



INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS OF TEXAS ATTORNEYS

The information included on this page is for educational and informational purposes only. Please consult an attorney regarding specific legal questions.

Becoming a Lawyer

Law is a popular vocational choice for many Americans. To help compare your career goals with the demands of a law career, here are answers to frequently asked questions about the legal profession.

What are the education and licensing requirements to be a lawyer?

Seven years of education following high school is typically required to obtain a law degree: four years of undergraduate school and three years of law school. Law schools generally require a bachelor's degree for admission. A graduate with a Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from a law school approved by the American Bar Association must then take the bar examination, which is a comprehensive test of knowledge in many areas of law. After passing this test, the person is licensed to practice law. Both applicants to law school and candidates for the bar exam are screened by the Texas Board of Law Examiners (www.ble.state.tx.us) for qualifications and standards of moral character.

As an undergraduate, should I take certain types of courses?

Many law schools recommend the broadest possible undergraduate education. There is no required or suggested course of study for pre-law students. Consider courses that develop organized thinking, a command of the English language (both written and spoken), and the ability to work well with others. The self-discipline and study habits required in law should be developed in undergraduate courses.



What are the entrance requirements to law school?

Admission is usually based on undergraduate class standing and scores on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). Many schools also will consider other factors, such as letters of recommendation, student leadership activities, work experience, community involvement, and extracurricular activities. Applying to law school and taking the LSAT should be completed at least eight months, and up to one year, before enrollment.

How much will law school cost?

Tuition and fees for law school may range from \$1,500 to \$12,000 per semester for a full-time student. Total cost varies per institution and whether it is a public or private school. Check with the Admissions Office for the current tuition fees for the school you wish to attend. Books average \$500 to \$750 for

each semester of law school. Financial aid, work/study programs, and state or federally funded student loan programs are available. Other sources of aid may include local bar association scholarships or private scholarship funds created to assist law students. Some schools also provide special programs for minority students.

What career options are available?

Private practice means practicing law in your own firm or associating with a firm that employs hundreds of attorneys. The attorney in a small firm often must be a "jack of all trades" in order to take a broad variety of cases. Attorneys in large firms often specialize in certain areas of law.

Corporate law usually means working in the law department of a large business, performing legal work as varied as the activities of the company. If the company has diverse interests and the



counsel staff is large, attorneys may specialize just as in a large law firm.

Government employment at the federal, state, or local level involves such activities as hearings conducted by regulatory agencies, prosecuting criminal defendants, representing a government agency in court, drafting regulations or ordinances, and evaluating the legal aspects of policy and other decisions by a governing body or its chief administrator.

Public interest law is the effort to provide representation to people and interests that historically have been unrepresented or underrepresented in the legal process. These include the poor and others without access to courts, administrative agencies, and other forums where decisions affecting them are made.

The judiciary offers the opportunity to serve the public as a municipal, state, or federal judge and preside over criminal and civil court proceedings.

Academic positions include teaching law and law-related courses at universities and colleges. Other academic positions include law librarians, editors, and administrators.

Military service in armed services' legal offices may provide a variety of legal experiences and an opportunity to live in many places. Like private practice, military legal offices may be small or large and may offer an opportunity to gain experience in specialty areas.

What are my chances of getting hired after graduation?

Job hunting is always competitive because approximately 3,000 new lawyers are licensed in Texas each year. Opportunities vary from area to area, with the most attractive openings having many applicants. The strongest competition for job openings is in large cities, while smaller towns tend to offer more opportunity. Graduates should consider

a full range of employment options to be successful in their job search.

Can I be involved in law-related work without a license to practice law?

An individual cannot give legal advice, offer representation in court, or handle many other legal matters without a license to practice law in Texas. However, legal assistants supervised by and responsible to lawyers now do many tasks traditionally performed by lawyers. Paralegal education and training courses are offered at several Texas colleges and universities and other institutions.

Online resources for those contemplating a law career include:

State Bar of Texas
www.texasbar.com

American Bar Association
www.abanet.org

Law School Admissions Council
www.lsac.org

This article is excerpted from *Becoming a Lawyer*, prepared as a public service by the State Bar of Texas. For a complete copy of the pamphlet, write to Public Information Department, State Bar of Texas, P.O. Box 12487, Austin 78711-2487; call (800)204-2222, ext. 1800; or visit www.texasbar.com.

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