

PRELAW AT UNCG

Suggestions and Timetable for

Juniors and Seniors

By the beginning of your Junior year, you are about halfway done with your undergraduate education, and it is time to get serious about preparing for what's ahead. If you want to apply to law schools, you should have learned lots about law schools and their curricula and understand lots about the law as a profession. You should be committed to the law as a career for you.

The last two years as an undergraduate should be carefully planned. Each of the years has its own challenges. Your Junior year is your last opportunity to improve your academic record and to strengthen your community service record or to become involved in other significant outside activities. In addition, if you have not already done so, this is your final opportunity to build relationships with faculty who you might want writing recommendations for you. Your Senior year focuses on completing application forms and then anxiously waiting for the mail to bring acceptances or rejections.

You should plan your objectives for the last two years semester-by-semester. If you prepare properly, you will improve your chances of being accepted by the law school of your choice.

NOTE: You may decide to delay applying to law school until you have worked for a year or several years. There is nothing wrong with this approach. In fact, some leading law schools actually prefer applicants who have work experience and are more mature. At least one law school admits virtually no applicants directly from undergraduate training. You may want to consider this option, particularly if you are not completely sure that law school is for you.

However, if you decide to go directly to law school, the following schedule may be useful as you make your plans.

JUNIOR YEAR, FALL SEMESTER

I. Review your academic record before classes start. Have you neglected to take certain courses which might strengthen your transcript? Have you taken demanding courses in your major? Are there some courses which might aid your law school preparation? Are you computer literate? Have you taken your writing and speaking intensive classes (do not wait until next year to do so)? **This is your last year to improve your academic credentials, since applications to law school usually include only the first three years as an undergraduate.**

NOTE: Avoid a weak Junior year. A weakening or declining grade point average will be a negative when your credentials are evaluated.

II. Decide early in the semester how you plan to approach preparation for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). Before making a decision, the Prelaw Advisory Committee recommends that you take at least one, but preferably several, practice LSAT exams. Score the exam you take (be sure to time yourself). How well you do may determine how you decide to prepare.

Practice LSAT publications can be found at Jackson Library or can be checked out from the Chair of the Prelaw Advisory Committee. In addition, LSAT publications and disks can be purchased from the Law School Admission Council (LSAC – website listed below) or from most major bookstores, such as Barnes and Noble or Amazon.

In preparing to take the LSAT, you have at least four options:

A. *Do not prepare systematically.* You may consider this option, but only if you are very confident that your reading speed, reading comprehension, and test-taking skills will allow you to perform well on the exam.

NOTE: The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) which prepares, administers, and grades the exam, claims that the best preparation, according to their studies, is a demanding course load which develops reading and analytic skills over your many years as a student.

B. *Develop your own self-study program.* Obtain old exams and familiarize yourself with the exam. The LSAC offers a study book, as do many other publications.

NOTE: As a minimum effort, you should study old tests to become familiar with the exam's format. You do not want to become comfortable with the format while grappling with the questions when you take the exam for the first time. Remember – the LSAT is a timed test, which works against a slow reader or taker with slow comprehension of written material.

C. *Take a commercial course.* These are offered by for-profit organizations such as Kaplan and Princeton Review. These organizations claim that, according to their research, students following their programs score higher than they would if they had not taken the programs. LSAC and other researchers dispute these claims. You should investigate this carefully. Make up your mind whether the costs of the program (this year the charge ranges from \$1200 to \$3900) are worth the potential reward of a higher score.

NOTE: Some students believe that attending a preparation course with other students aiming for the same objective has helped, though it is almost impossible to determine whether this actually translates into higher scores. In particular, students cite the number of timed exams taken in the programs. Some who have exam panic attacks think that taking trial exams helps to overcome the problems anxiety causes. Of course, students can take trial exams on their own, without the expense of a commercial course.

D. *Take local preparatory course.* Area colleges offer relatively inexpensive courses to prepare and have some of the advantages of a typical commercial course. Guilford College, for example, has offered a less expensive prep course regularly.

NOTE: LSAC research concluded that on-campus courses in general were the least effective way to prepare for the LSAT. Nevertheless any opportunity to take old exams and to approach the exam systematically should not be rejected outright. An on-campus course may fit your study needs and your budget.

CONCLUSION: If one of the options (B, C, or D) seems right for you, begin your preparation well ahead of the projected date of the exam. You can't cram for the LSAT. If you opt for self-study, start as soon as possible. If you take a course, those who give the course will set your schedule.

REMEMBER: Most law schools weigh your grade point average and LSAT scores about evenly. This means that how well you do on the LSAT on one Saturday morning is about as important as three years of courses (at least in the admissions process). **TAKE YOUR LSAT PREPARATIONS VERY SERIOUSLY.**

III. Research law schools and their programs and admission standards. You are now at the point of looking at specific law schools as opposed to more general investigations. Begin by examining *The Official Guide to the US Law Schools*. This book is prepared by LSAC and published annually. It has specific information about all of the almost 200 accredited (American Bar Association Approved) law schools in the United States and Canada. You may also visit the LSAC website which provides a web-friendly version of the book (www.lsac.org). The profiles of law schools should allow you to match your academic record (and LSAT score, if you have one) to the published standards of various law schools. This will give you an idea of which law schools are possibilities. Always remember that your objective is to determine the schools where you have a reasonable chance for admission.

IV. Attend a Law School Forum. These LSAC-sponsored events feature representatives from many law schools, workshops on financing law school, special sessions for minority candidates, and opportunities to talk with other students as well as persons involved with law schools. These events are held in various large cities; the nearest two in our region are Atlanta and Washington, DC. You could attend one of these forums in either your Junior or Senior year since they are usually scheduled for summer and fall dates. Watch the "Prelaw at UNCG" bulletin board (3rd floor Curry Building) for announcements or consult a prelaw advisor for more information.

The Legal Professions Association (LPA), a student group at UNCG, also sponsors a small version of a law school forum every year. In addition, in the past, this organization has sponsored a talk by an admissions officer from one of the local law schools (Wake Forest, UNC-Chapel Hill, NC Central, etc.). Again, please watch the "Prelaw at UNCG" bulletin board for announcements and check announcements on LPA's social media accounts.

V. Investigate financial arrangements required to attend law school. This is a serious subject,

since law school is costly. In general, those attending law school and other professional schools have to finance themselves. Some schools have limited numbers of scholarships. If you need financial aid, begin your search by calling the financial aid or admissions office of the law schools to which you are applying and ask them for any information or materials. You may want also to consult our own Financial Aid Office. Finally, keep close watch of the "PreLaw at UNCG" bulletin board where the PreLaw Advisory Committee will post any information they receive about financial aid. **NOTE: In the current economy, consider carefully the costs of attending law school, particularly with regard to student loans, and the estimated salary you would earn after law school. Read the book *Failing Law Schools* by Brian Z. Tamanaha (2012) (Chicago Series in Law and Society) for information about law school education and career prospects.**

VI. Be an active member of the UNCG Legal Professions Association. It is always helpful to be in contact with others who have the same objective you do. You will find the programs informative. Of course, you can help the club if you are an active member.

VII. Visit a law school and attend some classes. Many law schools encourage potential students to do this. Perhaps you could influence the Legal Professions Association to sponsor a day trip to Wake Forest, Duke, Elon, Campbell or UNC-Chapel Hill. Such a visit will also allow you to talk with admissions personnel as well as law students.

JUNIOR YEAR, SPRING SEMESTER

I. Obtain information and register for the LSAT at www.lsac.org. It is important that test takers carefully review all of the material contained on the website. LSAC stands for Law School Admissions Council, which reports your LSAT score and other information to law schools where you apply.

II. If you believe you qualify, LSAC has a waiver request form you may file. LSAC has a policy that no student should be denied a chance to take the LSAT because he or she cannot afford the registration fee. LSAC has complete information about this program.

III. Finish or continue preparations for the LSAT. If you intend to take the exam in the fall, you will continue your preparations through the summer and into the Fall Semester of your senior year.

SENIOR YEAR, FALL SEMESTER

I. Apply by late August (perhaps before classes start) for the late September/early October LSAT exam if you did not take the exam in June.

NOTE: Should you take the LSAT more than once? Yes, but only if you believe you were not at your best when you took the exam for the first time. If you take the exam twice, law schools generally accept the highest score, but certain law schools *might* average the two. In general, students who take the exam twice do not significantly improve the second

time. **Consult with the law school about their policy regarding multiple LSATs.**

BOTTOM LINE: For best results, plan to take the LSAT only once. Be VERY prepared the first time you take the exam.

II. Early in the semester (August/September) obtain admissions materials including catalogs and admissions forms from the law schools where you wish to apply. Your choices will be based on specific research into specific law schools and their admissions standards. Be realistic in assessing your grade point average and LSAT score compared to published admission criteria of the various law schools.

NOTE: Where should you apply? We recommend what advisors call the “three-tier” approach. Do not focus on costs, though you may have to pay \$100 or more to each school. **Your objective is to be accepted to a law school of your choice.** Application fees are an unavoidable expenditure.

a) **Top tier.** Apply to two (?) schools which seem long shots, but would be your choice if admitted.

b) **Middle tier.** Apply to four (?) schools where your credentials appear to give you a better than even chance of acceptance.

c) **Third tier.** Apply to two (?) schools which seem likely to accept you. These choices should be made carefully since these may be the only choices you will have. Basically, these are “back up” schools. They may not be ideal; but you see them as acceptable.

III. As you review application forms, write down the dates of the application deadlines. Most law schools set a deadline between December and February, and you should note these dates on a schedule you post to remind yourself of the due dates.

IMPORTANT: Often there is a real advantage in filing your application early. If a law school uses the rolling admission system (they notify you as soon as they have acted on your application), early applicants may have increased chances of acceptance. Later applicants compete for a declining number of places in the entering class. This is another reason why you are urged to be prepared for and take the LSAT in June or, at the latest, in late September/early October.

IV. Carefully choose those who will recommend you. The strongest recommendations will probably come from professors who know you more than casually and have had ample opportunity to judge your academic work. In general, you should first consider professors who can provide insight into your abilities and your character. The letters of recommendation are important, and if you have been an active student and have a strong academic record, you should be able to choose among several professors who can evaluate your abilities. When seeking letters of recommendation, do not ask the professor: “will you write a letter of recommendation for me?”

Rather, ask him or her: “can you write me a *strong* letter of recommendation?”

NOTE: Do not ask a prominent person (such as a politician) to recommend you unless that person knows you personally, knows something about your abilities, and will be able to write a letter that is not merely platitudes. All recommendations have to have content which will aid the admissions committee in judging your qualifications. Do not make the mistake of choosing someone you barely know and who barely knows you, but you think might carry some “influence” in the application process.

V. Ask professors for letters of recommendation EARLY in the fall semester, as much as a month or two ahead of the due dates. In addition to common courtesy, remember that it takes time to write a good letter of recommendation. Professors generally have busy schedules, and may be asked to write letters of recommendation for several students. A professor may not be able to produce a letter with just one or two week’s notice, and certainly will not be able to write the strongest possible recommendation. It is in your interest to give professors plenty of time.

VI. Continue to narrow or expand the list of schools where you intend to apply. You may want to confer with your prelaw advisor and do more investigating of more schools as the realities of the application process become apparent.

VII. Begin working on admission forms early – by mid-October, at the latest. You should plan to write and rewrite the essay or expository parts of the application forms. These essays should be polished statements.

NOTE: The Personal Statement can be a key part of the application. How well this is prepared may make a difference in how your application is viewed. This is your only opportunity to tell an admissions committee about how you perceive yourself. The portrait you draw should explain your values and your priorities in life. It should not be a resume (biographical information is provided elsewhere in the application). Do not be afraid to explain your academic career, any hardships or obstacles encountered (for example, your need as an undergraduate to work to support yourself). Strike a positive note; avoid being defensive. As you prepare to write the statement, ask yourself the following question: *what is it about me that a law school admissions committee would view in a positive light that is not already apparent from looking at my LSAT scores and my academic record?* Also, be very careful about inserting humor or being too innovative. An unusual, off-the-wall essay is high risk – it may win you a place, but it may turn off your readers.

In writing a Personal Statement, follow directions carefully. Confine your essay to the prescribed length. Edit your copy. Avoid spelling and grammatical errors. Have a friend or professor read the essay for reactions to the prose and to check for errors. **Why is the Personal Statement so important? Admissions committees generally do not interview, so the personal statement is your only opportunity to showcase yourself.** If your personal statement is incomprehensible or prepared sloppily, you might be eliminated early in the review process. You are applying to a professional program: take a professional attitude toward the application process.

Review online sources to help you in preparing the best possible personal statement. Law schools typically publish help guides for writing effective personal statements.

VIII. Set a deadline to have all applications completed. Some advisors think that you should have the forms completed and ready to submit by Thanksgiving. Of course, you do not need to submit all applications at one time, but early applications seem to have more advantages than disadvantages in a very competitive process.

SENIOR YEAR, SPRING SEMESTER

I. When you receive acceptance to a law school, note any deadlines for reply. Some schools want a fairly quick reply. All, or nearly all, request a deposit to hold your place. After being accepted, you do not want to put your admission at risk by failing to honor the requests and requirements of the law school.

II. If you receive multiple acceptances, consult your prelaw advisor and your family and friends about which choice is better for you. If this happens to you, you have a wonderful problem! Perhaps trips to law schools accepting you would be in order. You may need to see the schools to choose the best one for you.

III. Arrange your financial plan. Now that you are admitted, you should turn your attention to financing the three years of education. Learn about the options available to you. If you will have to borrow money, talk to the financial aid office of the law school you will be attending. You will want to make these arrangements before you begin classes at the start of the Fall Semester. **NOTE: In the current economy, consider carefully the costs of attending law school, particularly with regard to student loans, and the estimated salary you would earn after law school. Read the book *Failing Law Schools* by Brian Z. Tamanaha (2012) (Chicago Series in Law and Society) for information about law school education and career prospects.**

This information and advice should help you set your own agenda for your last two years as an undergraduate. The outline is only a starting point as you make plans which fit your schedule and objectives. You have many options, and you will ultimately have to decide how to proceed. Your choices will affect whether you are accepted by a law school. Use the extensive university support system. Don't hesitate to call on members of the Prewlaw Advisory Committee who can answer your questions or send you to other offices where you will find answers. Good luck!

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Please visit <https://eloisehassell.wp.uncg.edu/law-links/> for helpful information about law school and legal careers.

**Feel free to visit the following websites:

Law School Admission Council website at www.lsac.org.

American Bar Association website at www.abanet.org.

Kaplan Testing Services website at www.kaplan.com.