Law School Guide

Created by: Jose Magaña Salgado

The following is a guide with some suggestions for those who are seeking to attend Law School. If you find this guide helpful, please let us know. If you would like to add more resources, please email Gaby Pacheco at gaby.pacheco@thedream.us.

Law school is not for everyone, but law school is attainable even if you are undocumented. Below are 4 recommendations on what you should do if you are interested in applying for law school.

1) Apply for a fee waiver for the LSAT and Credential Assembly Service (CAS).
Institutions may waive application fees based on LSAC's approval of a fee waiver.

LSAC offers fee waivers for certain low-income law school applicants. One of the eligibility requirements is applying for or being granted Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA). Law schools may waive application fees based on a successful fee waiver application from LSAC.

Proactively reach out to law schools to which you want to apply to request fee waivers. Some individual institutions may have their own processes for considering fee waiver requests; others may require that you reach out to admissions departments to ask for more information.

Law school applications will request a Social Security number (SSN). If you have a valid SSN or ITIN, use it as directed. If you do not have a valid SSN or ITIN, contact LSAC to request a nine-digit LSAC number. You should be able to use that number instead of a Social Security number, but do not claim to be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident if you are not a U.S. citizen or permanent resident. Remember that DACA does not confer immigration status. Misrepresenting your citizenship or residency can have serious ramifications on your legal future.

2) Get the highest score you can on the LSAT.
Financial aid in law school heavily depends on your LSAT score.

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LSAT scores are a key factor in determining the level of institutional financial aid you may receive. Institutional financial aid is the financial aid package an individual institution decides to grant you based on their own internal process, not funding from an external source.

One way to work on improving your LSAT score is by taking an LSAT preparation course. You can pay to take a prep course, but a self-directed course will likely be cheaper. A prep course will require time, energy, and money, but if you can devote yourself to studying five days a week for at least three months, you will likely see a return on your investment.

If you get an unsatisfactory score on the LSAT, consider retaking the exam. This will cost you more time and money in the immediate future, but a higher score could result in a higher chance of acceptance in your desired program or more financial aid from your chosen school.

3) Apply to DACA- and undocumented-friendly law schools.
Ensure your admittance and enrollment eligibility.

Some law schools either cannot or will not admit or enroll undocumented students, but others will. For example, some states, like Colorado, offer in-state tuition and/or financial aid or institutional scholarships at their public institutions of higher education, whereas others, like Georgia, prohibit the admission of undocumented students at some or all of their public institutions of higher education.

According to the Dream Bar Association, some schools that will admit and enroll students regardless of immigration status include Cornell University, Harvard University, Michigan State University, the University of Chicago, and others. However, some of those schools may have certain requirements or procedures for undocumented students; be sure to look into any such requirements at the schools to which you apply.

4) Apply to a diverse range of law schools.
Broadening your options could increase your chances of getting admitted and getting financial aid.

Apply to a large number of law schools to maximize your chances of obtaining admission and a good financial aid package. Apply as early as you can to access as much aid as possible. The more applications you send and the earlier you send them, the greater the chance that your application receives a favorable response.

Apply to a geographically diverse series of schools, including schools where the cost of living is low. Keep in mind that whether you qualify for in-state tuition or other forms of financial assistance varies from state to state. The state where you choose to attend law school will be your home for the next three years. Be sure to pick a state where you feel comfortable with the local climate around immigration and where you can afford to live as a student.

Apply to a variety of low- to mid- to high-ranked schools. Mid- and lower-ranked schools often give more financial aid. A high LSAT score at a top-tier school may get you little to no aid, but it could get you a full ride to a mid- or lower-ranked school. You want to get a thorough legal education that prepares you for the bar exam and, later, for practicing law, but you can do that at a non-T14 law school—maybe even with less debt.

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Apply to both public and private schools. Enrolling in a public school can be a financially prudent decision, but the state legislature that governs that school may pass anti-immigrant legislation that negatively affects undocumented students and interrupts your education. Private schools are not subject to the same requirements as state schools, so enrolling in a private school may protect you from future anti-immigrant legislation that could, for example, prevent you from continuing to access in-state tuition. Additionally, private schools may have more discretion and flexibility in the amount and quality of financial aid they can award. However, on average, private schools are more expensive than their public counterparts.

Avoid taking out loans if possible. Research undocumented-friendly private scholarships and other forms of financial aid, being careful to minimize debt wherever possible.