



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY

CHAPMAN PRE-LAW FAQ

by Prof. Ronald Steiner, Pre-Law Advisor

1. What are the best kind of internships or volunteer opportunities to put on an application?

There is no single pathway toward a future in law and law-related careers; you need to find a personalized path that is right for you. That very much applies to internships. If you want an internship at a law firm, for example, that's fine, but you don't have to do that. Work at a non-profit or a community services organization or a political organization – all of that can all be valuable, if you really invest in it. And it doesn't matter if you do something mindless to make money and then volunteer somewhere or take an unpaid internship to get good experience. No law school will care how you made money to pay the rent as long as your resume and life experience reflects engagement, learning, and responsibility.

2. What is the best timeline to follow for applications?

It's really up to you. If you want to go to law school in Fall 2021, you probably should take the LSAT by the October 2020 exam session, and try to get your application together by Halloween 2020, or Thanksgiving 2020 at the latest. (It helps to use the holidays as mile-markers.) But you don't have to plan to attend law school immediately after graduation. A bit of time away from your college experience will not hurt, and will actually help – if you do something interesting with the time. Law schools absolutely do not have a preference for applicants who come right out of college. In fact, being a little older and having some experience in work and life is rather helpful. And remember, “work” refers to the quality of the experience, not what it pays, and “something interesting” can be anything at all, as long as it makes you a stronger addition to the law school classroom.

3. If an applicant takes the LSAT a second or subsequent time in December/January, should the applicant complete and forward their application but notify the law school they that they will be taking the test in December/January, or wait to submit their application until a score is received?

Most schools would prefer that you go ahead and complete the application but notify them that you will be taking the test again in December/January.

4. What about the February LSAT, will law schools consider a student for Fall Semester admission if the student takes the LSAT in February of that year?

February is very late to be taking the LSAT for Fall Semester admission of the same year, and it is not recommended. However, a number of law schools will consider an application with a January or February LSAT. If a student applies with an LSAT score and retakes the test in February of the application year, some law schools will consider the January or February score (see Question 6 above). In the case of a retake of the LSAT in January or February, if the student has already been rejected before the law school receives the new score, there are some law schools that will allow an applicant to request reconsideration of their file. BUT NOTE: many competitive law schools will have already filled much of their class before the February test results are available, and most of the financial aid offers will have already been made.

5. How do waitlists work?

Most law schools establish a waitlist of acceptable candidates, but most don't go very deep into the waitlist in most years. Waitlists are usually not ranked, and when a school goes to the waitlist they are mostly interested in making offers to waitlist applicants who are most likely to accept the offer. Many students who are put on a waitlist will send a follow-up letter to the law school trying to prove that they are likely to say yes if offered acceptance from the waitlist. Note that students accepted from the waitlist are not likely to get scholarship grants from the law school, though they will be eligible for loans. Many law schools will still be keeping an active waitlist into August; some even until the first day of classes. If a student is placed on a law school's waitlist and subsequently admitted, few law schools will grant a deferral of admission to students admitted from the waitlist.

Special Note for Fall 2021

Very many law schools have admitted too many applicants for Fall 2021 and face being over-enrolled. They are likely to draw few if any students from their waitlists.

6. Can I qualify for in-state tuition at a public law school if I apply from out of state?

Normally, a student can change their status to an in-state resident after their first year of law school – this option is available at the UC law schools. If an applicant applies as a non-resident their change of status to resident may not happen automatically. The applicant may have to complete a petition for state residency and provide documentation i.e. tax forms, in-state driver's license, in-state voter registration, etc., to support the status change.

7. What are the prospects for transferring to a different law school after the first year?

Most law schools will consider transfer applications for the second year, but there usually aren't too many slots available. Transfer offers are usually limited to some upper tier of students – it varies from top 10% to top half of the transfer applicant's class, depending on the competitiveness of the law school. Most law schools will still take into account the applicant's LSAT score, and scholarship grants are not likely to be available.

8. What should be in a personal statement?

Don't try to be cute; don't start by saying you were argumentative even as a child. You're applying for a professional degree, so come across as a professional. Don't repeat your resume in narrative form, but use the elements of your resume as evidence to build a case for yourself. What are your personal and professional goals? What are your talents, strengths, personal traits, and interests (academic and otherwise) and how are they relevant to law school and legal practice? What are the educational, employment, and life experiences that have prepared for law school and life as a lawyer? Tell a story of who you are and what you have done, and how it connects to what you will do and who you will be. You want to get into a law school that values you for who you really are.

A "diversity statement" essay invites applicants to discuss aspect of their background or life experience that will allow you to contribute to more diversity in the law school classroom and community. Diversity can be defined ethnically, socio-economically, in terms of first-generation in higher education, and in other ways. But remember, law schools have seen a lot of applications: don't get cute or come across as superficial, and don't try to make something seem significant that is really not that big of a deal.

Address directly any problems with your application such as bad grades, and especially any disciplinary or legal issues. Honest and mature explanations of youthful mistakes can go a long way; law schools have seen it all before, so don't be afraid to say what happened and what you have learned from the experience.

You might be able to tailor a unique statement of interest for at least some of the law schools to which you apply. This allows you to tell them why you wish to attend that specific law school. Pro Tip: when law schools make an offer, they want people to say yes; it helps their ranking and reputation. If you can talk about

special programs and opportunities, or even talk why you are interested to live and work in their city or region, you might be able to show them that you really will say yes if they make you an offer.

9. What about letters of recommendation?

At least one recommendation should be from a faculty advisor or professor and should address your academic performance and abilities. A letter from an employer may be helpful, especially for someone who has been out of school for a while. Your second or third recommendation might be more like a character reference from someone who has strong personal knowledge of you as a person, but letters from family members or from important people who really don't know you very well are not worth much.

10. What kind of services does Chapman provide to students and alums?

Career Services and other advising services are available to both students and alums. We're here to assist you, and we're not going anywhere once you graduate.

11. Do Chapman undergrads have any advantage getting into Chapman's law school?

There's a little bit of an advantage. It won't turn an unacceptable file into one that is acceptable, but it makes a difference on the margins.

12. Is there anyone that I should contact at Chapman's law school?

Contact Justin Cruz in the Law Admissions Office. He's at jucruz@chapman.edu

Finally, remember this basic point:

Don't try to make choices in activities and courses based on a stereotype of what a "pre-law student" looks like. Don't write your application to make yourself look like any stereotype. Live your life well, take interesting and rigorous courses, and then make your application reflect the best and most interesting version of yourself. Maybe that sounds hokey, but it's true.