

Pre-Law Advising Student Handbook

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The Pre-Law Advising Office
Eisenhower 112
(785) 532-6904



Do I have what it takes to be a good lawyer?

The following general explanation of the skills and talents needed to be a good lawyer comes verbatim from a brochure entitled “Thinking about Law School?” published by the University of Nebraska Law School.

Persons thinking about law school frequently ask what subjects they should take or what majors they should select in preparation for law school. In most circumstances you must have an undergraduate degree to be admitted to law school. However, law schools do not require any particular course of study or major as a prerequisite for admission. Whatever you pursue as an undergraduate, from liberal arts to business, from engineering to social science, from chemistry to physical education, from education to journalism, you will be eligible for law school. This means that it is never too late to choose law as a career. One of this country's greatest legal minds, Roscoe Pound, earned an advanced degree in Botany from the University of Nebraska before he decided to enter the law, and he subsequently became Dean of the University of Nebraska College of Law and then Dean of the Harvard Law School!

Nonetheless, there are things you can do to prepare yourself, not only for law school, but for the legal profession. First, let's examine the skills you will need to be a good law student and a good lawyer.

Three Basic Skills of a Lawyer

1. The Comprehension and Use of Language

Language is the lawyer's working tool. Lawyers spend their time drafting legal instruments such as contracts or statutes, engaging in oral and written arguments, and speaking to and on behalf of their clients. The lawyer, above all other things, must be able to communicate in a clear and concise manner. In law school, and as a lawyer, you will need to speak and write logically and persuasively.

If you are thinking about law school, you need to develop your ability to write. You must be able to write clearly and correctly. You must be able to write to explain, to inform, or to persuade. You must also learn to write quickly. Law school and legal practice will require you to write often and under rigid deadlines. You should take every opportunity to work on your writing skills.

Oral communication is also an important skill of a lawyer. The law student and the lawyer must be able to present their views and those of their client clearly, forcefully, and persuasively. You must learn to speak using proper English. All of us are sometimes lazy when we speak, and we often avoid complete sentences or use slang terms. The lawyer, however, will speak in formal settings where proper English is important for effective communication. This does not mean your speech has to be stuffy or boring. But you want your law professor or the jury to concentrate on what you say and not be thinking about your poor grammar or slang expressions.

You must also get over the fear of public speaking or of expressing and defending your views in public. All of us get nervous before a speech, but the more we speak in public the easier it becomes. And the lawyer is often called upon to speak in public. Do not avoid occasions to speak before an audience; view them as opportunities for improving your oral skills.

2. Understanding human institutions and human nature

Lawyers do not work in isolation. The law regulates human activity and shapes human institutions. It can be a force for accomplishing much good, but it can also be a force for oppression. The lawyer must have a keen sense of human values and an understanding of human nature. The lawyer serves clients who are often caught up in difficult or emotional circumstances, and must often respond with compassion, sensitivity, and understanding. The lawyer is also often called upon to predict how individuals will respond to certain circumstances. Thus the lawyer must be prepared by both education and experience to understand how and why persons behave the way they do.

3. Creative and Analytical Thinking

Problemsolving is an important part of a lawyer's work, and the good lawyer is one who can do more than just advise the client whether a particular course of action is legal or illegal. The lawyer is often called upon to help accomplish the client's objectives within the limits of the law. This requires the skills of research, fact gathering, deductive and inductive reasoning, and critical analysis. You must also be able to distance yourself from the heat of an argument in order to bring reason to a dispute.

What do I need to accomplish as a pre-law student and when?

Use the following checklist to make sure you are accomplishing what you need to:

SOPHOMORE YEAR

- ❑ Begin taking Mock LSATs and “Mini-Mocks” (dates available in the pre-law office.)
- ❑ Take the free LSAT test on the LSAC website, www.lsac.org.

JUNIOR YEAR

SPRING

- ❑ In the spring, pick up LSAT registration packet from the pre-law office.
- ❑ Plan to take the “ideal” LSAT the June after your junior year. (Registration is usually due 1 month prior to the test.) You will receive your scores in July.
- ❑ Attend “LSAT preparation” and “Choosing a law school” workshops.

SENIOR YEAR

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER

- ❑ Make an appointment with the pre-law advisor to discuss test scores.
- ❑ Sign up for the October LSAT, if you didn’t take the June test.
- ❑ Obtain applications from law schools you’ll be applying to.
- ❑ With the KSU Pre-Law Club, visit Washburn and KU.
- ❑ Work on personal statement with pre-law advisor.
- ❑ Contact recommendation letter writers.
- ❑ Subscribe to LSDAS and have your official transcript(s) sent to them.

LATE SEPTEMBER/EARLY OCTOBER

- ❑ Second LSAT. If taking this LSAT, follow the advice for September (above) when your test scores are in.
- ❑ If you took the June LSAT, mail in your applications.

DECEMBER

- ❑ Third LSAT (early in the month)
- ❑ Check with law schools to see that your applications are complete.
- ❑ If you took the Sept./Oct. LSAT, mail in your applications ASAP.
- ❑ Letter from law schools with rolling/early admissions may begin arriving.

JANUARY

- ❑ Fill out Federal Financial Aid forms (available in Fairchild)

MARCH/APRIL/MAY

- ❑ March is the final application deadline for many law schools.
- ❑ In April and May, letters from law schools without rolling admissions arrive.

What exactly *is* pre-law advising?

Identifying strengths and weaknesses

The advisor meets with pre-law students individually throughout their academic career, ideally each semester, and together they form a long-range plan that takes into account the unique strengths and interests of each student. Students work closely with the pre-law advisor and the advisor in their major to make sure that the classes the student selects will develop the competencies necessary for law study.

... Preparing You for Law School

The advisor works individually with students to help them select law schools or identify alternatives to a law career. Meeting in groups, they plan application strategies, prepare for the Law School Admissions Test, work on drafting personal statements, and formulate goals for law school scholarships and financial aid.

... and Providing Resources

The pre-law office is a resource center providing information about every accredited law program in the country. Students can check out resources from the pre-law library (located in Eisenhower 112). The office also sponsors group meetings that give supplemental information about preparing for a law career. Each semester, sessions are offered to help students prepare for the Law School Admissions Test. At Pre-Law Club events and in other meetings, students have an opportunity to talk with visiting representatives of law schools.

Where is your office located, what are your office hours, and how can I contact you?

I am always happy to meet with students to discuss individual strategies for preparing for and succeeding in law school. This handbook is intended to serve as a general guide to questions that students commonly ask about the pre-law process. Consult this guide first to see if it answers your question. If you have questions that are beyond the scope of this document or that pertain to your individual course as a pre-law student, please feel free to schedule an appointment to meet with me. Please reserve e-mail for questions that can be answered quickly. To schedule an appointment, call the number listed below.

Pre-Law Advisor
Kansas State University
112 Eisenhower Hall
Manhattan, KS 66506
(785) 532-6904

Office hours: 1 – 5 pm, Monday-Friday

Can I graduate with a pre-law degree?

No. Pre-law prepares you for attending law school (including the process of submitting applications and preparing for the LSAT), but it is not a degree track. You must select an academic major.

What majors will help me get into law schools?

Law schools accept students from any and every major. When trying to decide on a major, select one that suits your interests and strengths.

Can you recommend any classes that will help me as a pre-law student?

The one class I recommend to all students may surprise you: **ECON 110--Macroeconomics**. Former K-State students who have attended law school say that the knowledge of the economic system they learned in ECON 110 was essential to their success in law school.

Another class I strongly encourage students to take is **PHILO 110: Intro to Formal Logic**. This class provides experience with formulating arguments, practice that is extremely valuable for anyone preparing for the logic section of the LSAT and law school.

Also, any class in the Political Science Department will give you valuable insight into government and politics, comparative politics, international relations, and political theory. Pre-law students find **POLSC 607: Administrative Law** and **POLSC 614: Constitutional Law** particularly helpful.

In general, pre-law students should seek to improve their writing, reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical thinking skills through their coursework. History (especially the 500-level and above), English (Composition and Literature), and Philosophy courses all focus on honing these skills.

Consult your academic advisor about the following:

- Graduation requirements
- Selecting classes for a given semester (follow-up at some point during the semester with the pre-law advisor)
- Dropping and adding classes
- Problems with a specific class or professor (though follow-up with the pre-law advisor if the class will have a direct impact on your ability to enter law school)
- K-State financial aid
- Reinstatement and dismissal policies

Consult the pre-law advisor about the following:

- Any part of the application process (LSAT, selecting a law school, writing your personal statement, submitting applications)
- Developing and following up on a long-range course plan (i.e., selecting classes to take during your 4 years at K-State that will strengthen necessary skills)
- Any question that is relevant to the law school application process and your long-range plans

Pre-Law Advising Worksheet

The following worksheet is intended to help you know what kinds of things to talk about with your pre-law advisor. Whenever you have an appointment with the pre-law advisor, bring your handbook with you so you can fill in information as you receive it—or fill in the blanks after the appointment. As you fill in the information, be sure to share relevant details (especially class choices) with your academic major advisor, too.

LSAT: **When should I take it?** _____
 How should I prepare? _____
 My LSAT score is (scores are): _____
 Might my LSAT score impact which schools to apply to? _____
 Which law schools are realistic given my LSAT score? _____

GPA: **Might my cumulative GPA impact which schools will accept me?** _____
 How can I improve my GPA? _____
 Which law schools are realistic given my GPA? _____

Classes: **What classes might help me develop the skills I need for law school?**

Am I taking classes that are diverse in subject and adequately rigorous?

Rec letters: **Who should I ask for letters of recommendations?** _____

Personal statement:
 When should I begin work on my personal statement? _____
 What resources should I use to write it? _____

Applying: **How should I research law schools?** _____
 How many schools should I apply to? _____
 Which schools should I think about applying to? _____

 Should I use the LSACD to fill out my applications? _____

How do I decide which schools to apply to?

There are a wide variety of factors to consider when deciding which schools to apply to. There are also a number of sources that can help you in determining which school is right for you. This list is not exclusive; there may be other issues that have more bearing for you as a pre-law student. Check out the resources for researching schools available in the pre-law library.

- ❖ Tuition (in-state vs. out-of-state)
- ❖ Programs of interest
- ❖ Race, gender, background of students
- ❖ Class size or age
- ❖ Number of other students “like you”
- ❖ Diversity in professors
- ❖ Opportunities for research & writing
- ❖ Regional/national job scenario
- ❖ Part-time/evening/summer classes
- ❖ Internship/cooperative opportunities
- ❖ Social/support organizations
- ❖ National or local reputation
- ❖ Noted faculty
- ❖ Commuter campus
- ❖ Computer access
- ❖ Other libraries/facilities close
- ❖ Admissions deadline
- ❖ Curriculum options
- ❖ Journal options/competitiveness
- ❖ Joint degrees
- ❖ Clerkships
- ❖ Order of the Coif
- ❖ Accredited by ABA and AALS
- ❖ Private or state school
- ❖ Summer/January entrance
- ❖ School size
- ❖ Library: Staff? Seat numbers? Hours? Holdings?
- ❖ Symposia/guest speakers
- ❖ Area cost of living
- ❖ Campus atmosphere
- ❖ Employment statistics: Campus recruiting? Where are grads working? When? Positions? Salary?
- ❖ Clinical programs: Space in them? Internal? Supervised? For credit?
- ❖ Other factors: disability support/access, nightlife, cultural opportunities, academic support system, job availability for spouse, reasonably priced child care, housing, health insurance plans, etc.

What will admissions' committees be looking for in my application?

Law schools look at a variety of different factors in evaluating candidates. Two of the most important of those factors for most law schools are undergraduate GPA and LSAT score. In addition, they may consider: undergraduate major, college attended, improvement in grades over time and grade distribution in subject areas, activities in and outside of college, ethnic/racial background, graduate work, if any, letters of recommendation, written personal statement, work experience, community activities, motivation to study and reasons for wanting to study law, state of residency, difficulties you have overcome (apparent in your personal statement) and anything else that stands out about you in your application. As a result, applying to law school should be a carefully considered process undertaken in consultation with a pre-law or other advisor.

One of the most important things to remember is to get your LSAT taken and have your application in to the law schools as early as possible. Many schools have rolling admissions and like to admit candidates early. A late application, or even meeting the deadline, is not likely to help your chances for admission.

An additional consideration is taking time off to work or travel before law school. Although the majority of law students go directly from undergraduate school to law school, many choose to take time off for a year or more. This additional experience can add to your maturity and give you time to explore before settling down to a career.

What do I need to know about financial aid?

The price of going to law school has risen dramatically in the past decade. Unlike undergraduate schools, few law schools have many scholarships to offer. More commonly, law students use loans to get through law school. As such, it is imperative that students live frugally and take into account their future debt load. Today's law students can count on having a substantial debt to repay upon graduation. Remember to fill out the Federal financial aid form available in the KSU Financial Aid office as early as possible in January and file, or have your parents file, their taxes as early as possible. Will a monthly debt repayment of \$1,000 or more allow you to work in the field you hope to work in?

Consider the following when deciding how to finance law school:

- ❖ Tuition (in-state vs. out-of-state)
- ❖ Tuition increases (5.5-5.9% each year)
- ❖ Style of living now and in law school
- ❖ Possible field of law in the future
- ❖ Future choices of region and starting salary
- ❖ Salary in relation to race & gender
- ❖ Placement & average salaries of graduates
- ❖ Monthly debt repayment in future
- ❖ Length of time to repay loans
- ❖ Length of time to repay loans
- ❖ Loan forgiveness/repayment for public service
- ❖ Current and/or future financial obligations (car payments, mortgage, insurance, etc.)
- ❖ Other aid sources: parents' organization scholarships
- ❖ Status as financially independent
- ❖ Family disclosure of income necessary?
- ❖ Total real living costs
- ❖ Savings & resources
- ❖ Current debt
- ❖ Current credit rating (check Experian)
- ❖ Pros and cons of taking a year off
- ❖ Ease of borrowing money
- ❖ Recourse in a money crisis: parents? Bank?
- ❖ Advantages of federal loan subsidies

See the pre-law library in 112 Eisenhower for additional financial aid information resources.

Organizations offering further information on financial help for law school:

Council on Legal Educational Opportunity (CLEO), 1800 M Street, NW, Suite 160, South Lobby, Washington, DC 20036, (202) 785-4840—for minority students interested in law

National Association of Public Interest Law (NAPIL), 1118 22nd St. NW, Washington, DC 20037, (202) 466-3686

Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund, 99 Hudson St., 14th Floor, New York, NY 10013, (212) 219-3360

Earl Warren Legal Training Program, 99 Hudson St., Suite 1600, New York, NY 10013, (212) 219-1900

Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund, 634 S. Spring St., 11th Floor, Los Angeles, CA 90014, (213) 629-2512

U.S. Dept. of Education (Indian Graduate Professional Fellowships), 400 Maryland Ave. SW, Room 2177, Mail Stop 6335, Washington, DC 20202, (202) 401-1902.

Keep these “golden rules” of financing your legal education in mind:

1. Live like a student in law school (and as an undergraduate, I would add) or you will live like a student later.
2. Financing law school may be a greater accomplishment than being accepted for admission.
3. Not all loans are alike. Know the differences and borrow wisely.
4. Limit your use of credit cards. Save them for emergencies.
5. Pay your credit card and other consumer debt off before you come to school (or even better, don't accumulate any!)
6. Pay all consumer credit on time. Bad credit may prevent you from attending school.
7. Don't pay tuition with credit cards. There may be payment plans available from your school.
8. Maintain complete records of your loans. Keep track of your total debt, your lenders, and the terms of each loan.
9. Beware of “buy now, pay later.” How much will something really cost?
10. You're making an investment in your future. Make sure the benefits of the investment exceed the costs.
11. Use your financial aid office as a resource in your financing decisions.

Compiled by the financial aid office of New York University law school.

What do I need to know about the LSAT and registering with LSDAS?

What is the LSAT?

All students applying to law school must take the LSAT. This is a test of your general skills in reading, analysis, and logic, and your ability to deal with the unfamiliar, remain stable under pressure, and tolerate ambiguity. You do not need to have any legal knowledge to do well on this test.

When should I take it? Should I take it multiple times?

The “ideal” LSAT is the test given in the June of your junior year. Taking the June test frees you up to worry about putting together your law school applications in August and September and submitting them in October or November. **Plan to take the LSAT only once.** Many schools average test scores if you take the test multiple times. Instead of planning to take the actual LSAT multiple times, do Mock LSATs (either through our office or on your own) so you can get a sense of where your score might fall in the range of possible scores.

How do I register?

You can register for the test by picking up a free Registration and Information book in the pre-law advising office in Eisenhower 112. This book contains a practice test, registration information and materials and an explanation and application for LSDAS. You can also register on-line at www.lsac.org. Regular registration closes approximately one month prior to the test date. A late registration fee (\$50) is assessed to all registration materials submitted after the deadline.

LSAT Quick Facts:

- Offered in early June, late September or early October, early December, and early February.
- 5 timed 35-minute multiple choice sections: 2 Logical Reasoning, 1 Reading Comprehension, 1 Analytical Reasoning, and 1 experimental section of one of these three that will NOT be counted towards your score (you will not be able to tell which it is and should act as if every section is counting).
- Writing section, not scored but which law schools receive copies of. Describes a situation in which two courses of action are proposed. You must argue for one. No “correct answer.” Avoid grammatical or spelling errors!
- Total test time: 3 hours and 25 minutes, but total time at test center between 4½-5 hours
- 120-130 questions total
- 15-minute break between 3rd and 4th sections
- Scores range from 120-180
- Wrong answers are not counted against you. Only correct answers count. Don't leave any blanks!
- Practice using actual LSAT tests.

How should I prepare for the LSAT?

- **Take several Mock LSATs and/or practice taking timed tests.**
The pre-law advising office offers Mock LSATs (which are complete tests taken in a timed environment) and Mini-Mocks (one section of the LSAT taken in a timed environment) several times a semester. My advice is to take practice LSATs at least 4 times so you can establish a range of possible scores. Call the office for information on how to sign-up.
- **Take the free LSAT available on www.lsac.org**
- **Do the LSAT Question of the Day on www.lsac.org**
- **Buy official LSAT prep tests from Law School Admission Council for \$8 a piece.**
I recommend avoiding buying the 10 Official Prep Tests book also available from them because all of the tests were offered before 1996. The official word is that the test is gradually increasing in difficulty, and taking the earlier tests may not give you an accurate picture of where your score might fall.
- **Borrowing the LSAT prep books available in the pre-law advising office.**
The pre-law library offers several resource books for help with preparing for the LSAT. I recommend borrowing, or purchasing on your own, a book called Master the LSAT, which comes highly recommended by law school admissions representatives. This particular resource teaches you how to acquire the logical reasoning and analytical thinking skills necessary to do well on the test AND in law school rather than just teaching you how to conquer the test.

What is LSDAS?

The accredited law schools in the United States all require law school applicants to use the LSDAS service as a means of delivery of their test scores and transcripts to the individual law schools. You can apply for the LSAT and LSDAS at the same time, but given the high cost of each and that LSDAS is not used until you are actually sending in applications, you can also make a separate later application to LSDAS. If you have a financial need, it is possible to apply for a fee waiver for both LSAT and LSDAS. This requires a detailed form somewhat similar to a financial aid form available in the KSU pre-law office or from law schools.

When registering for LSDAS, send in the application fee, and the per-school fee for law school reports multiplied by the number of schools to which you intend to apply. If you wait to pay for the reports to be sent to law schools until later, you will pay more per report. You do not need to name the schools for LSDAS, merely indicate the number. The LSDAS service will evaluate your transcript in accordance with its regulations. Some KSU students find their GPA drops on their LSDAS report because LSDAS takes into account the initial and later grade of classes you have retaken and counts W/F grades as F grades. It is essential to submit transcripts for all undergraduate work you have done to LSDAS. Additional information about the LSAT and LSDAS is included in the registration book, which is available in the pre-law office.

How do I write a winning personal statement?

What is a personal statement and how do I know what to write?

When applying to law schools, you will be asked to write one or more essays to submit with your application. These essays are your opportunity to inform the law school about who you are beyond the numbers (LSAT score and GPA). Take this essay seriously: admissions' committees DO read essays. A good essay can boost the chances of a candidate with marginal numbers and a careless essay can raise doubts about a candidate with great numbers. If you have any questions about writing a personal statement that are not answered in this handout, please consult the pre-law advisor.

How do I start writing?

One of the first steps is to read the instructions for writing the personal statement provided in the applications of schools you are applying to. Their directions will give you a sense of what is expected. Determine whether you will need to write one essay or more than one, or if you will be able to modify one to fit other applications. Give yourself enough planning time to write a high quality essay that has been reviewed by at least one other person before submitting it.

What are law schools looking for in a personal statement?

A concise, well-written personal essay that shows you can write coherently

Tenacity and persistence

Honesty

Ability

Motivation

Growth

Self-knowledge

Intellectual curiosity

A clear understanding of what legal education will do for you and what your basic plans for the future are.

Do you have any possible ideas for what to write?

Consider these possibilities:

- ❑ Organizing information around a theme or 2-3 themes that allow you to present your ideas clearly and logically.
- ❑ Indicate what in your background suggests suitability for law school (if applicable).
- ❑ Describe unique features (e.g., clinics, programs of the school) that appeal to you. Don't 'reach' for slightly relevant features or remind the school of its ranking.
- ❑ Success in the face of adversity, if applicable.
- ❑ Leadership or employment if relevant.
- ❑ Your familiarity with law or lawyers if significant.

- ❑ Bring out unique features of your undergraduate curriculum if they are not evident from your transcript or resume, such as independent readings, graduate level work, research work, advanced writing, study abroad, etc.
- ❑ If you have any ‘blemishes’ in your record such as a low GPA or LSAT score, consider writing an addendum explaining them. Do not offer excuses or blame others; instead, explain how/why your record appears this way. If the problem is recent, carefully indicate to the admissions’ committee why you would be a successful student. It is a VERY good idea to review this section with the pre-law advisor, a professor, or friend.
- ❑ It is not necessary to mention the name of the law school, but if you do, **get it right!**
- ❑ Put yourself in the position of being on an admissions committee reading your application. What would you want to see?

Want help with your personal statement?

- Read some sample personal statements (available in the pre-law advising library, EH 112)
- Have the pre-law advisor review your drafts
- Have a friend read your drafts for grammatical errors and consistency
- Attend a personal statement workshop (hosted by the pre-law advising office)

Who should I choose to write letters of recommendation?

Along with your personal statement, your letters of recommendation are the items in your application that say the most about who you are and what you will contribute to your law school. It is very important to choose recommendation writers carefully. In addition, you will appear more trusting of your letter writers, if you sign a waiver form. If the law school does not provide a waiver and you would like one, the pre-law office has such forms available. You may be asked to complete a Dean's Certificate that certifies your academic standing at KSU. The pre-law advisor can assist you with completing this form.

Letters of recommendation for law school are most useful when they:

- Are written by people who know you (e.g., professors in small, upper-level courses you have taken.)
- Refer to specific experiences.
- Say something that is not obvious in other parts of the application.
- Say something relevant to your academic ability and potential for success in law school.

Who should write your letters of recommendations and why:

Faculty: They can put your transcript in context (e.g., explain what a "B" in their class means), highlight your strengths (e.g., writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills), emphasize your personal qualities (e.g., persistence, empathy, etc.)

Supervisors: They can emphasize your personal qualities, confirm achievements, commitment of time and energy, and highlight other successes relevant to success in law school.

Who should *not* write your letters:

High school teachers should not write letters of recommendation, unless you have done recent work with them. Also be careful about selecting "influential" people, such as judges or politicians (unless they know you personally).

How to request a letter of recommendation:

- 1) Decide what kind of reference would be most useful: think about the relevance of your experience with the writer, not his/her status.
- 2) Select the appropriate number of people to ask.
- 3) Notify your letter writers 3-5 weeks in advance of the time the letters should be sent.
- 4) Make an appointment to talk with the prospective writer. Bring the following to the meeting: a copy of your resume, good past papers you have written for the writer, a copy of your personal statement, stamped envelopes addressed to the law schools, a signed confidentiality waiver (if you wish to use one), and a timeline for when the letter should be mailed.
- 5) Follow up with a thank you note 1-2 weeks later.

When my applications are in, then what?

Having taken the LSAT, registered for LSDAS (and sent your transcripts to them), sent in an application form and personal statement to the law schools you've chosen, and received confirmation that your letters of recommendation have arrived at the law schools to which you are applying, you now sit and wait for letters from the law schools to come in. For schools with rolling or early admissions, you may begin receiving responses toward the end of the fall. For other schools, you may be waiting until late March. Charles Longley and Carol Wright explain law school decision-making in the following excerpt from the NAPLA Handbook for Pre-Law Advisors.

The Law Schools' Decisions

A. The Admissions Index

Many, if not most, law schools use an admissions index calculated on the basis of a value assigned to the LSAT, the GPA, and sometimes the undergraduate school attended in order to provide a preliminary assessment of applicants. Each school uses its own formula to determine the index, assigning what they believe are the appropriate weights to each factor (usually 50-50, but sometimes 60-40).

Although the index is recognized to be a crude indicator, it enables law schools to do an initial evaluation of the applicant pool. Frequently, law schools then divide the pool into three groups: some presumptive admits, some presumptive denies, and all the rest. If applicants are in the presumptive admit group, they are likely to be admitted unless there is something negative in their file such as a bad letter of recommendation, a poorly written personal statement, or indication of unfitness or misconduct. If applicants are in the presumptive group, they are likely to be denied admission unless there are extremely compelling factors in the file which demand reconsideration. The majority of the applicant pool will end up somewhere in the middle. These candidates are compared against each other using more subjective criteria.

B. Admit/Deny

The admit letter is wonderful: it offers the candidate a seat in the upcoming class. Usually, there are additional forms to be filled out and fees to be paid if the candidate intends to accept the offer of admission. In general, candidates are not required to submit money to hold their position in a class until April, thus giving them a chance to hear from most, if not all, of their schools before making a final decision. If applicants know that they are not interested in accepting an offer of admission from a particular school, many eager applicants would appreciate their telling the school of that decision so that the seat can be offered to someone else. Advisees should be certain that they pay their seat deposits on time. Otherwise, they might lose their chance of attending a school that has admitted them.

The deny letter is disappointing, but at least candidates know where they stand with a school. Hopefully, candidates will have applied appropriately, and they will be getting admission letters from other schools.

C. Hold

The hold letter tells the applicants only that their application has been reviewed, and that the school has not made a decision regarding their admission. Often this is because the school wants to see the rest of the applicant pool before deciding to admit/deny/waitlist an individual. This keeps the applicant on tenterhooks, especially if the school in question is the first choice. Still, it is a practice that has come into greater usage with the volatile admissions environment of the last several years. Advisees in a hold category would be well-advised to accept an offer of admission to another school (the bird in the hand) while awaiting a decision on a held application. Applicants might not know the status of an application on hold until late spring or even early summer.

D. Wait List

Being placed on a school's wait list tells applicants that the schools believes that they are qualified to be a member of the entering class, but that there were too many candidates who were even more qualified who received offers of admission. A wait-listed applicant will sometimes be offered admission late in the summer or even as late as the first week of classes at a law school, depending on the space available in the class. Of courses, candidates would be well-advised to accept an offer of admission from another school rather than count on being taken off a wait list. Still, each year some students will abandon their plans at the last minute to accept a very late offer of admission. This, of course, wreaks havoc for those who have signed a lease, or made other commitments expecting to go to law school A in city B, and then abruptly switch to law school Y in city Z. Advisees should be aware that in a competitive admissions environment, otherwise qualified candidates might find themselves on a wait list at a law school if they submit their applications at or near the application deadline.

E. Conditional Admission

The conditional admission has come into play at a number of law schools. Sometimes a conditional admission will allow an applicant to join the law school class if they successfully complete the CLEO program. For others, the condition on which a student is admitted is that they successfully complete a summer course offered by the school. While these programs provide an opportunity for candidates who would otherwise be denied admission to prove themselves, advisees should know what they are doing before deciding to accept a conditional admit. Law schools charge for their summer courses, and often the percentages of those successfully completing them and joining the law school class in the fall is low. An applicant should consider this offer carefully. If they receive an unconditional admission from another school, they would be well-advised to hold that seat to keep the option of attending law school open regardless of the results of a summer program.

F. Deferral of Admission

Some candidates may decide they want to or need to request a deferral for a year. Often this choice arises because of financial considerations, a familial problem or the

receipt of a fellowship for a graduate school program. Typically, law schools seek to accommodate deferrals, but this should not be assumed. Individual schools' policies differ. The NAPLA Supplement (available in the pre-law advisor's office at KSU) includes a listing of deferral policies at various schools for reference, but the applicant should contact the schools directly to ascertain what might be necessary to obtain a deferral.

Considering financial information after you have been accepted

Once you have been accepted to a school, make sure you have learned about your eligibility for any scholarships they offer. Some schools have an additional financial aid form that must be filled out before any institution aid is offered. Check with the law school financial aid office for more information.