

Smith College Guide to Law School

Application Process

Preparing for Law School

Begin your law school preparations as early as possible during your undergraduate career. [The American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar](#) has provided a statement on [Pre-Law Preparation](#). Explore and examine both the profession and the law school experience. Carefully examine your interests, abilities and goals. Question your preconception about 'the Law,' and weigh your aspirations against the realities of job opportunities and law school admissions. If these considerations do not yet confirm your commitment to a legal career, work a year or two before applying to law schools.

- Meet with a Career Advisor or Pre-Law Advisor to help you clarify your career interests.
- Research Smith's AlumNet and identify alumnae who may be contacted for information and advice about their careers.
- Join the LinkedIn group: Smith College Alumnae in Law

Law School: Now or Later?

Many people apply with the expectation of deferring admission. While one-year deferments are sometimes granted after acceptance, they are not automatic nor can they usually be extended beyond one year (policies vary from school to school). In recent years, the Smith applicant pool has contained more recent graduates than graduating seniors; there is no disadvantage to delaying applications.

Many seniors consider the option of working a year or two before applying to law schools. They question what kind of employment will enhance their chances of admission to law school. Students are often concerned that they may lack the motivation to return to school after they have begun a working career. Our surveys indicate that Smith graduates do, in fact, return to school. Moreover, the overwhelming advice of alumnae currently enrolled in law schools is to take time to work before attending.

Law school admissions officers encourage work experience. The goals of older applicants are generally more focused and, therefore, they are better prepared applicants. Smith graduates have worked in any number of fields before applying, ranging from business and education to the media and the social services -- for example, as many teachers as paralegals apply to law school. Paralegal work can give an undecided senior some experience in the field and help reinforce a career decision, but it is far from being an automatic, even desirable, route to admissions.

If you apply as a senior and are not accepted, you can always reapply without prejudice. Plan to take at least two years to gain experience and knowledge in a job you enjoy. Develop some skills that will make your next application significantly different from your earlier ones. In

general, unless you are very certain about a career in law and have a strong record going into senior year, our advice is to wait. Don't rush. A challenging job can be a good foundation for your postgraduate education. Feel free to discuss your questions or concerns with the pre-law advisor in the Lazarus Center for Career Development. We wish you every success.

Misconduct and Irregularities in the Admissions Process

"Misconduct or irregularity in the admission process is a serious offense with serious consequences. Intent is not an element of a finding of misconduct or irregularity. Misconduct or irregularity is defined as the submission, as part of the law school admission process, of any information that is false, inconsistent, or misleading conclusion, or the violation of any regulation governing the law school admission process, including any violation of LSAT test center regulations." -- Law School Admission Council

Applicants should be prepared to answer candidly and honestly questions about their background. Examples follow:

From Cornell Law School

Have you ever been the subject of disciplinary proceedings, or been warned, placed on probation, or suspended for academic, nonacademic, or any other reasons by any of the colleges, universities, graduate schools, or professional schools you have attended, or are any such proceedings pending?

-and-

Have you ever been charged with or convicted of a crime, including expunged offenses, other than a minor traffic violation, or are charges pending?

From Boston College Law School

Have you ever been placed on academic warning, academic probation or conduct probation, or been dismissed or subjected to any disciplinary action from any college, graduate or professional school, law school or professional licensing agency? Are you currently charged with (note: we are not inquiring about arrests) any violation of law other than minor traffic violations with a fine of less than \$100.00 per violation?

Applicants who answer "yes" to any such question should meet with a pre-law advisor and include an addendum with their applications. This document should describe and take full responsibility for the incident. Failure to disclose is considered misconduct and can result in expulsion from law school, refusal of an application to take the bar exam, or even subsequent disbarment.

Admissions Decisions

Most law schools begin to announce decisions in February. By the beginning of April, you should know your status at most schools. If you are notified that your decision will be placed on "hold" or that you'll be placed on a "wait list", acknowledge the notification and send any relevant current information, such as an additional letter of recommendation and/or a brief account of your present academic work, especially if you are writing a thesis. "Hold" status implies that your application has been reviewed, and that the school has not made a decision. This may be because a school wants to see a larger percentage of the applicant pool before making a decision. "Wait list" status implies that the law school believes that you are qualified to be a member of the entering class, but that there were too many other candidates who were even more qualified. Many times students are admitted off the wait list through late in the spring and summer. If you find yourself on hold or on a wait list at a school, please discuss your options with a pre-law advisor.

Financial Aid

Most financial aid is administered through individual law schools, and most awards are based on financial need. Although most financial aid packets have a large loan component, some merit scholarships are offered. Read individual law school catalogs for procedures for applying for specific scholarships and for financial aid policies. Contact the financial aid officer at the law school if you need further information. Many schools have **loan repayment assistance programs (LRAP)** for graduates who choose to enter low paying or public-interest law firms.

If you wish to be considered for **federal aid**, you must complete the **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)** form, available from the law school's financial aid office and online at <http://www.fafsa.ed.gov/>. Individual institutions may require additional forms to be completed, please be sure to read the institution's financial aid literature carefully. If you are currently receiving federal financial aid, you should receive a FAFSA renewal form in November or December.

[Fee waivers for LSAT and CAS](#) will assist you with the cost of taking the LSAT and applying to a select number of law schools. If you require a fee waiver for an application fee contact the admissions office at a law school of your choice to determine if the school participates in the fee waiver program and how it wants you to submit your application. Get an early start during spring or summer, well before you plan to apply. Procedures for requesting application fee waivers are described in the individual law school catalogs.