



Episode 119: Navigating the Law School Application Process (with Admission Logic)

Lee Burgess: Welcome to the Law School Toolbox Podcast. Today, we are talking about getting into law school with Doretta McGinnis and Ned Luce who are independent educational consultants with a focus on undergrad and law school admissions. Your Law School Toolbox hosts are Allison Monaghan and Lee Burgess, that's me. We're here to demystify the law school and early legal career experience so you'll be the best law student and lawyer you can be. We're the co-creators of the [Law School Toolbox](#), the [Bar Exam Toolbox](#), and the career related website, CareerDicta. Alison also runs the Girl's Guide to Law School.

If you enjoyed the show please leave a [review](#) on iTunes. And if you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out to us. You can reach us via the [contact form on lawschooltoolbox.com](#) and we'd love to hear from you. And with that, let's get started.

Welcome back. Today we're discussing tips for applying to law school with two application experts. Doretta McGinnis who's also a tutor for us at the Law School Toolbox and the Bar Exam Toolbox and Ned Luce, who are independent educational consultants with a focus on undergrad and law school admissions and founded a business called [Admission Logic](#), and you both are lawyers.

Ned Luce: We are.

Lee Burgess: There's that too. Well, we're excited to have you on the podcast today because I think this is the time of year when a lot of people are starting to work on their JD applications and thinking ahead to the future. So let's kind of jump right in. What do you think are the considerations that folks should think about when they're deciding [whether or not to apply to law school](#)?

Doretta M: I think the first question is whether to apply at all and then the second is where to apply. Thinking about the first question, long term employment prospects should be I think a major consideration for anyone who is considering applying to law school. Applicants should do their homework and consider what their career options might be. Everyone says you can use a law degree in so many ways and we are living proof of that.

Lee Burgess: All of us. All of us on this call are.

Doretta M: Exactly. All about alternate careers but I think the best approach is to decide if you actually want to practice law and to see what the traditional options are

likely to be for you and what areas of law you might be interested in and whether you're really a good fit for that career.

Ned Luce: And it helps taking some law related classes as an undergraduate. I did this and found that they were very instructive and actually increased my interest in studying law.

Doretta M: So exploring those options through coursework as Ned suggested, through summer jobs, through networking and conversations with actual lawyers, through online research, all of those things can really help you decide if this is the career that you are interested in. On a very fundamental level, I would say it's important to really enjoy reading and writing. That's what you'll be doing.

It has saddened us over the years, in our background we used to both teach law school, to find students who would say, I really don't like to read. I really don't like your write. That's not where my strengths lie. If those are issues for you then law school is probably going to be painful and is likely not the best fit.

Ned Luce: And you also should enjoy critical analytical thinking and problem solving because of course that is a big part of studying law and a huge part of practicing law as well.

Lee Burgess: And I had a law professor once who made the recommendation when I was kind of deciding between two internship opportunities to, if you think maybe going into this you're like, oh I love watching The Good Wife and all these shows about litigation, like I really want to be a litigator, one of the most poignant he said to me was, "Do you like living in conflict?" because litigation in so many forms is really about conflict resolution and you have to be okay living in conflict, and that means being in between people who are in conflict or companies that are in conflict. It's a state of being. I really think it is. I thought that was kind of a very poignant thing to ask because I hadn't really thought of it that way.

Ned Luce: Yeah, that's true but I think also it's important to realize that practicing law is not just about litigation.

Lee Burgess: True, it's about document review.

Ned Luce: Well, there is that but when you're watching law related shows on T.V. it's mostly litigation. It's not preparing you know regulatory filings with the Securities Exchange Commission. It's typically not drafting contracts, it's typically not drafting wills, or many of the other things that lawyers do on a daily basis, or setting up a closely held corporation to help a family business. I think that's important as well.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I think that's a really good point.

Doretta M: Right. A full exploration of the career options I think is essential because you do not want to spend three years and hundreds of thousands of dollars, potentially, and end up in a career that makes you unhappy or to which you are ill-suited.

Lee Burgess: I think you've mentioned this Doretta, one great way to do this is to do [informational interviewing](#) and we'll link to some suggested scripts and ways that you can do informational interviewing but this is the idea of reaching out to someone, maybe it's alumni from your undergrad. Perhaps it's a family friend or someone you've met at a networking event, to just meet with them and kind of talk to them about their life and to get a better idea of what they do every day and learn about these different areas of law because I think we've talked about kind of some different types of legal practice and the jobs that are required within those career paths.

But also, if you have this dream of owning your own practice, you also need to understand what it's like to run a small business, which is something we on this call all do and that comes with its own realities as well. And you better like doing things related to small business. So meeting people and talking about it can be some of the best use your time. If you like coffee, like go out and have a bunch of coffee dates. The \$5 you spend buying someone a cup of coffee could save you a lot of heartache and money in the end.

Doretta M: That's right. I think that's especially good advice for first generation students. If you are from a background where you really did not grow up around lawyers and you don't really know many lawyers or what they actually do but you can connect with them as you suggest through an alumni network from your college through the career planning and placement office at your college, through any other organizations to which you belong, I think that is particularly good advice. Law school is full of many students who have grown up with parents who are lawyers and really know exactly what they're getting into.

For students who do not have that familiarity from their upbringing, I think it's especially important to reach out and figure out kind of what the options are within this career.

Lee Burgess: Did you guys happen to read that article. I think it was in the [Washington Post](#) from last week about Sotomayor's clerk who went to Georgetown, did you guys happen to read about that? I'll send it to you guys after this call but I'll also post it in the show notes so readers can read it. But there was a great article profiling this young woman who was Sotomayor's clerk, I won't ruin the whole story because I want you to read it.

She is from D.C. and have had a bit of a tumultuous childhood, ends up losing her dad and her first interaction with a lawyer is actually the trusts and estates lawyer who helps her kind of after her dad died. She was like, "Who are you and what do you do? I think I want to be you some day." Which I thought was a

really poignant way that a lot of people get introduced to the law, like kind of through a crisis and then she has kind of a fascinating story of ups and downs in her life that lead her to taking an interview with Sotomayor two blocks from where her dad was murdered. It's just like it's incredible story. We'll link to it.

I think it also was such an interesting reminder of the way that sometimes your interest can get piqued in the law is that you interact with a lawyer who maybe helps you at a challenging time. That doesn't mean if you still shouldn't go and do all these other things but I think that lawyers also have the power to touch people in these really critical points. If you had that experience and you can pull on that importance when you're doing your law school work I think that can be really powerful.

Ned Luce: Well, and often applicants to law school will write about those experiences in their essays when they do J.D. programs or I've often seen this with foreign lawyers applying to LLM programs. Many of them had experiences like that with lawyers in their home countries, whether it's India or China that drove their interest in studying law.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's a really good point. So anyway, it's great article, I'll send it to you guys after this our podcast recording but I'll also post in the show notes. I hope everybody gets to read it. She sounds like a phenomenal woman. I think we're all lucky that she's going to be clerking at the Supreme Court.

All right, so let's dive in. So now we've kind of talked about whether or not you should apply to law school and then Doretta, you were mentioning not only that the decision was to apply at all but also where to apply. So how just do folks start chewing on that decision point?

Doretta M: Well, there are a lot of factors that should be taken into account in [deciding where to apply](#). I think again you want to try as best you can to take the big picture and look beyond law school and see what your goals are going to be. For example, if you know that you're going to want to live in a particular city, in a particular geographic area, then schools in that area might be the best fit for you because they will tend to have a strong local and regional alumni network that will help you in your job search.

If you are in the position with a strong enough record to apply to nationally prominent law schools, then that is almost certainly going to be the right choice because the options will be so much broader for you and you can take that degree and really practice anywhere.

If you are going to need a significant amount of financial aid, you'll probably want to apply to schools with the most reasonable tuition which are likely to be your in-state public law schools. Schools that can offer the most generous financial aid, which may be some of the more prestigious schools that have substantial merit aid available.

Lee Burgess: Right.

Doretta M: Those are some of the things that you want to take into account. Others might be special practice areas. Some law schools have strengths in particular areas even at the JD level such as health law or corporate law.

Ned Luce: Trial advocacy, something like that.

Lee Burgess: IP, intellectual property.

Doretta M: If there are things like that that you know that you're interested in, you will want to research schools that will you serve you in that regard.

Lee Burgess: What about loan repayment programs for public interest work? Is that something that students should look at even if they know that they want to do public interest work that they can get information on that going in?

Doretta M: Yes. I think that's a very good point. I think those programs have really proliferated over the years and are offered at many schools, kind of a standard. No longer the innovative programs that they were years ago, they're quite well established. So I think that's excellent advice as well as to look for those loan repayment programs. It's good to have those options. Of course, as with many things in life, people change plans or their priorities shift so although I'm suggesting that you look at the long term, it's certainly possible that you'll start law school thinking you're on one path and then discover your interests and passions lie elsewhere or your personal life causes you to have to move to a different city. We all get derailed in those ways but those are some of the factors that should be taken into account.

And keeping that option open of able to take a lower paying job, I think that's very good advice. So in terms of loan repayment plans or schools that will offer significant financial aid.

Ned Luce: And just lower tuition. State schools and so on are good options for that.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, I mean basically there should be a lot of research being done before you actually get, pending the admission paperwork because it sounds like people should be really thinking about this. When do you think folks should be starting to chew on these decisions? Is this something you do kind of as you're trying to apply to law school or do you think that they should be chewing on this, like the year before they apply to law school?

Ned Luce: Yeah. I would say starting probably the year before, in college. So that if you want to go to law school right out of college, then you should be thinking about it junior year because you're going to have to start preparing to take the LSAT in maybe the summer after your junior year or the fall of your senior year. You're

going to need to get those applications in during your senior year. So yeah, you want to start thinking about it ways in advance, for sure.

Doretta M: Of course, many people will be applying who are already out of college and working and that can be a huge advantage in applications. At many schools, a majority of the JD students now have had some work experience.

Lee Burgess: I know, that's what I did. Is that what you guys did or did you guys go straight through?

Doretta M: Ned went straight through.

Ned Luce: I did not. I went straight through and it was fine for me, it worked out fine. I enjoyed law school and so on but I do think it's generally better to have at least a couple of years out in the working world before going to law school.

Lee Burgess: Doretta, I can't remember, did you go straight through?

Doretta M: I did not. I worked in academic publishing. I worked for a test publishing company and I actually wrote standardized test questions. Really handy when I took the LSAT.

Lee Burgess: That's funny. I think I took four years off. I did political public relations and then I was a high-tech consultant for Accenture doing implementation of software systems and then I went in-house and did the similar work in a corporate environment. I was really glad that I had had those experiences, if for nothing else, is it was a great motivation to go back to a school because I saw that career path which was a, there was a profitable career path but I sat and I looked at the people who had the jobs, you know, one step ahead of me, two steps ahead of me. You have that moment when you're like, oh oh, I don't want their jobs so, you need a new plan.

Doretta M: That's exactly right and that's exactly how I felt and in test publishing world where I was working, the people with those jobs ahead of me had PhD's in psychometrics and that was really not an interest to me at that point. Finding an alternative was a very good move for me.

Ned Luce: And I think this actually circles back to something we were talking about before which is the wide array of types of practice of law and if you've been out of college for a few years in the working environment, you might actually get a broader sense of what lawyers do and it might give you a better idea of what you want to do as an attorney.

Lee Burgess: True.

Ned Luce: That's very true, and I've certainly worked with students who have had that experience in their post-college jobs that have interacted with lawyers and that has inspired their interest then in attending law school.

Lee Burgess: I think one thing though that's kind of funny about my experience is I was not happy working for a big international company, traveling for work all the time and having very little work-life balance, and then ironically, I took a similar job at a big law firm when I graduated. And then it was like shouldn't have been surprising to anyone including myself that when all those similar things started happening that I wasn't happy yet again.

So I will say it still involves some critical evaluation of things like work environment and maybe why you want to leave the career path that you're on to pivot because maybe I could have made some difference decisions. Hey, it all worked out for me in the end and I'm glad I have this alternative life that I've been able to build but it is interesting because I did have kind of an aha moment sitting in my big law office going like how do I feel like I have the same exact life that I was trying to leave before. Whoops, maybe I needed some therapy to help me figure that out or something before I made job decisions in law school, I don't know. Maybe that's why law schools offer free therapy for o many other students, to make better decisions like that.

Doretta M: That's a very good point and gets back to those ideas of those different practice areas and different lifestyles within legal practice. I mean, I certainly found in private practice at a large firm that one of the things that I was completely incompatible with was the uncertainty. I practiced as labor and employment law, we had emergencies all the time. You never knew what would happen when you walked in the door. Some people thrived on it and found it very exciting, I found it just unbearable and I really preferred having a sense of control and planning and knowing what I was going to do each day.

Ned Luce: I found that exciting sometimes and unbearable at other times, depending on what the matter was that came up at the last minute. But it's interesting as we're talking about this I think back to last week when I was walking around downtown Philadelphia and encountered two of my former students who had graduated from law school in 2009 and they had both started as litigators and didn't like it. I think one of them actually was family law and the other one was litigation. Due to their unpredictable schedules and all the conflict that we talked about before, they didn't like it that they had both landed in house as privacy lawyers at a big insurance company.

Lee Burgess: Interesting.

Ned Luce: They seemed very, very happy. They had reasonable work schedules, they're both expecting their first children next spring and said that their jobs were going to be very accommodating for that. And so, it had taken them a couple of moves

out there but they had both eventually landed on something that really worked well for them as practicing attorneys.

Lee Burgess:

It seems like one of the themes out of all these decisions, whether or not you should apply at all and where to apply is critically evaluate all of these decision points. When you talk to people, really think about putting yourself in their shoes. Does this life sound good to me? Start thinking about is conflict okay with me? Do I want to show up at work and be putting out fires all the time or do I want to just like have my to do list and be able to just go down my to do list and then go home? That's just a totally different environment and there are pros and cons to each.

I have friends that are criminal law defense attorneys or criminal defense attorneys and they thrive on that. Like when the phone call comes, that it's like they can jump into action and yeah, for a lot of people that'll just drive you mad. It's like that you just want to go to work and just be able to feel like you're moving things forward. I have other friends who to do MNA that you'll just work like crazy people for a week and then it'll be slow for a while. You work 24 hours a day basically for a week when somebody is trying to do a merger and then you're like, oh well now it's back to normal until the next merger comes. Some people really thrive on that.

Doretta M:

Right, and those are very good things to try to figure out before you choose a practice area. Another thing, speaking of people having some work experience before applying to law school and choosing the right school, something else to look for is the possibility of going to law school part time and looking at schools that offer evening programs, which not all schools do. Some offer an evening program that typically takes four years to get a JD degree and may require you to take summer classes as well as classes during the school year. Some schools offer part-time option with daytime classes.

And so, those are things that I think also drive some decisions particularly for people who may not have geographic mobility, may want to continue working in their current job while going to school. Perhaps an employer may even be paying for it. It may put them on a different career path within their company or maybe they're making a career change.

Lee Burgess:

I know also for some women who have young children, the part-time option is become quite popular. I've talked to a lot of moms because they can oftentimes do either work part time during the day or to some of their childcare and taking care of the kids during the day and then like handoff the kids to the other partner and go to school at night. And so, it allows them to kind of create that balance as well. I mean, hey, it's still a ton of work and you're so working like a dog but it allows you a little more flexibility if that's what you're trying to take on, like a family and a law school experience at the same time right.

Doretta M: Right, and we certainly had students like that when Ned and I taught previously. Our school for a period even had classes on Saturdays so the part-time program going like two evenings a week and on Saturdays. I was a new mom at that point and I found that great from a childcare perspective in terms of working. As you point, it was also helpful for students who were parents and perhaps a parent could be at home on a Saturday.

Lee Burgess: I was born while my mom was in law school and apparently, I spent many, many hours in like a swing in the law review office. That was apparently where I spent my formative baby years. So I guess it was meant to be. I guess when you're like raising the Law Review Office maybe you have to go to law school.

All right, well, let's pivot a little bit and talk about some of the trends in admission, you know, with the changes in enrollment numbers. We've heard about law schools closing. It feels like left and right although I don't think it's happened that often but there seems to be a lot going in this corner of the world.

Doretta M: Yes. Admissions took, or applications I should say took a real nosedive, I guess that was around ...

Ned Luce: Around 2010 or so.

Doretta M: Around that time between 2010 to 2012. We're not going to cite precise statistics but the numbers of applications really crashed and current law school enrollment now nationwide is down I think about, I just said I wouldn't cite statistics but generally, down about 30% from its high point, from its peak.

So that has sent just ripple effects throughout legal education causing the closure of several schools. So those schools that other problems as well that are beyond the scope of our conversation. But also causing some schools to either admit students that they might not have admitted previously in order to fill their classes or to reduce their class size in order to maintain the quality of their students.

That means that, although there's been a slight, slight increase in applicants over the past couple of years, this is still a very interesting time to apply to law school and still a time where students really have an opportunity to get into some more prestigious schools than they might not have 10 years ago.

Ned Luce: Yeah, and even in some cases with scholarship money and these trends were already underway by around 2011, 2012. We were still teaching at law school then and started to hear stories from admissions officers and people at other law schools and the enrollments were already dropping at that point.

Doretta M: Really all the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008 ...

Lee Burgess: Yes, which is when I graduated from law school. So let's talk about like the best time to graduate from law school. Basically, it's not that the world revolves around me but I graduated from undergrad in 2001 right before the bubble like completely imploded in the tech world and then it's I graduated law school in 2008 and then there's a new financial crisis and the firms are downsizing and I'm like, what is wrong with my timing.

Doretta M: You mentioned that your firm's downsizing, that knowledge that the employment market was contracting drove the reduction in law school applicants because I think that word trickled out that law school was no longer a sure bet, that you could end up going to school and not getting a job when you graduated and that really led to fewer students applying.

Ned Luce: There were highly publicized articles about it at the time too. There was at least one in the New York Times that I recall had an impact and I think scared some people off going to law school.

Lee Burgess: I think, and Doretta, this is something near and dear to our hearts because we do help people prepare for the bar exam, I think one of the things that I find concerning about this trend is if you are someone who has routinely struggled on standardized tests, and I'm not saying that like you just can't knock them out of the park but that starting maybe with the SAT's or multiple choice tests in college or the LSAT, that there are some major concerns about needing to take tests like that but then you can get into law school now because you're like, oh well, it's a little easier to get in, a lot of people forget that there's still one more test at the end that you have to be able to overcome, which is the bar exam.

I think when looking at law schools, it is worthwhile to talk to them about what their bar passage rates are and what the resources are to help their students get licensed because it is heartbreaking to me when somebody gets through three years of law school and then keeps running up against this wall with the bar. And maybe that is something they need to have thought about in the beginning.

Doretta M: An important resource to help them think about that is the required ABA disclosures that are on the website of every ABA accredited law school. You'll see these referred to sometimes as Standard 509 disclosures, simply ABA disclosures. This information I think is often not considered by applicants. I think a lot of people are not aware of it. The ABA mandates that this information be provided and it's in the standardized format which is great so for any school that you're looking at, you can find this on the website and see the form and it will look the same for each school which will really help you to make those comparisons.

We'd like to talk a little bit about what you will find there. Some of the most important information is the G.P.A and LSAT scores and the number of applicants offers and matriculants for the school. So this is useful because it will help you decide where to apply, you'll see if you're really a competitive

applicant for that school by seeing if your G.P.A. is in the range and if your LSAT score is in the range for that school.

You want to apply to some schools hopefully where your numbers are on the high end because those are the places where you're more likely to get merit aid. This information will help you put together a good list of schools from the perspective of where you're likely to be admitted.

Another really important bit of information on this form is the attrition rate, the JD attrition rate, which again, I think a lot of applicants don't pay any attention to and that's broken into categories of academic transfer and other. If you see a school with a lot of academic attrition, those are people who are failing out. And that really causes you to consider what's going on at that law school, are they admitting a large number of people to fill seats and get that tuition money in the first year and then having the students fall out either because they're poorly prepared and unable to do well in law school or perhaps the school's not providing sufficient support.

I think a lot of academic attrition is a red flag for sure.

Lee Burgess: And there are schools that kind of have that policy. I hate to say that but you got to dig into it. There are schools that that's kind of like if you talk to people, that's like what they're known for. They let you in and then they if you can't cut it, you're and that's it.

Ned Luce: Yeah, and that has a real effect on student morale too, especially among first years. If a lot of them are in fear of spending a lot of money and working really hard and then flunking out, it can be unpleasant atmosphere.

Doretta M: That's very true, that's very true. You know, law school is hard enough. You want to be in a collegial collaborative atmosphere, not one where people are fighting with each other to be able to continue there.

The attrition rate also indicates the number of students who transfer out of the school. Transfers are a little bit more difficult to assess because people may transfer for any number of reasons, from personal reasons wanting to move to a different city or financial reasons but a lot of times, people are able to transfer to a more prestigious school to, I'll just say it, a better school than where they started.

Ned Luce: A less expensive school.

Doretta M: Or a less expensive school. Those are two of the biggest reasons for that. Again, I think a lot of transfers, a high number of transfers could be a red flag, could also be a sign of opportunity that this school could be a good starting point and a springboard for you to move on to a school that's a better fit and a school that may have better career options for you or better cost options.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that is a really good point. I don't know if I fully realized that all those disclosures were on, I mean, granted it's been a few years since I've been researching law schools but how many disclosures that they had to make to allow you to do the side by side comparison.

Doretta M: Yes, it's a big issue for the schools in terms of compiling this data and complying with this mandate, but it's a goldmine of information. The last piece of it that I'd like to flag is the bar pass rates because they are right there for the past three years on these ABA disclosures and you'll see the number of students from the law school who took the exams and passed and the comparison between the school's pass rate and the average pass rate for the state. They displayed the jurisdictions where the majority of students took the exam so displayed on absolutely every single jurisdiction. Those give you a very, very good sense of the bar pass rate from your school.

Lee Burgess: Yeah. So important.

Ned Luce: You do want to take into account the state's overall pass rate and how well the school does relative to the overall pass rate in the state. And when you've got a passage rate from graduates of the school that's lower than the state's overall passage rate, that could be a little bit of a red flag.

Lee Burgess: I think that's true. Then the states that have low pass rates like California, you would also I think behoove yourselves to go on to the California bar website and look up these statistics broken out by school that they publish and then they talk about the schools that are ABA accredited, the schools that are non-ABA accredited. First time takers, repeat takers because sometimes you kind of have to dig through some of those numbers too and say, okay, well, is this school have only like 50% or 40% of first time takers passing.

California most years, the statewide numbers for ABA schools and first-time takers is like around 70% or so, give or take depending on the year. And if your school's pulling at 40% or 50% of first time takers, I would pause, seriously pause.

Ned Luce: Yes, Pennsylvania does that as well. Gives information for the different law schools and does break it out by first time takers versus repeat takers and that is a really important layer to analyze.

Doretta M: So in addition to these ABA disclosure, checking the bar examiners website for the jurisdiction where you plan to take the bar exam would be additional information in helping you compare the performance across schools if the state is one that publishes that information.

Lee Burgess: All right. So after you've done all this research, we've given our listeners a long to do list of research. But see if you don't want to do all this research like don't go to law school. All you have to do is like do research and writing in law school.

It's a good test of whether or not you want to go down this path. If you decide to go, like how do you apply? What are the admissions criteria and what are the things that students really need to be thinking about?

Doretta M: Well, the biggest criteria are going to be testing, standardized testing and your undergraduate G.P.A. Those are the two most important.

I'll talk first about the undergraduate G.P.A. Obviously, the higher the better. You'll see those statistics on those ABA disclosures we were talking about. The nice thing is that your major doesn't matter. People talk about pre-law programs in undergrad or taking pre-law courses. As Ned mentioned, you may want to take a law related course if that's of interest to you in undergrad but there's really no such thing as a pre-law major. You can major in anything and that is a really nice flexible aspect of applying to law school. But you do want to do well and the higher your G.P.A. the better obviously, as in all things.

So that's one point.

Ned Luce: Does it matter which undergraduate school? They take that into account as well. So it's not just the raw G.P.A but they factor in how they perceive, what they perceive to be the strength of the undergraduate institution.

Lee Burgess: Well, that's a loaded statement. What they perceive, you know, it's like ... I mean, I think it's honest but I'm just saying.

Ned Luce: Yeah, try to be fair.

Doretta M: That's a very good point and that idea of that you need to have a higher G.P.A. if you are at it less prestigious school is true, you know, for undergrad applying to law school and this is a whole other topic but it's certainly true at law school in terms of them applying for jobs and moving on. So where you were into that that G.P.A. will come into play as well, that is true.

The other major component is of course standardized testing and we're living in a slightly interesting era regarding that at the moment. The standard test of course is the LSAT and the LSAT is offered four dates throughout the year. In June, September, December, and February. It's very important to prepare and do as well as you can because unlike the SAT where you might have had score choice you might not have reported all your scores, for the LSAT, the law schools will have access to all of your scores, for every seating of the LSAT.

So that's different I think from undergrad where we're used to now score choice or not necessarily having to submit scores. So, this means you want to really be well prepared and do as well as you can the first time you take the LSAT. Should you take it a second time, you can. I think a lot of people do but you have to do that with the understanding that both of those scores will be reported to the law schools.

The interesting twist now is that some schools are accepting the GRE in lieu of the LSAT. And this is a very new trend. Currently, only about four schools have said that they will accept it in lieu of the LSAT. Those would be Harvard, Northwestern, Georgetown, and the University of Arizona. So that would be a pretty interesting list of schools to apply to.

Lee Burgess: That's true. Talk about a variety of law school experiences there. Variety of locations with a variety of histories.

Doretta M: Exactly, exactly. It's an interesting trend. The ABA has not determined whether they will continue or whether they really consider the GRE to be acceptable for law school applications. I think it would be absolutely foolhardy to take the GRE and not to take the LSAT because it would limit you to applying to just those handful of schools. If you could take the LSAT once and get, excuse me, The GRE and get into Harvard Law School, more power to you but this is a pretty limited list of schools at the moment.

Ned Luce: And three of them are extremely selective. So they're very difficult to get into anyway. You want to be taking the LSAT.

Doretta M: Yes. So you absolutely have to take the LST. I found interestingly that at some schools with joint programs, the GRE may come into play. For example, now at UCLA, if you were concurrently applying to a graduate program as well as to the law school or if you're already enrolled in a UCLA graduate program and applying to their law school, you can submit the GRE only and will not have to take the LSAT.

That's very interesting as well and I'll be curious to see if that trend continues with the UC schools or elsewhere. The big difference, well, there are many differences but one of the biggest differences between the LSAT and the GRE is that the GRE has a quantitative reasoning requirement a math section. That makes it a pretty different test than the LSAT. And of course, there is no data on whether the GRE is predictive of law school performance whereas there is a lot of data of course on that for the LSAT.

I just think the GRE it's interesting, it's sort of out there on the margins and it may become more important in law school admissions as the years go by, we'll see if other schools follow these for trendsetters. But at the moment, you must take the LSAT.

Lee Burgess: It is fascinating. It will be interesting to see how this plays out over a longer period and whether or not that, is diversity in applicants one of the motivating factors for that, do you think?

Doretta M: Yes. My understanding is that that is the stated motive for that and I haven't seen any data support that. I'm not sure that more under-represented minority applicants take the GRE. I'm not sure if that's the case but that seems to be one

of the motivating factors. To look at it a bit more cynically, as we've mentioned, law school applications have been down, I think that allowing people to submit GRE just widens the pool of potential applicants in general, not a diversity basis in terms of the way we typically think of diversity in terms of under-represented minorities but just in terms of applicants in general.

You could imagine someone who took the GRE because they thought they were going to apply to grad school and sociology and then they just toss off that application to Harvard Law. It's potentially broadening the pool of applicants.

Lee Burgess: It'll be interesting to see. I think what's a little interesting about that is it goes back to our discussion earlier in the podcast about really wanting to go to law school. I wonder if they're also going to start pulling applicants that are just kind of like throwing out applications to a variety of schools and seeing what fits instead of maybe really investigating the profession and making sure it's a good fit.

Doretta M: I agree and I think that the skills that are tested on the LSAT really do correlate with what you will be doing in law school.

Ned Luce: Yeah, they do.

Doretta M: If you hate those logic games on the LSAT, maybe law school is not the right call for you.

Ned Luce: On the other, some of these topics on the GRE, the quantitative reasoning with algebra and geometry, there is certainly logic involved there that relates. I used to tell my legal writing students sometimes that it might be helpful to think of it almost as more like a geometry proof than an essay, and that seemed to help them actually think about legal problems in a more logical way. So I see some connection there but generally speaking the LSAT tests law school skills or aptitude for law school reasonably well.

Doretta M: Right. And so at this point in time with so few schools accepting the GRE, that's really a nonstarter for me, taking that rather than the LSAT.

Lee Burgess: All right. Any other things that people really need start thinking about when they're looking forward to the admission process?

Doretta M: They also need to think about getting letters of recommendation. I think this is a problem for a number of applicants who fail to develop close enough relationships with undergraduate professors who could then write adequate, hopefully better than adequate, recommendations for them.

I think that for listeners who are in college, it's not too late to try to develop those relationships and get to know someone on the faculty who will be able to write a really insightful helpful recommendation letter.

Lee Burgess: I think it's the hardest for folks who go to the large schools. I have one friend who was talking to me about getting letters of recommendations at her university and she had transferred in from a community college and it was even harder for her because by the time she was kind of asking for those recommendations, she hadn't even been at the school very long.

Ned Luce: Sure.

Doretta M: Right. That's right, that's right. The thing to do in that situation is to do make an appointment with the professor and explain why you're asking for this letter of recommendation, provide your resume. Some will even suggest that you draft the letter or bullet points of what you think should be included in the letter. Try to make that personal connection and provide that faculty member with an opportunity to get to know you a bit outside of a classroom.

I know when I was asked to write recommendation letters for students that had not come to office hours and had not asked questions or participated in class, I found it very difficult because I have nothing to say, really, other than, well you did well in my class. The paper you got an A, that's nice, but who are you? You sat in the back of the room. I've got nothing here to say. And so, I would encourage those students to come and talk to me and for us to get to know each other a little bit and again to provide that resume and personal information. So I would have some fuller sense of them in order to write a good letter.

Ned Luce: I had the same experience in my case. Typically, the students who had come to visit me in the office were the ones who did ask me for letters of recommendation. I still remember as a college student when I was asking professors, one of them I asked, I had not met in person. It was a big lecture class. She had minimal office hours and our contact with the class was mostly through a TA who ran our small sections. It worked out nonetheless and I was not out of huge state school either, it's just not always easy.

Doretta M: That's right. You can also get recommendations from employers especially people who've been out of work, excuse me, out of school for a bit, out of college for a bit and working. Getting a recommendation from an employer can be helpful as well.

So we have test scores, undergraduate G.P.A, recommendation letters, and then the last really significant piece is the writing that will be required.

Lee Burgess: So what thoughts do you guys have about setting yourself up to really make sure that the writing component stands out. I would assume that because writing such a big part of the law school experience, the schools take this pretty seriously.

Ned Luce: Yes, I think they do. I think they do. They want to see good writing. They also want to see a fairly clearly articulated motivation for going to law school and ideally beyond that even for this particular law school where they can express an interest in a particular school.

That's true for LLM applications as well which we may talk about more later. On that side, there is no equivalent of the Common App. Each law school has its own question and it's very important for the students to articulate quite clearly and with some focus why they want to go to that particular program.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that's interesting.

Doretta M: For JD applications, again, through LSAC, the Law School Admission Council, that personal statement is more similar to the Common App type idea that we had from college, in that you'll write a personal statement that will go to all of these schools. It's open ended and it's an opportunity to tell your story and describe yourself, your motivations for going to law school and any experiences that really led you to that path.

Most of these personal statements are not the sort of soul searching, deeply revealing kind of college application essay that you may have written at that stage of life. This tends to be much more focused on your interest in law school and what you will bring to that law school community, what experiences, you'd had that have set you up to succeed in law school and possibly a view to what you would hope to be doing with your degree afterwards. So that's a piece of it.

There's some other possible writing components that are optional. There's an opportunity to do an optional diversity statement and this is a great opportunity for students who come from under-represented backgrounds in law school. So, under-represented minorities, low income students, first generation students, students who are immigrants, students who perhaps are not immigrants but who have grown up abroad and then returned to the US. Anything of that nature, you can kind of put in there to show what you are going to bring to the law school community and what perspective you are going to bring.

Now this possible optional statement kind of strikes panic in the hearts of students who feel they are not diverse and have nothing to say. It's okay to ignore that. If you're an upper middle class white applicant, you probably don't have anything to say on this aspect of the application and that's fine. You can just truly treat that as an option. But if you have anything interesting in your background to put in there, it's a very good opportunity to show that side of your background.

Some law schools have supplemental questions that I think are again, they say, oh they're really, really optional. I can't imagine not taking the option. If you really want to get into this law school, put in the effort and answer its optional questions. Some of them are pretty strange. My favorite comes from

Georgetown. It is, fill a five and a half inches long by two and a half inch wide box in any way you'd like.

Lee Burgess: That's amazing.

Doretta M: It sounds very much like a psychological test.

Lee Burgess: It does.

Doretta M: You can submit that on a paper application. You can color in the box or draw a cartoon.

Ned Luce: Or another question they have on here, give us your top 10 list.

Doretta M: You could even send Georgetown a video of something about you.

Lee Burgess: It's like applying to a reality T.V. show now. You have to make a video. You can apply to survivor and you can apply to Georgetown all at the same time.

Doretta M: Exactly. Video applications are really a trend in college applications, but I think it's a bit unusual to see that format for law school. Georgetown swears it's truly optional but you want to make a little effort and take them up on one of their strange requests, I think that you do.

So there's that. And then the fourth potential piece of writing is the general addendum where you have the opportunity to explain any sort of special circumstances in your application. I've had students use this for things like gaps in a resume. If you've had anything unusual that might require explanation.

Lee Burgess: Is this where you would put like if you needed to take a medical leave of absence from your undergrad or something like that, that's the appropriate place to talk about it.

Doretta M: That is precisely the right, and yes, people do tend to use it for those sorts of situations.

So, that's the writing component and of course, all of this goes through the Law School Admission Council, LSAC. You go to their website, you set up an account, you do all of this online except maybe your coloring project for Georgetown, on paper.

Lee Burgess: I almost want to start including that in my interview package. I would just be fascinated to see what people come up with.

Doretta M: It really would, it really would. That's the place though. Much like listeners will remember the Common App from applying to college, LSAC is the way to do that for law school and it has its companion Credential Assembly Service that

will put together your letters of recommendation and transcripts, all that will go through this one portal.

Lee Burgess: Well, you know, there's a little part of me though that is happy to hear that the law schools are starting to use opportunities to show some creativity in these application processes because I think you know maybe some students have a hard time standing out just by their G.P.A. or their LSAT's or things like that. So maybe they're able to highlight some future creative legal minds by the coloring project, I mean, who knows, right?

Maybe the next Supreme Court justice could have done an amazing coloring project. We don't know. Maybe someday somebody can like do some longitudinal studies, the effects of the creative application process in future legal careers.

Doretta M: Right.

Lee Burgess: Well, I did maybe take some time as we kind of wind up in a little bit to talk a little bit about LLM applications because I know that's something that you guys have some experience with as well. So could you kind of talk a little bit about what LLM programs are and if you're considering an LLM program, what you should start chewing on when you start to compare those programs.

Ned Luce: LLM programs are advanced degrees in law. LLM means basically a Master's in law and I think it has that name because in much of the world, the first degree in law is actually a bachelor's, an LLB. We have the LLM terminology here even though our first degree in law is a doctorate degree.

For these programs, it's helpful to distinguish between people who've graduated from law school in the United States and foreign law graduates. People who've graduated from law school in the United States, they're typically applying to a specialized program that is going to enhance their career or help them in an area of law in which they're already practicing. They're not going to go to just a general unrestricted LLM where they study American law in general. It's going to be something very specific like securities regulation or tax or environmental law or bankruptcy or intellectual property, something like that.

American law graduates are typically applying to LLM programs after they've been out of law school for a while. Some of them have gone a little ways in a practice area and then want to study that area in-depth. Now, some do go into LLM programs right out law school. Often that's for people who know they want to be tax lawyers because that's one practice area in the U.S. in which a large percentage of high level practitioners do have LLM degrees, and that also I would say includes people who practice in estate planning which has a heavy tax component of course.

Those are the types of programs now. When we're talking about foreign law graduates who are a very, very large percentage of the LLM student population in the United States, they often go into these specialized programs as well but many of them go into general LLM programs that are maybe an LLM program just in general American law in which they will take courses that JD students typically take in the first year and other bar related courses or core courses. Things like evidence, constitutional criminal procedure, federal income tax and so on.

They might be doing that with the goal of sitting for a US bar exam, most frequently New York or California or more frequently, to go back to their home countries and practice law and they find the LLM degree enormously useful when there are perhaps representing American companies doing business overseas or representing companies based in their home country that's doing business in the United States. Trans-national work in general.

Lee Burgess: I think the UBE, the Uniform Bar Exam is changing that too because I know LLM's that I've spoken to are oftentimes interested in taking the UBE which is now what's in New York as well as many other jurisdictions around the country because it gives them a lot of flexibility if they are practicing from abroad and they need to be able to have a license at different points in different states, it's going to be a more flexible option for folks whereas you fight your way to a license in California, that's great but it's just going to allow you to do work in California.

Ned Luce: States treat foreign law graduates differently. Not all states allow foreign lawyers even with LLM degrees to sit for the bar exam. An important point for them is that if they're interested in a bar exam, they really need to look into the eligibility requirements carefully and at least in the case of New York and California, they need to apply for an eligibility determination before they can then actually register to sit for the bar exam.

Lee Burgess: Good point.

Ned Luce: Yeah. One interesting aspect of the LLM programs in the United States is that there's a geographical component to it. So in other words, a program in a particular area of law might be offered by a school in a region in which that area of law is extremely important to the local economy. University of Miami for instance has one in estate planning and as you know, there are a lot of retirees in Florida.

Georgetown has one in national security law because of course being in Washington D.C. there they have access to the national security apparatus in ways that most law schools do not. Houston bills itself as the energy capital of the world and so lo and behold, University of Houston has an LLM in energy, environment and national resources. It goes on and on, there are many examples like this, which is kind of fun to look at.

Lee Burgess: Yeah, that is really interesting. It sounds like it's similar to the general law school application process. If you're considering doing an LLM as a foreign attorney, you've got your research cut out for you because you need to figure out what jurisdictions you might want to become licensed in. If that's a goal, you need to evaluate the different schools and specialty programs. Like you said, if you are from abroad but you work in energy, maybe you need to be in a place at a school that's going to offer you specialized courses and energy law to make it really valuable for you.

Ned Luce: Yes, that's right. That's absolutely right. Now, one thing about the foreign lawyers is sometimes they come here thinking they are not interested in taking an American bar exam but then once they're here and living in the United States and studying the law here, they then become very interested in taking the bar exam. And so, some of them then try to configure their courses for bar eligibility and that and that can be a challenge. Usually, they can manage it at least in New York and California.

Lee Burgess: Well, that's really great advice. Just this idea that no matter what you do, interacting with these law schools, you kind of got to do some groundwork to make sure you land in the spot that's going to help you reach the goals that you have like everything else. Maybe that's our overarching theme for this whole discussion. Do your homework so you know where you land is where you want to be.

Ned Luce: For American educated lawyers looking at LLM degrees, that's usually not an issue. They're driven to the LLM program by something they definitely want to do. They're typically in good shape with respect to that.

Lee Burgess: Nice, awesome. Well, that's all great advice but with that, I just looked at our clock and we're about out of time. I want to thank you guys for joining us on this podcast. I think there were a lot of really great nuggets in here for those thinking about attending law school or applying to an LLM so thanks for joining us.

Doretta M: Okay, thank you Lee.

Lee Burgess: If you want to learn more about Admission Logic, you can go to their website which is admission-logic.com or you can email Doretta and Ned directly at @admissionlogic.pa@gmail.com or of course you can write to us at the Law School Toolbox and we will connect you.

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Thanks for listening. Good luck on your law school applications and we'll talk soon.

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- [How to Conduct Great Informational Interviews](#)
- [Washington Post, "From Her Dad's Killing During the Crack Epidemic to a Supreme Court Clerkship."](#)
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