

The Nontraditional Law Student

What is a nontraditional student?

A nontraditional student is difficult to define, but typically includes factors such as age, delayed enrollment, unconventional schedules (including working full-time), and having dependents other than a spouse. The World Health Organization defines disability as “an umbrella term, covering impairments, activity limitations, and participation restrictions. An impairment is a problem in body function or structure; an activity limitation is a difficulty encountered by an individual in executing a task or action; while a participation restriction is a problem experienced by an individual in involvement in life situations.”

Law students with families

If you are planning to attend law school with a family or planning to start a family in law school, it is important to consider that as a factor when you are making decisions about law school attendance. Come up with a set of questions for you and your spouse to work through before you decide where to go and how to approach your law school experience.

- How will law school affect our family finances?
- If both spouses will be attending school, how will we manage childcare?
- What are our priorities in getting through law school? (class rank, debt, getting through quickly, networking, job locations, job opportunities, etc.)
- Will my spouse be working? Will I work after my first year?
- How important is the location of the law school?
- How will we handle medical expenses for ourselves and our children?

Students with disabilities

Many resources are available to students with disabilities. Schools want to help their students and will generally do whatever is reasonably necessary to help students have an equal opportunity for success. Some internet resources include:

- **The American Bar Association** has posted on their website a very helpful article about disabled students succeeding in law school at www.abanet.org/lsd/stulawyer/apr02/disabled.html. The ABA also has a law student mentoring program that pairs law students with practicing attorneys. The ABA tries to match students with disabilities to attorneys with similar disabilities.
- **The National Association of Law Students with Disabilities** (www.nalswd.org) is a relatively new organization (founded in 2007) that is rapidly growing into an important resource for support, networking, and information. Membership and the mailing list are free. The site includes publications, a list of available scholarships, information about their conference, and links to states' bar applications and states' bar moral character and fitness applications. They are also available on Facebook.
- **The American Foundation for the Blind** (www.afb.org) lists scholarship possibilities for blind students provided by both the American Foundation for the Blind and by specific universities.
- **The Online Academic Support Program for Law Students** (www.onlineasp.org/students/Disabilities.htm) provides information for the disabled law student and for law school administration regarding physical disabilities, learning disabilities, and emotional disabilities, including definitions, laws regarding disabilities, how to document a disability, and accommodating students.
- **Blogs:** Take advantage of today's instantaneous global communication and look up some blogs of students with disabilities that write about their experiences and feelings.