Pre-Law
Student Guide
For Students Who Wish to Apply to Law School
Who is this booklet for?
This booklet is designed for those students who wish to apply to law school.

Who are we?
Pre-Law Advisors
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Advising Hours:
For advising hours please visit our website: www.stonybrook.edu/prelaw

What pre-law services do we provide?
• We meet individually with applicants needing advice.
• We sponsor programs that educate students on the law school application process as well as other special topics relating to career interests in law.
• We complete Dean’s Certifications for schools requesting them.
• We produce and distribute a bi-weekly “Please Be Advised” e-mail that includes pre-law advising information.

For Freshmen
If you are a freshman you should contact your Undergraduate College advisor to discuss your pre-law plans.
Picking a Major
There is no preferred major for undergraduates seeking entrance to law school. You should pursue the subject you enjoy and can perform well in.

You should consider taking one or more of the 3-credit law-related courses listed below during your studies at Stony Brook. To read the course description for each class below, visit www.stonybrook.edu/ugbulletin.

G/P/NC and Withdrawal Options
It is important to discuss the G/P/NC and Withdrawal options for any class with an advisor before making that decision; however, this is especially important if you are looking to apply to law school. You should avoid a pattern of such remarks on your transcript. Professional schools may interpret this as indicating poor judgment, bad planning, or the inability to finish what you begin. If you receive an “NC” for a course this will be factored into your LSAC GPA as an “F” when applying to law school. For more information, please speak with a pre-law advisor.

Maintaining and Balancing Your Schedule
There are no substitutes for good grades. Anything which impairs your ability to earn good grades in challenging courses may ultimately cost you in terms of time and lost opportunities. Take on courses and experiences that you enjoy but that will also result in success.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Code</th>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Prerequisites</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ECO 345</td>
<td>Law and Economic Issues</td>
<td>Prerequisite: C or higher in ECO 303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIS 371</td>
<td>Law and Society in American History, 1620 – 1877</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3 or U4 standing</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIS 372</td>
<td>U.S. Constitutional History and Civil Rights</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3 or U4 status</td>
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<tr>
<td>HIS 373</td>
<td>History of Crime and Criminal Justice in the U.S.</td>
<td>Prerequisites: U3 or U4 status; HIS 104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JRN 220</td>
<td>Media Law and Ethics</td>
<td>Prerequisite: JRN 110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL 311</td>
<td>Introduction to International Law</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3 or U4 standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL 319</td>
<td>Business Law</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3/U4 standing or new transfer student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL 320</td>
<td>Constitutional Law &amp; Politics: United States</td>
<td>Prerequisites: POL 102 or 105, U3 or U4 standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL 328</td>
<td>Criminal Law</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3 or U4 standing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POL 330/WST</td>
<td>Gender Issues in the Law</td>
<td>Prerequisite: U3 or U4 standing</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHI 108</td>
<td>Logical and Critical Reasoning (II)</td>
<td>Prerequisite: Open to freshmen &amp; sophomores, &amp; to juniors and seniors who have not completed DEC B</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHI 220</td>
<td>Introduction to Symbolic Logic (II)</td>
<td>Prerequisite: Satisfaction of entry skill in mathematics requirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRT 380</td>
<td>Advanced Research Writing: Theories, Methods, Practice</td>
<td>Prerequisite: WRT 102 or equivalent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WRT 381</td>
<td>Advanced Analytic and Argumentative Writing</td>
<td>Prerequisite: WRT 102 or equivalent</td>
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The following checklist presumes law school entrance in the fall following graduation from Stony Brook. The schedule can be condensed, but applications need to be made approximately ten months in advance of fall matriculation at law school, and an additional three to six months of concentrated study for the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is necessary to maximize your score.

**Freshman and Sophomore Years**
Learn, Explore, Study, and Earn Good Grades!

- Attend seminars and informational meetings sponsored by the Pre-Professional Advising office. Note that law schools do not look for any particular major or minor. It’s most important to study in a subject area that interests you, and one in which you will do well academically.
- Join the Stony Brook Pre-Law Society. Visit: https://stonybrook.collegialink.net/organization/PreLawSociety
- Make every effort to adjust successfully to the academic rigors of college so that you can begin building a record of solid, positive academic achievement. A GPA of 3.0 or higher is your goal. The higher your GPA, the better. Stay focused on why you are in college and where you want to go.
- Participate in at least one positive, enriching co-curricular activity on campus, especially one in which you demonstrate your leadership abilities.
- Expand your vocabulary. In addition to maintaining good grades, read a good, current law-related novel every semester, read the New York Times every weekday, do a crossword puzzle (the Tuesday New York Times is a worthy goal). Sign up for the Merriam-Webster Dictionary Word of the Day (www.m-w.com) and/or Wordsmith - A Word A Day (e-mail: wsmith@wordsmith.org). Try to avoid being a TV addict; studying and general reading are far more productive and more like what you will be doing in law school.
- Pursue internships and other opportunities to gain information and experience about careers in the legal profession.
- Bookmark and review the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) website (www.LSAC.org).

**Junior Year**
Obtain Recommendations, Research, Study, & Prepare to Apply!

- Think about your decision to go to law school and if you are unsure, research other career options. Most law school students take time off between college and law school.
- Pursue internships and other opportunities to gain information and experience about careers in the legal profession.
- Discuss legal careers with friends and acquaintances who are attorneys. Informational interviews with attorneys are also helpful.
- Set up a half hour appointment to speak with a Pre-Professional Advisor to review your academic progress and goals, as well as the details related to applying to law school.
- Register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) at LSAC.org. Most law schools want two letters of recommendation, typically from faculty or employers. Begin having those writing recommendations submit letters on your behalf.
- Begin serious investigation of law schools. Review law school websites. Look at each school’s profile in the Official Guide to ABA Approved Law Schools available for free on-line at LSAC.org.
- Research law schools by exploring websites and law school catalogues. Visit law schools whenever you can.
• Attend the fall law school fairs, particularly the NYC Law School Forum in September or the Boston Law School Fair, Copley Plaza, in late October. These are comprehensive events with many admissions deans/counselors present to answer your questions.

• The LSAT is offered four times a year: June, October, December, and February.

• Visit the LSAC.org site to get information on ordering practice exams. Investigate LSAT review courses and prepare thoroughly for the LSAT. Practice! Practice! Practice! Both Princeton Review and Kaplan are given on campus. There are other prep courses which can be helpful, including Cambridge and Home-Study. Check them all out if you need the extra help.

• Begin writing your personal statement. Revise, revise, revise!

• Review your Stony Brook transcript at the end of your junior year. If it is accurate, have the Registrar’s Office send an official transcript to CAS, and make the same request of each Registrar’s Office of previously attended colleges.

Senior Year
Research, Take the LSAT, & Apply!

• Continue to visit law schools, especially those close to where you live.

• Attend law recruitment days and other opportunities to meet with law school admissions officers. Revisit the NYC Law School Forum in September, or go to the Boston Law School Fair, Copley Plaza in late October.

• Register with the CAS at www.LSAC.org if you have not done so already.

• Select at least five law schools to apply to and discuss your choices with a Pre-Professional Advisor.

• Take the LSAT if you have not yet already. LSAT exams are offered in June, October, December, and February.

• Complete your application files with LSAT and the law schools by mid-November. Make sure you disclose everything required. Failure to do so can result in the automatic rejection of your application(s).

• File your taxes early and submit your FAFSA in January. The FAFSA is available on-line beginning January 1.

• Submit an updated transcript with your fall grades to LSAC and the law schools.

• Expect to hear from law schools beginning in December through the spring. If you have been waitlisted at a school, consider forwarding NEW information to the law schools (i.e., fall semester grades, completion of a thesis, awards, additional recommendations).

• Visit the schools where you have been admitted to or waitlisted.

• Inform the Pre-Professional Advising office and those writing letters of recommendation of the results of your law school applications. The Pre-Professional Advisors will be able to help if you have a problem.

• Once admitted, send a deposit to reserve your space in the entering class. If you are no longer interested in the school, let them know early so they can offer your seat to someone else.

• Before leaving school in the spring, have the Registrar’s Office send a final transcript to the law school which you plan to attend with your complete academic record and notice of graduation.
The LSAT is offered in June, October, December, and February. Refer to www.LSAC.org or the inside cover of the current LSAT & CAS Registration & Information Book for more information about LSAT dates and registration deadlines. You may register on-line to take the LSAT. Register for the LSAT ASAP so that you have a better chance at being assigned your first choice test site!

The best time to take the LSAT is when you are prepared! Preparing for the LSAT takes PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE! Taking the LSAT in June is ideal because you will have your scores in time to apply “early action” to programs and if you need to cancel your June score, you still have time to take the October exam and have your applications completed at the schools by mid-November. However, do not plan to take the June exam as a “practice test”. Ideally, you only want to take this test ONCE! Many law schools average LSAT scores. Furthermore, law schools will question multiple score cancellations.

**LSAT Preparation Course**
Some applicants prepare alone or with a group by buying LSAT prep tests through LSAC.org or other LSAT books on the market. They find that this works for them. Others determine that they need the structure of a class to help discipline themselves to prepare for the exam or they need help with a particular section of the exam. Many applicants also find that the insight and strategies for taking the exam they learn from the course are extremely helpful. Whether you decide to take an LSAT prep course or not, the key to doing your best is to PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE under simulated LSAT conditions. Below is a listing of some companies that offer LSAT prep courses. Many of the test companies offer scholarships for applicants with financial need. Inquire with each company.

- Power Score - www.powerscore.com
- Binary Solutions – www.binarysolution.com
- Kaplan - www.kaptest.com
- Princeton Review - www.princetonreview.com
- TestMasters - www.testmasters.com

**Canceling Scores**
Applicants may cancel their scores at the test site or via written requests received by LSAC within six (6) calendar days of the test.

**Testing Accomodations**
LSAC will provide accommodations for individuals who have documented disabilities. Please refer to the LSAC website at www.LSAC.org.
LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

• A person who knows you well can write a more substantial and helpful letter than someone who hardly knows you. In choosing between a person who taught you in a small class versus someone with a famous name or title but who cannot write a personal letter, choose the former. Letters from graduate student instructors are acceptable.

• When asking for the letter, make sure that you make an appointment to meet with the person whom you are asking. Don’t ask for a reference over email. Bring your resume, transcript, and tests/papers from classes taken with the faculty member and be prepared to talk about your future goals and past achievements. Applicants should include on their resume their current and permanent address, current and permanent phone number, Stony Brook ID number, e-mail address, education (including all colleges attended and study abroad experiences), GPA, honors and awards (describe them), extracurricular activities, skills, language proficiency, and employment history. A sentence/bullet point describing the nature of the experience should accompany each activity or experience and it should indicate start and end dates.

• Make sure that you allow the person the option of saying NO. You want to have strong letters and if a person is somewhat uncomfortable writing for you or doesn’t have enough time, it is likely that the result will be short and weak. It is much better to have someone be honest with you at the start, so that you can find another person to write your recommendation who will be more enthusiastic.

• Give those writing recommendations plenty of advanced notice and time to write a good letter of recommendation (a month or even two), but also give them a deadline. Make sure that they know your application timeline.

• Give those writing recommendations the LSAC Letter of Recommendation form and a stamped envelope addressed to LSAC.

• “Should I waive my right to see the recommendation letters?” The general feeling is that the person writing your recommendation will be more candid if it is a closed letter. The choice is yours. You must either waive or not waive your rights to see all the recommendations as well as your Dean’s Certification.

• Write a thank you note following your initial request for the letter, thanking the individual for agreeing to write the letter.

• “What is the total number of recommendations I should submit?” LSAC will accept up to four letters of recommendation.

• It is not necessary for those writing recommendations to write targeted letters to each law school. A generic law school recommendation letter is fine unless the school specifically requests otherwise. It is also not necessary to give those writing recommendations the school-specific recommendation forms.

• Inform your writers when you have decided where you will be attending school and thank them again for their assistance and support.
**Credential Assembly Service (CAS)**

Almost all ABA approved law schools require that applicants register with the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). CAS provides a centralized and standardized report to each law school where you apply that includes the following:

- Undergraduate academic summary
- Copies of all undergraduate, graduate, and law school/professional transcripts
- LSAT scores and writing sample copies
- Copies of letters of recommendation processed by LSAC

CAS also provides applicants with the following services:

- Ability to track LSAC file status and electronically file law school applications
- Recommendation service active for five years
- Great resources available for purchase and for FREE

Applicants may register with CAS anytime. You do not have to register at the time you register for the LSAT, but you will want to register with CAS before you submit your applications to the schools. Your registration is good for five years. You can register on-line at www.LSAC.org.

**Law School Reports**

Once LSAC has summarized your transcripts, you will be able to view your CAS Law School Report on-line. It is important that you check it for accuracy. If there are errors, you will need to write to LSAC to have it corrected. Refer to the LSAT and CAS Registration for more information.

**Fee Waivers**

LSAC offers fee waivers for both the LSAT and CAS. More information is available in the LSAT & CAS Registration and Information Book or on-line at www.LSAC.org.

**Transcripts**

You must have a transcript sent to LSAC from each undergraduate and graduate school you have attended. Request your Stony Brook transcript from Registrar and make sure to give them the CAS Transcript Request form found in the online application. This form is not required, but the form will serve to expedite the matching of your transcript to your CAS file. We recommend submitting transcripts over the summer because CAS experiences a backlog in the fall. Applicants currently in school should wait until they receive their spring (or summer) grades. Applicants in school this coming fall should send their updated transcript to LSAC and to the individual schools as soon as all their fall grades are in.
Dean’s Certification

What is a Dean’s Certification?
A Dean’s certification is a summary statement of a student’s academic history. It verifies for the law schools whether an applicant has had any academic or disciplinary sanctions and includes a brief statement about your Stony Brook academic performance, extracurricular activities, and campus service. Your resume or a list of your activities helps us to write the statement.

- Pre-Professional Advisors write certifications for seniors and alumni/ae.
- Some schools do not require a Dean’s Certification. Check the application materials of the schools you are applying to.
- The Dean’s Certification is not considered a recommendation letter. The writer does not need to know or meet with the applicant.
- Applicants who transferred to Stony Brook from another college or university must also have their previous schools submit Dean’s Certifications to the law schools as well.
- The Pre-Professional Advising office needs at least one week advance notice to send out a Dean’s Certification Form. They are written in the order received from applicants.
The purpose of the personal statement is to gather information about you outside of your academic performance, LSAT score and extracurricular involvement. Think of it as a written interview, one where you have control of the questions and answers. The most important consideration in your personal statement, no matter what the topic, is the impression of yourself that you are creating. The personal statement is your opportunity to distinguish yourself.

Possible Topic Areas

• Your motivation for a career as a law professional
• The influence of your family/early experiences on your life
• The influence of extracurricular, work or volunteer experiences on your life
• Personal philosophies as related to your goals
• How you’ve overcome an obstacle or disadvantage

Before You Begin

• Brainstorm
• Engage in self-reflection exercises
• Free-write
• Decide your approach in terms of content
• Think about your readers and tailor your message
• Write an outline

Writing Process

• Get started writing 1st draft
• Revise, Revise, Revise
• Obtain feedback from others
• Proofread

General Advice

• Answer the questions that are asked. Don’t use the same statement for all applications.
• Tell a story. Show or demonstrate your points using concrete examples from your experience.
• Be specific. Broad sweeping statements will not make you stand out as an individual. Illustrate your points with personal examples or experiences.
• Find an angle. An angle helps you to focus and make your statement interesting.
• Have a strong opening paragraph. Your first paragraph should state your thesis and grab the reader’s attention.
• Avoid clichés and quotes. This statement is about you and should not borrow from other’s words.
• Write well. Be meticulous about your writing style. Type and proofread your essay very carefully.
• Don’t write a descriptive resume. This is a common mistake. Don’t restate your resume in prose. This information can be found in other parts of your application.
• Avoid writing about high school experiences. Professional schools will expect that you have had significant experiences while in college.
• Be positive. Don’t badmouth the profession.
• Be honest.
• Find a balance between creative and cautious. This can be tricky. There is a fine line between creative and interesting and odd and gimmicky. Don’t write your personal statement as a legal brief or as a poem.
• Be concise. This is greatly appreciated by those who are reading thousands of applications.
• It’s hard to be a stand-up comedian. Humor is difficult and can be misinterpreted. It’s best to avoid it.
**Tips for Writing Your Best Law School Personal Statement**

1. Your personal statement should give a sense of who you are – your values and passion, but don’t beg for admission!
2. Law schools want to know who you are – not the specialty area that interests you. Law schools want you to be open to all areas of law.
3. Your personal statement is a substitute for the interview. Law schools deliberately do not have interviews because they expect applicants to utilize the English language, since the written word is an important part of being a lawyer. Use the essay to write about what you would have said in the interview. Here’s an example: If you had 5 minutes to make a pitch about yourself in an interview, figure out what you would say, speak into a tape recorder, play it back, and write about it.
4. Don’t use your personal statement as a time to review your resume and waste valuable space! Keep your personal statement limited to what has been stated on the application.
5. Your statement should be personal and self-revealing, but not maudlin. Use good judgment by not writing something too personal. Your statement must sound like you, not like a legal brief; it can have a “chatty” tone, but should be written in your own voice.
6. Let the reader in on the process. For example, explain why you did something, or what caused you to make a change in life circumstance, or what led you to law school. You should lay out the process in your statement – include anecdotes, how you problem-solved, what you expected, and what you learned about yourself. The reader should be able to understand how your mind works, and how you came to a particular conclusion, without giving every detail. Engage the reader and lead the reader to the conclusions you want; in other words, “show, don’t tell”.
7. Use good judgment. Don’t be too intimate in your statement; use discretion – it is a balancing act. Everything you write about must be true, but you don’t have to tell everything about you!
8. Don’t name traits – describe them. For example, instead of saying you are hard working, provide an example or evidence for your claim. (i.e., “I was studying so hard, I was locked overnight in the library.”) Tell a story that highlights the traits you want someone to learn about you.
9. Always be positive in your personal statement. Even if you are writing about something sad, end your story on a positive note (i.e., turning your life around.)
10. Your personal statement should be non-speculative. You should stick to writing about the past and the present. Let the law schools draw their own conclusions about your future.
11. Pick a story (or two related stories) that most define you. The story should be distinctive so that it gives you a “label” as a candidate. You want the law school to REMEMBER you as “the candidate who wrote about [something good and memorable]”. Your essay should be prosaic, and constructed around a metaphor, theme, or label. It should be written in-depth enough so that it says something important about you. Law schools want classic prose – write intellectually acute – not cute!
12. Seek feedback on your personal statement from trusted friends, faculty, and pre-professional advisors.

**The Six Biggest Errors in Writing Your Personal Statement**

1. Having spelling and grammar errors. Don’t rely on spell check to catch everything!
2. Having a statement in your essay that reads “I really want to go to Duke Law School”, but sending it in an envelope to Northwestern University.
3. Putting your resume information in your personal statement.
4. Focusing on your weaknesses, whining, and giving excuses.
5. Writing a personal statement that is too cute – for example, starting with a famous quote, using a crazy font, or printing it on pink paper or with green ink.
6. Writing a personal statement that is not personal at all or lacks any self-revelation.
With 186 accredited law schools in the United States, how do you decide where to apply and ultimately where to attend? It will be important to balance factors that address your personal preferences with those that affect your chances of admission. Do not let the search for "long shots, good chances, and sure things" govern your selection process. Begin by assembling a list of law schools based on criteria that are important to you, then revise your choices according to your chances of admission. This systematic approach should help limit frustration and confusion during the process of applying to law school. Selecting schools carefully will help reduce the time and expense of applying to an excessive number of schools.

**Criteria for Selection**
Consider the following factors and determine which are important to you:

**National/Regional Schools:** Does the school attract applicants from across the country and abroad? Or do most students come from the region in which the school is located? Where do most students want to work following graduation—throughout the country or in the school’s region?

**Faculty:** What are the academic and experiential backgrounds of faculty? How accessible are they? What is the faculty-student ratio, the number of full-time vs. adjunct faculty, and the number of female and minority faculty?

**Facilities and Resources:** Is the school affiliated with a university? Do students have access to courses from a range of academic disciplines to supplement their legal curriculum? Is the library large enough to accommodate holdings and permit students to conduct research and study? How helpful is the library staff? How accessible are electronic databases such as Lexis and Westlaw? In general, do the facilities provide a comfortable learning environment?

**Student Body:** What is the size of the entering class? What does the admissions profile tell you about the quality of the student body? Where did students study as undergraduates and what are their geographic backgrounds? Does the student body reflect a diversity of interests and personal/cultural backgrounds? What is the overall atmosphere—are students friendly or overly competitive? Is there much interaction with fellow students outside the classroom?

**Special Programs:** What coursework is available in specialized areas? Are there any joint degree programs of interest to you available? What are the opportunities for practical experience, including clinics, internships, etc.? What specialized institutes, journals, or organizations exist in your areas of interest? Does the school demonstrate a commitment to women and minorities through special programs?

**Placement:** What advising and resources are available to help you find a job? Is career counseling available? How many employers recruit at the law school and who are they? What percentage of the class has positions at graduation? In what types of positions and geographic areas are they employed? What is the percentage of graduates holding judicial clerkships? What assistance is given to students not interested in working in law firms? What is the bar passage rate for recent graduates?

**Student Life:** Is housing provided for first-year students? If not, does the school offer assistance in locating off-campus housing? Is the school located in a safe area? Is the location rural or urban? What is the cost of living? What types of cultural opportunities are there? Does the school provide recreational facilities?

**Costs:** What are tuition, housing, and transportation costs? Is financial aid exclusively need-based, or are merit scholarships available?
Reputation
The issue most often discussed by prospective law students, yet the most difficult to define, is “reputation”. A number of factors contribute to a school’s reputation, including faculty, facilities, career services, reputation of the parent university, etc. Though a number of law school rankings are available, most factors evaluated are not quantifiable, and therefore you should not perceive the rankings as accurate or definitive. Selectivity at law schools, however, is one factor which can be quantified; you can gauge a school’s relative selectivity by comparing the number of applicants accepted to the overall number of applications. The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools and the Official American Bar Association Guide to Approved Law Schools contain charts and tables of recent admissions cycles at most schools, reflecting the level of selectivity.

Schools can be divided roughly into three groups:
• Schools with national reputations which tend to appear in various "top ten" lists. They draw students from a national pool and offer geographic mobility to graduates.
• Schools with good regional reputations which are attended primarily by students from the region, who may want to remain in the area following graduation, but who may also seek positions throughout the country.
• Local schools which draw students primarily from the immediate area who want to practice there following graduation.

For a more detailed discussion of law school reputation, refer to The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools.

Non-Traditional Alternatives
You should be aware that some law schools offer alternatives to fall admission in a full-time law program. Evening divisions and part-time programs make it possible for students to work and study law simultaneously, earning a J.D. in four years. A few schools on the quarter system allow students to enter mid-year. Summer entry and/or summer courses can accelerate the degree program from three to two-and-a-half calendar years. And finally, some law schools have created summer trial programs, which allow applicants who may need additional preparation to ready themselves for legal study in time for fall entrance.

Publications and Online Resources
The ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools is available for applicants to review on the on-line at LSAC.org. Applicants can order the Guide on-line from LSAC.org or from Barnes & Noble and Amazon.

Catalogs and bulletins published and distributed by law schools are available by contacting the schools by phone, by U.S. mail, or through their web sites. http://www.bc.edu/content/bc/offices/careers/gradschool/law/research/lawlocator.html

The Boston College Online Law School Locator helps applicants identify schools where their LSAT score and grades are most competitive for admission.

School Visits are extremely important in helping an applicant determine if the school is the "right fit" for him or her. Each school has its own culture. It’s intangible but you can feel it during a visit. Do not make your decision of where to attend law school solely on ranking and prestige.