Applying for law school: Exploring challenges students might face when seeking a law degree

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The path to law school for an eager student with a passion for constitutional law, rules and regulation, and the American legal system begins with an undergraduate education.

Post graduation, students can apply for law school in order to earn a law degree and excel in a long career in the legal field.

Michele DeStefano, a distinguished visiting professor at Harvard Law School and professor of law at the University of Miami, provided insightful perspectives on the legal education journey — including navigating the complexities of law school applications and the essential preparations required for academic success.

What do you need to know to get into law school?
How do you know if you are fit for law school?
What do I need to know about starting law school?
Is a 3.7 GPA good enough for law school?
What year in law school is the hardest?
How old are most law students?

Is law school easier than college?

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION WEIGHS PROPOSAL REQUIRING US LAW SCHOOLS TO CRACK DOWN ON FREE SPEECH DISRUPTIONS

1. What do you need to know to get into law school?
To get into law school, a bachelor's degree, a solid GPA, a commendable LSAT score, impactful recommendation letters and a compelling personal statement are usually required.

"Experience is highly valued, and it doesn't necessarily have to be directly related to the field of law. When considering the pursuit of law school, it's crucial to thoroughly assess your financial standing," said DeStefano.

Specific law schools may have unique preferences, so thorough research and readiness are crucial.

"Recognize the substantial cost associated with legal education and contemplate its implications for your overall quality of life. Prioritize your happiness in the decision-making process. If faced with choosing between two schools, opt for the one where you believe you will thrive and feel the most comfortable fitting in."

Showcasing relevant skills through extracurricular activities, work experience or volunteer engagements can bolster your application. Remember, specific law schools may have unique preferences, so thorough research and readiness are crucial.

2. How do you know if you are fit for law school?
You might be a good fit for law school if you enjoy critical thinking, analyzing complex issues and feeling passionate about justice.

Strong communication skills, the ability to handle extensive reading and research, and a drive to persist through challenges are also essential.

Regardless of one's career path, the value derived from law school is substantial, making it accessible to anyone with the right mindset and dedication, said DeStefano.

"Beyond legal expertise, law school gives students crucial skills in problem-solving, time management, and focus," she said.

"Future law students need to embody qualities such as innovation, open-mindedness, and creativity, recognizing that the methods of studying law may undergo changes in the next decade," she also said.

3. What do I need to know about starting law school?
Starting law school is the first step in an exciting yet demanding path.

It is an academically rigorous journey requiring dedication, sharp analytical skills and unwavering commitment. You will immerse
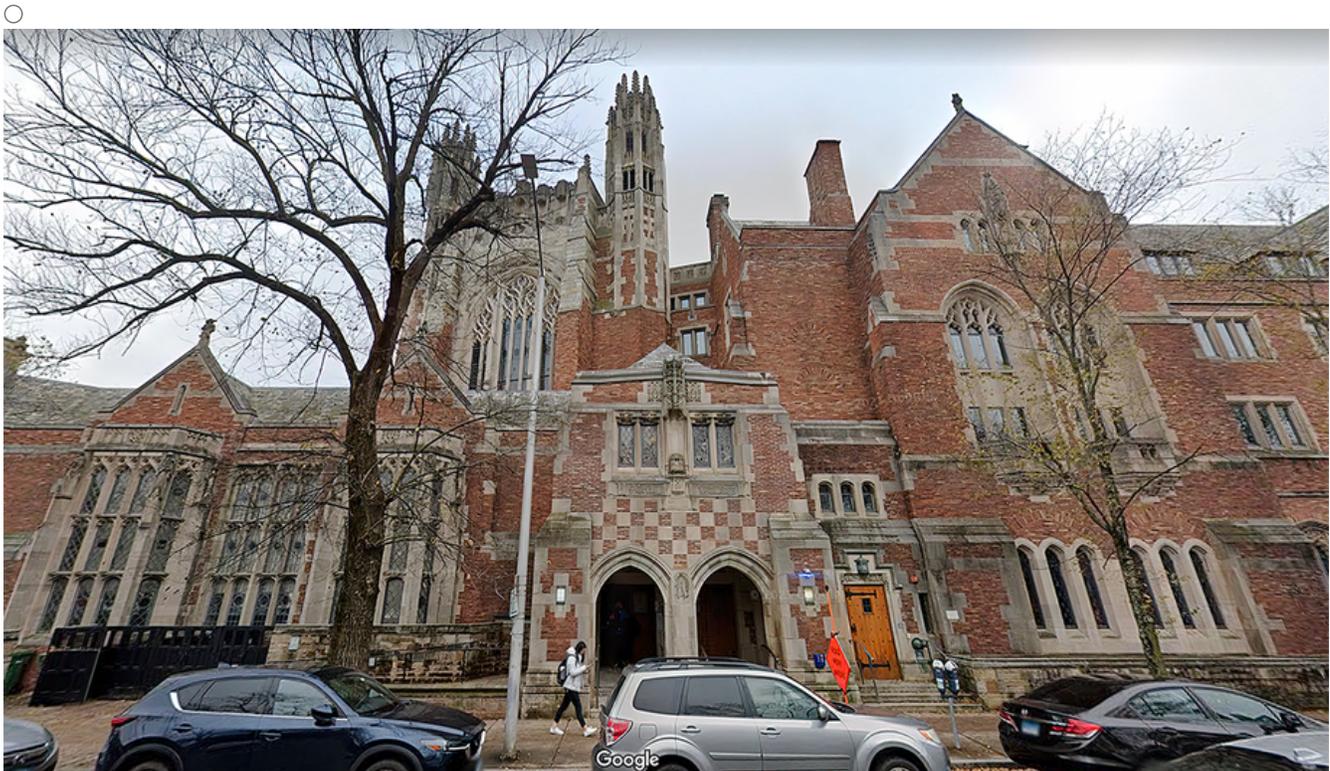
yourself in extensive reading, critical thinking and legal analysis.
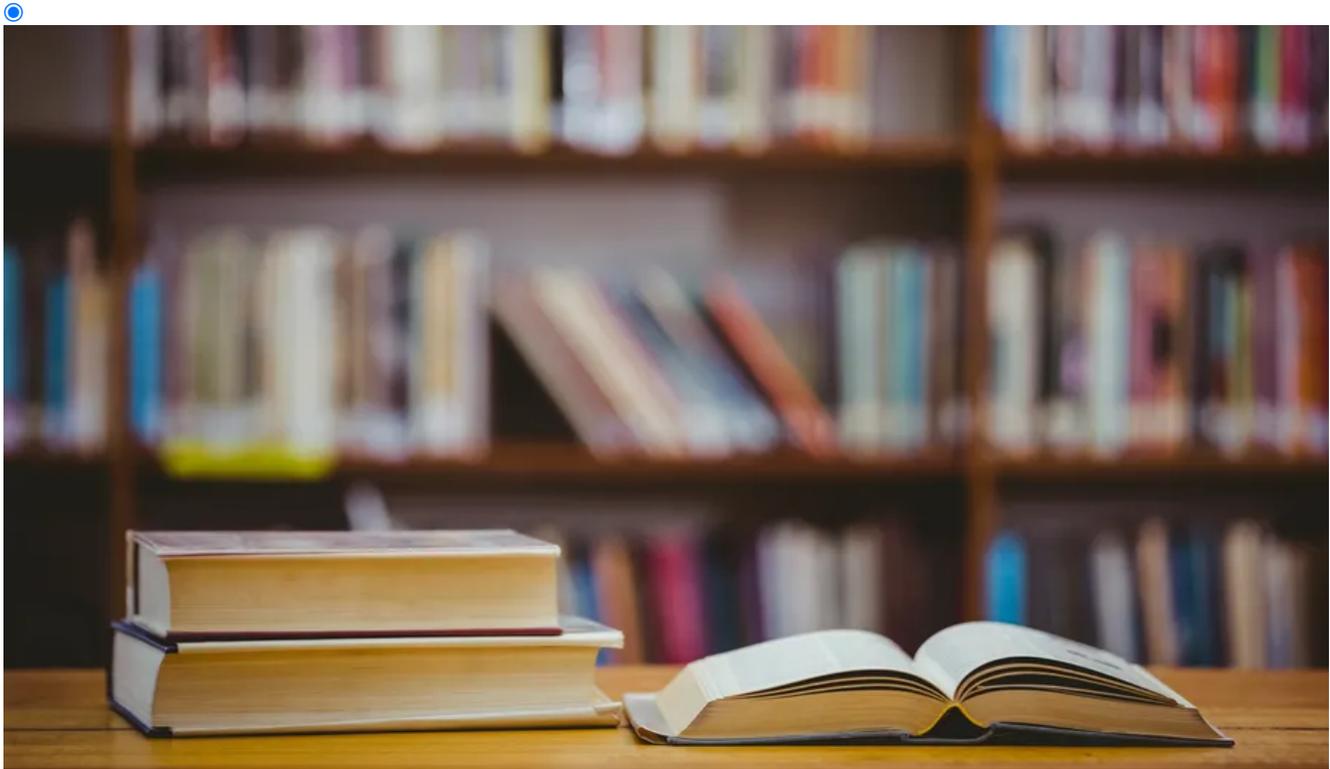
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Image 1 of 3

Studying law involves various texts that cover foundational legal principles. Some recommended books for law students include "Getting to Maybe" by Richard Michael Fischl and Jeremy Paul, and "The Bramble Bush" by Karl N. Llewellyn. (iStock)
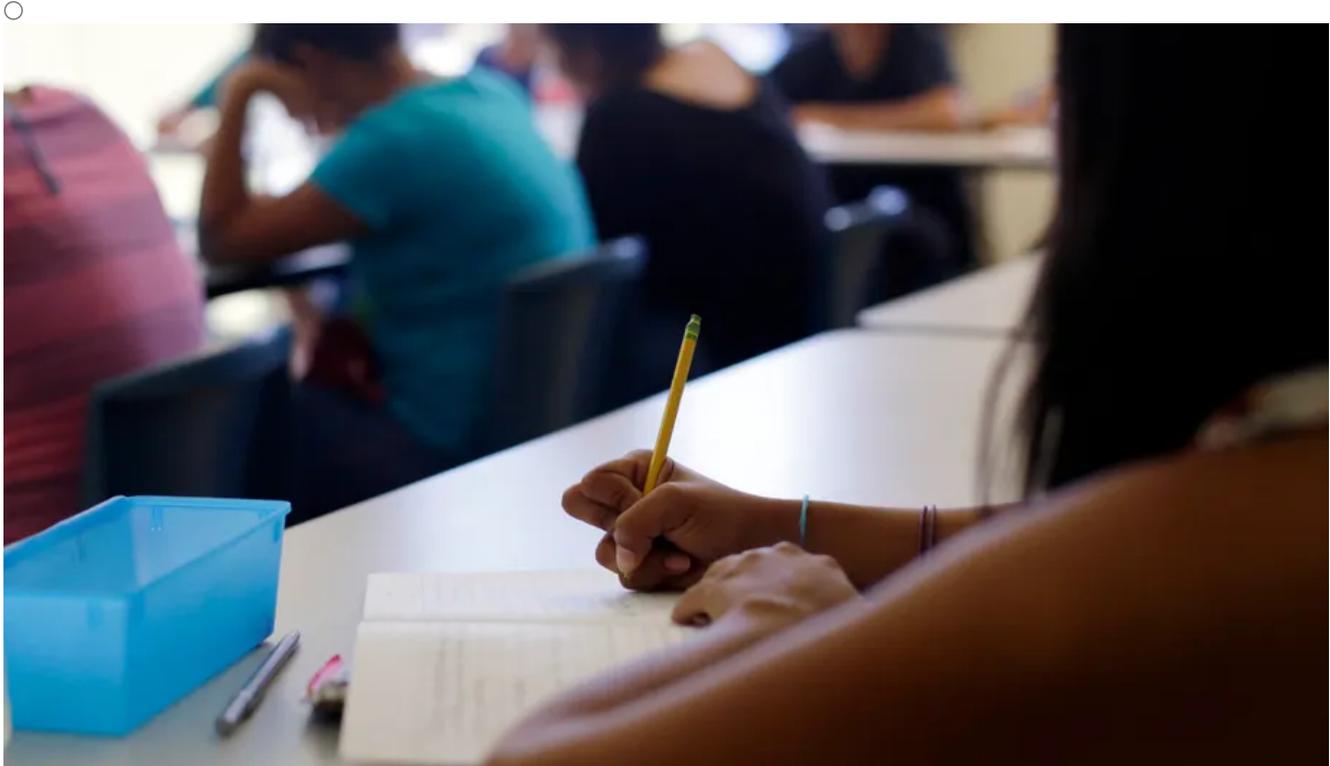

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Image 2 of 3

Yale Law School is internationally esteemed for its top-tier academics, focus on public service and renowned faculty, making it a leading institution in

legal education. Students need to find the right fit for them. (Google Maps)

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Image 3 of 3
Studying in law school demands deep comprehension and application of legal concepts, often through extensive coursework, discussions, and writing. (AP Photo/Eric Gay)

Effective time management and establishing effective study habits are crucial to tackling the workload effectively.

Actively engaging in class discussions and participating in extracurricular activities enhance the learning journey.

Building solid connections with faculty and peers, leveraging internships and networking, and prioritizing self-care amid a demanding schedule are vital. Striking a balance between academics, networking and personal wellness is pivotal for success in law school.

4. Is a 3.7 GPA good enough for law school?
A GPA of 3.7 is generally considered a very competitive GPA for law school admissions.

It is above the average GPA for many law schools, which can vary but often falls around 3.0 to 3.5.

Law school admissions, however, don't rely solely on GPA; they also consider other factors like LSAT scores, letters of recommendation, personal statements and extracurricular activities.

CAREER TREND OF 'MANAGING UP' CAN PROVE BENEFICIAL FOR ALL IN THE WORKPLACE, SAY EXPERTS

5. What year in law school is the hardest?
Law school is generally demanding throughout the years required — but many students often find the first year (1L) particularly challenging.

The workload is typically heavier during the first year, and students are adjusting to a new way of learning and thinking. The transition to understanding legal concepts, reading complex cases and developing legal analysis skills can be intense for many.

Here is valuable advice to prospective law students from DeStefano, with four key tips:

Take deep breaths
Avoid clubs and study groups in 1L
Prioritize networking

Build relationships with professors

1. Take deep breaths

"Starting law school is challenging, similar to learning a new language," she said.

"It's normal to feel confused in the initial weeks. Give yourself the grace to adapt; understanding the legal language is a process, not an instant achievement."

2. Avoid clubs and study groups in 1L

Your first year should be dedicated to mastering the foundations of law and building confidence, said DeStefano.

"Joining clubs or study groups can be distracting. Focus on navigating law school itself; it lays the groundwork for everything else."

3. Prioritize networking

It's important to network both within and beyond law school, DeStefano advised.

"Acknowledge your peers as potential future colleagues. First impressions matter, and the relationships you cultivate are often more impactful than grades."

4. Build relationships with professors

The relationships you make can prove invaluable, providing support and guidance throughout your law school experience.

"Over the three-year journey, aim to form meaningful connections with at least three professors. Make an effort for them to know your name and remember you."

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6. How old are most law students?

Law students can vary widely in age. Traditionally, many law students pursue their Juris Doctor (JD) degree directly after completing their undergraduate studies, typically in their early to mid-20s.

Yet law schools often have a diverse student body that includes individuals from various age groups.

7. Is law school easier than college?

Law school involves an intensive curriculum that focuses on legal theory, case studies and the application of laws.

The workload in law school can be substantial, requiring extensive reading, case briefings, legal research and critical thinking to understand complex legal concepts.

College, on the other hand, offers a broader educational experience, allowing students to explore various subjects and disciplines. The coursework might be diverse, covering topics beyond a specific field of study.

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"Law school is a whole new level of intensity compared to college. It's similar to having a full-time job, dedicating about 10 hours every day from 9 AM to 7 PM solely to law school. Even after that, the day doesn't end — you might fit in a workout, have dinner, and then continue reviewing. It's a demanding routine, but it's the rhythm that shapes each day," said DeStefano.

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