

How to Determine Where to Apply

The application process is time consuming and expensive. It is up to you to determine how much time and money you are willing to spend. For most students, it is not the number of applications that is important, but how many *prudent* applications are submitted. Generally, you want to apply to at least two sure bets, a few schools where your chances are fair, and possibly one or two far-fetched choices. This general guideline is especially advisable in a tight admissions market. Check the law school's statistics on past years' applicants and acceptances – this should give you a realistic assessment of your chances.

Visiting law schools while they are in session is another valuable tool for determining which school is for you. This is the only way for applicants to truly gauge how good a fit a particular school may be. While visiting schools, speak to current students involved in clubs or other activities that you would be interested in joining. Ask them their impression of the school and whether the programs you are interested in are truly as good as they seem on paper. Students always do better in an environment where they are comfortable, so this process should not be ignored.

Another important factor to take into account is financial aid. Law school can be very expensive; in fact, according to the *NAPLA Handbook*, the debt crisis confronting law school students is becoming the biggest crisis schools have ever faced. According to U.S. NEWS, as of 2012, between 80-100% of graduates from law school are in debt. Grants and scholarships are available to ease this looming debt and should be researched by applicants thoroughly. However, these grants and scholarships rarely cover half of a student's expenses. Schools allocate their financial aid awards based on different criteria – need, merit, or some combination thereof – and thus it is important to research each school's aid policy.

Other important factors are: your particular legal field of interest; location (geography and size of the surrounding community); whether schools are public or private; housing options; financial aid availability; and the size of the school. The *Places Rated Almanac* (Prentice Hall) can be a good source of information for some of these questions.

While it may seem premature to worry about future employment, in a tight job market it is important for students to inquire about job placement. Some important questions to ask are: what type of work is being done by recent grads; are those jobs full-time or part-time; where are the grads working; what are their starting salaries? Obviously, asking these questions several years in advance will not give students a completely accurate picture of the future, but it can give students an idea of how the school is seen by potential employers.