

***My Best PreLaw Advising Advice:
Pursue Real Information and Context,
Then Decide What you Want to do
With What you Learn***

by Brad Reich¹

¹ I regularly thank C. William King for his keen reminder that, “In an insane world a sane man must appear insane.”

Introduction

Caveat: *If you are considering law school you must learn to genuinely read for content and context. This entire document is approximately 30 pages. Actually read it; all of it. Do not cheat yourself. Do not skim or paraphrase, do not look for “information” supporting what you already “know”; actually read and analyze. Then question, seek more and different information beyond what I provide, and examine further. Be warned, this article has footnotes. If you are truly considering a law school education, and you have not yet learned to do so, start paying attention to footnotes now.² This next sentence may well reflect how much attention you paid to this Caveat.*

Going to law school, and becoming a “lawyer”³, is not a good choice.

Aha! You can stop reading now!! My sinister agenda is exposed!!! Whatever. Pay equal attention to the next sentence and understand the dangers of not actually reading for context and content.

Going to law school, and becoming a lawyer, is also not a bad choice.

See?

Pursuing a legal future is an individual choice that makes more or less sense depending on your circumstances and career plan. It should involve research and perspective that most simply do not undertake or consider. This article begins that conversation. My goal is to give you things to genuinely contemplate, not to direct you to any final destination. To that end, I strive to provide sources and/or commentary on both sides of an issue when possible or, at least, sources that seem

² This has an unusual footnote structure. Each source is provided in its entirety, each time it is used. This is so the user can access it quickly for further information. There is one ongoing exception. If a footnote references the last source immediately above it, I use “*Id.*” Think of “*Id.*” as “look at the last one” or “look back”.

One of the things that you will see is that footnotes are not always about sources. They often contain quotes, links, explanations, or other items offering further context or explanation. Sometimes there is an entirely separate discussion happening in footnotes. As I said, learn to use them.

³ For purposes of this article a “lawyer” is a person earning a Juris Doctorate (“J.D.”) degree. It has nothing to do with how they use that degree.

neutral. Do not take this article as definitive. Do not take any career advice as definitive.⁴ Inquire. Genuinely seek information, not just to confirm, but to actually learn.⁵ Rigorously assess how much weight to give information; what do you believe and why? Make your own decisions. This will take work. It should. It is your life.

I. The LSAT: It is What it is

The Law School Admissions Test (“LSAT”) is “mandatory” (more on this later) for those applying to American Bar Association (“ABA”) accredited law schools.⁶ The test was the brainchild of a small handful of law schools seeking a new screening tool. The Law School Admission Council (“LSAC”) administers the exam multiple times each year, both in the United States and abroad.⁷ The LSAT was first implemented in 1948. Fairly soon after, for a variety of sociological reasons, law school applications increased dramatically, with first year enrollment more than doubling in 15 years.⁸ This rapid increase forced law schools to look to new and “efficient” methods of sorting applicants; they decided the LSAT was just the tool.⁹ The end result was that, “By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the LSAT was firmly

⁴ Other than, “Do not take any career advice as definitive.” Take that definitively. Definitely.

⁵ Don’t fear surprise. It just means something unexpected happened.

⁶ See <https://www.lsac.org/applying-law-school/jd-application-process/jd-application-requirements> (last visited April 12, 2021). For a related discussion, see *As Law Schools Undergo Reform, Some Relax LSAT Requirements*, <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2015/04/02/as-law-schools-undergo-reform-some-relax-lsat-requirements> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁷ See <http://www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/about-the-lsat> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁸ See William C. Kidder, *The Struggle for Access from Sweatt to Grutter: a History of African American, Latino, And American Indian Law School Admissions, 1950-2000*, 19 Harvard BlackLetter Law Journal 1-41 (Spring, 2003), <http://academic.udayton.edu/thewhitestlawschools/2005twls/chapter2/legaled11c.htm> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁹ *Id.*

established as the most influential factor in law school admissions decisions.”¹⁰ In other words, for many years, it was the primary screening tool for many law schools when making admission decisions. Assuming that is true, the LSAT score said something to some (law schools), but not everything to everyone (including law school applicants and potential employers). Wait...what do I mean by that last sentence? I’m glad you asked.

It is important to understand what the LSAT is and what it is not. The LSAT is simply a focused aptitude test. The LSAT tries to identify just three skills or abilities: reading comprehension, analytical reasoning, and logical reasoning. In theory, the LSAT focuses on these areas in an attempt to predict who will be “successful” in law school classes (i.e. earning high letter grades). In reality it shows quite limited results, at best:

For 2012, the mean correlation between LSAT scores and first-year grades was a relatively weak 0.36. The correlation varied widely among schools, from a low of 0.19 to a high of 0.55. Generally, variables are not considered to be “highly correlated” unless the coefficient reaches or exceeds 0.7, although the context of what is being considered is important in evaluating the strength of correlations...[w]hile the LSAT correlates with success for many students, it does not reliably predict the success of any individual student.¹¹

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ See Andrew J. McClurg, “Grit and Grind” Your Way to Success in Law School, <https://abaforlawstudents.com/2016/07/14/grit-and-grind-your-way-to-success-in-law-school/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

Empirically, LSAT results show some level of positive correlation with first year law school grades.¹² Put simply, and speaking very generally, the higher you score on the LSAT, the more likely you are to achieve higher grades in first year law school courses. However, and this is a “however” worth *seriously* pondering, there is little or no positive correlation between LSAT score and second or third year law school grades¹³, and there may well be an inverse (negative) correlation between LSAT score and later lawyer effectiveness or success.¹⁴ The ABA is clear that LSAT scores are for school *admissions* procedures only, and should not be used for any other purpose.¹⁵ A prospective law school applicant, looking to her LSAT score as a “should-I-go-to-law-school” decision maker, indicium of law school grades necessary to keep financial aid, or indicator of professional success as a lawyer, should remember why the exam exists and what it tries to measure. Simply put, “It is what it is.” However there are also two recent developments regarding the LSAT.

First, LSAC previously limited the number of times you could take the LSAT, at least within a specific time period. The old general rule was “no more than 3 in 2”; in other words, you could not take the LSAT more than three times in any two year period. However, beginning in September of 2019, that changed and it is a bit complicated. In short, you may a) take the LSAT no more than three times in a single testing year (the testing year goes from June 1 to May 31) b) take the LSAT no

¹² LSAT results show a positive correlation with first year law school grades. See Marjorie M. Shultz and Sheldon Zedeck, *FINAL REPORT: Identification, Development, and Validation of Predictors for Successful Lawyering*, <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/LSACREPORTfinal-12.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

¹³ See Tim Alan Garrison and Frank Guliuzza, *Before the Paper Chase*, at p. 101, <http://www.cap-press.com/pdf/2195.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021) (“...the LSAT was a very weak predictor of three-year law school performance.”)

¹⁴ See Marjorie M. Shultz and Sheldon Zedeck, *FINAL REPORT: Identification, Development, and Validation of Predictors for Successful Lawyering*, at p. 54, <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/LSACREPORTfinal-12.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

¹⁵ See http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/publications/misc/legal_education/Standards/2013_2014_standards_appendix2_lsat.authcheckdam.pdf (last visited April 12, 2021).

more than five total times in the current and preceding five past testing years and c) take the LSAT no more than seven total times in your life.¹⁶

There are three notes of caution regarding this development. First, how a school treats any LSAT result is up to that particular school. A school may choose to consider the first score, the highest score, an average of exam scores, or any individual score the applicant submits. Do not simply assume your best score “counts” for admission purposes. Second, re-taking the LSAT does not guarantee a significant score improvement, or any improvement at all.¹⁷ Third, LSAC does not automatically inform law schools that you registered for a subsequent LSAT. It is the applicant’s sole responsibility to so inform schools.

The second significant development, and it is a growing consideration, is that some law schools allow alternatives to the LSAT. The GRE¹⁸ is a common test for those applying to graduate schools.¹⁹ The GMAT is, often, a requirement for those applying to graduate business programs.²⁰ Some law schools now accept applications with GRE²¹ or GMAT²² results in lieu of LSAT scores. However,

¹⁶ Tests taken prior to September 2019 will not count against these numerical limits.

¹⁷ See *Thinking About Retaking the LSAT*, <https://www.lsac.org/lsat/retaking-the-lsat> (last visited April 12, 2021):

The majority of test takers increase their score on the second test. However, some test takers’ scores do not change, and some even experience a score decrease. Analyses indicate that, on average, test takers taking their second test in the same testing year increase their scores 2 to 3 points.

¹⁸ See <https://www.veritasprep.com/blog/2017/08/the-gre-exam-for-law-school/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

¹⁹ See <https://www.princetonreview.com/business/gmat-vs-gre> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²⁰ *Id.* For further discussion see also <https://www.universitylanguage.com/guides/what-is-the-difference-between-the-gre-and-gmat/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²¹ 26 schools accepted GRE scores as of May, 2019. See <https://www.princetonreview.com/law-school-advice/gre-scores-law-school-admissions> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²² It is unclear exactly who accepts the GMAT. For minimal perspective see <https://classroom.synonym.com/law-schools-accept-gmat-7944024.html> (last visited May 2, 2018).

currently, only a minority of schools accepts these alternatives and there is no uniformity as to how schools value or process such results.²³ The LSAT remains the default, but times are changing and such change is likely to continue.

II. Law School Selection: Pursue Real Information and Perspective

This section does not attempt to tell prospective law students how to choose a law school. Any such strategy or methodology should be based on individual needs and priorities. However, many prospective law students are going through the law school selection process for the first and only time. They have no real background or experience, so they need perspective on important considerations regularly in play. Here are three to consider: rankings systems, increasing school specializations, and supply and demand of/for law school applicants.

A. The Rankings Systems

While there is no study on the topic, I suspect four things are true. First, almost all prospective law students were (or will be) advised, by at least some, to “Go the best school you can get in to.” Second, that advice is well intentioned, and rooted in an idea that “best” equates to some ranking or perceived public perception of quality. Third, this well-intentioned advice comes from a source, or sources, doing little or no actual, *current* research. Finally, this type of perspective carries tremendous weight with many prospective law students.²⁴

²³ See <https://abovethelaw.com/2018/01/more-law-schools-get-in-on-the-gre-creep-but-some-conditions-apply/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²⁴ See Richard Sander and Jane Yakowitz, *The Secret of my Success: How Status, Prestige, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers*, at p. 3, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/072910sanderyakowitz.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021) (“The LSAC’s landmark longitudinal Bar Passage Study... asked students entering law school...to assess how important sixteen different factors were in choosing their law school. The most important, by a considerable margin, was the schools’ ‘academic reputation.’”)

Commentators, schools, and prospective students often speak of law schools in ranked groups such as “Tiers” or “Top” with a number added, so “T1” references a school in some ranking’s top tier or “T14” references a school ranked in someone’s top 14 law schools, overall²⁵. Such designation supposedly identifies a very good, or even better, law school.²⁶ I never term schools (law or otherwise) “good” or “bad” as such phrasing is, at best, horribly over-generalizing and, at worst, flat out misleading. However, many using these terms seem to default to ranking systems to make or justify such assessments.²⁷

Any person relying on rankings should understand how ranking systems actually work. It is not feasible to break down every possible system and some come and go over time, so I use the most prominent, U.S. News & World Report’s, as an example.²⁸ It uses the following weighted categories²⁹:

1. Peer assessment score (25%): Law school deans, deans of academic affairs, chairs of faculty appointments and the most recently tenured faculty members were asked to rate programs.

²⁵ See Michelle Fabio Law School Info Expert, *T14 Law Schools*, <http://lawschool.about.com/od/lawschoolprofiles/tp/T14.htm> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²⁶ *Id.* While individual rankings may shift slightly from year to year, these 14 schools have usually been ranked among the “best”.

²⁷ See Tim Alan Garrison and Frank Guliuzza, *Before the Paper Chase*, at p. 165, <http://www.cap-press.com/pdf/2195.pdf> (April 12, 2021).

²⁸ “Most prominent” is likely a vast understatement as, “...the U.S. News & World Report rankings of law schools, has become an almost obsessive concern of the law school community....” “Using data...we find that schools’ rankings have significant effects both on the decisions of prospective students as well as on decisions schools make in the admissions process.” See Tim Alan Garrison and Frank Guliuzza, *Before the Paper Chase*, at p. 163, <http://www.cap-press.com/pdf/2195.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021). For additional perspective on the role of rankings see *Law Schools Rankings, do they Matter?*, <http://lawstudents.findlaw.com/choosing-a-law-school/law-school-rankings-do-they-matter.html> (last visited April 12, 2021).

²⁹ See *Methodology: 2022’s Best Law School Rankings*, <http://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/law-schools-methodology> (last visited April 12, 2021).

- 2. Assessment score by lawyers and judges (15%):** Legal professionals, including the hiring partners of law firms, practicing attorneys and judges, were asked to rate programs. *Names of those surveyed were provided to U.S. News by the law schools themselves* (emphasis added).
- 3. Median LSAT AND GRE scores (11.25%):** The combined median scores [for] all full-time and part-time entrants to the J.D. program.
- 4. Median undergraduate GPA (8.75%):** The combined median undergraduate grade-point average of all full-time and part-time entrants to the J.D. program.
- 5. Acceptance rate (1.0%):** The combined proportion of applicants to both the full-time and part-time J.D. programs accepted for the applicable entering class.
- 6. Employment rates for 2019 graduates 10 months after graduation (14%) and at graduation (4%)** This has been a very controversial area and recently underwent significant change.³⁰ If interested I strongly urge further research, particularly regarding why changes were implemented.
- 7. Bar passage rate (2.25%).**
- 8. Average debt incurred obtaining a J.D at graduation (3.0%) and the percent of law school graduates incurring J.D. law school debt**

³⁰ See *The 2016 U.S. News Law School Rankings are Here!*, <http://abovethelaw.com/2015/03/the-2016-u-s-news-law-school-rankings-are-here/> (last visited April 12, 2021):

For the 2016 edition of the Best Law Schools rankings, U.S. News has changed its methodology so that law schools receive less credit for employing their own new graduates. Starting with this year's rankings, law schools with large percentages of graduates who hold jobs funded by the law school or university typically will rank lower than they would have if those jobs had been at law firms or in government. For new J.D. graduates, being employed by their law school or holding a university-funded job is less desirable than being employed more permanently in a law firm, in government or in a corporation.

(2.0%). This data is based on J.D. candidate graduates in 2019-2020. The indicators were calculated by comparing each school's value with the median value (midpoint) for that indicator. Schools whose values were farthest below the median scored the highest, and schools that were most above the median scored the lowest on each indicator.

9. Faculty, Law School and Library Resources Faculty, law school and library resources is **13.75%** of the ranking and is composed of two indicators on expenditures, one on student-faculty ratio and seven on library resources.

10. Expenditures per student (15%): This includes average instruction, library, and supporting services (9.75%) and student financial aid (1.5%).

11. Student-faculty ratio (2.0%).

12. Library resources (1.75%): The total number of volumes and titles in the school's law library at the end of the applicable fiscal year.

As a potential user considers a ranking system, it is important to pay close attention to what that system does, and does not, actually assess. Ranking systems are not all-encompassing conclusions; they address only what their variables allow. Go back and read the above to see what is not actually there. As examples, if a prospective student wanted feedback regarding quality of education, from students actually attending a certain law school, the U.S News & World Report methodology guarantees no such piece. If a prospective student wanted employment perspective, from actual attendees or graduates of a school, that system also guarantees no such piece. These limitations do not make U.S News & World Report's ranking system somehow "good" or "bad", reliable or unreliable, significant or insignificant....they simply remind users to understand what any ranking system actually addresses. The user can then decide what weight to accord the respective system. This is true for all ranking systems; so read, analyze, and weight accordingly.

B. Law School Education Evolution

Law school education was, not very long ago, a fairly uniform experience. Schools offered highly similar first year course structures³¹ and the totality of required and elective offerings was relatively consistent. Law school was not, primarily, specific pre-professional education.³² Times changed. As one author succinctly recognized, “The twilight of the generalist law degree is here.”³³ She then elaborated:

In the traditional model of legal education, schools offer a general professional degree in law. No majors or concentrations. Schools provide a strong foundation of legal analysis and grounding in the common law, on the assumption that law firms will teach new associates the specifics of what they need to practice law....

[But] law firms are struggling with the new normal of a segmented

³¹ This is still the case. See <http://www.princetonreview.com/law-school-advice/first-year-curriculum> (last visited April 12, 2021). If interested in different ways some schools are changing their curriculums, see DAVID M. MOSS AND DEBRA CURTIS MOSS, REFORMING LEGAL EDUCATION: LAW SCHOOLS IN THE CROSSROADS (2012).

³² See *Report and Recommendations American Bar Association Task Force on the Future of Legal Education*, at p. 14, http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/report_and_recommendations_of_aba_task_force.authcheckdam.pdf, (last visited April 12, 2021):

... it is commonly stated that the basic purpose of law schools is to train lawyers, but there is no consensus about what this means....

For further related discussion see David Segal, *What They don't Teach Law Students: Lawyering*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/20/business/after-law-school-associates-learn-to-be-lawyers.html?_r=0 (last visited April 12, 2021). To see how some law schools are responding see Alan Rothman, *Law Schools Innovative Efforts to Produce “Practice Ready” Lawyers*, <https://subwayfold.com/2015/02/19/law-schools-innovative-efforts-to-produce-practice-ready-lawyers/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

³³ See Victoria Fleisher, *The Shift Toward Law School Specialization*, <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2012/10/25/the-shift-toward-law-school-specialization/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

industry. The new economics of the profession are marked by increased lateral mobility among partners, increasing numbers of nonequity partners, increased client scrutiny of fees and a decrease in the routine legal work that used to support the pyramid model. As a result, it is harder for law firms to devote nonbillable time to training entry-level associates. Law graduates are expected to arrive knowing more than just how to “think like a lawyer.”³⁴

We see strong support for her contention in the recent, and dramatic, proliferation of law school “specialties” and “concentrations”. While this movement is relatively new (primarily over the last decade or so), there are already far too many programs to list. Law schools feature them, usually quite prominently, on their home webpages. Some schools have several; most have at least one. The impetus for this growth is likely two-fold. First, while there is no research on the subject, it is logical that “lower-tiered” law schools became frustrated with prominent rankings systems. They lacked the resources (basically money) to “move up” within the existing structures, so they decided to allocate what they did have to excelling in particular, focused areas (“Let’s be the best law school we can be at _____”). This is likely best evidenced by the “non-T1” schools dominating U.S. News & World Report’s specialized law school rankings.³⁵ Second, the current legal

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ As an example, see the 2017 rankings for the rapidly growing field of Dispute Resolution. Only one of the top 10 schools is a “T14” and it (Harvard) is ranked behind Ohio State, Pepperdine, and Missouri-Columbia. See <http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/dispute-resolution-rankings> (last visited May 6, 2019). We must also understand this ranking system as it, too, has limitations:

The specialty rankings are based solely on votes by legal educators, who nominated up to 15 schools in each field. U.S. News asked law schools during the summer of 2015 to supply the names of faculty members and legal educators who were currently teaching in each field. U.S. News used those names as the sole basis for creating the respondent pool for the specialty rankings.

Programs are numerically ranked in descending order based on the number of nominations they received, as long as they received seven or more nominations in that specialty area. This means that schools

services market demands immediate expertise³⁶ and law firms are no longer investing heavily in bringing new attorneys up to speed,³⁷ so what a job applicant actually learned (or displayed) in law school is significantly more important than ever before.

This means prospective law students might consider a new strategy, one focused on what schools actually prioritize and the applicant's likely success within a school's structure, and much less on the name of the institution. This can also strongly impact salary as recent research indicates that the best predictor of salary, for most (not all) law school graduates, is not where you went to school, but law

ranked at the bottom of each law specialty ranking have received at least seven nominations. *See* <http://www.usnewsuniversitydirectory.com/graduate-schools/methodology-law.aspx>.

³⁶ *See* Victoria Fleisher, *The Shift Toward Law School Specialization*, <http://dealbook.nytimes.com/2012/10/25/the-shift-toward-law-school-specialization/> (last visited April 12, 2021):

In the traditional model of legal education, schools offer a general professional degree in law.

In the emerging model, law students must add on a degree, certificate or other indication of readiness to engage in a particular practice area or industry.

³⁷ *See* DAVID M. MOSS AND DEBRA CURTIS MOSS, REFORMING LEGAL EDUCATION: LAW SCHOOLS IN THE CROSSROADS, at p. 2 (2012):

[M]any legal services clients are shying away from under-writing the additional legal training often necessary for those new hires, which has in essence been “built in” to the continuum of legal education for many years.

Traditionally, recent graduates of law schools could count on their firms investing in them through a lengthy and exhaustive mentoring process that helped bridge the gap between a law school education and making it possible for them to contribute as productive members of a firm or organization.

school G.P.A..³⁸ This may make increasing sense going forward. If firms (or other employers, such as government agencies) are hiring new graduates, but not significantly training them, they can hedge their employment bets by targeting applicants with some form of demonstrated aptitude. For recent law school graduates the best evidence of this aptitude may be his/her G.P.A. in a school or program focusing on whatever subject or skill the prospective employer targets with the hire.

C. Application and Enrollment Trends

Prospective law students must understand the law school “big picture”, at any given time, so they can strategize accordingly. Currently we are in the midst of an unprecedented trend. We experienced a period of dramatic law school cost increase³⁹, followed by a never before seen development; law school as a buyers’ (applicants’) market.⁴⁰ This latter development may or may not last, but that is not the point. A student applying to law school, at any time, should understand

³⁸ See Richard Sander and Jane Yakowitz, *The Secret of my Success: How Status, Prestige, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers*, at p. 37, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/072910sanderyakowitz.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

³⁹ See Gregory Yang, *Law Schools Inching Towards \$100K*, <https://tippingthescales.com/2018/02/law-school-tuition-inching-toward-100k/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁴⁰ This may be best evidenced by acceptance rates. See Aaron N. Taylor, *Are Financially Desperate Law Schools Using a “Reverse Robin Hood Scheme” to Stay Afloat?*, <http://chronicle.com/article/Are-Financially-Desperate-Law/236041> (last visited April 12, 2021):

Since 2010, the admission rate among all law-school applicants has increased from 31 percent to 44 percent. More significantly, the median rate among law schools in 2015 was 54 percent, meaning that applicants at more than half the law schools in the country had better than 50-50 odds of gaining admission. By contrast, the median in 2010 was 35 percent. Twenty-four law schools in 2015 had admission rates of 70 percent or higher, compared with just two in 2010.

enrollment trends and status. I provide context spanning the past decade plus. This data comes directly from LSAC and addresses ABA accredited law schools:

<u>Year</u>	Total law school <u>applicants</u> :	Total <u>admitted applicants</u> :
2004	98,700	55,900
2005	93,500	56,100
2006	87,300	56,000
2007	82,800	55,500
2008	82,000	55,500
2009	85,600	58,400
2010	87,500	60,400
2011	78,800	55,800
2012	67,700	50,600
2013	59,400	45,700
2014	55,700	43,500
2015	54,500	42,300
2016	56,500	42,800
2017	56,400	42,300
2018	60,700	44,000
2019	55,955	44,174 ⁴¹
2020	56,954	40,252
2021	63,212	43,777
2022	54,377	38,207

Unquestionably the number of people applying to, and enrolling in, law schools decreased dramatically over an extended period of time.⁴² It also appears the numbers may have started to stabilize, somewhat, beginning in 2016 or so. In reality there is ongoing uncertainty regarding law school applications, admissions,

⁴¹ <https://www.lsac.org/data-research/data/admission-trends-country-citizenship-aba-applicants-admitted-applicants>. This last line is a bit misleading. All data here comes from LSAC, but the 2004-18 data encompasses ALL applicants and admitted applicants (worldwide). The 2019 data is for U.S. applicants and admitted applicants only. That is the case for any data after 2019 as well.

⁴² For longer-term data, and additional perspective on other topics, *see* <http://insidethelawschoolscam.blogspot.com/2013/02/the-twenty-year-drop.html> (last visited April 12, 2021).

and attendant responses.⁴³ The point, again, is context. This type of knowledge is significant for prospective applicants as it lets them understand the current market for their dollars and enrollment opportunities.⁴⁴ The above shows a strong buyers' market. Schools are significantly reducing class size because of a limited applicant pool.⁴⁵ This means prospective students have more options than if the market was flooded with competing applicants. This might encourage prospective students to

⁴³ See Mark Hansen, *As Law School Enrollment Drops, Experts Disagree on Whether the Bottom is in Sight*, http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/as_law_school_enrollment_drops_experts_disagree_on_whether_the_bottom (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁴⁴ This applies when considering employment opportunities as well. The logic is the same; understand the real trends. As an example, say you think you are interested in a job in "Biglaw", generally a term used to describe very large law firms. There is a common perception that "only top 10" law school graduates are likely to get hired by Biglaw.

If you accept that as true, and use that to guide your future plans, you would want to know data and trends for graduates of such schools relative to Biglaw jobs. If you explored such information, you could learn that 55.3% of top ten law school graduates worked in Biglaw firms in 2003, that percentage dropped to 28.7% by 2007, and that further dropped to just 16.8% by 2012. See Debra Cassens Weiss, *24 Percent of JDs who Passed the Bar in 2000 Aren't Practicing Law, Survey Finds*, http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/twelve_years_after_the_jd_20_percent_arent_practicing_law/ (last visited April 12, 2021).

That data seems to indicate that "top 10" law schools are no longer the road to Biglaw jobs they were less than a decade earlier. Again, pay attention to actual data, not stereotypes and shortcuts.

⁴⁵ See <http://press.kaptest.com/press-releases/kaplan-test-prep-survey-law-schools-cut-their-incoming-classes-and-increase-practice-ready-curricula> (last visited May 6, 2016):

In a new Kaplan Test Prep survey, 54% of law school admissions officers report cutting their entering law school classes for 2013-2014 and 25% plan to do so again next year. This marks two years in a row that law schools report cutting their entering class sizes; Kaplan's 2012 survey showed 51% of schools cutting the size of their entering classes. According to the Law School Admission Council, the organization that writes the LSAT, since its recent peak in 2010, law school applications have dropped from 602,300 to 385,400 in 2013 – their lowest level in decades.

pursue schools they otherwise would think “out of reach”.⁴⁶ It also indicates that law schools may need to make financial aid packages particularly attractive to obtain students generally⁴⁷, or students with targeted measurables⁴⁸. If the trend was the opposite, it certainly might dictate a corresponding strategy change. Succinctly put, prospective students need to understand the big picture; they are part of the entire market. They compete not only with applicants at their targeted schools, but within the entire market of law school buyers and sellers at any given time. They should develop strategies, and make choices, accordingly.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ See Elizabeth G. Olson, *The Financial Aid Arms Race at Law Schools*, <http://fortune.com/2013/08/15/the-financial-aid-arms-race-at-law-schools/> (last visited April 12, 2021):

Law schools, says Michael Spivey, a law school admissions consultant in Boulder, Colo., are feeling the squeeze from the shrinking numbers of applicants. “In the go-go years, it was easy for the law schools to get the numbers,” he says. “Now clients are being accepted to law schools they could never get in before.”

⁴⁷ See Natalie Kitroeff, *The Best Law Schools Are Attracting Fewer Students*, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-01-26/the-best-law-schools-are-attracting-fewer-students> (last visited April 12, 2021) (“As applications have dwindled, some of the most exclusive schools have opened their doors a little wider: Top-tier schools admitted a median 7 percent more people in 2015 than they did in 2011.”)

⁴⁸ *Id.* (“The most urgent challenge facing the top schools is that applications from students with the highest test scores have declined. In 2010, 12,177 people with the highest scores on the LSAT (165 and above, the highest possible score being 180) applied to law school. By 2015, only 6,667 people with those scores applied....”) According to one Dean, “Top schools have made more substantial investments in financial aid in recent years. We are spending more money on competing for students—and still seeing enrollment decline.” *Id.*

⁴⁹ They should also proceed respectfully. There is much discussion about prospective students negotiating financial aid packages. As an example see <https://ulife.vpul.upenn.edu/careerservices/blog/2015/02/09/negotiating-law-school-scholarship-offers-some-best-and-worst-practices/> (last visited April 12, 2021). PreLaw Advisors have the opportunity to actually meet and talk with law school admissions personnel annually. I have learned a lot in these interactions. While I have not yet heard of a financial aid offer being “pulled” because of negotiations, I do know that several law school people have discussed how close they are getting to pulling offers when encountering “disrespectful” prospective students. Here is a valuable hint, don’t discuss how “bad” the school is you are

III. Have a Real Plan for After Law School, but Implement it Before and During Law School

A. “Satisfaction?”

It is no secret that many lawyers are unhappy.⁵⁰

*Law is a prestigious and remunerative profession, and law school classrooms are full of fresh candidates. In a recent poll, however, 52% of practicing lawyers describe themselves as dissatisfied.... In addition to being disenchanted, lawyers are in remarkably poor mental health. They are at much greater risk than the general population for depression. Researchers at John Hopkins University found statistically significant elevations of major depressive disorder in only 3 of 104 occupations surveyed. When adjusted for sociodemographics, lawyers topped the list, suffering from depression at a rate of 3.6 times higher than employed persons generally. Lawyers also suffer from alcoholism and illegal drug use at rates far higher than non-lawyers. The divorce rate among lawyers, especially women, also appears to be higher than the divorce rate among other professionals. Thus, by any measure, lawyers embody the paradox of money losing its hold. They are the best-paid professionals, and yet they are disproportionately unhappy and unhealthy. And lawyers know it; many are retiring early or leaving the profession altogether.*⁵¹

negotiating with, nor should you talk about how much better your other alternatives are. While this should be obvious, apparently it is becoming a common problem.

⁵⁰ There are several books on aspects of this topic. If interested check out Susan Swaim Daicoff, *LAWYER KNOW THYSELF* (2006) and Nancy Levit, *THE HAPPY LAWYER: MAKING A GOOD LIFE IN THE LAW* (2010). There are multiple articles as well. For examples see Becky Beaupre Gillispee and Hollee Schwartz Temple, *Hunting Happy: In Grim Times, a Search for Joy in Law Practice Gains Ground*, http://www.abajournal.com/magazine/article/hunting_happy_in_grim_times_a_search_for_joy_in_law_practice_gains_ground/ (last visited April 12, 2021); Daniel S. Bowling III, *Lawyers and Their Elusive Pursuit of Happiness: Does it Matter?*, <http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1057&context=dfisc> (last visited April 12, 2021); David Chambers, *Overstating the Satisfaction of Lawyers*, <http://repository.law.umich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1871&context=articles> (last visited April 12, 2021); and Nancy Levit, *Five Myths About Happy Lawyers*, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/happylawyers/FiveMythsAboutHappyLawyersfinaldraftwebsite.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

Many law students struggle with similar issues.⁵²

Although law students enter school with fairly normal rates of depression (about 8-9 percent), upon matriculation, the rate of depression more than quadruples (to about 40 percent)....⁵³

But is it really as simple as “law students and lawyers are unhappy with their lives because they are law students and lawyers?” As with the rest of this article, I urge you to genuinely pursue information and make your own decisions. However, I forward an idea for consideration.

While there is no empirical research on point, it may be that at least some of these people are not unhappy because their lives substantially differ from what they envisioned, *but because they had no real vision to begin with*. In other words, they had no actual plan or reasoned expectations. Many probably explained their “plan” as “going to law school” to “be a lawyer”. Such generic approach likely did not work out well. As one career counselor explains:

The lawyers I know who developed defined interests in law school, and got to know themselves better, are the ones who are happy now. The lawyers I’ve met who are unhappy are often the ones who are not in a good fit for their position. They are stuck in their offices doing research, when they would rather be in a high people interaction career. Or they are stuck in court all day, when in fact they are terrified of public speaking. Or, they are beaten down by the adversarial nature of litigation, when they would rather be in a less contentious career setting.⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Martin E.P. Seligman, *Why Are Lawyers So Unhappy?*, <http://www.lawyerswithdepression.com/articles/why-are-lawyers-so-unhappy/> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁵² See *Depression and Denial*, <http://insidethelawschoolscam.blogspot.com/2012/01/depression-and-denial.html> (last visited April 12, 2021). On the other hand, see Paula A. Franzese, A SHORT AND HAPPY GUIDE TO BEING A LAW STUDENT (2014).

⁵³ See *Law School Quadruples the Chances of Depression for Tens of Thousands: Some Changes That Might Help*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/kate-mayer-mangan/law-school-quadruples-dep_b_5713337.html (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁵⁴ See Hillary Mantis, *Who are the Happiest Lawyers?*, <http://www.nationaljurist.com/content/who-are-happiest-lawyers> (last visited April 12, 2021).

As an attorney and educator puts forth, in an article published by the American Bar Association:

The precise scope of the problem is unclear. But a basic point is incontestable: Many lawyers admit to dissatisfying careers.

I have developed a theory: Attorneys who lead lives that more closely resemble their pre-law dreams are more satisfied than those who don't. The wider the gap between expectations and reality, the greater the likelihood of disappointment.⁵⁵

If this is accurate, it creates a critical new analysis for prospective students, one that goes far beyond “Go to the best school you can get in to” (implying that you will just figure things out once there, and the “better” the law school, the more options you must automatically have).⁵⁶ This new discussion culminates in one simple, yet potentially life-altering question, “What do you really and specifically want to do?” Underlying this is perhaps an even more critical question, “What do you actually know about what you think you want to do?”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ See Steven J. Harper, *Unhappy Attorneys and the Expectations-Reality Gap*, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/publications/litigation_journal/2014-15/winter/unhappy_attorneys_and_expectationsreality_gap/ (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁵⁶ See Richard Sander and Jane Yakowitz, *The Secret of my Success: How Status, Prestige, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers*, at p. 15, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/072910sanderyakowitz.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021) (“There is little question that going to the right law school was a virtual prerequisite for many elite law positions in the 1950s and 1960s. But it’s equally clear that the importance of an elite degree declined substantially since then.”)

⁵⁷ Many decide to be a “lawyer” without any real exposure or plan. See Steven J. Harper, *Unhappy Attorneys and the Expectations-Reality Gap*, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/litigation/publications/litigation_journal/2014-15/winter/unhappy_attorneys_and_expectationsreality_gap/ (last visited April 12, 2021).

According to recent surveys, about one-third of law students make the decision to become an attorney in high school; another third reach this conclusion during their freshman or sophomore college years. For many of the remaining one-third, getting a JD is the last bastion of the liberal arts major who can’t decide what to do next.

B. Consider Working “Backwards”

“A legal education is an investment”⁵⁸, and you should know what you are buying and why you are buying it.⁵⁹ Law school is a step in a path; it is not a destination. It is vital to understand that you go *through* law school, not *to* law school. You go *through* law school to get to somewhere else. That somewhere else could be a particular occupation, or it could be personal growth and edification. Such determination is a personal choice, but it is difficult to select the law schools best preparing you for such choice if you have not first identified your real goals.

I confess I love this author’s explanation of his efforts as I think he “gets it”. I wish many of those passing judgment on prelaw advising knew as much as he does. He explains:

That’s why I developed an undergraduate pre-law course. My goal is not to talk anyone into or out of a legal career. Our ten weeks of reality therapy give undergraduates the tools to make more informed decisions. My hope is that by reframing their expectations about a legal career before they head into the profession, they will become happier lawyers when they confront a reality that is less jarring than it might be for their less-informed contemporaries.

My personal experience, certainly at my current institution, is that anything less than “Go to law school. It is a great idea!” is somehow “anti-law school” or nefariously unsupportive. That is ridiculous. At some point we must apply common sense. If this author is so wildly off base why would the American Bar Association (the entity accrediting the vast majority of American law schools and “the” face of lawyers in America) publish his article?

Perhaps the ABA understands his insight is really important. He is not alone in his views. Another author urges prospective students to get real perspective and make informed choices. His name is Paul Campo and he is a Professor of Constitutional Law at the University of Colorado Law School. He authored the book *DON’T GO TO LAW SCHOOL (UNLESS): A LAW PROFESSOR’S GUIDE TO MAXIMIZING OPPORTUNITY AND MINIMIZING RISK* (2012). Finally, a website is devoted exclusively to helping understand law schools and legal education. Many find it quite eye-opening. See *Law School Transparency Project* at <https://www.lawschooltransparency.com> (last visited April 12, 2021). “Costs” information can be found under the “Data Dashboard” tab..

⁵⁸ See Tim Alan Garrison and Frank Guliuzza, *Before the Paper Chase*, at p. 101, <http://www.cap-press.com/pdf/2195.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁵⁹ Are you likely to buy a house just to buy a house, or would you buy a house because it provided things you actually wanted or needed?

This preparation also makes sense when you remember that law schools are increasingly focused on specialized areas, and that means law schools are increasingly different from each other.

There are two obvious strategies when attempting to plan your legal future: work forward or work backwards. Working forward asks you to identify, *as specifically as possible*, your future professional goals (as an example, “I want to be a trial lawyer focusing on medical malpractice, specifically prenatal procedures causing injuries”). You then use this definition to choose the law school(s) likely best facilitating the career you identified. The upside to working forward is that it can be “easier” as you have a current starting point, a future targeted goal, and you can largely limit your challenge to how to get from A to B. The downside is that it may be very difficult to know exactly what you want now and proceed accordingly (not to mention that A and/or B might change). On the other hand, there is the option to work backwards. It is somewhat unorthodox, but it may appeal to some.

There is a quote, perhaps true, perhaps not, that might help. The artist Michelangelo was commissioned to create a statue of David. He worked on it for two years; then there was a grand unveiling, with attendant oohing and aahing as the sculpture was seen for the first time. Inevitably someone asked, “How did you know what David looked like?” Michelangelo said it was simple, “I just chipped away all the rock that wasn’t David.” As you consider your professional future, perhaps remove what you do not want in it. Chip the stone away and see what remains. In my experience several found the book, *Should You Really Be A Lawyer?: The Guide To Smart Career Choices Before, During & After Law School*⁶⁰, helpful in this process, particularly the components asking users to identify and prioritize interests, skills, work environment demands, etc.. Logically, what does not make those lists helps eliminate potential clutter.

⁶⁰ The author of the most recent version is Deborah Schneider. It is now available on Amazon.com. I have no affiliation with author or seller. The book also discusses several decision making short cuts that many of us regularly use, but may well lead to seriously flawed analysis and conclusions. Many find these insightful as well.

There are two important caveats to a working backwards strategy. First, be honest. Do not try to provide the “right” answers as that cheats the analysis (and yourself). Second, after such analysis, you might be tempted to slap a triumphant label on your conclusion(s), such as (purely as an example) “litigator!” But consider taking your analysis a step farther. What do you *actually know* about being a litigator? What experience and exposure do you *really have*?⁶¹ If you do not actually know or have much, try to gain real information and perspective. A potentially invaluable way to do this is to job shadow.

C. Job Shadow, with a Purpose

My experience is that people are generally reluctant to both shadow and undertake the steps necessary to create a shadow opportunity.⁶² I strongly suggest you overcome such reservations. If you are considering an educational or professional step that may well be a true major life decision, don’t you want all information realistically available?

Often a solid starting place, for potential shadow opportunities, is the alumni association of your undergraduate institution. Use that to identify people in substantive areas you may be interested in.⁶³ Contact them and coordinate a true shadow experience.⁶⁴ You do not just want their perceptions or stories of what they do; you want to experience it yourself so that you can form your own conclusions. I

⁶¹ The question is not “What have you been told by others, including family, friends, movies, television, or books?” The question is, “What have you *actually* observed, experienced, or done?”

⁶² I have taught a class with job shadows as a significant piece of the final project. Every semester I had students absolutely rave about what they learned and how valuable this piece was to them. Almost all also said something like “I’d never have done it if it wasn’t required for the class.”

⁶³ Be specific and strategic. Shadowing “a lawyer” probably will not help you much. Shadowing a lawyer who actually does what you think you might be interested in may provide great value. If you thought you wanted to buy a Corvette, would you simply test drive any car? Always think about what likely provides the most and best information.

⁶⁴ Be patient and considerate. Some will be receptive; others will not.

suggest you structure the shadow in two separate steps: an initial interview and a full day shadow. I also suggest you do them on separate days.

Potential questions for the interview:

1. How did their undergraduate education prepared them for this career?
2. How law school prepared them for this career?
3. What did their education not prepare them for?
4. Did they plan a specific career path or strategy?
5. If they did not have a path, how did they end up in this career?
6. What is a day in the life of a person in this occupation like?
7. What are the most significant positives of this career?
8. What are the most significant negatives of this career?
9. How has this career and/or career path impacted their personal lives?
10. What advice would they give someone who was interested in pursuing this career?
11. What do they wish they would have known before or during law school that they know now?

When setting up the shadow ask for an ordinary, representative day. You want to be able to learn what the person actually does, or does not, do. You can then use this to begin to determine how such occupation does/not match up with your true priorities. The goal is genuine exposure. You then decide what weight to give any particular piece of the experience.

D. Campus Visits

Consider working backwards when assessing potential law schools as well.⁶⁵ A valuable piece, in this context, is campus visits. Many considering law school have never spent any time in a law school. Perhaps this explains why so many refer to “law school” as some sort of singular, homogenous entity. They often say things like, “I’m going to law school”, as if there is just one model.⁶⁶ This is inaccurate. Law schools very much have their own structures, cultures, and “vibes”. Visit almost any

⁶⁵ Yes, I know. This could have gone in Section II, but we are “working backwards”, so indulge me.

⁶⁶ To me, this is like saying, “I’m going to buy car.”

two and this will likely be quickly apparent. Use common sense and consider campus visits like home inspections. Would you buy a house without walking in and thoroughly checking it out?⁶⁷

Strategize your campus visits in, at least, two ways. First, try to use visits to give you a real sense of day-to-day life and activities. There can be a big difference between a guided campus tour and sitting in on a class. There may be an equally significant difference between sitting in on a required first year course and attending an elective in an area of interest to you. If a school touts its clinical programs, and those are a draw for you, stop and actually observe for a while. Talk with students and faculty. Interact and experience; don't just tour facilities or sightsee. Second, use campus resources to provide new avenues for information. Two can be particularly informative: Financial Aid and Career Services.⁶⁸

Quite a bit is written about law school financial aid over the past few years, much stressing it is the applicant's responsibility to know the rules and to understand they vary from school to school.⁶⁹ A fairly constant discussion is the true extent of aid provided and/or debt incurred.⁷⁰ If aid is important to you meet

⁶⁷ And I bet those of you considering your second (or subsequent) home purchase spend more time and pay more attention than you did for your first....because you probably learned some things over time. I bet several renters do the same thing.

⁶⁸ These titles will vary by institution, but one covers monetary aid and the other employment services.

⁶⁹ LSAC is absolutely clear on this:

Changes in financial aid rules and regulations are ongoing, and law school policies vary. Therefore, it is your responsibility to stay current and to educate yourself about financial aid in much the same way that you research law schools when deciding where to apply. See <https://www.lsac.org/sites/default/files/media/financial-aid-brochure-2019.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁷⁰ See David Segal, *Law Students Lose the Grant Game as Schools Win*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/business/law-school-grants.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (last visited April 12, 2021). See also <http://insidethelawschoolscam.blogspot.com/2012/07/mysteries-of-rutgers.html> (last visited April 12, 2021).

I promised even commentary in the introduction. Accordingly, I would provide an article detailing that law students are actually receiving equal or more

with Financial Aid services and try to get a sense of what to actually expect. Logical questions include⁷¹:

1. What percentage of first year students receive non-debt producing aid and in what forms?
2. What percentage of students retain such aid from years one to two, and two to three?
3. If an answer is something akin to “aid retention is grade dependent”, ask what percentage of students carry the requisite grade point from years one to two and two to three.⁷²

This final question is likely to lead to many related queries. Feel free to ask what the average G.P.A. is and what the bottom G.P.A. is for the top 10th, 25th, and 33rd percentiles. Some schools issue fairly low grades overall, but these are not likely emphasized in promotional materials. If an aid package requires a 3.0 G.P.A., you a) need to know this and b) understand how likely you are to earn the necessary grades as you attempt to project your total costs of attendance.⁷³

I suspect some readers are now smiling and shaking their heads, immediately fixating on the 3.0 G.P.A. I provided above (purely for discussion purposes), and thinking “No problem. I’d get that, easy.” For those with such a response, seek information and perspective. Learn to actually analyze, not just jump to conclusions. Does the law school use a mandatory grading curve (another *very* good question to ask)? If so, some or many are not going to “earn” the grades necessary

aid that they expected, but I cannot locate any such piece. I can say, anecdotally, that I have recently encountered a few students who received first year law school financial aid, even though they had never qualified for educational aid before.

⁷¹ This discussion becomes even more potentially targeted if you already have an aid award, from the respective school, in hand.

⁷² This assumes the deciding criterion is grade point average. If aid is contingent on another factor, adjust the question accordingly.

⁷³ See David Segal, *Law Students Lose the Grant Game as Schools Win*, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/01/business/law-school-grants.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0 (last visited April 12, 2021).

to keep aid because that is the way the system is structured. Think about it logically. If the curve mandates that only 10% of students earn A grades and only 25% earn B grades, only 35% of students, in any given class, will be above a 3.0 for that course.⁷⁴

I suspect some are still smiling and thinking, “No problem, I just need to be in about the top third. That’s easy.” Beware of overconfidence. For purposes of this discussion, “Overconfidence is an error in calculating statistical probabilities.”⁷⁵ Research indicates overconfidence significantly shapes law students’ predictions of their likely academic successes. Even though they had never been in a law school environment before, prospective law students often believed they would be “big

⁷⁴ As a broader example see *Id.*, discussing one student’s experience, although the article is not limited to a single experience:

Like a lot of other college seniors, Alexandra Leumer got her introduction to the heady and hazardous world of law school scholarships in the form of a letter bearing very good news. The Golden Gate University School of Law in San Francisco had admitted her, the letter stated, *and* it had awarded her a merit scholarship of \$30,000 a year — enough to cover the full cost of tuition.

To keep her grant, all that Ms. Leumer had to do was maintain a grade-point average of 3.0 or above — a B or better. If she dipped below that number at the end of either the first or the second year, the letter explained, she would lose her scholarship for good.

“I didn’t give it much thought,” she said. “I didn’t think it would be a challenge.” Her grades and test scores were well above the median at Golden Gate... [so] how hard could a 3.0 be? Really hard, it turned out.

Ms. Leumer quickly realized that she was surrounded by dozens of students just as motivated to get a 3.0 as she was. Concern turned into worry when, in her first semester, her grades included a B-minus in torts and a B-minus in contracts. Translated numerically, she had a 2.786. In the second semester, she raised her grades in almost every class, except one. She ended the year with a 2.967. In the parlance of 1L’s, she had “curved out.”

⁷⁵ See Blythe McGarvie, *Optimism or Overconfidence?*, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/blythe-mcgarvie/optimism-or-overconfidenc_b_523078.html (last visited April 12, 2021).

fish, regardless of where they went to school.”⁷⁶ In fact, 34% expected to be in the top 10% of their class, and 99% were certain they would, at least, make the top 50%.⁷⁷ Do the math. Undertake actual analysis. Form your own conclusions.

I also suggest you coordinate with Career Services to facilitate separate interviews related to employment. I would try to arrange at least three, each with a different target audience. First, speak with a current student, likely a third year (“3L”), ideally pursuing a career you think you are interested in. Immediate and basic questions could include:

1. What attracted you to this school?
2. How have your expectations been met or not met?
3. How has this school provided employment opportunities for students, generally, and you, specifically?
4. What are the strengths and weaknesses, of this school, relative to the career you are pursuing?

You should also speak with graduates, ideally a) in a career you think you might really be interested in and b) at different stages in their careers. As examples, perhaps one is three to five years post-graduation, while another is 10 or more years out. Logical starting questions include:

1. How did this school’s education prepare you for your current duties?
2. How did it not?
3. How did this school help you gain employment?
4. What is your experience with fellow alumni, particularly in terms of job placement assistance?⁷⁸

⁷⁶ See Richard Sander and Jane Yakowitz, *The Secret of my Success: How Status, Prestige, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers*, at p. 9, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/072910sanderyakowitz.pdf> (last visited April 12, 2021).

⁷⁷ *Id.* at p. 10.

⁷⁸ This can be quite a revealing question, particularly for schools touting “large alumni networks” as that can (and does) mean anything from “our graduates work

5. What should a prospective student be aware of, in terms of regional and national employment, for graduates of this school?
6. What should a prospective law student, interested in this particular area, know about the future?

Obviously any of the above questions are merely suggested starting points, but the goal remains the same; pursue more information and perspective. Then do with that what you will.

E. Take Advantage of the LSAC

The reality is that the “law school world” goes through the Law School Admissions Council, or “LSAC”.⁷⁹ LSAC, particularly over the last few years, expanded services dramatically. You may find one or more resources insightful, and potentially quite helpful. All the following examples are currently available through the LSAC website, although LSAC may require you to create a (free) use account. Current services include questions from prior LSAT exams and full practice examination sections, advice for writing personal statements, considerations for “How to Find the Right Law School” and understanding financial aid, as well as tools such as “Admission Unmasked” and “Law School Unmasked” under the LawHub section.⁸⁰ There is a lot here, and there will be more. Use it; you want as much information as possible so you have the best opportunity to make the most informed choice.

strongly with and for each other and our students” to “we have many graduates”. If alumni relations are an important consideration for you what, specifically, are you looking for? Then what evidence shows you that is, or is not, actually happening?

⁷⁹ Begin at www.lsac.org.

⁸⁰ This is a result of LSAC’s 2022 acquisition of the former Law School Transparency project. I still list that source later in this pamphlet.

Conclusion

Over the years I have had multiple advisees tell me they really wanted “answers” about attending law school and/or being a lawyer. That is not the role of a prelaw advisor. This is your life. The attention, effort, and analysis you give to decision-making are your choices. My goal is to make you aware of information, perspective, and considerations you might otherwise not know about or pay attention to. Hopefully my contributions increase the likelihood of informed decision-making. In any event, what you choose to do is absolutely your decision. Good luck.

Major Source Recap

These are sources cited in the footnotes, but well worthy of further review, depending on what you are interested in. Some are lengthy, others numbers driven, none seem overtly “pro” or “anti” law school.⁸¹ All may be valuable when seeking perspective. I list them in no particular order of importance as that is up to the user to decide. However, each has much more to offer than I can adequately address in this article.

1. *Law School Transparency*, <http://www.lawschooltransparency.com>.

⁸¹ Although *Law School Transparency* openly pursues significant reform of the current information model, thus its demand for much greater transparency:

A fairer entry to our profession requires that the legal education system undergo significant structural change. Our sharpest tool thus far has been information. Publicizing the expense, debt, job outcomes, moral hazard, rent seeking, deception, regulatory capture, price discrimination, protections that enable systemic failure, etc. has led to better consumer information, downward price pressure, and more accountability.

2. Marjorie M. Shultz and Sheldon Zedeck, *FINAL REPORT: Identification, Development, and Validation of Predictors for Successful Lawyering*, <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/files/LSACREPORTfinal-12.pdf>.
3. Tim Alan Garrison and Frank Guliuzza, *Before the Paper Chase*, <http://www.cap-press.com/pdf/2195.pdf>.
4. Richard Sander and Jane Yakowitz, *The Secret of my Success: How Status, Prestige, and School Performance Shape Legal Careers*, <http://online.wsj.com/public/resources/documents/072910sanderyakowitz.pdf>.
5. *Report and Recommendations American Bar Association Task Force on the Future of Legal Education*, http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/professional_responsibility/report_and_recommendations_of_aba_task_force.authcheckdam.pdf.