

# A Life in the Law

## **American Bar Association**

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This booklet replaces a previous edition authored by Brian Dolan and Charles White of the American Bar Association's Division for Public Education and Kevin Saunders and Rodney K. Smith of the Pre-Law Committee of the American Bar Association's Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.

## **What Is the Lawyer's Role in Society?**

Carved above the entrance to the U.S. Supreme Court is the phrase “Equal Justice Under Law.” Assuring justice through the rule of law is the work of the country’s more than one million lawyers. The field has grown in recent decades, with the number of lawyers increasing more than 400 percent since the 1950s.

The American legal system reflects the complexity of our society. The foundation is the United States Constitution, but we also are governed by the acts of the United States Congress, fifty state constitutions, and state statutes. American law is also grounded in the decisions of its courts. These decisions make up the Common Law, under which prior court decisions serve as precedent (guidance) for later courts deciding similar issues. Some lawyers also deal with international legal matters, as the practice of law has become more global.

A lawyer is both an advisor and an advocate. As an *advisor*, a lawyer informs clients about the possible legal consequences and drafts legal agreements. A lawyer also helps clients resolve disputes through counseling, negotiation, and mediation. As an *advocate*, a lawyer represents clients in court. American courts operate under an adversary system, which means that parties to a disagreement in a civil case, or the prosecution and defense in a criminal case, present their case to a judge (and sometimes a jury) in accordance with set rules of evidence and procedure. As advocates, lawyers assist their clients in resolving matters without going to court.

All lawyers are part of a profession and are officers of the court. As professionals, they are regulated by court rules as well as by laws and professional ethics rules. Most lawyers derive satisfaction from resolving major disputes in a way that demonstrates a genuine sense of caring both for the parties involved in the dispute and for the interests of society as a whole.

Former Harvard Law School dean Roscoe Pound once defined lawyer professionalism as “pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of public service.” It is not surprising, therefore, that lawyers are expected to render legal service in the public interest. This includes providing professional services for no fee or a reduced fee to people of limited means or to public service organizations or charities. Taking part in activities for improving the law, the legal system, and the legal profession is also a recognized way for lawyers to engage in meaningful public service. The legal profession provides many opportunities to help others.

## **More Than Courtroom Theatrics**

The “law” is much more than a dramatic movie actor speaking eloquently and saving a client by producing a last-minute surprise witness or key piece of evidence. In reality, most lawyers spend much of their time outside of the court-

room and are encouraged by judges to settle disputes without undergoing the emotional and financial expense of a time-consuming trial.

Lawyers' work can include defending or prosecuting those accused of committing crimes (**criminal law**) or clarifying the rights and duties of persons, businesses, and the government in such matters as contracts and real estate transactions (**civil law**). Lawyers

- talk to their clients and others on behalf of their clients;
- research legal issues;
- draft contracts, wills, and other legal documents; and
- counsel, mediate, and negotiate settlements.

Lawyers' careers are extremely varied. Some lawyers specialize in advising corporations on contracts, leases, or insurance; actual or potential lawsuits; employee relations; and compliance with government regulations. Others advise businesses and individuals on tax planning and filing tax returns. Some are general practitioners, advising clients about real estate transactions and estate planning, among many other areas of everyday law. Others practice public interest law, for example, working to protect the environment or representing low-income clients.

About 10 percent of lawyers work for the government in either civil or criminal law. A much smaller number become judges, often after years of experience practicing or teaching law.

Others do not practice law but use their legal skills and education to serve society in a variety of other fields. Examples include elected or appointed government officials, corporate executives, legal affairs reporters, and school administrators. A few embark on careers in sports management; others become entertainment agents. Some combine careers, such as a law practice and politics.

This booklet will answer some of your questions about a career in law. You can find additional resources listed at the end of this booklet.

## **Should You Be a Lawyer?**

The qualities needed for a successful legal career include dedication to justice and the public good, integrity and high ethical standards, motivation, attention to detail, thoroughness of preparation, and respect for others and the legal system.

Other important abilities are an excellent work ethic and willingness to work hard, a good vocabulary, sound reasoning skills, the ability to understand complex written material and to write clearly and concisely, a good memory, the ability to communicate orally, good research skills, and skill in applying relevant law to the facts of each case. It's also important to be able to listen well.

Lawyers interested in a career in a courtroom also need the ability to think quickly on their feet, speak with ease and authority, be highly organized and pursue many details at once, and master courtroom strategy.

## **Preparing for Law School**

The Pre-Law Committee of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar has issued a very useful statement on preparing for legal education. (The resources section of this booklet tells you how to access their Web site to obtain a complete copy.) Here is a summary of its most important points.

*There is no one pre-law curriculum.* Students who are successful in law school and the profession come from widely differing backgrounds. Some students enter law school directly from their undergraduate studies without having had any post-baccalaureate work experience. Others begin their legal education significantly later in life with perspectives gained from those life experiences. Legal education welcomes and values diversity, and you will benefit from the exchange of ideas and different points of view that your colleagues will bring to the classroom.

The ABA does not recommend any specific undergraduate majors or group of courses to prepare for a legal education. Students are admitted to law school from almost every academic discipline. Whatever major you select, however, you are encouraged to pursue an area of study that interests or challenges you, while taking advantage of opportunities to develop your research and writing skills. Taking a broad range of difficult courses is excellent preparation for a legal education.

*Check with your academic advisor.* Your college pre-law advisor or secondary school advisor may be able to help you select courses or instructors that will help you develop the right skills and knowledge for law school. If you're thinking about particular law schools, consult their publications and admissions personnel for any specific recommendations concerning preparation.

## **Developing Skills, Values, and Knowledge**

In addition to maintaining high ethical standards, certain skills and values are essential both to success in law school and to competent lawyering. Law students and lawyers should possess a large body of knowledge. The student who is admitted to law school without a broad range of basic skills and knowledge may face a difficult challenge.

The skills and values essential for competent lawyering include

- analytic and problem-solving skills,
- critical reading skills,
- writing skills,

- oral communication and listening abilities,
- general research skills,
- task organization and management skills, and
- the values of public service and promotion of justice.

You should seek educational, extracurricular, and life experiences that will assist you in developing these attributes.

## **Skills and Values**

**Analytic and Problem-Solving Skills:** Seek out courses and experiences that engage you in critical thinking about important issues, challenge your beliefs, and create tolerance for uncertainty. Your legal education will demand that you structure and evaluate arguments for and against propositions that are susceptible to reasoned debate. Your law school experience will develop and refine these crucial skills, but you should enter law school with a reasonably well-developed set of analytic and problem-solving abilities.

**Critical Reading Skills:** It is good to have substantial experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual material. It is also important that you learn to read well and quickly. You can acquire these skills through the careful reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy, or history. The particular nature of the materials examined is not crucial; what is important is that law school not be the first time that you have been rigorously engaged in careful reading, understanding, and critical analyzing of complex written material of substantial length.

**Writing Skills:** Try to develop first-rate writing skills. Language is the most important tool of a lawyer, and lawyers must express themselves clearly, concisely, and quickly. Seek experiences that require rigorous and analytic writing, including preparing pieces of substantial length and revising written work in response to constructive criticism.

**Oral Communication and Listening Abilities:** The ability to speak clearly and persuasively is another skill essential to success in law school and the practice of law. Lawyers also must have excellent listening skills. You can develop these skills by engaging in debate, making formal presentations in class, or speaking before groups in your school, community, or workplace.

**General Research Skills:** Many research sources and techniques are specific to the law, and you need not have developed familiarity with them before entering law school. But you should have developed general skills in library research and the analysis of large amounts of information. The ability to use a personal computer is also necessary for law students, both for word processing and computerized legal research.

**Task Organization and Management Skills:** The practice of law requires the ability to organize large amounts of information and apply it in an efficient way. You should be prepared to organize and assimilate large amounts of information so that you can use it efficiently. It is good experience to undertake school projects that require substantial research and writing or to prepare major reports for an employer, a school, or a civic organization.

**The Values of Public Service and the Promotion of Justice:** Each member of the legal profession should be dedicated to serving others honestly, competently, and responsibly; to performing duties with civility; and to improving fairness and the quality of justice in the legal system. You should try to get some significant experience in assisting others before coming to law school, perhaps by participating in public service projects or similar efforts.

### **Knowledge**

Certain basic areas of knowledge have proven helpful to a legal education. The types of knowledge that will maximize your ability to benefit from a legal education include

- a broad understanding of history, including the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of our society;
- a fundamental understanding of political thought and the contemporary American political system;
- some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data;
- a basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction; and
- an understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, of world events, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.

### **Conclusion**

You can acquire these skills, values, and knowledge in a wide variety of ways, including course work, self-learning (another essential lawyering skill), reading, experience on the job, or various other life experiences. Some of this foundation can be acquired during the initial years of law school. But if you begin law school having already acquired most of this foundation, you will have a significant advantage and be well prepared to benefit fully from a sophisticated and challenging legal education.



## Selecting a Law School

Being a lawyer usually requires college and law school degrees. Law school takes three years of full-time study or four or five years of part-time study. Some law schools may have flexible scheduling for the benefit of part-time students.

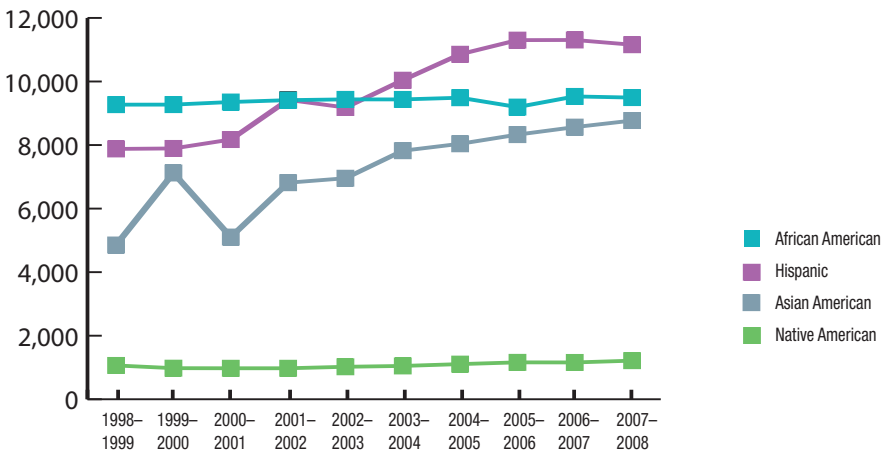
Two hundred law schools have been accredited by the ABA. There are law schools in almost every state. You will have a wide choice of locations and environments (urban or suburban, large or small, public institution or private).

Law schools also have different cultures or “styles” and vary in what they teach and how they teach it. And, of course, they vary considerably in cost, reputation, and the availability of financial aid. Student loans are available, but you’ll want to weigh carefully how much debt you want to take on in making your law school decision. It’s a good idea to begin weighing all these factors early in your college career. Your college’s pre-law advisor can help you sort out the options.

Law schools look at a variety of factors in considering each application for admission. Among the most important are undergraduate grades and scores on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), a half-day, multiple-choice test that measures verbal and reasoning skills. You can get information about the LSAT from the Law School Admissions Council or your pre-law advisor. Other factors include the rigor of your undergraduate program and any graduate work you may have completed, the nature of any work experience you may have acquired, letters of recommendation, examples of your leadership and character, and the strength of your personal written statement. Personal interviews usually are not required.

Law schools seek diverse student bodies. Most offer special recruitment and academic assistance programs for members of groups traditionally under-represented in legal education and the legal profession.

**Minority Law School Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity**



Source: American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar



**Law Professor at Temple University  
Beasley School of Law  
Sandra Sperino**

**Schools:** Texas Tech University Undergraduate; University of Illinois, Journalism Graduate School and Law School

**Years in legal field:** 10

**Work history:** Prior to entering academics, I was a law clerk for the Hon. Donald J. Stohr, U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Missouri. Following my clerkship, I was an associate at a law firm where I worked on general litigation and employment discrimination cases. After several years in private practice, I participated in a teaching fellowship at the University of Illinois College of Law.

**Best thing about your work:** Teaching students. In law school there is quite a bit of interaction between the students and the professor, and it is rewarding to try to create a classroom dynamic to engage and challenge students.

**Tips for preparing for law school:** Find out about law school by talking to students who attend the school you will be attending. If the school offers a student mentor, sign up for one.

**On selecting an undergraduate major to prepare for a legal career:** Any major that focuses on writing and critical-thinking skills is good preparation for law school.

**On selecting a law school:** Consider the reputation of the school, the faculty/student ratio, the cost of tuition, and the average debt of graduating students. Having practiced law, I now know that I should have also considered whether either the school's reputation or its location made it a good feeder school for law firms in the city in which I wanted to practice. Many law firms have a preference for hiring students from local law schools.

**Tips on being successful in law school:** Be prepared for every class and do not get behind in the reading. It can be hard to catch up after missing just a couple of assignments. Join a study group. Also, because the law school environment can be intense, it is important to get away from the law school at times and participate in other activities.

**Other value found in your legal education:** Law school taught me a particular way of analyzing problems that is helpful when making all kinds of decisions.



## **Business and Employment Attorney** Ireneo A. Reus III

**Schools:** Claremont Graduate University, Whittier College, UCLA School of Law

**Years as a lawyer:** 5

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** I entered the legal field because I wanted to have the option of working in government, in private practice, or at a corporation throughout my career.

**Best thing about your work:** The ability to help clients achieve their goals.

**Advice for people thinking about a legal career:** Speak with and ask questions of as many attorneys as possible about their career paths and what lessons they learned along the way.

**On selecting an undergraduate major to prepare for a legal career:** No matter what major you choose, you should gain excellent writing and critical-thinking skills to prepare you for law school.

**Factors you considered when selecting a law school:** The quality of legal education at the law school, alumni achievement from that law school, and reputation in the legal community.

**Tips for law school success:** Effective time management and having effective exam-taking strategies.

**On deciding a practice area after leaving law school:** I was able to originate business clients who sought my advice and representation in employment law, business litigation, and business transactions. It turned out that these areas of practice were some of my favorite classes at UCLA Law School.

**Other value found in your legal education:** The opportunity to become life-long friends with some of the smartest, funniest, and most talented people I know.



## **In-House Counsel** Sarah Sharp Theophilus

**Education:** Northern State University; University of South Dakota School of Law

**Years as a lawyer:** 7

**Work history:** Immediately after law school graduation, I worked for the County Public Defender's Office for almost two years. I left the public defender's office to join a private firm where I did criminal law and domestic law. After about a year of that, I went to work part-time as an immigration attorney, assisting battered immigrant women and children achieve their American status. After having my son, I decided to work full-time again and became in-house counsel for the Community HealthCare Association of the Dakotas. I have been here almost three years and I absolutely love it! I do employment law, contract law, and health care law, along with a number of compliance issues.

**Went to law school because:** I didn't enter law school wanting to practice law. I simply (or so I thought) wanted to obtain my J.D. degree. After taking a criminal law class in law school, I was inspired to "save the world," or at least my county, and took a job at the public defender's office.

**Advice for people thinking about a legal career:** Going to law school was the best decision that I made. You can truly go anywhere with a law degree.

**Tips for preparing for law school:** Know that it will be the most challenging and the most rewarding three years of your life.

**On selecting an undergraduate major to prepare for a legal career:** I do not think that any one particular major prepares you for law school better than another. It is the study habits that you develop along the way that will give you the edge or not.

**Tips for being successful in law school:** Study hard, but do not take the process too seriously.

**On paying for your legal education:** Student loans, working, and some parental assistance.

**Other value found in your legal education:** Your legal education is something that no one can take away from you. It's yours forever, to do with as you please.



## Senior Attorney-Advisor U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Maha Jweied

**Schools:** The George Washington University, London School of Economics, Columbia University School of Law

**Years as a lawyer:** 5

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** I wanted to pursue a career that was intellectually challenging and in which I could help people.

**Best thing about your work:** Following developments in civil rights law.

**Tips for preparing for law school:** Do the best you can in college and maintain a good GPA. Study well for the LSAT: I suggest practicing using old tests. And finally, take your time writing your personal statement and have someone you consider to be a good writer proofread it and provide you with feedback.

**On selecting a law school:** Reputation of law school, coupled with the location of the school. I also considered special programs and opportunities to pursue in law school—such as opportunities related to public interest law and international law.

**Tips on being successful in law school:** Try to relax. It may be stressful at times, but with dedication and patience, you will be fine.

**Other value found in your legal education:** I enjoy seeing the world through a legal perspective. I perceive everything differently after law school: the news, the elections, even discussions with friends.



## Immigration and International Business Law Attorney Hanishi Thanawalla Ali

**School:** University of Edinburgh Law School, United Kingdom

**Years as a lawyer:** 11

**Best thing about your work:** Interacting with people from different cultures and backgrounds and helping them fulfill their dreams of working or living in the United States is very rewarding and satisfying.

**Worst thing about your work:** Making sure that your work is not all consuming and having a good work-life balance.

**Advice for people thinking about a legal career:** Don't let anyone tell you whether or not you should pursue law. If you are a driven individual, enjoy hard work and meeting challenges, and have the ability to think quickly and speak with ease and authority, you should consider becoming a lawyer.

**Tips for preparing for law school:** Take courses in your undergraduate degree that will develop your skills in writing, communication, research, analysis, and critical thinking. Classes in mathematics and science can also be helpful. Also, taking part in extracurricular activities to develop techno-social and leadership skills can be a useful tool.

**Tips for being successful in law school:** Hard work and dedication are, no doubt, musts. Picking courses that you enjoy and trying to get internships, paid or unpaid, during school will help you decide whether or not you enjoy practicing a particular area of law—theory and practice are two different things.

**Other value found in your legal education:** Law taught me perseverance and determination and that there are no right or wrong answers—you have to make the best possible case for your client.

**Final thoughts:** There are numerous opportunities in and outside the legal field for those that have pursued a legal education. Having a legal background can be a tremendous advantage even if you choose never to practice law, as knowing the law is empowering and a powerful tool set that you can bring to any job, career, or business endeavor.



## **Commercial Litigator** **Kelly-Ann Clarke**

**Education:** B.A. Duke University, 1996; J.D. University of Houston Law Center, 2000

**Years in the legal field:** 9.5

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** It has always been a dream of mine to be a lawyer. I liked *L.A. Law*. I liked arguing. I liked solving problems. It was a perfect fit.

**Best thing about your work:** Helping my clients solve their problems and doing a job well for them is rewarding.

**Recommendations for Web sites or books with helpful information about law school and how to prepare for a legal education:** The ABA has a ton of materials for law students on the Law Student Division Web site. Many state bars have information on preparing for law school. Any bookstore would have LSAT prep materials, but asking questions of those who have been through it is really the best way to understand what it will be about.

**On selecting a law school:** My decisions were based on my family. I had been away for a while and wanted to be closer because my little sister was growing up and I wanted to be a part of her life. Finances had a large part to do with it too after my not-so-cheap undergraduate education. Other considerations may be the state or even city you may want to practice in later (but that decision can wait), an area of the country you really want to see, or the best law school that you get into. Go to the best school you can afford that meets your needs.

**Tips for being successful in law school:** Study, be prepared, and make friends! My contracts professor said that if you study alone, you are always right. He was right. Find a good, small group of people to study with so that you can bounce ideas off of them. Study guides help understanding concepts, but the thinking is up to you! Make sure you have good study habits, but live a life too!

**Final thoughts:** Being well rounded in any profession will keep you sane. During law school and after, you need a hobby that isn't law related so you can escape. If you do law all day long, you will go nuts. There is no such thing as balance, but you can get as close as possible if you make time for yourself, your family, and your life!



**Law Clerk to the Honorable Amul Thapar,  
Eastern District of Kentucky**  
Vib Mittal

**Education:** University of California, Berkeley, California; New York University School of Law

**Years in the legal field:** 2

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** Trial work fascinated me. I was interested in understanding how the law can resolve disputes. I liked the idea that I could represent people—whether it was a business or an individual accused of a crime—and help them get a fair result.

**Best thing about your work:** As a district court clerk, I am getting to understand how litigation in federal court works from start to finish. The work is challenging and diverse. For example, I've learned about how federal crimes are prosecuted and how a person can get social security benefits. Plus, I get to see lawyers in action. I get to see what works and what does not.

**Advice for people thinking about a legal career:** Make sure you are going to law school with realistic goals in mind. There is a lot of misinformation out there about law school and the opportunities following it. I like Atticus Finch (from *To Kill a Mockingbird*) as much as the next person, but not all of us can be him. I would talk to lawyers and law students who will speak with you honestly about what they do. Every profession has its pluses and minuses. Going into law school is a big commitment—both financially and in terms of time—so I would make sure I have as much information as possible.

**On selecting an undergraduate major to prepare for a legal career:** I majored in engineering and political science. Neither of my majors was picked to prepare for law school. If you major in what you like, you will do well, and grades do matter for law school admissions. Also, I would not want to feel like I missed out on certain experiences in college because I needed to do a certain major to get into law school. Most law schools welcome a diversity of majors. That being said, it is important to have strong reading and writing skills entering law school. I would try to find ways to keep those sharp. But you do not have to do that via your major in college.





**Law Clerk**  
Meghan Edwards-Ford

**Education:** The College of William & Mary; Georgetown University Law Center

**Years in the legal field:** 1.5

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** I sought a career that would allow me to use my skills as a writer, an oral communicator, and an analytical thinker. The law is a challenging and intellectually stimulating profession.

**Best thing about your work:** The varied nature of the work. Each day presents a new legal issue to tackle.

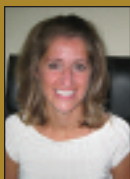
**Any advice for people thinking about a legal career:** Do not go into it halfheartedly. Law school is hard and expensive. Getting a legal job is increasingly difficult for all but a lucky few.

**Tips for preparing for law school:** Law school is not an extension of college. I suggest discussing study methods or strategies with law school grads. Though everyone studies a little bit differently, it would be good to get a survey of available methods. Make use of old outlines made by those who have taken the class in previous years.

**Web sites or books that may provide helpful information about law school and how to prepare for law school:** *The Paper Chase*, though fictional, is an entertaining movie about first-year law school. Scott Turow's novel, *One L*, about his first year of law school, is a classic.

**On selecting a law school:** I considered cost—in terms of tuition, housing, and travel home. I considered where I wanted to practice when I graduated. Some schools are national schools, from which you can practice anywhere, but other schools are more regionally bound.

**Tips for being successful in law school:** I suggest getting involved in activities—not too many activities but a few meaningful ones. I participated in moot court and was on a journal. Both activities yielded some of my best memories and my proudest achievements in law school.



## **Paralegal** Emily Terlop

**Education:** Lakeland Community College, Kirtland, Ohio (Associates of Applied Business Degree in Paralegal Studies)

**Years in the legal field:** 2

**On deciding to enter the legal field:** I had always been interested in law and I had a friend who was an attorney. I saw how much she enjoyed her job and decided to take a few legal classes at college. I enjoyed the legal classes so much, I changed my degree and earned my Associates of Applied Business Degree in Paralegal Studies.

**Best thing about your work:** Knowing that my hard work and persistence are helping people resolve their legal troubles. I also work for lawyers who allow me to have a very flexible work schedule.

**Advice for people thinking about a legal career:** If you are thinking about going into law, try taking a few legal classes at your local college. You may find that you really enjoy them or realize that a legal career is not for you. But if you enjoy working with people and enjoy law, a legal career can be very rewarding.

**Job prospects for new graduates:** I believe these vary depending on your location. I have found that law firms are hiring more paralegals rather than attorneys to help keep costs down.

**On paying for your legal education:** Fortunately, I did not have to take out a large loan for school. I went to a very affordable local community college and it was great! I am a big advocate of community colleges. They offer very flexible evening and weekend classes at a very affordable price.

**Final thoughts:** Networking is a great way to find a job. You will be surprised to find out how many people you know will know someone who works in the legal field. Establishing relationships with co-workers, clients, and other attorneys can help you with your current job as well as prospective jobs. Lastly, there are many areas of law that you can go into, such as probate, criminal, or domestic law, to name a few. Try to go into the area that you are most interested in; this will make your job more pleasant and rewarding.

## **Financing Law School**

*This section is reprinted with permission from Law School Admission Council and the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar.*

The cost of a three-year law school education could exceed \$150,000. When calculating the total cost of attending law school, you also have to include housing, food, books, transportation, and personal expenses. The amount of aid you receive and the form it takes are largely determined by the law schools; therefore, the law schools to which you are applying should be your primary source of information. Changes in financial aid rules and regulations are ongoing. Law school policies vary. You must educate yourself about financial aid in much the same way that you research law schools.

Today, approximately 80 percent of law school students rely on education loans as their primary, but not exclusive, source of financial aid for law school. Loans from governmental and private sources at low and moderate interest rates are available to qualified students. Typically, the lowest interest rates are associated with federal loans; private education loans are available at higher rates. Institutional loans may be available from your school. Scholarships, grants, and fellowships exist but are limited. Some students are offered part-time employment through the federal work-study program in their second and third years. First-year students are expected to concentrate fully on schoolwork. Additional information is available from the law school financial aid office.

### **Before Law School: Careful Planning**

Plan a financial strategy before you enter law school. If possible, pay off any outstanding consumer debt. Save as much money as you can to reduce the amount you will borrow. Have a plan for meeting the expenses of your legal education, and anticipate what portion of the plan will be based on borrowing. It is also important that you have a good credit history. Because most of your financial aid will come from loans, you are likely to graduate from law school with debt. Keep accurate records of all loans you receive during your enrollment in law school; this will help you manage your repayments. Federal loan recipients will be required to attend an entrance interview during the first few weeks of law school and an exit interview before leaving school. During these sessions, your financial aid officer will review the terms of your loan, sample repayment schedules, and repayment options.

While loans may be available, the question of how much to borrow is often asked. The maxim “Live like a student now or you will live like a student later” is a good one to remember. Consult an individual school’s Student Expense Budget for estimates of living expenses, and budget accordingly. Track your current spending habits and compare them to the budgets at schools of your choice. Share housing; learn to cook. Food expenses are often budget-busters. While law

school may be an excellent long-term investment, paying loans in the short term can be a real burden. Remember, not all lawyers will earn the highest salaries. Most federal loans allow you to defer payment while you attend law school at least half-time. Interest on subsidized loans does not accrue, while unsubsidized, Graduate PLUS, and private loans accrue interest while you are in law school. The Student Expense Budget does not allow the use of federal education loan funds to pay for prior consumer debt.

### **Planning Ahead: Repayment of Your Loan**

Your income after law school is an important factor in determining what constitutes manageable payments on your education loans. Although it may be difficult to predict what kind of job you will get (or want) after law school or exactly what kind of salary you will receive, it is important that you make some assessment of your goals for the purpose of sound debt management. In addition to assessing expected income, you must also create a realistic picture of how much you can afford to pay back on a monthly basis while maintaining the lifestyle that you desire. You may have to adjust your thinking about how quickly you can pay your loans back, how much money you can afford to borrow, or how extravagantly you expect to live in the years following your graduation from law school. Your education loan debt represents a serious financial commitment that must be repaid.

### **Going to Law School**

Your arrival at law school will signal the beginning of an experience very different from your undergraduate education. While undergraduates often have choices among courses and meet different students from one class to another, first-year law students typically take a set group of courses with the same classmates. Law school is a rigorous, interactive, analytic experience. Just as lawyers need to understand and express the interests and positions of clients, law students will be asked to argue for a variety of positions. Since they can expect to be called on in class, students will need to be active learners.

Grading is also usually different from college. Most law school grades are based entirely, or almost entirely, on a single exam that is graded anonymously. Success requires daily preparation, both to be an active learner and to not fall so far behind as to make catching up impossible.

Law schools differ in their emphasis. Students who know they have a strong interest in a particular field or approach to learning law may want to research a number of schools. The courses students are required to take in their first year also may vary from law school to law school. Typical courses include Contract, Criminal Law, Torts, Property, Civil Procedure, Legal Research and Writing, and with less regularity, Constitutional Law or Criminal Procedure. The remainder of

the curriculum also varies. Some law schools have many required courses, while in others, upper level courses are almost entirely elective.

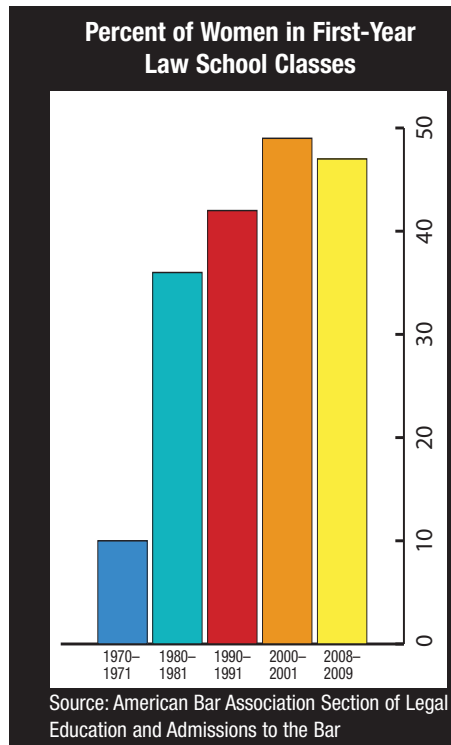
Throughout law school, students will be asked to apply their understanding of ethics to legal situations. Although all students are required to take a course in Legal Ethics or Professional Responsibility, ethics questions can arise at any time in any course.

There is also variation in the way in which classes are taught at different schools. Almost all first-year course professors and many second- and third-year professors employ a variant of the Socratic method, in which a student will be called on and asked a series of questions concerning a case that had been assigned for the day's reading. The professor's questions will help the class discover and explain the legal theory in the case and the possible variations or responses to that theory. Other professors may primarily lecture, conduct discussions of cases without employing the Socratic method, or use a problem-solving approach. Still other professors will employ a combination. Whatever method is used, there will be a great deal of reading to prepare for each class, and it is important to manage your time properly.

A number of law schools also have programs to teach skills through real-world simulations or situations. Typically, first-year legal writing courses require students to research and write the same sort of legal memoranda that a junior associate of a law firm can expect to write for a senior partner of the firm. First-year students also typically write a legal brief such as would be presented to an appellate court and participate in a practice oral argument. Students have the opportunity to expand on those research and advocacy skills through second- and third-year classes and activities, participating in moot court competitions, serving as editors of student-run law reviews, working with real clients in clinical programs, participating in counseling and mock trial competitions, serving as externs with judges, or doing independent research.

### **Admission to the Bar**

Almost all states require law school graduates to pass a rigorous test, the bar exam, to get a license to practice law in that state. Most also require graduates to meet that jurisdiction's specific requirements of character and fitness.



Most bar examinations consist of a locally constructed essay examination, a nationally administered test (the Multistate Bar Examination), and a national exam on ethics and professional responsibility. You can obtain more information on bar admission by contacting your state’s board of bar examiners, often an agency of the state supreme court or the state bar association.

## Nonlawyer Careers in the Law

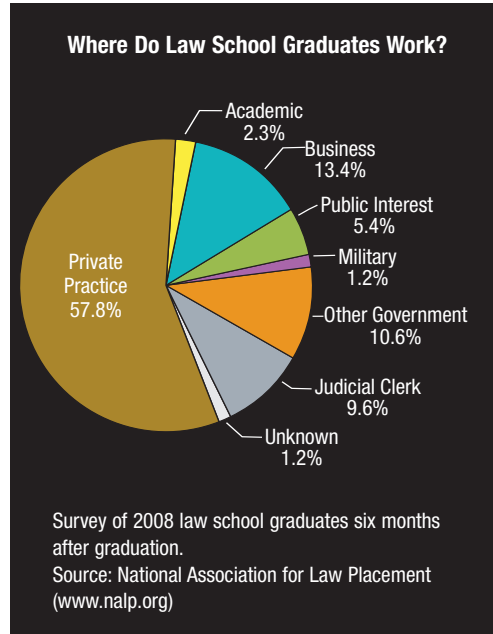
*Legal assistants*, also known as *paralegals*, assist lawyers. They cannot represent clients in court or provide legal advice to clients. They interview clients, conduct legal research, and draft legal documents under the supervision of lawyers. There are about 238,000 paralegals in the United States, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor.

Many two- and four-year colleges, as well as for-profit private schools, now offer paralegal training. The Web site for the ABA’s Standing Committee on Paralegals has helpful information on finding a school ([www.abanet.org/legalservices/paralegals/](http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/paralegals/)).

*Mediators* help people resolve disputes without going to court. They meet with the involved parties in the dispute, listen to the problem, discuss options, and help the parties come to an agreement. Mediation is a rapidly growing field. Mediators are often trained initially as lawyers, social workers, or mental health professionals and have additional mediation training before beginning work as mediators.

Court workers include *court reporters*, who record everything said as part of a trial. (There are nearly 19,000 court reporters in the United States.) Court reporting is taught at about 130 community colleges, four-year colleges, and private business schools. Training programs generally take from two to four years. A high school diploma and strong English skills are a must. For a listing of schools approved by the National Court Reporters Association, see the association’s Web site ([www.ncraonline.org](http://www.ncraonline.org)).

*Court clerks* administer oaths, take custody of physical evidence, and help administer the trial. (Many, but not all, court clerks are lawyers.) Information about being a court clerk or other court worker can be obtained from the court system in your community.



## **Resources**

### **PREPARING FOR A LEGAL CAREER**

*Choose Law: A Profession for All.* American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, 2006.

Coleman, Ronald. *The Princeton Review Pre-Law Companion.* Princeton Review Publishing, 1996.

*So You Want to Be a Lawyer: A Practical Guide to Law as a Career* (Law School Admission Council). Broadway Books, 1998.

### **SELECTING A LAW SCHOOL**

ABA-LSAC *Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools.* Produced annually by the American Bar Association and the Law School Admission Council, the Official Guide contains admission data, tuition, fees, living costs, financial aid, enrollment data, graduation rates, composition and number of faculty and administrators, curricular offerings, library resources, physical facilities, placement rates, and bar passage for all ABA-approved law schools. Available from the ABA Web store: [www.abanet.org/abastore](http://www.abanet.org/abastore) or from the ABA Service Center at 800.285.2221.

*The Princeton Review Student Advantage Guide to Law Schools.* Random House, 1996.

### **THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE**

Cassidy, Carol-Jane and S.F. Goldfarb. *Inside the Law Schools: A Guide by Students for Students* (Seventh Edition). Plume, 1998.

Miller, Robert H. *Law School Confidential: A Complete Guide to the Law School Experience: By Students, For Students.* St. Martin's Griffin, 2004.

Munneke, Gary A. *How to Succeed in Law School* (4th Edition). Barron's, 2008.

Turow, Scott. *One L: The Turbulent True Story of a First Year at Harvard Law School.* Grand Central Publishing, 1997.

### **SPECIFIC CAREER PATHS**

The National Association for Law Placement ([www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org)) offers a guide to selecting a legal specialty. *The Official Guide to Legal Specialties.* Harcourt Legal & Professional Publications, Inc., 2000.

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Specialization offers a concise guide to legal specialties that can be downloaded for free. (Visit: [www.abanet.org/legalservices/specialization/downloads/June2007\\_Concise\\_Guide\\_Final.pdf](http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/specialization/downloads/June2007_Concise_Guide_Final.pdf))

### **WEB SITES**

*American Bar Association Legal Education* | [www.abanet.org/legaled](http://www.abanet.org/legaled)

*American Bar Association Legal Education Opportunity* | [www.abanet.org/cleo](http://www.abanet.org/cleo)

*American Bar Association's PREVIEW of United States Supreme Court Cases* | [www.supremecourtpreview.org](http://www.supremecourtpreview.org)

*Law School Admission Council* | [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)

*National Association for Law Placement* | [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org)

## **Glossary**

**acquittal** A verdict stating that a defendant in a criminal case has not been proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt of the crime charged. Note that the defendant is not found “innocent.” The defendant does not have to prove anything; rather, the state is found not to have proven its case.

**adjudication** Giving or pronouncing a judgment or decree; also the judgment given.

**admissible** Able to be legally and properly introduced in a civil or criminal trial.

**affirmed** In the practice of appellate courts, a decree or order at issue is declared valid and will stand as rendered in the lower court.

**allegation** The statement in a pleading of what a party expects to prove. For example, an indictment contains allegations of crime against the defendant.

**alternative dispute resolution** Settling a dispute without a full, formal trial. Methods include mediation, conciliation, arbitration, and settlement.

**answer** The defendant’s response to the plaintiff’s allegations as stated in a complaint. An item-by-item, paragraph-by-paragraph response to points made in a complaint; part of the pleadings.

**appeal** A request by the losing party in a lawsuit that the judgment be reviewed by a higher court.

**appellant** The party who initiates an appeal. Sometimes called a petitioner.

**appellate court** A court having jurisdiction to hear appeals and review a trial court’s procedure and legal rulings.

**appellee** The party against whom an appeal is taken. Sometimes called a respondent.

**appearance** Coming into court; the formal act by which a defendant submits to the jurisdiction of a court.

**arbitration** A form of alternative dispute resolution, in which the parties bring their dispute to a neutral third party and agree to abide by his or her decision. In arbitration there is a hearing at which both parties have an opportunity to participate. Decisions usually can’t be appealed.

**arrest** To take into custody by legal authority

**at issue** The contested points in a lawsuit are “at issue.”

**bail** Money or other security (such as a bail bond) given to secure a person’s release from custody, which is at risk should he or she subsequently fail to appear before the court. Bail and bond are often used interchangeably.

**bailiff** A court attendant who keeps order in the courtroom and has custody of the jury.

**beyond a reasonable doubt** The standard in a criminal case requiring that the jury be satisfied to a moral certainty that every element of a crime has been proven by the prosecution. This standard of proof does not require that the state establish absolute certainty by eliminating all doubt, but it does require that the evidence be so conclusive that all reasonable doubts are removed from the mind of an ordinary person.

**bind over** To hold a person for trial on bond (bail) or in jail. If the judicial official conducting a preliminary hearing finds probable cause to believe the accused committed a crime, he or she will “bind over” the accused, normally by setting bail for his or her appearance at trial.

**booking** The process of photographing, fingerprinting, and recording identifying data of a suspect following arrest.

**brief** A written statement prepared by one side in a lawsuit to explain to the court its view of the facts of a case and the applicable law.

**burden of proof** In the law of evidence, duty of affirmatively proving a fact or facts in dispute on an issue raised between the parties in a lawsuit. The responsibility of proving a point—the burden of proof—is not the same as the standard of proof. “Burden of proof” deals with which side must establish a point or points; “standard of proof” indicates the degree to which the point must be proven. For example, in a civil case the burden of proof rests with the plaintiff who must establish his or her case by such standards of proof as “a preponderance of evidence” or “clear and convincing evidence.”



**challenge** An objection, such as when an attorney objects at a *voir dire* hearing to the seating of a particular person on a jury, civil or criminal; may be challenge for cause or peremptory challenge.

**challenge for cause** Objection to the seating of a particular juror for a stated reason (usually bias or prejudice for or against one of the parties in the case); the judge has discretion to deny the challenge (differs from peremptory challenge).

**change of venue** Moving a lawsuit to another place for trial, often because pretrial publicity makes it difficult to empanel an impartial jury.

**circumstantial evidence** Evidence that suggests something by implication. For example, physical evidence, such as fingerprints, from which an inference can be drawn. Circumstantial evidence is indirect, as opposed to eyewitness testimony, which is direct.

**civil actions** Noncriminal cases in which one private individual or business sues another for redress of private or civil rights.

**clear and convincing evidence** Standard of proof sometimes used in civil lawsuits and in regulatory agency cases. It governs the amount of proof that must be offered in order for the plaintiff to prevail. This standard requires more than “a preponderance of the evidence” but less than “beyond a reasonable doubt.”

**complaint** The legal document that usually begins a civil lawsuit. It states the facts and identifies the action the court is asked to take.

**concurring opinion** An appellate court opinion by one or more judges that agrees with the result reached by the majority but not necessarily its reasoning.

**contempt of court** Willful disobedience of a judge's command or of an official court order.

**conviction** A judgment of guilt against a criminal defendant.

**cross-examination** The questioning of a witness produced by the other side.

**damages** Money awarded by a court to a person injured by the unlawful act or negligence of another person.

**defendant** In a civil case, the person being sued. In a criminal case, the person charged with a crime.

**deposition** The testimony of a witness taken under oath in preparation for a trial.

**direct evidence** Proof of facts by witnesses who saw acts done or heard words spoken, as distinguished from circumstantial, or indirect, evidence.

**direct examination** The first questioning of witnesses by the party on whose behalf they are called.

**discovery** The pretrial process by which one party discovers the evidence that will be relied upon at trial by the opposing party.

**dismissal** The termination of a lawsuit. A “dismissal without prejudice” permits the suit to be filed again at a later time. In contrast, a “dismissal with prejudice” prevents the lawsuit from being filed later.

**dissent** An appellate court opinion setting forth the minority view and outlining the disagreement of one or more judges with the decision of the majority.

**double jeopardy** Putting a person on trial more than once for the same crime; forbidden by the Fifth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

**due process of law** The right of all persons to receive the guarantees and safeguards of the law and the judicial process. Includes such constitutional requirements of a fair and impartial proceeding as adequate notice, assistance of counsel, and the rights to remain silent, to a speedy and public trial, to an impartial jury, and to confront witnesses.

**exhibit** A document or other article introduced as evidence during a trial or hearing.

**grand jury** A group of citizens, numbering as many as twenty-three, who are assembled in secret to hear or investigate allegations of criminal behavior. A grand jury has authority to conduct criminal investigations and to charge a crime by indictment; it also may have power to issue a report, or presentment, without charging a crime.

**habeas corpus** A writ which commands that a person be brought before a judge. Most commonly, a writ of habeas corpus is a legal document that forces law enforcement authorities to produce a prisoner they are holding and to legally justify his or her detention.

**harmless error** An error committed during a trial that was corrected or was not serious enough to affect the outcome of a trial and therefore was not sufficiently harmful (prejudicial) to warrant reversing the judgment.

**hearsay** Evidence that is not within the personal knowledge of the witness but was relayed to the witness by a third party. Hearsay evidence generally is not admissible in court although there are many exceptions under which it can be admitted.

**hostile witness** A witness who does not want to testify on behalf of the party who calls him or her as a witness. A hostile witness may be asked leading questions and may be cross-examined by the party who calls him or her to the stand.

**hung jury** A jury that cannot reach a verdict.

**impeachment of a witness** An attack on the credibility (believability) of a witness, through evidence introduced for that purpose.

**indictment** An accusation by a grand jury charging a person with a crime.

**judgment** The final disposition of a lawsuit.

**jurisdiction** The nature and scope of a court's authority to hear and/or decide a case. Also, the territory from which a court is authorized to hear cases.

**jury** A certain number of persons selected according to law and sworn to inquire into matters of fact and declare the truth about matters of fact before them. A grand jury is traditionally composed of as many as twenty-three people who decide whether the facts of a criminal case are sufficient to issue an indictment charging a person with a crime. A petit jury is an ordinary or trial jury, composed of six to twelve persons, which hears either civil or criminal cases.

**liable** Legally responsible for.

**mediation** A form of alternative dispute resolution, in which the parties bring their dispute to a neutral third party who helps them agree on a settlement.

**misdemeanor** A criminal offense considered less serious than a felony. Misdemeanors generally are punishable by a fine or a limited local jail term but not by imprisonment in a state penitentiary.

**mistrial** A trial that is terminated before a verdict is reached because of some extraordinary circumstance, a fundamental error prejudicial to the defendant (such as an improper drawing of jurors), or a hung jury.

**motion** An application for a rule or order made to a court or judge.

***nolo contendere*** A plea of no contest. In many jurisdictions, it is an expression that the matter will not be contested but without an admission of guilt. In other jurisdictions, it is an admission of the charges and is equivalent to a guilty plea.

**notice** Formal notification to the party being sued that the lawsuit has been filed.

**objection** The process by which one party takes exception to some statement or procedure. An objection is either sustained or overruled by the judge.

**"on his own recognizance"** Release of a person from custody without the payment of any bail or posting of bond.

**opinion** The written decision of an appellate court.

**order** A written or oral command from a court directing or forbidding an action.

**overrule** A judge decides not to allow an objection; also, a higher court decides that one of its previous rulings was in error.

**peremptory challenge** A challenge which may be used to reject a certain number of prospective jurors without giving a reason. Differs from challenge for cause.

**perjury** The criminal offense of making a false statement under oath.

**plaintiff** The person who brings a civil lawsuit.

**plea** The defendant's declaration in open court that he or she is guilty or not guilty — the defendant's answer to the charges made in the indictment or information.

**pleadings** The written statements of fact and law filed by the parties to a lawsuit.

**preliminary hearing** In criminal law, the hearing at which a judge determines whether there is sufficient evidence against a person charged with a crime to warrant holding him or her for trial.

**preponderance of the evidence** Greater weight of the evidence, the common standard of proof in civil cases.

**pretrial conference** A meeting between the judge and the lawyers involved in a lawsuit to narrow the issues in the suit, agree on what will be presented at the trial, and make a final effort to settle the case without a trial.

**probable cause** Sufficient legal reasons for allowing the search and seizure or the arrest of a person.

**prosecutor** A trial lawyer representing the government in a criminal case.

**public defender** Government lawyer who provides free legal defense services to a poor person accused of a crime.

**rebuttal** Evidence disproving other evidence previously given or reestablishing the credibility of challenged evidence.

**record** All of the documents and evidence plus transcripts of oral proceedings in a case.

**remand** To send a dispute back to the court where it was originally heard.

**reversible error** An error sufficiently prejudicial (harmful) to justify reversing the judgment of a lower court.

**search warrant** A written order issued by a judge that directs a law enforcement officer to search a specific area for a specific piece of evidence.

**self-incrimination, privilege against** The constitutional right of people to refuse to give testimony against themselves that could subject them to criminal prosecution.

**service** The delivery of a legal document, such as a complaint, summons, or subpoena notifying a person of a lawsuit or other legal action taken against him or her.

**settlement** An agreement between the parties disposing of a lawsuit.

**stipulation** An agreement by attorneys on both sides of a case about some aspect of a lawsuit, e.g., to extend the time to answer and to admit certain facts at the trial.

**subpoena** A court order compelling a witness to appear and testify. A subpoena duces tecum commands a witness to bring certain documents or records to court.

**summary judgment** Order by a judge deciding a case in favor of one side on the basis of the pleadings before trial. A judge grants a summary judgment upon determining there is no dispute about any of the important facts in the case.

**testimony** Evidence given by a witness under oath; does not include evidence from documents and other physical evidence.

**transcript** The official record of all the testimony and events that occur during a trial or hearing.

**verdict** Conclusion, as to fact or law, that forms the basis for the court's judgment.

**venire** The pool of people summoned for jury duty.

**voir dire** Process of questioning potential jurors so that each side may decide whether to accept or oppose individuals for the jury.

**warrant** A court order authorizing law enforcement officers to make an arrest or conduct a search.

**witness** One who testifies to what he or she has seen, heard, or otherwise experienced.

**writ** A judicial order directing a person to do something.



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