Appendix D - **UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM**
SENIOR PROJECT - APPROVAL

Name: Chirag Shah

College: Business/Arts + Sciences Department: Finance/Economics

Faculty Mentor: Rhonda Fawbush

PROJECT TITLE: Pre-Law Handbook: Choosing a Law School

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

Signed: Rhonda D. Fawbush, Faculty Mentor

Date: 8/11/99

Comments (Optional): Having only had a short time to review the paper* and given that it is my first time mentoring, I want to let the recipient of this approval know the parameters within which it was given. I enjoyed reading the paper, and it gave some valuable internet cites and thought provoking questions to the reader. He could've taken more time with grammar (which he admits) and I would've liked to have seen a more developed bibliography.

* Please see attached letter of explanation from Chirag.

Dear Ms. Fawbush,

I am so sorry to do this to you, but I need you to please look over my project and approve it. If you could please look at it by Wednesday morning I would truly appreciate it. I am going to NY and will be back Wednesday. I can change anything you think I should then before I turn it in. I have to turn it in Wednesday to graduate.

I haven't had time to proofread it well, so I'm sorry about these errors. I will fix those myself.

Again I am very very sorry to give this to you at the last minute.

Thanking You,

Chris

Title: **Pre-Law Handbook: Choosing a Law School**

Author: **Chirag Shah**

Faculty Mentor: **Rhonda Fawbush, College of Business Administration**

Abstract

In order to aid potential law school students, the University of Tennessee needs some type of resource that simplifies the highly time-consuming process of the law school search. There is such a wealth of information available via the Internet and various publications that students can feel like they do not know where to start or what they should look for. Also, there are many different law school rankings, but often users of such rankings do not know the methodology behind these rankings.

This guide will hopefully serve as a beginning point that students can use to simplify the law school search process. The first section will identify factors that should be considered when choosing a school and where to find information on these factors. The broadly defined factors that this guide will address are: ability of students, atmosphere/size, costs/financial aid, geography, job placement, quality of teaching, reputation, and specialties/programs. The guide will also serve to explain the methodology behind various rankings in order to help understand what should be considered. Hopefully, the guide will serve future students by eliminating wasted time spent aimlessly looking up information, simplify the search process, and help them in making an informed decision when choosing where to study law.

Purpose Statement

This guide was developed to aid pre-law students in their search for a law school. There is such a wealth of information out there, it can be difficult to get started. This guide attempts to give students a starting point in their law school search. It identifies criterion that should be considered by all students searching for a law school. It also provides publications and websites that can be useful to begin this search. Much attention is given to rankings as well, and this guide provides the methodology behind some major rankings that are commonly used by the public. It is important to identify what is considered in each ranking to see if it takes into account what the student values. Also by breaking down rankings, students can see the importance of different factors in the law school search process. The guide is designed to simplify what can be an overwhelming and confusing process.

Pre-Law Handbook: Choosing a Law School

By Chirag Shah
Summer 1999

Dear Future Attorney,

By now you have decided that you want to enter one of the most respected professions, despite all the jokes, in our society. You have a long, hard road ahead of you, but hopefully you have found a profession that will develop into a rewarding career. The next question is where are you going to learn the trade?

Having just completed the law school search, I think I have gained much insight into the law school search process. This guide is not going to pinpoint the school that is best for you. It is not going to tell you what schools are good and which ones are bad. What this guide will do is get you started in your search. I have tried to identify what you should consider and give you places to look to start your search. Everyone values different factors in their own way, but there are factors that *everyone* should consider.

I was always told you should go to the best school you I can get into, but who says which one is best? The truth is only you can know which school is best for you. There are many rankings available that attempt to tell you which schools are better than others. These rankings are *only* useful if you know how they came about. In the second part of this guide, I have provided the methodology behind some major rankings so you can see what is considered and so you can identify the rankings that best take into account what you value most.

After having looked through the guide, I hope you will know better how to begin your search. There is so much information out there that it can be difficult to know where to start. There is also so much to consider, hopefully this guide will identify something you did not consider.

This may be the biggest decision you have made in your young life, so start early, take your time, and know there is a place out there for you that will be a great place to begin your road to becoming a fine attorney.

GOOD LUCK,

Chirag Shah

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Ability of Students

The ability of other students is an area that can have many implications in law school. One factor to consider is how you fit in terms in terms of grades and LSAT score. If your scores fall in the upper range of scores, you may find that you are one of the best, which is always a nice feeling. The problem with this is that you may not be challenged while in school. One of the greatest tools to learning is interacting with classmates. If classmates are on a lower level, you are not going to get the most out of your education. On the flip side, if you fall in the lower range, your pride may be hurt when you go from feeling like you are one of the best, as you may in undergrad, to one of those who looks like they just cannot keep up. Do not be mistaken; if you were admitted to a school, you are definitely capable of making it there. Something to consider is that when hiring firms like to hire from the top of the class. Most firms would rather have graduates near the top of their respective class than perhaps someone in the lower half of a more reputable school. The better the school, the lower into the class will firms dip for employment. Just to get into law school, you have to have done well, but law school is a different challenge. It is like nothing you have ever done amongst people who are as good, if not better, than you. A challenge is great and is going to give you a valuable education, but do not forget to be realistic.

Another factor to consider is competitiveness. You may have already heard the horror stories of fellow students hiding books or ripping out important pages to gain an upper hand. Some people are cut out for this and prosper under a cutthroat atmosphere and some would prefer a communal atmosphere where everyone works together to get through. Considering that law school is a place where student cooperation is so important in learning, competitiveness is an obvious negative. On the other hand, for some, competition can serve as a way to push us to do our best. This is a personal decision that you have to decide for yourself.

Together, your fellow students can provide great relief and facilitate learning, but also classmates can create tremendous stress and leave you at the bottom of the class, struggling to find a job.

Questions to consider:

- How do you fit in in terms of grades/scores?
- How competitive are the students and what do you prefer?

Additional Information

The Best Law Schools by Princeton Review – this provides a section that, based on surveys, ranks the most and least competitive schools.

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – charts provide information on GPA and LSAT ranges

Boston College's Law School Locator - www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/carct/matrix.html - The Locator can help you identify schools where your scores and grades are most competitive for admission and help you gauge your chance of admission at a particular school.

Talk to students during visit

Atmosphere/Size

The place you choose to attend law school will have a tremendous impact on your life. That is obvious, but the actual city and school is what we are talking about here. You can choose to go to a school in a small, medium, or large city. Each has a different lifestyle as well as a different set of opportunities. Smaller cities are likely to be college towns and they may not have much going on off-campus. Larger cities are going to have much more to offer such as professional sports and theater, but all these distractions may turn out to be too tempting. Wherever you choose, remember you will be there for at least three years and that is a long time to be miserably bored.

The size of the school is important as well. Smaller schools offer smaller classes and more interaction with professors. Schools that have larger classes offer a greater variety of classes and have a greater array of programs. In exchange for the intimate environment of smaller schools, larger schools also offer a more diverse faculty and student body. As just about everything thing, this is all up to personal taste; each type of school has its pros and cons. The more you can learn about schools, the easier it will be to find the school that is just right for you.

Questions to consider:

- How large are classes and what do you prefer?
- What kind of social scene is there (college town or more)?
- What student organizations are available (journals, etc.)?
- What resources does the school offer (size of library)?

Additional Sources:

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – provides information on class sizes, library, etc.

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Talk to students during Visit

Cost/Financial Aid

There is no doubt that law school is expensive. Costs can vary, though, especially between private and public universities. There are many different opinions about whether or not you should attend the school that fits best no matter what cost or only attend a school that you can afford. Once again this is another personal choice. You may come out of school saddled with huge debt, but sometimes going to a better school promises higher salaries which offset the higher loan payments. On the other hand, many students coming out of law school feel they are forced to work at a large firm to make enough to pay off their loans. If you would like the option of not having to go for the money, maybe avoiding high prices is the road for you. If you are considering public interest law, salaries are relatively not very high, but there are many assistance programs available that pay for some or even all of your costs if you serve for a certain amount of time. Each school varies in their programs, so you should check their particular catalog or website.

Most likely you are going to need some type of financial aid to help pay for law school. For your first year of law school, you are highly discouraged from working. Some schools go as far as to making you sign a statement saying you won't. The workload is often seen as more than that of a full-time job. More than likely you are going to need to borrow. There are two forms of aid commonly used: public and private. Public, or government, loans should be your first choice as they carry lower interest rates and fees. These loans are easily obtained because most graduate students are considered independent from your parents and unemployed, which means needy. Private loans check your credit and may require a co-signor. Some schools are better known for low or high default rates and this reputation does influence how easily you will receive private assistance.

Your goal is to minimize financial aid you have to take out to finance your education. You may regret all the money you spent in school so don't be wasteful, but there is money out there so don't feel like you can't afford to go to the law school of your dreams.

Questions to Consider:

- How much will *everything* cost? (tuition, housing, meals, entertainment, etc.)
- Is it worth paying more? (better education, higher salaries)
- When and where do I apply for aid?
- How can I minimize the money I have to borrow?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Information on Government Loans – *www.ed.gov*

Talk to financial aid counselors at schools

Geography

Before you run off to California or New York chasing glitz and glamour you have much to consider. Where you go to law school is going to largely determine where you work. Most graduates end up working close to where they go to school, so do not get stuck somewhere you are going to hate living for a long time. If where you are considering attending school is totally different from where you are, remember it will take some getting used to. Your first year of law school is not like undergrad where you can afford to make mistakes; you need to do well from the get go. There are many opportunities available in large cities that may not be available elsewhere. Large cities will have more firms and a larger share of the court system. These provide excellent opportunities for part-time jobs after your first year, summer work, internships, contacts, or just places to see what you are learning in action. As with every positive, there are negatives as well. In a large city, you may feel lost in the crowd. Cultures are different from region to region. For example, if you are used to southern hospitality, it is going to take some getting used to if you move north and encounter the faster, less gentle, lifestyle. Cost of living is another consideration. It is much more expensive to live in New York than it is in Florida.

There is so much to consider when choosing a place to live. Just remember you will be spending at least 3 years in this place, and you may spend much more in the same area.

Questions to Consider:

- Am I going to like living here for 3 or more years?
- What types of opportunities are available in the area?

Additional Sources:

Look up cities on www.yahoo.com

Yahoo City Comparisons – v4.yahoo.com/cities

Compare Cost of Living effects on Salary – v4.yahoo.com.cities/salary.html and www.homefair.com

Talk to students during visit.

Job Placement

As much as we would like to say we are going to law school to further our knowledge and make us better citizens, the truth is we want to find a job. Some schools are better than others at placement. Schools compile vast amounts of data about how soon graduates are employed. Considering loan payments begin 6-9 months after graduation, you need to find a job and fast. Schools usually have available, either in their catalogs or upon request, employment rates for students 3, 6, 9, and 12 months out of school. Unfortunately each school uses different criteria and includes or omits different things so comparisons should be made generally, not to each percentage point.

Another consideration is salaries. School usually can provide information as to starting salaries of recent graduates. Beyond starting figures, it becomes too difficult to keep up. Of course the highest number looks the best but do not be fooled. The fact of the matter is that cost of living affects salaries in any profession. A $70,000 salary in the northeast may be just as good as $55,000 in the south. If everything costs more, such as in the northeast relative to the south, a bigger salary is going to mean little. Also, remember schools place graduates in their area. Schools in areas of high cost of living are going to have higher average starting salaries than schools in areas of lower cost of living. Do not be fooled by numbers! Some schools provide information about starting salaries by region. This is an excellent way to compare what graduates are really getting relative to students of other schools. You cannot just look for the bigger number.

Another area to investigate is what types of law graduates choose to practice in. Some schools produce more litigators, some more tax attorneys, etc. It is also useful to look at what percentage of students go into public service, private firms, corporate, etc. to see how well the school meets your preferences. If you want to work for a major corporation and a school only seems to place in large firms, this could provide problems when it comes time to find a job.

Consider what students do in the summer. What you do and where you work during your summers will greatly affect your job prospects after graduation. Often, your job during

the summer after your second year is where you offered employment after graduation. Look to see what schools offer to help students find work both during and after law school. A good career center can make your life much easier and open opportunities you may not find on your own.

Questions to Consider:

- What are employment rates 3, 6, 9, 12 months after graduation?
- What are averages and ranges of starting salaries of recent graduates(consider cost of living and type or work)?
- What areas do graduates go into?
- What types of firms (public or private, large or small, corporate) do graduates work for?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

The Best Law Schools by Princeton Review - provides employment/salary information

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – information on types of employment taken (law firm, business and industry, government, public interest, judicial clerk, academia)

Find out about the career center at schools

Quality of Teaching

When you think about it, this may be the most underrated factor when looking for a school. What can be better than learning from the best? The problem students face, though, is how to evaluate faculty. The best way to evaluate faculty is to visit every teacher's class and see which school seems to best facilitate your learning. Back in the real world, we must base our decisions on less perfect information. The first place to start is the school's catalog. Most catalogs will provide a snapshot of what their full-time faculty teach and what they have accomplished. Websites may provide additional information. Factors to consider are educational background, professional experience, accessibility, reputation, continued professional activity, and diversity.

Another consideration is faculty to student ratios. A school looks a bit better than it should if it does not require the usual amount of teaching from its faculty. Some schools can to afford faculty with light teaching loads. Just because the teachers are being paid at some schools does not mean that you will get to see them. The writing that teachers do improves their ability to teach. In addition, research done by the faculty enhances the reputation of a school, which in turn benefits the students. Hence, the ideal teacher would spend considerable time writing for publication. It is likely, however, that some teachers spend more of their time writing than they would if they were trying to maximize student welfare. Look for schools where the best schools actually teach.

Questions to Consider:

- How accessible are the faculty?
- How reputable and distinguished are faculty?
- How happy/satisfied are students with faculty?
- How diverse is faculty (race, gender, specialties, experience)?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Talk to students during visits

Reputation

Reputation is the factor that unfortunately receives too much importance. No matter how good a lawyer you become, people will always look at where you went to school. Going to a "big name" school can open doors that may be locked for graduates of less respected schools. Schools with better reputations will also help eliminate regional favoritism. For instance, Harvard and Yale graduates are welcome anywhere from Maine to California. Reputation of a school can make up for less than stellar performance as well. It has been said that you have to be at the top of your class at other schools just to compete with the top 33-50% of Ivy League classes. Just like designer clothes, firms are willing to pay more to get that name. With that name, you know you are getting quality; with a smaller school, firms do not know what they are getting. Without that name, you can still be a good or even great lawyer and accomplish a great deal, but it just may be a longer road.

Questions to Consider:

- What are you getting in the name of the school?
- How do law firms view the school?
- How do academics view the school?

Additional Sources:

Talk to lawyers (find law firms on the Internet and e-mail them with questions)

U.S. News and World Reports Rankings – survey firms and professors about how they rank schools

School Specialties/Programs

This is the reason schools hate rankings. Each and every school is different in what they offer and the different specialties and programs available. This is an area that it is difficult to find information on. Catalogs and different law school publications usually list specialties and programs, but you get little information. If there are specific areas you are interested, you should definitely ask admissions officers by phone or e-mail. All law schools will offer a similar curriculum in general; the way they are set apart is what areas you can specialize in. A smaller school is going to have far fewer electives and, thus, much less options. Larger schools are probably going to have much more selection and more opportunity for you to study the type of law you prefer.

Another consideration is other graduate schools in addition to the law school. Joint degrees can be achieved in an extra year or two, saving you a year or two from what it would take to get the degrees separately. Most schools will allow you to combine programs and this option can be quite valuable. For example if you want to get an M.B.A. in addition to your J.D., you should investigate the business school as well. Remember, though, that most of the time you have to apply to each separately. Since most business schools require work experience, it is not a given that you will be accepted even if you get into the law school. Nevertheless, if you can obtain a J.D./M.B.A. joint degree your options will seem endless. You can work in law or business or combine the two. Sounds great, but don't forget you are going to have to pay for at least another year of school which probably means even more debt.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the school known for?
- What types of special programs are available?
- What areas do most graduates go into?

Additional Sources:

U.S. News and World Reports – www.usnews.com - rankings have reputations

Look especially at specialty rankings that are based on surveys

Catalogs/Websites – list areas of study and programs

JURIST: The Law Professors' Network – jurist.law.pitt.edu/lawschl.htm

Provides links to law school home pages and subordinate links to areas about faculty, publications, library, admissions, curriculum, and news and events

Talk to admissions offices and students during visit

LAW SCHOOL RANKINGS

U. S. News and World Reports Rankings

This is the best known set of rankings out and most criticized as well. Despite varying opinions about the rankings, *U. S. News* provides a wealth of information in one location. The information is available both in publication form and on the Web. The website www.usnews.com provides the most information in the most manageable form.

The rankings were created with the goal of helping applicants choose the right school by providing an assessment of academic quality of various programs. Statistical and reputation data are collected on programs each year and used to rank schools. Quality of students, faculty, and resources are evaluated as well as education and reputation based on surveys of academia and professionals.

Methodology

Reputation (40 percent): Reputation for academic quality is measured through two surveys conducted in the fall. The dean and three faculty members at each law school are asked to rate the quality of schools from "marginal" (1) to "distinguished" (5). The resulting reputation score accounts for 25 percent of the school's rank. Practicing lawyers, hiring partners, and senior judges were also asked to rate each school and their opinions account for 15 percent of the final rank.

Selectivity (25 percent): Combines median LSAT scores (50 percent of this measure), median undergraduate grade point average (40 percent), and proportion of applicants accepted as full-time J.D. students (10 percent).

Placement success (20 percent): a measure of employment rates at graduation (30 percent of this score) and nine months after (60 percent), and the bar passage rate (10 percent). Employed graduates include those employed; those pursuing graduate degrees; and for the nine-month rate, 25 percent of those with unknown status. Both employment rates exclude individuals who are not seeking jobs. The bar passage rate indicator is the ratio of the school's bar passage rate in a selected jurisdiction and the overall rate for first-

time test takers. The jurisdiction is the state in which the largest number of a school's graduates took the test for the first time.

Faculty resources (15 percent): This factor is based on average expenditures per student for instruction, library, and supporting student services (65 percent of this measure); student-to-teacher ratio (20 percent); average expenditures per student for financial aid and other expenditures (10 percent); and total number of volumes and titles in the law library (5 percent).

Overall rank: A school's score on each indicator is first standardized and used to rank schools on that attribute. Then scores are weighted, totaled, and rescaled so that the top school received a 100 and other schools received a percentage of the top score.

U. S. News also provides specialty rankings in dispute resolution, clinical training, environmental law, health law, intellectual property law, international law, trial advocacy, and tax law. U.S. News asked legal educators in the field to identify the 15 schools with the best program offerings in each specialty. The 10 schools receiving the highest number of nominations appear in the tables. The schools verified their offerings.

These rankings have been widely criticized for not being accurate and misused. A letter signed by deans of all 179 ABA approved schools was sent to all potential applicants stating that they do not believe decisions should be made based upon these rankings. In 1998, a report commissioned by the Association of American Law Schools, found that the *U. S. News* rankings had many serious problems such as inaccuracies, errors, and no good reasons to weight factors as they did. To view the report in full go to www.aals.org/validity.html.

Judging the Law Schools by Thomas Brennan
www.ilrg.com/rankings

This is an analysis of the nation's 179 ABA-approved law schools by Thomas E. Brennan, a former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court who is founder and president of Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan.

Which are the top law schools in the United States? "It all depends on what you're looking for in a legal education," says Judge Brennan.

His 400-page study, titled "Judging the Law Schools," is intended to help future law students choose the educational institution best for them. It uses 50 categories of information, such as enrollment, tuition cost, library resources, faculty-to-student ratio, and diversity of students and faculty, to rank every school. The categories are then combined into rankings on seven indexes: Composite, Quality, Institutional, Faculty, Library, Diversity, and Value.

Although the American Bar Association opposes law school rankings of any kind, Judge Brennan based his analysis on ABA data.

"For more than 30 years, the ABA's Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar has published a variety of data about law schools from which any interested person can glean a fairly clear picture of any school -- if one has the time or inclination to do the math," said Judge Brennan. "If you do the math, as I have, you will discover that there are many Number One law schools in America. All I have done is calculate what appear to be significant ratios, and rank schools accordingly, with no favorites and no assumptions. Just the plain, unvarnished facts."

Methodology

All raw data used in Judging the Law Schools came from the 1994 Review of Legal Education in the United States, published by the American Bar Association's Section of Legal Education and Admissions. Fifty categories were developed, based on the type of data collected and reported by the ABA, to rank law schools. Some of the categories are

straight numerical computations. Other categories are calculations Judge Brennan thought to be significant ratios. The law schools were ranked according to the results.

The fifty categories were divided into five indexes: Institutional Index, Faculty Index, Diversity Index, Library Index, and Value Index. Two additional indexes, the Quality Index and Composite Index, were developed using the five descriptive indexes.

The **Institutional Index** is primarily a measure of a law school's student enrollment in a given year and its annualized growth in enrollment, degrees awarded, credit hours required for graduation, and the number of deans and administrators and their ratio to students. The law school's age is also a factor. If a prospective law student is most interested in an institution's size, the categories which define the Institutional Index may be most helpful.

The **Faculty Index** is a measure of the number of faculty and the ratio between faculty numbers and student enrollment. The full-time equivalent student to full-time teacher category represents the traditional student-teacher ratio, the principal factor used by academic accreditation agencies to measure the quality of a school. The smaller the ratio, conventional wisdom declares, the more likely that teaching takes place in smaller class sections and that students will have a greater chance of access to faculty.

The **Diversity Index** measures the number of nonwhite males who attend or teach at law schools. Historically, law schools have been the primarily comprised of white males. Now females and persons of color are also finding a place in today's American law schools. However, this ranking does not differentiate among law schools as to those that are historically black or from a region with large minority populations and those law schools that have a traditionally white student body; therefore, the lists ranking number of minority students/faculty and ratios to total enrollment/total faculty do not indicate the historical or geographical components to the law schools. Historically, there are no law schools that principally enrolled women; therefore, the comparison of number of women and the ratio to total numbers is significant, indicating a school's success in recruiting a nontraditional population.

The size of a law school's library will always be a major consideration in evaluating the status of the school. The **Library Index** is a measure of a library's size in terms of its hard bound and microform volumes. It also includes the ratio between the number of volumes and student enrollment and the ratio between volumes and number of faculty members. You would expect the oldest law schools in America, like Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, to have well-established libraries with extremely large hard volume collections, and they do. Schools that are over one hundred years old, well-funded, and well-endowed should have large volume counts, but newer law school libraries should not necessarily be discounted by their lower hard volume count. Younger libraries tend to grow their microform and electronic collections, knowing how much space and resources it takes to store and maintain a hard volume collection. The most efficient way of maintaining a law library today is to look at alternative formats, of which microforms is one. Currently, the ABA counts only hard volumes and microform volumes, a technology that has been around for about 40 years. Libraries are looking to the newer technologies, such as networks, compact discs, and the Internet, to increase the resources available to their patrons. These library resources will be measured before long. You should inquire at individual schools about their newest technologies.

The **Value Index** measures a law school's overall tuition and tuition per credit hour for resident and nonresident students. Also, the index considers library volumes per dollar of tuition and the cost per full-time teacher and per deans and staff.

In determining the **Quality and Composite Indexes**, the Library Index is weighted by a factor of four and the Faculty Index by a factor of two to achieve more balance among the five primary indexes. The Quality Index does not include the Value Index because cost is not a component of quality. It also does not include the Diversity Index. The Composite Index makes no claim to identifying the best law schools in America. It does rank the schools according to the most objective criteria available and generally favors law schools which are conceded to be strong in most areas.

Cost-Benefit Analysis by ILRG
www.ilrg.com/schools/analysis

Compiled in July of 1996 by Christopher Sgarlata, a third year law student at the University of Texas School of Law, the following table re-ranks "the top 50 law schools," as designated by U. S. News & World Report, in terms of cost-of-living adjusted median salary, ranked from lowest to highest.

For the cost-of-living data, the average of the COL indices available was used for all cities in the state where the law school is located, with seven exceptions. For Yale, University of Connecticut, Harvard, and Rutgers-Newark, the New York cost-of-living average was used. For Duke, University of Virginia, and Vanderbilt, the Washington, D.C. cost-of-living average was used.

This analysis reflects the reality that most schools in the top 50 have a primarily regional reach. This shows that the idea that even for those looking at only the economic advantages of getting a law degree should consider more than the absolute dollar amount of average salaries. A dollar goes much farther in Georgia than it does in New York and this analysis exemplifies this idea. After looking at this analysis, one sees there are certainly advantages of going to a state school, the greatest of which is the lower cost, thus lower debt.

The Ranking Game

monoborg.law.indiana.edu/LawRank/rankgame.html

Finally a ranking that allows you to value what is important to you. In the *Ranking Game*, you weight each criterion as you see fit. Each school's score is multiplied by the weights to obtain a score that is used to "Re-rank" the schools.

Specific criteria and their components:

Tuition - These data are taken from the 1998 edition of the American Bar Association book of statistical information on "Approved Law Schools" (ABA). This should give a good idea of comparative price

Discount - The ABA tuition figure can be reduced by any discount you get from a school, whether by scholarship or discount for in-state residence.

Faculty size - This is not an independent criterion in the rankings, but is used as a component of other criteria. These are ABA data. Faculty size is the sum of the following: 1) Full-time faculty, 2) Other full-time faculty, 3) Administrators and librarians who teach times 1/2. Part-time faculty times 1/6 are included or not, depending on the criterion chosen. Student enrollment - These are ABA data. Enrollment is the sum of full-time students plus 3/4 of the part-time students.

Criteria directly relating students to faculty:

Student/faculty ratio criterion - A common measure of the quality of educational opportunity in schools is the student/faculty ratio. Student enrollment is divided by faculty size.

Reputation criteria:

Academic and non-academic - The academic reputation and non-academic reputation scores are taken from data published by U. S. News & World Report.

Student aptitude and knowledge criteria:

LSAT and GPA - Both law students and their teachers learn a lot from the students present in a school. The better the students, the more can be learned from them. The

median LSAT and 75%tile GPA are measures of student aptitude and knowledge. The median LSAT is taken from U. S. News & World Report. The 75%tile GPA is taken from published ABA data. The GPA data should be viewed and used with great caution because grading practices vary widely across undergraduate institutions and the GPA data have not been adjusted to account for these differences.

Career placement criteria

Percentage employed - This figure is calculated from ABA data. The employment percentage is added to the percentage pursuing further schooling. That sum is multiplied by the percentage of graduates whose whereabouts are known, for a final percentage of the class that the school knows has employment (or is in school). This method of calculating gives schools no incentive to forget about students they think have not found jobs.

Number of states where employed - This taken from ABA data. This is a measure of how "national" a law school is. Unfortunately it is slightly biased in favor of large schools and schools in the East where there are more states nearby. Biases are serious enough, however, to prevent it from being a useful criterion for many students.

Percentage of students employed in-state - This factor is taken from ABA figures and is considered a negative factor by the game. One purpose of decreasing the rank of a school for in-state employment is to compensate for the advantage the comparative bar pass rate gives schools that keep their top students within the state. It also serves as an additional measure of the "national" nature of a law school, a measure which is not subject to the bias against small schools. This is a criterion that should be applied with caution.

Comparative bar pass rate - The comparative bar pass rate for each school is the quotient of the passing percentage for the school in the state where the plurality of graduates take the exam over the passing percentage for all first time examinees in that state, with both figures taken from the ABA book.

Library criteria:

Library titles and active serial subscriptions - These two items are taken from ABA data. They measure how many different titles and subscriptions there are in the library. The larger the number, the greater the chances the library has the book you need for your research.

Library volumes per student - Library volumes data are also provided by the ABA. This figure describes the total number of volumes in the law library of each school. It adds nothing to "library titles" except as a measure of duplication. This is important if other users are using the books you need. It measures of how likely it will be that you can get the books you need without the delay of recalling it from another student or finding it in a pile of books.

Library seats per student - The more seats there are in the library, the more likely there is one (or two for those big projects) for you. The number of library seats is taken from ABA data and divided by the number of students.

Other considerations:

Campus beauty - The scores on this criterion are derived from a book called "Campus as a Work of Art", by Thomas A. Gaines. Summing scores on four criteria, Gaines gave his top schools total scores from 19 down to 17. He did not publish the scores below that in his table. All other schools were given 16, whether they deserve it or not. Weighting this criterion says you like to go to school or attend your homecomings in an attractive setting.

Tibetan restaurants within 400 meters - Just to prove, if it is not already obvious, that choices of criteria are subjective and idiosyncratic, a factor designed to account for whether there are adequate restaurants within walking distance of the law school is included. Rather than count the restaurants near each school, which would be entirely too much work, they have chosen to simplify the search in a non-random fashion.

Student Ranked Best Law Schools

www.natjurist.com

The National Jurist ranking of best law schools is based on five factors: Quality of Teaching; Employment Rate; Faculty-Student Relations; Reputation Among Attorneys; and Bar Pass Rate. These factors were selected based on responses to a survey of 155 law students conducted by The National Jurist in February 1997, in which students were asked to rate the importance of 39 different factors in selecting a law school.

Data for each law school was adjusted to a 100-point scale to achieve the school's score for each factor. Each factor was then weighted to achieve an overall score. Quality of Teaching, identified by students surveyed as the single most important factor in choosing a law school, was worth 30 percent of a school's overall score. Employment Rate, ranked as second most important by students, was worth 20 percent. Faculty-Student Relations was worth 17.5 percent; Reputation Among Attorneys was worth 17.5 percent; and Bar Pass Rate was worth 15 percent.

Data on quality of teaching and faculty-student relations was taken from a Princeton Review-sponsored survey of 28,000 students at 170 ABA-accredited law schools in 1995 and 1996. Data on employment rates and reputation among attorneys was taken from the 1997 U.S News & World Report law school rankings. Data on bar pass rates was taken from "ABA Approved Law Schools: Statistical Information on American Bar Association Approved Law Schools."

Quality of Teaching

The Quality of Teaching scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The scores, which are based on a 4.0 scale, reflect student answers to the Princeton Review survey question: "How would you rate the quality of teaching?"

Faculty-Student Relations

The Faculty-Student Relations scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The scores, which are based on a 4.0 scale, reflect student answers to the Princeton Review survey question: "How would you rate the relations between faculty and students?"

Employment Rate

The Employment Rate scores at right reflect the percentage of 1995 graduates who had jobs nine months after graduation, as reported to U.S. News & World Report.

Reputation Among Attorneys

The Reputation Among Attorneys scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The raw scores indicate how each school was ranked by 1,310 attorneys and judges surveyed by U.S. News & World Report in fall 1996.

Bar Pass Rate

The Bar Pass Rate scores at right are the raw scores for each law school, based on the pass-rate percentage difference between a school's first-time bar pass rate for the state in which the most students took the July 1995 bar exam and that state's first-time bar pass rate for the July 1995 bar exam. The school's pass rate was divided by the state's pass rate to achieve the raw score for each school.

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Department of Education - *www.ed.gov*

Judging the Law Schools by Thomas Brennan- www.ilrg.com/rankings

JURIST: The Law Professors' Network – jurist.law.pitt.edu/lawschl.htm

The Ranking Game - monoborg.law.indiana.edu/LawRank/rankgame.html

U.S. News and World Reports – www.usnews.com

www.homefair.com

Yahoo City Comparisons – v4.yahoo.com/cities

Title: **Pre-Law Handbook: Choosing a Law School**

Author: **Chirag Shah**

Faculty Mentor: **Rhonda Fawbush, College of Business Administration**

Abstract

In order to aid potential law school students, the University of Tennessee needs some type of resource that simplifies the highly time-consuming process of the law school search. There is such a wealth of information available via the Internet and various publications that students can feel like they do not know where to start or what they should look for. Also, there are many different law school rankings, but often users of such rankings do not know the methodology behind these rankings.

This guide will hopefully serve as a beginning point that where students can use to simplify the law school search process. The first section will identify factors that should be considered when choosing a school and where to find information on these factors. The broadly defined factors that this guide will address are: ability of students, atmosphere/size, costs/financial aid, geography, job placement, quality of teaching, reputation, and specialties/programs. The guide will also serve to explain the methodology behind various rankings in order to help understand what should be considered. Hopefully, the guide will serve future students by eliminating wasted time spent aimlessly looking up information, simplify the search process, and help them in making an informed decision when choosing where to study law.

need segway into other section

Next

Purpose Statement

This guide was developed to aid pre-law students in their search for a law school. There is such a wealth of information out there that it can be difficult to get started. This guide attempts to give students a starting point in their law school search. It identifies criterion that should be considered by all students searching for a law school. It also provides publications and websites that can be useful to begin this search. Much attention is given to rankings as well, and this guide provides the methodology behind some major rankings that are commonly used by the public. It is important to identify what is considered in each ranking to see if it values what the student values. Also by breaking down rankings, students can see the importance of different factors in the law school search process. The guide is designed to simplify what can be an overwhelming and confusing process.

Pre-Law Handbook: Choosing a Law School

By Chirag Shah
Summer 1999

Dear Future Attorney,

By now you have decided that you want to enter one of the most respected professions, despite all the jokes, in our society. You have a long, hard road ahead of you, but hopefully you have found a profession that will develop into a rewarding career. The next question is where are you going to learn the trade?

Having just completed the law school search, I think I have gained much insight into the law school search process. This guide is not going to pinpoint the school that is best for you. It is not going to tell you what schools are good and which ones are bad. After looking through this guide, you may be even more confused about where you want to go than you were when you started. What this guide will do is get you started in your search. I have tried to identify what you should consider and give you places to look to start your search. Everyone values different factors in their own way, but there are factors that *everyone* should consider.

NOT GOOD

I was always told you should go to the best school I can get into, but who says which one is best? The truth is only you can know which school is best for you. There are many rankings available that attempt to tell you which schools are better than others. These rankings are *only* useful if you know how they came about. In the second part of this guide, I have provided the methodology behind some major rankings so you can see what is considered and so you can identify the rankings that best take into account what you value most.

After having looked through the guide, I hope you will know better how to begin your search. There is so much information out there that it can be difficult to know where to start. There is also so much to consider, hopefully this guide will identify something you did not consider.

This may be the biggest decision you have made in your young life, so start early, take your time, and know there is a place out there for you that will be a great place to begin your road to becoming a fine attorney.

GOOD LUCK,

Chirag Shah

FACTORS TO CONSIDER

Ability of Students

Intro stmt? What? Don't let heading be intro it.

This is an area that can have many implications in law school. One factor to consider is how you fit in terms in terms of grades and LSAT score. If your scores fall in the upper range of scores, you may find that you are one of the best, which is always a nice feeling. The problem with this is that you may not be challenged while in school. One of the greatest tools to learning is interacting with classmates. If classmates are on a lower level, you are not going to get the most out of your education. On the flip side, if you fall in the lower range, your pride may be hurt when you go from feeling like you are one of the best, as you may in undergrad, to one of those who looks like they just cannot keep up. Do not be mistaken; if you were admitted to a school, you are definitely capable of making it there. Something to consider is that when hiring firms like to hire from the top of the class. Most firms would rather have graduates near the top of their respective class then perhaps someone in the lower half of a more reputable school. The better the school, the lower into the class will firms dip for employment. Just to get in to law school, you have to have done well, but law school is a different challenge. It is like nothing you have ever done amongst people who are as good, if not better, than you. A challenge is great and is going to give you a valuable education, but do not forget to be realistic.

Then why do all schools have a standard attrition rate?

False encouraging stmt.

Another factor to consider is competitiveness. You may have already heard the horror stories of fellow students hiding books or ripping out important pages to gain an upper hand. Some people are cut out for this and prosper under a cutthroat atmosphere and some would prefer a communal atmosphere where everyone works together to get through. Considering that law school is a place where student cooperation is so important in learning, competitiveness is an obvious negative. On the other hand, for some, competition can serve as a way to push us to do our best. This is a personal decision that you have to decide for yourself.

Together, your fellow students can provide great relief and facilitate learning, but also classmates can create tremendous stress and leave you at the bottom of the class, struggling to find a job.

Questions to consider:

- How do you fit in in terms of grades/scores?
- How competitive are the students and what do you prefer?

in terms of grades or student interaction? Need to clarify. I wouldn't think they could gauge student interaction competitiveness

Additional Information

The Best Law Schools by Princeton Review – this provides a section that, based on surveys, ranks the most and least competitive schools.

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – charts provide information on GPA and LSAT ranges

Boston College's Law School Locator - www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/carct/matrix.html - The Locator can help you identify schools where your scores and grades are most competitive for admission and help you gauge your chance of admission at a particular school.

Talk to students during visit

Wording problems here

Atmosphere/Size

The place you choose to attend law school will have a tremendous impact on your life. That is obvious, but the actual city and school is what we are talking about. You can choose to go to a school in a small, medium, ~~and~~ or large city. Each has a different lifestyle as well as a different set of opportunities. Smaller cities are likely to be college towns and they may not have much going on off-campus. Larger cities are going to have much more to offer such as professional sports and theater, but all these distractions may turn out to be too tempting. Wherever you choose, remember you will be there for at least three years and that is a long time to be miserably bored. :)

The size of the school is important as well. Smaller schools offer smaller classes and more interaction with professors. Schools that have larger classes offer a greater variety of classes and have a greater array of programs. In exchange for the intimate environment of smaller schools, larger schools also offer a more diverse faculty and student body. As just about everything thing, this is all up to personal taste; each type of school has its pros and cons. The more you can learn about schools, the easier it will be to find the school that is just right for you.

Questions to consider:

- How large are classes and what do you prefer?
- What kind of social scene is there (college town or more)?
- What student organizations are available (journals, etc.)?
- What resources does the school offer (size of library)?

Additional Sources:

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – provides information on class sizes, library, etc.

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Talk to students during Visit

Cost/Financial Aid

There is no doubt that law school is expensive. Costs can vary, though, especially between private and public universities. There are many different opinions about whether or not you should attend the school that fits best no matter what cost or only attend a school that you can afford. Once again this is another personal choice. You may come out of school saddled with huge debt, but sometimes going to a better school promises higher salaries which offset the higher loan payments. On the other hand, many students coming out of law school feel they are forced to work at a large firm to make enough to pay off their loans. If you would like the option of not having to go for the money, maybe avoiding high prices is the road for you. If you are considering public interest law, salaries are relatively not very high, but there are many assistance programs available that pay for some or even all your costs if you serve for a certain amount of time. Each school varies in their program, so you should check their particular catalog or website.

Most likely you are going to need some type of financial aid to help pay for law school. For your first year of law school, you are highly discouraged from working. The workload is often seen as more than that of a full-time job. Most likely you are going to need to borrow. There are two forms of aid commonly used: public and private. Public, or government, loans should be your first choice as they carry lower interest rates and fees. These loans are easily obtained because most graduate students are considered independent which means needy. Private loans check your credit and may require a co-signor. Some schools are better known for low or high default rates and this reputation does influence how easily you will receive private assistance.

Your goal is to minimize financial aid you have to take out to finance your education. You may regret all the money you spent in school so don't be wasteful, but there is money out there so don't feel like you can't afford to go to the law school of your dreams.

Questions to Consider:

Good pt. UNC-Chapel Hill school was cheap but living exp high.

- How much will *everything* cost? (tuition, housing, meals, entertainment, etc.)
- Is it worth paying more? (better education, higher salaries)
- When and where do I apply for aid? How soon must I start the loan process. Before acceptance? (pre-approval for certain amt or after accepted.
- How can I minimize the money I have to borrow?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Information on Government Loans – *www.ed.gov*

Talk to financial aid counselors at schools

Geography

Before you run off to California or New York chasing glitz and glamour you have much to consider. Where you go to law school is going to largely determine where you work. Most graduates end up working close to where they go to school, so do not get stuck somewhere you are going to hate living for a long time. If where you are considering attending school is totally different from where you are, remember it will take some getting used to. Your first year of law school is not like undergrad where you can afford to make mistakes; you need to do well from the get go. There are many opportunities available in large cities that may not be available elsewhere. Large cities will have more firms and a larger share of the court system. These provide excellent opportunities for part-time jobs after your first year, summer work, internships, contacts, or just places to see what you are learning in action. As with every positive, there are negatives as well. In a large city, you may feel lost in the crowd. Cultures are different from region to region. For example, if you are used to southern hospitality, it is going to take some getting used to if you move north and encounter the faster, less gentle, lifestyle.

mention cost of living

There is so much to consider when choosing a place to live. Just remember you will be spending at least 3 years in this place, and you may spend much more in the same area.

Questions to Consider:

- Am I going to like living here for 3 or more years
- What types of opportunities are available in the area?

Additional Sources:

Look up cities on www.yahoo.com

Yahoo City Comparisons – v4.yahoo.com/cities

Compare Cost of Living effects on Salary – v4.yahoo.com.cities/salary.html and www.homefair.com

Talk to students during visit.

Is ~~there a place to find law schools~~ I see... on next section !! :)

Job Placement

As much as we would like to say we are going to law school to further our knowledge and make us better citizens, the truth is we want to find a job. Some schools are better than others at placement. Schools compile vast amounts of data about how soon graduates are employed. Considering loan payments begin 6-9 months after graduation, you need to find a job and fast. Schools usually have available, either in their catalogs or upon request, employment rates for students 3, 6, 9, and 12 months out of school. Unfortunately each school uses different criteria and includes or omits different things so comparisons should be made generally, not to each percentage point.

Also - hours expected "billing" diff based on salary

Another consideration is salaries. School's usually can provide information as to starting salaries of recent graduates. Beyond starting figures, ~~it~~ becomes too difficult to keep up. Of course the highest number looks the best but do not be fooled. The fact of the matter is that cost of living affects salaries in any profession. A $70,000 salary in the northeast may be just as good as $55,000 in the south. If everything costs more, such as in the northeast relative to the south, a bigger salary is going to mean little. Also, remember schools place graduates in their area. Schools in areas of high cost of living are going to have higher average starting salaries than schools in areas of lower cost of living. Do not be fooled by numbers! Some schools provide information about starting salaries by region. This is an excellent way to compare what graduates are really getting relative to students of other schools. You cannot just look for the bigger number.

Another area to investigate is what types of law graduates choose to practice in. Some schools produce more litigators, some more tax attorneys, etc. It is also useful to look at what percentage of students go into public service, private firms, corporate, etc. to see how well the school meets your preferences. If you want to work for a major corporation and a school only seems to place in large firms, this could provide problems when it comes time to find a job. Teachers interests will drive the end result also

Consider what students do in the summer. What you do and where you work during your summers will greatly affect your job prospects after graduation. Look to see what

schools offer to help students find work both during and after law school. A good career center can make your life much easier and open opportunities you may not find on your own.

Questions to Consider:

- What are employment rates 3, 6, 9, 12 months after graduation?
- What are averages and ranges of starting salaries of recent graduates(consider cost of living and type or work)?
- What areas do graduates go into?
- What types of firms (public or private, large or small, corporate) do graduates work for?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

The Best Law Schools by Princeton Review - provides employment/salary information

ABA Guide to Approved Law Schools – information on types of employment taken (law firm, business and industry, government, public interest, judicial clerk, academia)

Find out about the career center at schools

Quality of Teaching

When you think about it, this may be the most underrated factor when looking for a school. What can be better than learning from the best? The problem students face, though, is how to evaluate faculty. The best way to evaluate faculty is to visit every teacher's class and see which school seems to best facilitate your learning. Back in the real world, we must base our decisions on less perfect information. The first place to start is the school's catalog. Most catalogs will provide a snapshot of what their full-time faculty teaches and what they have accomplished. Websites may provide additional information. Factors to consider are educational background, professional experience, accessibility, reputation, continued professional activity, and diversity.

Another consideration is faculty to student ratios. A school looks a bit better than it should if it does not require the usual amount of teaching from its faculty. Some schools can to afford faculty with light teaching loads. Just because the teachers are being paid at some schools does not mean that you will get to see them. The writing that teachers do improves their ability to teach. In addition, research done by the faculty enhances the reputation of a school, which in turn benefits the students. Hence, the ideal teacher would spend considerable time writing for publication. It is likely, however, that some teachers spend more of their time writing than they would if they were trying to maximize student welfare.

I lose your meaning here

Questions to Consider:

- How accessible are the faculty?
- How reputable and distinguished are faculty?
- How happy/satisfied are students with faculty?
- How diverse is faculty (race, gender, specialties, experience)?

Teacher evaluations?

Additional Sources:

Law School Catalogs/Websites

Talk to students during visits

Reputation

Reputation is the factor that unfortunately receives too much importance. No matter how good a lawyer you become, people will always look at where you went to school. Going to a "big name" school can open doors that may be locked for graduates of less respected schools. Schools with better reputations will also help eliminate regional favoritism. Harvard and Yale graduates are welcome anywhere from Maine to California. Reputation of a school can make up for less than stellar performance as well. It has been said that you have to be at the top of your class at other schools just to compete with the top 33-50% of Ivy League classes. Just like designer clothes, firms are willing to pay more to get that name. With that name, you know you are getting quality; with a smaller school, firms do not know what they are getting. Without that name, you can still be a good or even great lawyer and accomplish a great deal, but it just may be a longer road.

Questions to Consider:

- What are you getting in the name of the school?
- How do law firms view the school?
- How do academics view the school?

Additional Sources:

Talk to lawyers (find law firms on the Internet and e-mail them with questions)

U.S. News and World Reports Rankings – survey firms and professors about how they rank schools

School Specialties/Programs

This is the reason schools hate rankings. Each and every school is different in what they offer and the different specialties and programs available. This is an area that it is difficult to find information on. Catalogs and different law school publications usually list specialties and programs, but you get little information. If there are specific areas you are interested, you should definitely ask admissions officers by phone or e-mail. All law schools will offer a similar curriculum in general; the way they are set apart is what areas you can specialize in. A smaller school is going to have far fewer electives and, thus, much less options. Larger schools are probably going to have much more selection and more opportunity for you to study the type of law you prefer.

Another consideration is other graduate schools in addition to the law school. Joint degrees can be achieved in an extra year or two, saving you a year or two from what it would to get the degrees separately. Most schools will allow you to combine programs and this option can be quite valuable. For example if you want to get an M.B.A. in addition to your J.D., you should investigate the business school as well. Remember, though, that most of the time you have to apply to each separately. Since most business schools require work experience, it is not a given that you will be accepted even if you get into the law school. Nevertheless, if you can obtain a J.D./M.B.A. joint degree your options will seem endless. You can work in law or business or combine the two. Sounds great, but don't forget you are going to have to pay for at least another year of school which probably means even more debt.

Questions to Consider:

- What is the school known for?
- What types of special programs are available?
- What areas do most graduates go into?

Additional Sources:

U.S. News and World Reports – www.usnews.com - rankings have reputations

Look especially at specialty rankings that are based on surveys

Catalogs/Websites – list areas of study and programs

JURIST: The Law Professors' Network – jurist.law.pitt.edu/lawschl.htm

Provides links to law school home pages and subordinate links to areas about faculty, publications, library, admissions, curriculum, and news and events

Talk to admissions offices and students during visit

LAW SCHOOL RANKINGS

U. S. News and World Reports Rankings

This is the best-known set of rankings out and most criticized as well. Despite varying opinions about the rankings, *U. S. News* provides a wealth of information in one location. The information is available both in publication form and on the Web. The website www.usnews.com provides the most information in the most manageable form.

The rankings were created with the goal of helping applicants choose the right school by providing an assessment of academic quality of various programs. Statistical and reputation data are collected on programs each year and used to rank schools. Quality of students, faculty, and resources are evaluated as well as education and reputation based on surveys of academia and professionals.

Methodology

Reputation (40 percent): Reputation for academic quality is measured through two surveys conducted in the fall. The dean and three faculty members at each law school are asked to rate the quality of schools from "marginal" (1) to "distinguished" (5). The resulting reputation score accounts for 25 percent of the school's rank. Practicing lawyers, hiring partners, and senior judges were also asked to rate each school and their opinions account for 15 percent of the final rank.

Selectivity (25 percent): Combines median LSAT scores (50 percent of this measure), median undergraduate grade point average (40 percent), and proportion of applicants accepted as full-time J.D. students (10 percent).

Placement success (20 percent): a measure of employment rates at graduation (30 percent of this score) and nine months after (60 percent), and the bar passage rate (10 percent). Employed graduates include those employed, those pursuing graduate degrees, and for the nine-month rate, 25 percent of those with unknown status. Both employment rates exclude individuals who are not seeking jobs. The bar passage rate indicator is the ratio of the school's bar passage rate in a selected jurisdiction and the overall rate for first-

time test takers. The jurisdiction is the state in which the largest number of a school's graduates took the test for the first time.

Faculty resources (15 percent): This factor is based on average expenditures per student for instruction, library, and supporting student services (65 percent of this measure); student-to-teacher ratio (20 percent); average expenditures per student for financial aid and other expenditures (10 percent); and total number of volumes and titles in the law library (5 percent).

Overall rank: A school's score on each indicator is first standardized and used to rank schools on that attribute. Then scores are weighted, totaled, and rescaled so that the top school received a 100 and other schools received a percentage of the top score.

U. S. News also provides specialty rankings in dispute resolution, clinical training, environmental law, health law, intellectual property law, international law, trial advocacy, and tax law. U.S. News asked legal educators in the field to identify the 15 schools with the best program offerings in each specialty. The 10 schools receiving the highest number of nominations appear in the tables. The schools verified their offerings.

when?

These rankings have been widely criticized for not being accurate and misused. A letter signed by deans of all 179 ABA approved schools was sent to all potential applicants stating that they do not believe decisions should be made based upon these rankings. In 1998, a report commissioned by the Association of American Law Schools, found that the *U. S. News* rankings had many serious problems such as inaccuracies, errors, and no good reasons to weight factors as they did. To view the report in full go to www.aals.org/validity.html.

Good :)

Judging the Law Schools by Thomas Brennan
www.ilrg.com/rankings

This is an analysis of the nation's 179 ABA-approved law schools by Thomas E. Brennan, a former Chief Justice of the Michigan Supreme Court who is founder and president of Thomas M. Cooley Law School in Lansing, Michigan.

Which are the top law schools in the United States? "It all depends on what you're looking for in a legal education," says Judge Brennan.

His 400-page study -- titled "Judging the Law Schools" -- is intended to help future law students choose the educational institution best for them. It uses 50 categories of information, such as enrollment, tuition cost, library resources, faculty-to-student ratio, and diversity of students and faculty, to rank every school. The categories are then combined into rankings on seven indexes: Composite, Quality, Institutional, Faculty, Library, Diversity, and Value.

Although the American Bar Association opposes law school rankings of any kind, Judge Brennan based his analysis on ABA data.

"For more than 30 years, the ABA's Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar has published a variety of data about law schools from which any interested person can glean a fairly clear picture of any school -- if one has the time or inclination to do the math," said Judge Brennan. "If you do the math, as I have, you will discover that there are many Number One law schools in America. All I have done is calculate what appear to be significant ratios, and rank schools accordingly, with no favorites and no assumptions. Just the plain, unvarnished facts."

Methodology

All raw data used in Judging the Law Schools came from the 1994 Review of Legal Education in the United States, published by the American Bar Association's Section of Legal Education and Admissions. Fifty categories were developed, based on the type of data collected and reported by the ABA, to rank law schools. Some of the categories are

straight numerical computations. Other categories are calculations Judge Brennan thought to be significant ratios. The law schools were ranked according to the results.

The fifty categories were divided into five indexes: Institutional Index, Faculty Index, Diversity Index, Library Index, and Value Index. Two additional indexes, the Quality Index and Composite Index, were developed using the five descriptive indexes.

The **Institutional Index** is primarily a measure of a law school's student enrollment in a given year and its annualized growth in enrollment, degrees awarded, credit hours required for graduation, and the number of deans and administrators and their ratio to students. The law school's age is also a factor. If a prospective law student is most interested in an institution's size, the categories that define the Institutional Index may be most helpful.

The **Faculty Index** is a measure of the number of faculty and the ratio between faculty numbers and student enrollment. The full-time equivalent student to full-time teacher category represents the traditional student-teacher ratio, the principal factor used by academic accreditation agencies to measure the quality of a school. The smaller the ratio, conventional wisdom declares, the more likely that teaching takes place in smaller class sections and that students will have a greater chance of access to faculty.

The **Diversity Index** measures the number of nonwhite males who attend or teach at law schools. Historically, law schools have been the primarily comprised of white males. Now females and persons of color are also finding a place in today's American law schools. However, this ranking does not differentiate among law schools as to those that are historically black or from a region with large minority populations and those law schools that have a traditionally white student body; therefore, the lists ranking number of minority students/faculty and ratios to total enrollment/total faculty do not indicate the historical or geographical components to the law schools. Historically, there are no law schools that principally enrolled women; therefore, the comparison of number of women and the ratio to total numbers is significant, indicating a school's success in recruiting a nontraditional population.

The size of a law school's library will always be a major consideration in evaluating the status of the school. The **Library Index** is a measure of a library's size in terms of its hardbound and microform volumes. It also includes the ratio between the number of volumes and student enrollment and the ratio between volumes and number of faculty members. You would expect the oldest law schools in America, like Harvard, Yale, and Columbia, to have well-established libraries with extremely large hard volume collections, and they do. Schools that are over one hundred years old, well funded, and well-endowed should have large volume counts, but newer law school libraries should not necessarily be discounted by their lower hard volume count. Younger libraries tend to grow their microform and electronic collections, knowing how much space and resources it takes to store and maintain a hard volume collection. The most efficient way of maintaining a law library today is to look at alternative formats, of which microforms is one. Currently, the ABA counts only hard volumes and microform volumes, a technology that has been around for about 40 years. Libraries are looking to the newer technologies, such as networks, compact discs, and the Internet, to increase the resources available to their patrons. These library resources will be measured before long. You should inquire at individual schools about their newest technologies.

The **Value Index** measures a law school's overall tuition and tuition per credit hour for resident and nonresident students. Also, the index considers library volumes per dollar of tuition and the cost per full-time teacher and per deans and staff.

In determining the **Quality and Composite Indexes**, the Library Index is weighted by a factor of four and the Faculty Index by a factor of two to achieve more balance among the five primary indexes. The Quality Index does not include the Value Index because cost is not a component of quality. It also does not include the Diversity Index. The Composite Index makes no claim to identifying the best law schools in America. It does rank the schools according to the most objective criteria available and generally favors law schools that are strong in most areas.

Cost-Benefit Analysis by ILRG

www.ilrg.com/schools/analysis

Compiled in July of 1996 by Christopher Sgarlata, a third year law student at the University of Texas School of Law, the following table re-ranks "the top 50 law schools," as designated by U. S. News & World Report, in terms of cost-of-living adjusted median salary, ranked from lowest to highest.

For the cost-of-living data, the average of the COL indices available was used for all cities in the state where the law school is located, with seven exceptions. For Yale, University of Connecticut, Harvard, and Rutgers-Newark, the New York cost-of-living average was used. For Duke, University of Virginia, and Vanderbilt, the Washington, D.C. cost-of-living average was used. why?

This analysis reflects the reality that most schools in the top 50 have a primarily regional reach. This shows that the idea that even for those looking at only the economic advantages of getting a law degree should consider more than the absolute dollar amount of average salaries. A dollar goes much farther in Georgia than it does in New York and this analysis exemplifies this idea. After looking at this analysis, one sees there are certainly advantages of going to a state school, the greatest of which is the lower cost, thus lower debt.

The Ranking Game

monoborg.law.indiana.edu/LawRank/rankgame.html

Finally a ranking that allows you to value what is important to you. In the *Ranking Game*, you weight each criterion as you see fit. Each school's score is multiplied by the weights to obtain a score that is used to "Re-rank" the schools.

Specific criteria and their components:

Tuition - These data are taken from the 1998 edition of the American Bar Association book of statistical information on "Approved Law Schools" (ABA). This should give a good idea of comparative price

Discount - The ABA tuition figure can be reduced by any discount you get from a school, whether by scholarship or discount for in-state residence.

Faculty size - This is not an independent criterion in the rankings, but is used as a component of other criteria. These are ABA data. Faculty size is the sum of the following: 1) Full-time faculty, 2) Other full-time faculty, 3) Administrators and librarians who teach times 1/2. Part-time faculty times 1/6 are included or not, depending on the criterion chosen. Student enrollment - These are ABA data. Enrollment is the sum of full-time students plus 3/4 of the part-time students.

Criteria directly relating students to faculty:

Student/faculty ratio criterion - A common measure of the quality of educational opportunity in schools is the student/faculty ratio. Student enrollment is divided by faculty size.

Reputation criteria:

Academic and non-academic - The academic reputation and non-academic reputation scores are taken from data published by U. S. News & World Report.

Student aptitude and knowledge criteria:

LSAT and GPA - Both law students and their teachers learn a lot from the students present in a school. The better the students, the more can be learned from them. The

median LSAT and 75%tile GPA are measures of student aptitude and knowledge. The median LSAT is taken from U. S. News & World Report. The 75%tile GPA is taken from published ABA data. The GPA data should be viewed and used with great caution because grading practices vary widely across undergraduate institutions and the GPA data have not been adjusted to account for these differences.

Career placement criteria

Percentage employed - This figure is calculated from ABA data. The employment percentage is added to the percentage pursuing further schooling. That sum is multiplied by the percentage of graduates whose whereabouts are known, for a final percentage of the class that the school knows has employment (or is in school). This method of calculating gives schools no incentive to forget about students they think have not found jobs.

Number of states where employed - This taken from ABA data. This is a measure of how "national" a law school is. Unfortunately it is slightly biased in favor of large schools and schools in the East where there are more states nearby. Biases are serious enough, however, to prevent it from being a useful criterion for many students.

Percentage of students employed in-state - This factor is taken from ABA figures and is considered a negative factor by the game. One purpose of decreasing the rank of a school for in-state employment is to compensate for the advantage the comparative bar pass rate gives schools that keep their top students within the state. It also serves as an additional measure of the "national" nature of a law school, a measure that is not subject to the bias against small schools. This is a criterion that should be applied with caution.

Comparative bar pass rate - The comparative bar pass rate for each school is the quotient of the passing percentage for the school in the state where the plurality of graduates take the exam over the passing percentage for all first time examinees in that state, with both figures taken from the ABA book.

Library criteria:

Library titles and active serial subscriptions - These two items are taken from ABA data. They measure how many different titles and subscriptions there are in the library.

The larger the number, the greater the chances the library has the book you need for your research.

Library volumes per student - Library volumes data are also provided by the ABA. This figure describes the total number of volumes in the law library of each school. It adds nothing to "library titles" except as a measure of duplication. This is important if other users are using the books you need. It measures of how likely it will be that you can get the books you need without the delay of recalling it from another student or finding it in a pile of books.

Library seats per student - The more seats there are in the library, the more likely there is one (or two for those big projects) for you. The number of library seats is taken from ABA data and divided by the number of students.

Other considerations:

Campus beauty - The scores on this criterion are derived from a book called "Campus as a Work of Art", by Thomas A. Gaines. Summing scores on four criteria, Gaines gave his top schools total scores from 19 down to 17. He did not publish the scores below that in his table. All other schools were given 16, whether they deserve it or not. Weighting this criterion says you like to go to school or attend your homecomings in an attractive setting.

Tibetan restaurants within 400 meters - Just to prove, if it is not already obvious, that choices of criteria are subjective and idiosyncratic, a factor designed to account for whether there are adequate restaurants within walking distance of the law school is included. Rather than count the restaurants near each school, which would be entirely too much work, they have chosen to simplify the search in a non-random fashion.

Student Ranked Best Law Schools
www.natjurist.com

The National Jurist ranking of best law schools is based on five factors: Quality of Teaching; Employment Rate; Faculty-Student Relations; Reputation Among Attorneys; and Bar Pass Rate. These factors were selected based on responses to a survey of 155 law students conducted by The National Jurist in February 1997, in which students were asked to rate the importance of 39 different factors in selecting a law school.

Data for each law school was adjusted to a 100-point scale to achieve the school's score for each factor. Each factor was then weighted to achieve an overall score. Quality of Teaching, identified by students surveyed as the single most important factor in choosing a law school, was worth 30 percent of a school's overall score. Employment Rate, ranked as second most important by students, was worth 20 percent. Faculty-Student Relations was worth 17.5 percent; Reputation Among Attorneys was worth 17.5 percent; and Bar Pass Rate was worth 15 percent.

Data on quality of teaching and faculty-student relations was taken from a Princeton Review-sponsored survey of 28,000 students at 170 ABA-accredited law schools in 1995 and 1996. Data on employment rates and reputation among attorneys was taken from the 1997 U.S News & World Report law school rankings. Data on bar pass rates was taken from "ABA Approved Law Schools: Statistical Information on American Bar Association Approved Law Schools."

Quality of Teaching

The Quality of Teaching scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The scores, which are based on a 4.0 scale, reflect student answers to the Princeton Review survey question: "How would you rate the quality of teaching?"

Faculty-Student Relations

The Faculty-Student Relations scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The scores, which are based on a 4.0 scale, reflect student answers to the Princeton Review survey question: "How would you rate the relations between faculty and students?"

Employment Rate

The Employment Rate scores at right reflect the percentage of 1995 graduates who had jobs nine months after graduation, as reported to U.S. News & World Report.

Reputation Among Attorneys

The Reputation Among Attorneys scores at right are the raw scores for each law school. The raw scores indicate how each school was ranked by 1,310 attorneys and judges surveyed by U.S. News & World Report in fall 1996.

Bar Pass Rate

The Bar Pass Rate scores at right are the raw scores for each law school, based on the pass-rate percentage difference between a school's first-time bar pass rate for the state in which the most students took the July 1995 bar exam and that state's first-time bar pass rate for the July 1995 bar exam. The school's pass rate was divided by the state's pass rate to achieve the raw score for each school.

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