

Resources for Minority Law School Applicants

Contributed by Norton Gappy

Minority law school applicants have access to a wide range of resources to assist them in all phases of obtaining a legal education and developing a successful career in the practice of law.

According to LSAC statistics, minorities are underrepresented in law school and the legal community, with no single minority group accounts for more than four percent of the lawyers in the United States.

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It should come as no surprise that the question of whether to provide assistance versus preference to minority applicants is a hotly debated issue. For a better understanding of both perspectives:

Views on Affirmative Action: Assistance, Yes; Preference, No

George Shepherd on Racism and ABA Accreditation

The Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) collects statistics and data from American Bar Association (ABA) accredited law schools about the following factors:

1. LSAT score
2. GPA
3. Ethnicity
4. Gender
5. Number of total applicants
6. Number of total acceptances
7. Enrollment for first year, second year, and third year law students
8. Number of JD or LLB Awarded
9. Tuition costs for in-state on out-of-state applicants
10. Bar acceptance rate for first time test takers

To promote diversity, law schools actively seek qualified African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American students. Such ethnic groups are sought to help enrich the education process. According to the LSAC, diversity might include contrasting economic, educational, and geographical backgrounds; different sexual orientations; varied familial or other personal experiences; or unusual careers.

Who is a Minority Applicant?

The term "minority candidate" includes ethnic and gender minorities. Ethnic minorities include: Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans and other Latin Americans, African Americans, and Native Americans (this group also includes Native Alaskans, U.S. Pacific & Virgin Islanders).

Arab Americans and Indian Americans are usually not considered minorities or "underrepresented ethnic groups" by the LSAC or law school admissions departments. However, law schools may collect data on these ethnic groups and report the information to the ABA.

Women as a gender are considered a minority. And more recently, gay and lesbian groups are petitioning to be part of the gender minority status.

Minority Assistance

High Schools and Colleges: High schools and colleges usually offer pre-law assistance for minorities to help determine whether law school is right for them or how to better prepare for admissions. Minorities in Legal Education ("MILE") is a free service/program designed to increase the numbers of ethnic minority (as different from gender minority) students who attend law school. Students are encouraged to enroll in MILE to obtain many benefits such as:

1. Advance notice of Law School Forums;
2. E-mail access to on-line advice regarding the law school admissions process; and
3. MILE Markers newsletter.

Law Schools: While in law school, minority law students can network with other groups by participating in minority bar associations and other ethnic associations.

Another option is to enroll in a head start class (offered by some law schools). This class usually takes place in the summer right before the entering class starts its first semester in the fall. The head start class is a primer law school course which is open to minority students. Check with your law school of choice for head start offerings.

Where to Designate Minority Status

LSAT Application: Minority status can be noted on the LSAT Application which can be submitted by U.S. mail or online application. See <http://www.lsac.org/> for an online application.

Law School Application: Minority status can be claimed on the law school admissions application. Law school applications can be submitted via U.S. mail or online (check with the law school or its website for details). In each case, simply check the appropriate ethnic status box option on the application. To enhance your chances of gaining admission and showing that you are a worthy candidate, consider the following:

Personal Statement: Your personal statement is part of your law school application and provides supplemental information about you to the law school. Law schools are interested in diversifying their student body. So you may want to incorporate your ethnicity or gender into your personal statement. A well drafted personal statement may tell a story about your character, ethnicity, and gender or how you have overcome obstacles in life. Or what challenges and disadvantages you have overcome. For more details on how to write a compelling personal statement, please visit Legalnut's page on how to write a law school application personal statement .

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Other important information: Also relevant are letters of recommendation, work experience, community service, unique special interests, graduate work and other special studies. Research individual law schools to review their goals for diversity and incorporate that into an authentic story.

Financial Aid Resources

The cost of attending law school is rising at a fast rate. For lower income applicants, the cost alone can be a deterrent. To help finance your law school education, consider the following resources:

1. Financial Aid
2. Federal Student Loans
3. Merit based scholarships
4. Need based scholarships
5. Fellowships
6. Scholarship Grants (There are national and local scholarship opportunities available for law students. Each school has its own scholarship/grant program to consider.)
7. Clerking positions or other employment by day, evening classes by night
8. Tuition reimbursement from current employer

Conclusion

Minority status alone will not guarantee your admission into law school, but it may help the law school admissions department form a more complete picture of you and whether you are a good fit for the law school and its students.

Resources

LSAC Office of Minority Affairs

LSAC Minority Brochure from the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC)

LSAC Minority Statistics