the Relative (Un) Importance of Geography

Many students take for granted that the question of where to apply is an easy one, usually because they plan to apply only to law schools in Virginia and perhaps, in an adjoining state, or in some other restricted geographic region. This is perhaps the most serious mistake a pre-law student can make, apart from failing to acquire a solid educational background during her or his undergraduate career.
As we will see, every law school has its own admissions philosophy, its own special characteristics, and its own personality. For any qualified candidate for admission to law school, the key to acceptance and personal preferences will be happy and, thereby, excel. There are several such law schools for every qualified pre-law student, but it may well be that there is no ideal “fit” for a particular student in a restricted geographic region.

Failure to identify and apply such schools that represent a good personal “fit” regardless of region, can have serious consequences. First and foremost, it can result in being denied admission to the schools to which you apply. Many students who limited themselves to a particular region find themselves in this position, while they could have gained admission to a number of schools in other regions.

Equally serious, failure to apply to schools that are a good “fit” for you can result in being admitted to a law school for which you are not suited and at which, as a result, you will not do well. While the result of such an unhappy situation could be flunking out of law school, statistically it is more likely that you would drop out. In either event, the outcome could be said to have been your choice. Any student who is accepted to law school has the ability to succeed at study of the law. In this sense, when a law-school student does not complete his or her legal education (whether by flunking or by dropping out), the cause is seldom (if ever) lack of ability. Most commonly, the real reason a poor “fit” between the student in question and the law school.

For all these reasons, whenever possible pre-law students should not limit themselves to a specific geographic area in deciding which law schools to apply to. Rather, they should look for law schools that represent the best “fit” for them, wherever they might be located. Ordinarily, region should be on of the less important criteria in considering where to apply.

For many students, taking the preceding advice seriously will mean that a basic issue they had considered settled- namely, where to apply- will need to be revisited. In order to choose wisely, you will need information from a variety of sources, on a variety of topics.

Sources of information

A good place to begin the search for information is the joint publication of the A.B.A. and the L.S.A.C. entitled The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools, which has already been mentioned in Chapters One and Two. The publication can be accessed at the L.S.A.C. web site (www.lsac.org), or purchased in hard copy for approximately $25 either at the same site or when registering for the LSAT and the LSDAS. Since the hard-
copy edition runs over 900 pages in length, most students prefer to access it electronically.

In addition to general information on the legal profession, the law-school experience, and the admissions process, currently The Official Guide to U.S Law Schools provides four pages (two pages, in earlier editions) of general information on every accredited law school in the country. Included are the general description of each school, an overview of each school’s admissions standards and policies, and, often, statistical data on the school’s most recent entering class. This information will be invaluable as you begin to explore the possibilities of law schools you may not previously have considered or even heard of.

Once you have compiled a list of law schools that interest you, access each school’s web site for additional information. You may also consult the school’s catalogs and brochures, which are available in the pre-law advisor’s office or directly from the law school. Recent graduates of the schools that interest you are also a potential source of information, though students should beware of the sort of outdated information often offered by older graduates.

Ordinarily, the best source of additional, more detailed information about a particular law school is the admissions staff of the school. When possible, you should visit every law school that seriously interests you. A virtual visit is no substitute for a real visit. If the school grants formal interviews, call to schedule one several days prior to your visit. (Note that in general, law schools no longer encourage interviews, and some do not give them.). Arrange to sit in on a class, tour the law-school facility, and visit the law library. Read the notices posted on the bulletin boards. Perhaps most important, be sure to visit the student lounge, and hang out with students. Listen, and ask lots of questions! If Radford graduates are currently enrolled at the school, seek them out.

If you are unable to visit each of the schools in which you are interested due to geographic or financial constraints, you should plan to attend one of the national Law School Forums. There is no admission charge. The most convenient forum for most Radford students is the one held annually in Washington, D.C., usually in early July. Other forums are held annual in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Oakland during the first three months of the fall semester. Representatives of all A.B.A.-approved law schools are available at each forum to meet individually with interested students, and individual law-school brochures and catalogs are available. In addition, there are workshops and videos on the application process, financial aid, and special opportunities and programs for minority students, as well as programs on legal education and careers. Information on LSAT-prep course and packages is also available.

In their effort to find the right “fit,” pre-law students should also take advantage of the Candidate Referral Service, a free program which they can sign up for when registering for the LSAT and subscribing to the LSDAS. The Candidate Referral Service provides a data file of potential applicants to individual law schools at no cost to the
applicants. Each school then contacts the candidates it identifies as meeting its criteria, many of who might not otherwise have considered that particular law school.

**Information Necessary to Decide Where to Apply**

As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter makes clear there is no “best” law school, only the one that is best for you. You should carefully select the law schools you apply to, determining what individual schools you are looking for. Match your own strengths and the things that set you apart from other applicants – state residence, foreign language, ethnic background, work experience, or whatever – to what the school seems to value in a candidate. In determining what a particular school is looking for, you will need to use the sources discussed in the previous section of this chapter to consider both academic and non-academic factors.

Concerning academic factors, be sure at the outset that the law schools that interest you hold accreditation. Any school listed in *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools* is accredited.

Consider the quality of the faculty, student body, physical plant, and law library as well as the educational program of each school. Begin by looking at the school’s curriculum. What courses are offered? Are exams on a year’s or only a semester’s work? Is a student automatically out (and out for good) after one bad semester? What is the school’s attrition rate?

Students should be careful not to over-emphasize the importance of “specialty courses” offered at a particular law school. While such courses should be a consideration for the students who have a serious interest in a particular legal specialty, other factors should be more important even for these students. For one thing, students are not yet acquainted with many legal specialties, since they will experience them only once while they are in law school. Finally, a law school with a given “specialty” often has only one or at most two faculty members with expertise in that field. These professors could well accept employment elsewhere or be on leave during your time at the law school. For all these reasons, a school’s “specialty courses” should be among the less important considerations in seeking the ideal “fit.”

In addition to each school’s course offerings, you need to consider the opportunities available for participation and exposure in the legal profession beyond the classroom. For instance, are there a moot court and/or a law review? Are the clinical programs for “hands-on” experience? Are there opportunities for law-related part-time work in the second and third years of law school? What placement services are available for summer and part-time jobs, and for employment following graduation? What is the school’s placement record for recent graduating classes?
Consider the *admissions philosophy* of each law school. What weight does the school assign to G.P.A., LSAT scores, and other factors such as letters of recommendation and work experience, and how does this relate to your particular strengths? Remember the importance of finding the ideal “fit” as relates to a school’s admissions philosophy.

Students should pay careful attention to *financial considerations*. What are the tuition and fees of each school that interests you? Equally important, what are the living costs? A private school in a rural area might well have a lower overall cost than a state school in a major urban area. Most important of all, what sorts of financial aid are available? *Do not rule out an “expensive” school simply on the basis of height tuition and fees.* Many such schools offer the most generous financial-aid packages, and for some students an education with an “expensive” school turns out to be cheaper for the student than an education at a school with much lower tuition and fees. Moreover, many “expensive” schools have loan-forgiveness programs for students who plant to work in relatively low-paying areas like public-advocacy law following their graduation from law school.

Among the personal or non-academic factors to consider in your search for the ideal “fit” are the size of the school and its *geographic location*. Is the school situated in a rural area, or is an urban or suburban institution? What sorts of living arrangements are available to students? Do most students live in dormitories? If so, what is the food like? If not, what are the options for off-campus living? You should consider the answers to these and other personal questions in light of your own expectations and preferences.

**The Final Decision**

Having considered all these factors, you should have identified a small number of law schools with varying admission standards, but at all of which you would seem to be a good “fit.” In the end, you should apply to at least two or three schools that seem to be “sure shots” for you, schools that appear to be “below” your credentials. You should apply to four or five schools at which you seem to have a reasonable chance at admission. Finally, you should apply to at least two “long shots,” “dream schools” that you might find especially appealing but at which your chances of admission appear to be relatively remote, though non-existent.

Applying to fewer schools than the suggested number increases the chances that you will be accepted to none. At the other extreme, while you could apply to more schools that the number recommended, eventually you would have to narrow down your list in any event. Moreover, limiting your applications to the suggested number means limiting the amount of money you spend on application fees (though the fees can be waived in cases of demonstrable financial need).
Experiential Learning and Internships

As concerns preparation for the law outside the classroom, any sort of “hands-on experiences” (not to include getting arrested and undergoing trial!) is useful. At the least, talk to the lawyers at the Graduate and Professional School Fair on campus, and attend court sessions or arrange to “shadow” a working attorney for a day. Explore the possibility of a summer job, or unpaid volunteer work, in a law firm. Consider an internship of experiential learning for academic credit during your junior or senior year. Useful internships for pre-law students include work in government agencies and legislative offices as well as in law firms. Consult the pre-law advisors, your major department’s internship director, and the Office of Experiential Learning for further information on the possibilities for internships that are available to you. Students not planning to go directly to law school following their graduation from Radford should bear in mind that an undergraduate internship could lead to employment as a paralegal for a year or more before they enroll in law school.

Extracurricular and Other Activities

It is important to understand that for most law schools, extracurricular activities—no matter how impressive—are no substitute for grades and LSAT scores as a factor in admission decisions. Even student-body presidents with strong letters of recommendation from their university presidents have been rejected because of their G.P.A’s or LSAT scores were not as high as those of applicants with otherwise less impressive resumes. Clearly, without a competitive G.P.A. and a strong showing on the LSAT, even a student with an exceptional array of extracurricular accomplishments has little chance of acceptance to law school.

Nevertheless, extracurricular activities can separate applicants with similar academic credentials. Since most law schools have more qualified applicants than they can accept, the student-body president with competitive grades and LSAT’s would have an edge in the competition for admission. Therefore, the strongest candidate for law school is one who has complemented high grades and LSAT scores with a limited number of extracurricular activities, while avoiding the sort of over-extension that would have resulted in lower grades.

In general, a law-school admission committee would prefer to see a limited number of leadership positions rather than an extensive list of memberships. Note that some positions could help you develop the personal and intellectual skills and attributes identified earlier in this chapter and in Chapter One as essential to success in the legal profession. A few examples would be writing for student publication such as The Tartan, serving as newsletter editor or recording secretary for a student organization, or serving in any capacity with the campus judicial system.

What we have said about extracurricular activities applies equally to work experience and community involvement: While these are no substitute for grades and...
LSAT scores, they can serve to set apart students with competitive G.P.A.’s and LSAT’s. Work experience and community activities do count more in the case of older applicants who have been out of school for a number of years whose undergraduate records might not therefore be an accurate reflection of their overall achievements.

Preparation for the LSAT

By now, it should be clear that a competitive score on the LSAT is essential to admission to law school. In light of its importance, pre-law students should prepare for the LSAT before taking it.

Of course, the most important component of your preparation for the LSAT is the same as for your preparation for law school and a legal career in general: the acquisition of a strong educational background over the course of your undergraduate years, as discussed earlier in this chapter. No short-term program of preparation for the LSAT per se is effective at overcoming the sort of basic deficiencies that result from a weak undergraduate education. Nevertheless, short-term preparation for the LSAT can be of considerable benefit to any student with the requisite undergraduate background.

All students planning to take the LSAT should first take the sample tests included in the LSAT registration packet and the old LSAT’s available from the Law School Admission Council, whose address is given in Chapter Four. You should arrange to take the sample tests under “real-test” conditions. Take them in a quiet place, without distractions, and time yourself. At the least, taking the sample tests under appropriate conditions should develop a familiarity with the test directions and the types of questions you will encounter when you take the LSAT, and provide appropriate practice, thus building confidence. Additionally, the practice tests should help you begin to learn to pace yourself and to keep fresh. Ideally, they should also help you begin to develop test-taking strategies for each section.

All students who plan to take the LSAT should also first take the free diagnostic test offered each fall on the Radford campus by the Stanley Kaplan organization in conjunction with the Office of Career Services. You can register for the rest by contacting the Career Services Office. Students taking the test are under no obligation to sign up for a Stanley Kaplan LSAT-preparatory courses or for any other Kaplan service.

Some students prepare for the LSAT exclusively by taking practice tests. However, most students want to develop their ability to pace themselves and their test-taking strategies further. These students gave two options.

Many students continue their preparation by using commercial study guides or software packages, whose cost can range from $20 to upwards of $100.

Students planning to prepare for the LSAT in this way should first identify their strengths and weaknesses as revealed in the results of sample and old tests and the free Kaplan diagnostic test. They are then in a position to choose an appropriate book or software package in light of their particular needs, and to use it accordingly.

Other students continue their preparation by investing in a commercial LSAT-preparatory course like those offered by Stanley Kaplan, Princeton Review, and similar organizations. A minority of Radford students enroll in commercial test-prep courses before taking the LSAT. The majority of Radford students who enroll in prep courses do
so after taking the LSAT, in the hope of raising their score when they retake it. Typically, commercial LSAT-preparatory courses can cost as much as $1,000 or more, though the best-known companies have scholarship programs. The classes offered by the Princeton Review are limited to eight students or fewer, and therefore cost somewhat more than those offered by Stanley Kaplan. While some students find the small class size to be an advantage of the Princeton Review program, others note that Kaplan, unlike Princeton Review, has “centers” where students can “live the LSAT” even when their class is not in session.

Any commercial LSAT-preparatory course will begin by identifying a student’s strengths and weaknesses, and then focus on the student’s needs. Most commercial courses combine practice testing, classroom lessons, and home-study materials in an individual’s areas of particular weakness. All emphasize the need to pace yourself, keep on track, and manage stress.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE LAW-SCHOOL APPLICATION AND ADMISSION PROCESS

“Start early, watch deadlines, and follow instructions!”
- A Law School Admissions Council official

This chapter is designed to guide you through the application process. It begins with general information that you should bear in mind throughout the process, and continues with specific details of the process.

General Information Concerning the Application Process

While all law schools are looking for the potential for outstanding performance in law school and while the application process is similar for all schools, each law school has its own admissions philosophy. Most law schools base admission decisions primarily on an applicant’s G.P.A. and LSAT scores, and most are relying increasingly on LSAT’s as a result of increasing uncertainty of the significance of a G.P.A. at a particular institution due to grade inflation. Nevertheless, each law school assigns somewhat different weights to LSAT scores, grades, letters of recommendation, and other factors like extracurricular activities, work experience, and personal history. Of course, this means that it is extremely important for you to know what specific law schools are looking for in an applicant so that you can match your strengths to the particular schools to which you decide to apply.

Further, it is important to understand that the way an applicant presents himself or herself in an application will have an obvious impact on how the candidate is perceived
by a law school’s admissions committee. In the personal statement that is a required part of a law-school application, you should highlight those strengths that make you a good “fit” for the particular law schools to which you choose to apply, as well as emphasizing (with examples) your motivation for attending the school in question.

In some specific cases, it may also be appropriate to point out the reasons for weakness in an application as well. For instance, law schools will take into account considerations like time away from school as a possible explanation for a low LSAT score, or a longstanding history of poor performance on standardized tests combined with consistently high grades in demanding curricula, if they are informed. The personal statement provides you with an opportunity to point out such factors, which should be presented as obstacles you have overcome to get where you are today. The authors of letters of recommendation written on behalf could also mention such considerations in the context of the distance you have come in your life.

In terms of the mechanics of law-school decisions on admission and rejection, many schools accept a certain percentage of applicants strictly on the basis of their G.P.A.’s and LSAT scores, with the remainder chosen primarily but no exclusively on the basis of these quantitative factors. Many law schools also have a quantitative cut-off below which they will not consider an application. (Of course, an applicant who falls below the cut-off is wasting the application fee in applying for such a school.) As we saw in Chapter Two, in general letters of recommendation are only incrementally used, and work experience and extracurricular activities rarely play a decisive role in an admission or rejection decision.

While there is some variation, most law schools accord greater weight to LSAT score than to G.P.A.’s. In general average would be that LSAT’s would account for 60% and G.P.A.’s for 40% of the combined weight give the two scores in law-school admissions decisions. Virtually all schools would consider a G.P.A. of B- or C+ or an LSAT score below 135 to be hopelessly uncompetitive, though students with grades and scores in this range might improve their chances somewhat by applying to law schools outside their geographic region. Such students should also apply to law programs at which conditionally accepted students must demonstrate their potential as a condition of their enrollment in the school’s entering class.

Finally, as the quotation at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, it is important that students observe application deadlines for the LSAT, the LSDAS and the actual law-school application form, and that they fill out all forms correctly. At those law schools with rolling admissions policies, submitting a complete application (i.e., LSAT scores and LSDAS report as well as the application form for the particular law school) early in the academic year can marginally increase a candidate’s chance of admission. In any event, at any law school a candidate who begins the application process after December 1 is a disadvantage regardless of when a particular school’s deadline for applications may be.
Step One: The Law School Admission Test

The LSAT is a half-day test designed to give a standardized measure (unlike grades and recommendations, which vary from institution to institution and from professor to professor) of a student’s ability and aptitude as a predictor of the likelihood of the student’s success in law school. Currently, the LSAT measures students’ ability to reason; the capacity for abstract analysis, logical thinking, reading comprehension, and problem identification; and their general academic ability and development.

As we have seen, law schools rely heavily on the LSAT in admissions decisions. Their reliance on the LSAT has increased as grad inflation has increased on most campuses. At present, there is no movement among law schools to de-emphasize or abolish the use of LSAT scores, as is the case among some undergraduate colleges with the SAT. While the LSAT remains controversial and it is widely acknowledge that it both an imperfect and incomplete measure, statistical evidence shows that LSAT scores do help predict performance in law school. Indeed, the LSAT is widely viewed as the best single available predictor of a student’s performance, especially in the first year.

Since the LSAT is so important, students should prepare for it. For detailed information on preparation for the LSAT, see the concluding section of Chapter Two.

Currently, the LSAT is offered four times a year— in June, October, December, and February. Statistical evidence shows that the longer a student has been in college, the higher the student’s LSAT score will be. Moreover, since the LSDAS reports up to twelve LSAT scores to each law school to which the applicant applies, the only way to prevent your earliest score from being reported would be to take the LSAT a total of thirteen times! In light of these considerations, ordinarily students planning to enter law school in the fall following their graduation should take the LSAT in June, following the end of their junior year, but not before. This allows time to consider the results as a factor in deciding where to apply, to take the test a second time in the fall if additional study and preparation prove necessary and to apply to law schools in a timely fashion in the fall. Since there is statistical evidence that the longer a student has been out of college, the lower the student’s score will be, students planning to take a year (or more) off from school before attending law school should take the LSAT in June, following the end of their senior year.

Students can get information about the test dates, test centers, and registration procedures for the LSAT from LSAT/LSDAS Registration and Information Book, which is available from the pre-law advisors for the Career Services Center, or from the LSAC web site, www.lsac.com. Advanced registration for the LSAT is required; there are no walk-ins. It is important to register early to ensure a place at the test center you desire.
Fro instance, students planning to take the LSAT in June should apply by the end of April at the latest. No student can take the LSAT more than three times in any two-year period.

You can register for the LSAT (and also the LSDAS) and order LSAC publications in any of three ways: 1) by completing and mailing the registration form included in the *LSAT/LSDAD Registration and Information Book;* 2) by phone, at (215) 968-1011; or 3) via the internet at [www.lsac.com](http://www.lsac.com). Payment is required at the time of registration. For online or phone registration, payment must be by Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express. For mail registration, personal checks are also accepted. Note that the deadline for online and phone registration is later than that for registration by mail.

Registration fees change annually. You should count on approximately $90 or more for the LSAT. Other charges include approximately $55 for late registration, $30 for test-center change, and $30 for test-date change. These fees do not include the cost of LSDAS subscription and related services, including LSAT score reports, which will add over $100 to the total. Fee waivers for the LSAT and LSDAS are available in cases of demonstrable financial need. Fee-waiver packets are available from the LSAC, any law-school admissions office, or the pre-law advisors. Completed waiver request forms should be sent directly to a law school to which plan to apply. Only a law school can approve a fee waiver.

Students with documented disabilities should note that accommodations may be available. For consideration, you must request an accommodations-request package online at [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org). Individual law schools may waive the LSAT requirement for applicants with disabilities. You should contact the law schools to which you plan to apply for information on their policies in this regard.

All students who register for the LSAT will receive an acknowledgement and an admission ticket. Without these forms, your registration is not complete. On the day of the LSAT is given, all registered students must bring one form of photo identification to the test center for which they are registered.

Since LSAT scores are derived from the number of correct answers, with no reduction for wrong answers, you should guess on questions you are unsure of. Do not leave any question unanswered! If your ability, you have five days from the test date to contact the LSAC and ask that your test not count.

An LSAC representative has noted that “eighty percent of the LSAT is really a test of various aspects of reading comprehension.” Currently, the LSAT consists of five 35-minute sections. These include one section specifically devoted to reading comprehension per se, one section of analytical reasoning, and two sections of logical reasoning. The fifth section, which is not identified, is a prêt-test of potential new items and is not scored.
In addition, the LSAT includes 20-minute writing sample. The writing sample involves a decision-problem. An issue specified, and students are given a choice between two positions and principles and information on which to base their decision. Both positions are defensible; there is no “right” or “wrong” answer. Currently, the writing sample is ungraded. Copies of the writing samples are sent to each law school to which a student applies, and are considered as part of the overall application in accordance with the school’s admission philosophy. While the writing sample alone is ordinarily not determinant of the admission or rejection decision, I can be used (in the words of one law school dean) “to weed out a cripple.”

Several changes in the LSAT have been proposed, and experimental questions for new sections could appear on the LSAT as early as June, 2001 test date. The proposed changes include a section of listening comprehension, a section involving comparison of two reading passages, and a section of strategic reasoning. A scored writing sample is also under consideration. LSAC is “proceeding cautiously: (i.e., continuing to do research) on the feasibility of a computerized LSAT.

LSAT scores and percentile rankings are reported by mail approximately five weeks after each administration of the test. Scores and percentiles are available by phone one to two weeks earlier. The number to call for this service is (215) 968-1200. A fee of approximately $10 is charged, and must be paid by credit card before the numbers are released. Students who believe that their scores are not accurate as reported may request that their test be scored by hand for a fee of $35. In a typical year, over two thousand students request hand-scores. Fewer than ten scores are changed each year as a result.

LSAT scores range from 120 to 180, with a mean of 150 a standard deviation of ten. Seventy percent of all students take the test, score between 143 and 162. The standard error of measurement (S.E.M.) is 2.6 points. There is two-thirds chance that a student’s score is within one S.E.M. Students who consider retaking the LSAT should realize that a higher score will be considered significant only if it is above the S.E.M. of the previous score. While retaking the LSAT may or may not strengthen your application, it rarely hurts, since few students score below the S.E.M. of their previous score.

As we have seen, each school answers the question of how to treat multiple scores in terms of its particular admissions philosophy. Most commonly, law schools use an average of the scores or only the first score, since there is statistical evidence that these provide the most useful predictors of performance in law school.
Step Two: The Law School Data Assembly Service

As its name implies, the LSDAS serves as a clearinghouse for the assembly and dissemination of data that are required as a component of a law-school application. Each application provides the required data to the LSDAS, which in turn distributes the data to law schools to which the applicant is applying. In this way, applicants are no longer responsible for sending the data to each law school individually, making the application process much easier for all concerned. Currently, all U.S. law schools require the use of this service.

Students can subscribe to the LSDAS by mail, by phone or by the internet, either at the same time as they register for the LSAT or separately. Addresses for LSDAS subscription and LSAT registration are provided in the previous section of this chapter. The fee for the one-year LSDAS subscription is approximately $95, with one-year renewal available for an additional $55. Each LSDAS report to an individual law school costs approximately $10, when ordered at the time you subscribe, or approximately $12 when ordered at a later time.

A complete LSDAS law-school report contains the following data: biographical information provided by the applicant; a year-by-year and college-by-college summary of all undergraduate grades and credits; photocopies of transcripts of all colleges attended; the most recent LSAT score and test date, up to twelve previous scores and (where applicable) an average of all scores from the last six years; copies of the last three writing samples; a “yes” or “no” response to a question concerning misconduct in the admissions process; up to three letters of recommendation; and any special documentation (e.g., certifying disability). It is the student’s responsibility to provide the LSDAS with the required biographical data and all other required documents. Students are responsible for arranging to have their transcripts sent to the LSDAS from the registrar of each college they have attended, and to have their LSAT scores and writing samples forwarded.

Additionally, students must make arrangements to have letters of recommendation sent to the LSDAS on the appropriate form. Note that the LSAC generic reference letter is now required. When requesting a recommendation, you should provide each reference with an unofficial transcript, a personal resume, and a list of the courses you took from the reference and the grades you earned. This information should assist your references in writing the strongest and best possible letters possible on your behalf. Students should be aware that some law schools disregard letters of recommendation to which applicants have not waived their rights of access, and many take such letters less seriously than those to which the right of access has been waived.

Students must allow sufficient time for all required documentation to be received and processed by LSDAS prior to the application deadline for individual law schools. At the latest, you should register with the LSDAS eight weeks before the earliest application deadline. Of course, you must register with the LSDAS prior to arranging for transcripts,
recommendations, and other documentation to be sent.

**Step Three: Applying to Individual Law Schools**

As we have seen, students must arrange to have a complete LSDAS report (including their LSAT scores) sent to each law school to which they apply. In addition, they must also file an application for admission with each school.

While being careful to avoid providing inaccurate information, applicants should use the application as a chance to “sell themselves.” If you have followed the advice given in Chapter Three and chose carefully the law schools to which you are applying, you can view the application as an opportunity to demonstrate that you are a good “fit” with each school. The personal statement can be particularly useful in this regard. One law-school dean has remarked that qualified applicants have total control over two of the three components of the law-school admission process, since they alone decide where to apply and, ultimately, where to enroll. Moreover, he noted, the law-school application gives a thoughtful applicant much greater control over the application process itself than is commonly realized. A CD-ROM containing application forms for every accredited U.S. law school as well as the entire text of *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools* is available from LSAC at a cost of approximately $50. It can be ordered by mail, by phone, or on the web at the address specified in the previous section of this chapter entitled “Step One: The Law School Admissions Test.” Among the advantages of the CD-Rom is that standard information given on one application form will “flow” onto the applications of all other schools to which you are applying that ask for the same information. The savings in time can be significant.

Each completed law-school application can be mailed directly to the school in hard-copy form. Alternatively, applications can be filed with LSAC for electronic delivery to the law schools. When an applicant releases each application for electronic delivery, she or he must print a hard copy of the certification letter, sign it, and mail it to the school along with the school’s application fee. In this way, the school’s signature requirement is satisfied.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**FINANCIAL AID**

“Never choose where to apply on the basis of a school’s fees as listed in the catalog.” –a law-school dean

“Any school that accepts you will do whatever it can to help you attend.” –a lawyer and Radford alumnus
Most law-school students finance their own legal education. Typically, then, financial contributions and the availability of financial aid are important factors in deciding where to enroll.

Students should pay close attention to the wording of the preceding sentence, and ponder its meaning in light of the first quotation above. You should never decide where to apply on the basis of the tuition and fees listed in a school’s catalog, since these are often a completely inaccurate reflection of what you might end up paying to attend that particular school. Rather, you should apply for admission and for financial aid at any school where you appear to be a good “fit,” regardless of its tuition and fees. Your decision on where to enroll should then be based in part on the overall financial picture, including financial aid.

The second quotation at the beginning of this chapter is from a Radford alumnus who graduated from an “expensive” private law school that was right for him and that, in the end, proved less costly to him than schools with considerably lower tuition and fees. It makes the point well. A school that accepts you wants you and will try hard to make it possible for you to attend. One reason this chapter is short is that a law school that wants you is by far the best source on financing a legal education at that school.

No one should hesitate to apply to law school for financial reasons. Students with demonstrable need should recall that financial aid for law-school applicants can begin with the application process itself. Such students can obtain fee waivers for the LSAT registration fee the LSDAS subscription fee, and the application fees charged by individual law schools. For details, see Chapter Four.

All students applying to law school should file a Graduate and Professional School Financial Aid Statement (GAPSFAS) form. The forms are available from the Graduate School Office or the Financial Aid Office at Radford, or from any law school. You should also check into the availability of loans and other forms of financial assistance.

Basically, there are two types of financial aid for law school. The first, grants and scholarships, don’t have to be repaid. Most grants and scholarships are awarded on the basis of merit (primarily measured by G.P.A. and LSAT scores). Many schools also earmark a portion of their grant and scholarship funds for diversity recruitment, usually defined in terms of geographic region and ethnic and socioeconomic background. A few schools award grants and scholarships solely on the basis of need. Of course, the “fit” between the financial-aid philosophy of a particular law school and the needs of an individual student should be a factor in deciding where to apply.

The second type of financial aid is loans. Since most law-school students finance their own legal education, for many students financial aid will take this form. Of course, in general educational loans must be repaid over a period of years beginning after the student leaves school. However, many private law schools have loan-forgiveness programs for graduates who commit to public-interest law for a specified period of time following their graduation. These programs make such schools an attractive alternative to schools with lower tuition and fees for students with an interest in public advocacy or other areas of public-interest law.

Loans to finance a legal education are of two types. The less attractive is an ordinary educational loan obtained through a bank, but at a considerably lower interest rate than that of a regular education bank loan. To apply for a government-sponsored
loan, a student must fine the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), which is available from the same sources as the GAPSFAS. Government-sponsored loans are needs-based. There are maximum amounts that a student can borrow per year and for his or her entire education, though the maximum is higher for law school than for undergraduate school. Students should be aware that they must have a good credit record to qualify for government-sponsored loans. While having no credit record is not an adverse consideration in obtaining these loans (as it might be, say, for a mortgage or other loan), having two unpaid bills over ninety days will disqualify you for life from obtaining a government-sponsored educational loan.

Law schools also provide federally funded work-study grants to second- and third-year law students with demonstrated financial need. In keeping with ABA policy, these grants should not be awarded to first-year law students.

Minority students should also be aware of the opportunities for financial aid available through the CLEO program. This program is discussed in the following chapter.

Students wanting general information on financial assistance should obtain the free LSAC brochure entitled Financial aid for Law School: A preliminary Guide. Scholarship information is also available from the following web sites: www.ed.gov/prog_info?SFA/StudentGuide/; www.finaid.org/finaid/scams.htm; and www.studentservices.com/fastweb/. As we have seen, the law schools in which you are interested are the best source of detailed information on availability and sources of financial aid. You should not hesitate to contact an individual law school, and to be honest about your needs, in this regard.
LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE
For Radford University Juniors Who Hope to Attend Law School in the Fall Following Their Graduation

- Consult the “Law School Application Time Line for R.U. Freshman and Sophomores” for suggestions also relevant for juniors.
- Attend the Pre-Law Information Session (especially the first half).
- Read Part II of the Radford University “Handbook for Pre-Law Students” for information about choosing the law schools to which you will apply, taking the L.S.A.T.’s, the law school admissions process, financial aid, and opportunities for minority students. Consult the handbook, and its suggestions for further readings, as needed throughout the year.
- Among your elective courses, include in your schedule classes recommended at the Pre-law Information Session. If possible, include a law-related internship or other law-related experiential learning in your junior or senior year schedule. Seriously consider foreign study.
- Take the practice L.S.A.T offered by Stanley Kaplan on campus. (contact: Career Services Center)
- Attend the Law School Forum in Washington, D.C. in July (or in Atlanta or other, more distant cities in the fall).
- Register with the Career Services Center, and plan to meet law-school representatives who visit Radford or Virginia Tech during the year.
- Study the Official Guide to U.D. Law Schools.
- Contact law schools to request applications and admissions information during the late summer following your junior year. You must contact each law school directly.
- Register and take the L.S.A.T at the end of your junior year. NOTE: the L.S.A.T is offered in the late Spring, early Fall, and mid-winter.
- Register and submit the LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service) forms at the end of your junior year. (All U.S. law schools require the LSDAS.)
- Plan for alternatives.
- Consult with Pre-Law Advisor as needed.
CHAPTER SIX

SPECIAL OPPORTUNITIES AND PROGRAMS FOR MINORITY STUDENTS

“In a democracy, the legal profession must reflect the community it serves.” – a Richmond attorney

The American Bar Association and American law schools are committed to the goal of a legal profession that, in the words of the quotation above, reflects the community. As the quotation makes clear, the realization of this goal is crucial to the future of democracy in an increasingly diverse society. For this reason, special opportunities and programs exist for members of groups that have been historically disadvantaged in American society.

Minority students considering law school should obtain a copy of the LSAC publication Thinking about Law School: A Minority Guide early in their undergraduate careers. It can be accessed, and hard copies ordered, through the internet at www.lsac.org. The publication offers suggestions for minority undergraduates who are considering the option of a legal education as well as for those who already committed to a career in law.

The Council on Legal Educational Opportunity (CLEO) is a non-profit project of the ABA Fund for Justice and Education. Its goal is to diversify the legal profession by increasing the educational opportunities available to under-represented groups. CLEO sponsors a number of programs for minority undergraduate students who are seriously considering a legal career. Interested students should see the pre-law advisors as early as possible in their undergraduate careers for information on the various opportunities that CLEO makes available.

Among the more important programs that CLEO sponsors is a series of six-week pre-law institutes which are held each summer. The institutes are designed for promising minority pre-law students who are already in the final stage of applying to law school.
Such students are encouraged to apply to a CEO pre-law institute regardless of their financial status. Financial aid is available. Students accepted to the institutes include both those who have already been accepted to a law school and those seeking placement assistance. Generally, students in the latter category have borderline academic credentials (including LSAT scores and G.P.A.’s that meet a school’s admissions standards but are in the lower percentiles of accepted students), but can demonstrate other indicators of a strong likelihood of success in law school. Students with LSAT scores below 140 and G.P.A.’s below 2.5 are unlikely to qualify for admission. Each institute includes an introduction to Socratic method of course analysis and training in legal research and writing, briefing cases, time management, and test-taking skills.

A number of law schools also sponsor special summer or weekend programs for minority students considering a career in law. Many of these programs are free, and others charge only a minimal fee. The pre-law advisors have information on the programs sponsored by law schools in our region. Students should contact the schools directly for additional information.

Minority students should also be aware of the ABA’s Legal Scholarship Fund for racial and ethnic minority students. Information on scholarships available through the Fund is available on the web at www.abanet.org. Information on other sources of financial aid can be found in Chapter Five. Information on fee waivers for LSAT, LSDAS, and law-school applications can be found in Chapter Four.
APPENDIX

LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE

For Radford University Freshmen and Sophomores

- Attend the Pre-Law Information Session (especially the first half).
- Develop the habit of reading broadly for pleasure and keeping up with current events.
- Read the American Bar Association’s statement on “Preparation for Legal Education” and the Radford University “Handbook for Pre-Law students” (both available from the Pre-Law Advisor).
- As you fulfill general education requirements, take courses that will enhance your writing skills, your reading comprehension, and your analytical thinking skills. Increase your awareness of ethical and social values, of human institutions, of people and the world. Choose a balanced schedule, don’t overload. Consider honor courses where available in areas of personal interest.
- Choose a strong major in a field that interest you and in which you excel. Work to build a strongly competitive G.P.A.
- Involve yourself in law-related activities. Try to obtain legal experience so as to develop a realistic view of the profession and find out where lawyers work.
- Investigate your career options. Read Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want To Be a Lawyer? And other suggested readings listed at the end of Chapter One of the R.U. “Handbook for Pre-Law Students”.
- Develop relationships with faculty. Take at least two courses from a favorite teacher, and plan to take at least one seminar.
- In your long-range schedule planning, seriously consider the possibility of law-related experiential learning during your junior or senior year, and also consider the possibility of foreign study.
• Get a copy of the L.S.A.T. book (Available from Career Services or the Pre-Law Advisor) and familiarize yourself with question types.

LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE
For Radford University Juniors Who Hope to Attend Law School in the Fall Following Their Graduation

• Consult the “Law School Application Time Line for R.U. Freshman and Sophomores” for suggestions also relevant for juniors.
• Attend the Pre-Law Information Session (especially the first half).
• Read Part II of the Radford University “Handbook for Pre-Law Students” for information about choosing the law schools to which you will apply, taking the L.S.A.T. ’s, the law school admissions process, financial aid, and opportunities for minority students. Consult the handbook, and its suggestions for further readings, as needed throughout the year.
• Among your elective courses, include in your schedule classes recommended at the Pre-law Information Session. If possible, include a law-related internship or other law-related experiential learning in your junior or senior year schedule. Seriously consider foreign study.
• Take the practice L.S.A.T offered by Stanley Kaplan on campus. (contact: Career Services Center)
• Attend the Law School Forum in Washington, D.C. in July (or in Atlanta or other, more distant cities in the fall).
• Register with the Career Services Center, and plan to meet law-school representatives who visit Radford or Virginia Tech during the year.
• Study the Official Guide to U.D. Law Schools.
• Contact law schools to request applications and admissions information during the late summer following your junior year. You must contact each law school directly.
• Register and take the L.S.A.T at the end of your junior year. NOTE: the L.S.A.T is offered in the late Spring, early Fall, and mid-winter.
• Register and submit the LSDAS (Law School Data Assembly Service) forms at the end of your junior year. (All U.S. law schools require the LSDAS.)
• Plan for alternatives.
• Consult with Pre-Law Advisor as needed.
LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION TIMELINE  
For Radford University Seniors Who Hope to 
Attend Law School in the Fall Following Their Graduation

- Consult the “Law School Application Time Line for R.U. Freshman and Sophomores” for suggestions also relevant for juniors.
- Consult the Radford University “Handbook for Pre-Law Students” and its suggestions for further readings, as questions arise.
- Consult with Pre-Law Advisors as needed.
- (Take the L.S.A.T, in the fall if you did not take it the previous spring. Take early fall L.S.A.T., if possible.)
- (Register with the LSDAS [Law School Data Assembly Service] and submit the required forms, if you did not do this in the previous spring.)
- Complete and submit all law school applications in the fall. Apply to a range of schools to maximize chances of acceptances. Do not limit yourself geographically.
- Visit with faculty and other references regarding letters of recommendation. Provide them with specific resume, requirements, forms and any helpful information to enable them to write a strong recommendation.
- Visit law schools to which you are applying. Be sure to include to talk with current students and to arrange to meet with admissions staff.
- Expect to hear admission decisions any time from late fall through the winter, and into spring. Patience and a tolerance for ambiguity help at this stage!
- If rejected, don’t panic; decide on a course of action. Talk to law school admissions officers and Pre-Law Advisors.
- If accepted, celebrate! Investigate financial aid, housing, etc., if you have not already done so. Don’t forget to finish your last term in college, even though you have been accepted to law school!
- Develop a plan to finance your legal education. Prepare and submit all loan applications as early as possible.

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