

Factors to Consider When Researching Law School

You might be tempted to focus on a law school's "ranking" or perceived prestige; however, your happiness at law school may have more to do with other important factors. Make sure you consider the following:

ATMOSPHERE

Do you prefer a state or private school? Religious or not? Is there a difference to you?

COST

How much debt are you willing to leave law school with? Research the average debt of graduates from that school and the average starting salaries of these graduates. Do the starting salaries vary by class ranking? How reliable is the information (i.e. how many people answered this question)? Are you comfortable with that average amount of debt when compared against the average starting salary?

CURRICULUM

What unique classes are offered? What classes interest you? You may currently have an idea of what you are interested in studying, but you may change your mind—make sure you attend a law school that offers several different learning opportunities.

LOCATION

Where does the law school place its graduates? Most law schools place their students in positions near the school, in-state, or surrounding states. Would you be happy living there after graduation? If the law school places a small percentage in a location you would like to live, are you willing to do the networking necessary, outside the law school's career services, to make this happen?

PERSONAL CAREER GOALS

Again, do you know what you want to do already? If you want to go into politics or if you wish to teach law as a professor, where you attend law school may be important. If you intend to pursue public interest law, you may want to consider schools that will leave you with minimal debt due to the low-paying nature of public interest jobs. No matter what you think you are going to do, you could change your mind—what school will provide you with the most options for your areas of interest?

SIZE

Do you want a more intimate setting with professors or do you learn better in large diverse classes? Will you bond with other students if there is a greater variety of classmates or would you rather have a small close-knit class?

SPECIALTY AREAS

Do you already have a specific interest? Is this school well-known for that program? How flexible will the school be in helping you pursue that interest? If you decide you are more interested in something else, is there the potential to study other specialty areas?

STUDENT BODY

Because law school is taught by the Socratic method, it is important to learn from classmates that have different perspectives. Does this school bring in diverse backgrounds that you can learn from? What activities, clubs, and associations are available? How cooperative or competitive is the student body? Talk to as many current students as you can.

FACULTY

How do current students feel about the professors? Do the professors have experiences that they will be able to draw upon in teaching and molding you? How many professors are there and where did they study and practice law?

FINALIZING YOUR DECISION

Once you are accepted to multiple law schools you may feel overwhelmed by your options. One of the best ways to help you decide which law school to attend is to prioritize. For example, if you want to work in Washington DC after graduation, you may decide that the higher tuition cost of a law school in that area is money well spent. Take advantage of all the networking opportunities the DC law school provides; after all, that is what you are paying for. However, if indebtedness is your primary concern, attending a school that costs less may be worth the extra time and effort it may take you to network with others to find a job in DC.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Firsthand from Schools and Alumni
- The ABA-LSAC Official Guide
- The NAPLA/SAPLA Book of Law School List
- ABA 509 Reports