



Law As A Career



In Harris County

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Speakers Bureau Committee:
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HOUSTON IS A GREAT PLACE TO BE A LAWYER

Houston is the largest city in Texas and the fourth largest city in the United States. As a major center for business, oil and natural gas production, science, technology, sports and entertainment, Houston plays a significant role in the state and national economy. Houston is widely regarded as the "energy capital" of the world. Houston is home to the Texas Medical Center and its many hospitals and research centers, the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, international corporations such as BMC Software, Continental Airlines, and many other technology companies on the cutting edge of tomorrow's conveniences.

Houston is a city full of people who need help - help in complying with the law, in resolving disputes with others, in preparing wills for their families' future security, and in defending the rights of others.

Houston lawyers play important roles working with people in the courthouses throughout the city of Houston, and in towns and cities around the state.

Houston is home to many courts:

- q Municipal Courts (Traffic Tickets and other Minor Offenses)
- q State and County Courts (Civil and Criminal)
- q Appellate Courts (Review Decisions from Trial Courts)
- q Federal Courts
- q Numerous Specialty Courts (Juvenile, Probate, Bankruptcy, Family, Tax)

Houston lawyers help make things happen. Lawyers from Houston travel across the country and around the world...to Asia, Africa, Europe and South America ... to work on projects to build dams, power plants, and pipelines, to create new businesses, and to patent new technologies - just to give a few examples.

WHAT DO LAWYERS DO???

We all know from television, movies and books that lawyers go to court, but they do much more. Lawyers do everything from writing business contracts to representing professional athletes/entertainers (yes, Carlos Lee, ZZ Top, and Beyoncé all need lawyers to help them with their careers and businesses). Opportunities for lawyers abound in every field, and areas of practice may focus on any one or more of the following interests: aerospace, banking, bankruptcy, business and corporate, criminal justice, employment, energy, estate planning (e.g., wills and probate), environmental, family (e.g., adoption and divorce), health care, immigration, insurance, intellectual property (patents, trademarks and copyrights), juvenile, maritime, personal injury, public interest, real estate, sports and entertainment, tax, and worker's compensation.

In addition, the federal, state, and local governments use lawyers to review and update existing laws, to draft new or eliminate outdated laws, to enter into contracts, and to represent the government in criminal or civil trials.

Many state and federal legislators are lawyers, as are most judges. That is one of the great benefits about having a law degree — it opens many career paths. In addition to lawyer jobs, the legal profession also offers other jobs such as paralegal, law librarian, legal secretary, court clerk, and professor.

WHERE DO LAWYERS WORK?

Lawyers work in law firms, corporations, federal, state and local government, and colleges and universities. Houston contains numerous courts, which employ many lawyers to further the interest of justice. Most lawyers are in private practice (70%); more than half are in firms of five attorneys or less; another 12% are employed by corporations.*

Harris County Attorneys =20,006

Primary Occupation	Private Practice	72%
	Government	5%
	Judiciary	1%
	Law Faculty	1%
	1A-House Counsel	12%
	Other Law Related	3%
	Other Non-Law Related	3%
	Retired or Not Working	2%
	Unemployed: Looking for Work	1%
	Unemployed: Not Looking for Work	<1%

Harris County Attorneys =20,006

Law Firm Size	Solo Practitioners	32%
	2 to 5 Attorneys	22%
	6 to 10 Attorneys	8%
	11 to 24 Attorneys	9%
	25 to 40 Attorneys	5%
	41 to 60 Attorneys	2%
	More than 60 Attorneys	11%
	Median Firm Size	5 Attorneys

* Statistical information comes from the State Bar of Texas' 2006-2007 membership figures.

WHO ARE LAWYERS?

Lawyers come from all walks of life. Legal careers are open to people without regard to economic status, gender, race, religion, or nationality. That makes sense, since the U.S. Constitution guarantees every person equality before the law. The legal system aspires to do the same.

The membership of the Houston Bar Association is also a reflection of Houston's ethnic variety. As Houston has grown from a struggling inland port in the 1860s to a thriving oil town in the 1980s to the current position it now holds with international trade, information technology, and promising continuing growth, its population has grown and diversified. Houston attorneys reflect the dynamics of the city and constitute an extremely diverse group of professionals.

Harris County contains 20,006 lawyers.* Graduates from the three Houston law schools represent about 55% of the Harris County lawyers.

One of the largest changes in the last 20 years is the substantial increase in the number of women attorneys. Increasing opportunities exist for all minorities in Houston. Houston lawyers come from various backgrounds and have widespread interests. Whether outgoing or shy, various personality types may find a comfortable place in a legal career.

Many have selected the law as a second career, coming from other fields such as accounting, business, education, engineering, journalism or law enforcement.

IS A CAREER IN LAW A GOOD CHOICE?

A value cannot be placed upon the satisfaction of helping someone solve a problem or participating in an important project. From helping a couple adopt a child or an entrepreneur start a small business, all the way to working on the merger of a huge corporation, Houston attorneys at every level and type of practice sense the importance and value of doing their jobs well. Lawyers draft laws for the betterment of society. Lawyers often exert influence and authority in their communities.

As a person coming from a modest background but determined to succeed, I realized while in college that the legal profession would provide a wide array of opportunities that were not available in other endeavors... I saw the critical role played by lawyers serving the public... I wanted to be a part of this noble and revered profession.

...James B. Sales, Of Counsel
Fulbright & Jaworski L.L.P.

LAW IS MORE THAN JUST LAWYERS

Many people are involved in making our legal system work. You do not have to go to law school and become a lawyer to make a difference in our legal system.

Many people in Houston work as "paralegals" or "legal assistants," a job where you work closely with lawyers in preparing legal documents and performing important tasks for lawyers and their clients. Many people perform other tasks important to providing legal services, such as using computer technology, managing legal records, creating visual aids and providing clerical support. Houston's courthouses are filled with people working to make the legal process run smoothly, from court clerks to bailiffs.

LIFE AS A LAWYER

Working as a lawyer is more than a job. In upholding the law, lawyers play an important role in helping our community to be a better place to live.

After watching my father in his role as a lawyer, I realized... lawyers help people and make our communities and neighborhoods better places to live.

...Amy Dunn Taylor,
Former Houston Bar Association President
Godwin Pappas Ronquillo L.L.P.

It was one of the few career paths in which one could truly make a difference and directly benefit one's community.

...Hon. Andrew S. Hanen,
Former Houston Bar Association President
United States District Judge

LAW AS AN OPPORTUNITY

How do you become an attorney?

If you want to become an attorney, you must stay in school, work hard and make good grades. In order to get into law school, you must first have a degree from a four-year college. Your degree can be in any major (e.g., English, business, engineering, art or other subjects). Although some colleges offer "pre-law" degrees, a pre-law degree is not required to become an attorney. You must also take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). Preparation courses are available. Law schools look for well-rounded students. Strong candidates have certain desirable characteristics such as good moral character, academic excellence, leadership skills and activities, self-discipline, achievements, honors, extracurricular activities, work experience and community involvement. Unique abilities, hardships overcome, advanced degrees, and past work experience are also considered in the admissions process.

Are there law schools in Houston?

Houston has three excellent law schools: South Texas College of Law, Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and the University of Houston Law Center. Law School requires hard work, but it can lead to a satisfying lifelong career as well as lasting friendships. Once you have a law degree (which generally takes three years of full-time studies or four years of part-time studies), you must pass a test called the bar exam, after which you receive a license to practice law. Your license allows you to practice statewide in any of the many fields of law.

Scholarships and loans are available to help pay the cost of law school. For specific information, contact the law school of your choice.

WHY STUDY LAW IN HOUSTON?

Houston is one of the most dynamic cities in the United States. It is home to many law firms, corporations, and other agencies which offer outstanding job opportunities upon graduation. The large number of private law firms in Houston offer opportunities to work while attending school. The Houston schools also offer clinical programs in various areas that enable students to practice client interviews or problem solving techniques or assist the courts with a variety of issues.

I tell prospective law students that the best reason to go to law school is to have an interesting life, because a legal education prepares you to pursue a wide array of professional opportunities. Building on this notion, I encourage them to explore these opportunities fully while in law school through clerkships and pro bono work by taking advantage of Houston's vibrant legal community and diverse social programs. In my short time in Houston, I have been very impressed with the breadth and depth of Houston's legal culture. Houston rocks.

...James J. Alfini, Dean,
South Texas College of Law

Lawyers offer their views on choosing a legal career

Law school prepares you to do anything you want. I have found that many aspects of life require or can be enhanced by an understanding of the law - everything from voting, to understanding the evening news, to something as fundamental as knowing your rights in any situation. A career in law allows you not only to fully appreciate these things, but more importantly, to realize your fullest potential, allowing you to be anything you want to be, and to make a difference in the lives of others.

...Irene Kosturakis, Senior Counsel
BMC Software, Inc.

Being a lawyer has provided me the opportunity to make an impact by helping people accomplish their goals and solve problems in both corporate and community board rooms.

... Debra Gatison Hatter, Partner
Haynes and Boone, L.L.P.

The great thing about a legal career is that whatever subject interests you, whether it is sports, business, arts and entertainment, medicine, civil rights, you can find a legal job in that field and it can be different from what you studied in high school and college.

... Arturo G. Michel, City Attorney
City of Houston

Large corporations maintain a staff of lawyers to assist the corporation in remaining profitable while complying with existing law. The members of the staff may concentrate on a specific area of the law. Many corporate presidents began their careers in the corporation as a counselor and attorney, and then rose to the top positions.

A legal education is a valuable tool for use in building a successful business career. It teaches individuals how to analyze problems from a different standpoint and reason clearly to solve them. It has been a great help to me over the years.

...Richard D. Kinder, Chairman and CEO
Kinder Morgan Inc.

There are as many good reasons to be a lawyer as there are lawyers. Being a lawyer carries the responsibility for serving clients with competence and concern for their best interests. It also requires participation in community affairs and working with other lawyers to uphold the honor and integrity of the legal profession. Law practice is a wonderful career, full of opportunities for interesting work and for personal growth.

...James E. Brill, Attorney at Law

Lawyers may also pursue their dream by entering the field of education, such as teaching at the undergraduate or graduate level. Other academic positions include law librarians or administrators.

From my father, a solo practitioner and federal judge and from other family and friends who were lawyers, I learned at an early age that law was a noble profession, and one that I would choose. From law school, especially from the law librarians, and from summer law clerkships, I learned that I could choose to become a licensed Texas lawyer, not practice law, but use my law degree and license for a multitude of law-related responsibilities - from legal research to continuing legal education to pro bono work and bar association work. I am proud and fortunate to be a licensed Texas lawyer and law librarian.

... Elizabeth Black Berry, J.D., M.S.L.S.
Manager of Information Resources,
Professional Development & Pro Bono
Weil, Gotshal & Manges LLP

I am proud to be a lawyer. Lawyers provide a voice for those unable to speak for themselves, and ensure that rights are not violated and wrongs are remedied. Lawyers are often the subject of scorn and criticism, but they are the backbone of the best system of justice in the world.

...Richard M. Alderman, Dwight Olds Chair in Law,
Associate Dean, University of Houston Law Center
Director, Consumer Law Center
“The People’s Lawyer”

Legal educators teach and reinforce the ideals of the legal community.

“I enjoy being a lawyer because law gives me the unique tools and opportunities to help make a difference in the lives of other people by helping them resolve complex issues and matters that affect their lives, the lives of their families and their businesses. As a law professor, I draw on my legal education and law practice knowledge to create a stimulating environment for my students and to help shape their lives and careers after they graduate. It gives me immense enjoyment, especially when they come back and I can see the knowledge I have instilled.”

...Gabriel Aitsebaomo
Associate Professor of Law
Thurgood Marshall School of Law

HOW TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE LEGAL PROFESSION

Ask a lawyer about his or her responsibilities or duties.
Observe trials in the many Houston courtrooms or hear arguments in an appellate court.

LAWYERING IS A LIFE-LONG PROCESS AND COMMITMENT

If you want to “right” the wrongs in society, make the world a better place, join a noble and revered profession, work with people at their best and their worst, or solve problems with some of the brightest, then consider a career in the law.

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HOUSTON SCHOOLS OF LAW

South Texas College of Law	713-659-8040 www.stcl.edu
Thurgood Marshall School of Law Texas Southern University	713-313-4455 www.tsulaw.edu
University of Houston Law Center	713-743-2100 www.law.uh.edu

OTHER TEXAS SCHOOLS OF LAW

Baylor Law School	254-710-1911 law.baylor.edu
St. Mary's University School of Law	210-436-3424 stmarylaw.stmarytx.edu
Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law	214-768-2550 www.law.smu.edu
Texas Tech University School of Law	806-742-3793 www.law.ttu.edu
Texas Wesleyan University School of Law	817-212-4000 www.law.txwes.edu
University of Texas School of Law	512-471-5151 www.utexas.edu/law



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