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Helpful Law School Application Resources



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**Contributed by
Senior Consultant
Derek Meeker**

Early Admissions Option Can Benefit Law Applicants

Derek holds a J.D. from Capital University and studied comparative law at Oxford University. Before becoming Dean of Admissions and Financial Aid at Penn Law, he was assistant director of admissions at William Mitchell College of Law in St. Paul, MN. He also served as an assistant attorney general in Ohio, where he represented universities and state agencies in employment litigation. At Penn Law, Meeker was the final decision maker on more than 21,000 applications and has been credited with numerous improvements in the law school's admissions process.

Several top law schools, including the New York University School of Law and the University of Pennsylvania Law School, have recently added binding Early Decision programs to their admissions options, notes Senior Consultant Derek Meeker.

These programs can benefit applicants who use them – even those who are not admitted on the basis of an early application.

As admissions officials point out, binding Early Decision and non-binding Early Action programs give applicants earlier notification of their admissions outcomes. Students know by December whether they have been admitted to a law class convening the following fall. That extra notice is important for applicants who will be leaving a full-time job to attend law school, or who will be combining law school with family responsibilities.

But even applicants who do not receive an admissions offer in the ED round can gain from the experience, says Derek. "If an applicant who applies early is placed on 'hold' – i.e., deferred to the regular admission applicant pool for further review – this is a signal that the school was interested enough in the applicant to keep him or her in the pool," says Derek. "That gives the applicant an opportunity to take a step back, 're-review' the application he or she submitted, and think about what he or she might send the school to supplement the application.

"If an applicant is rejected through an early admission program, it may be an indicator that he or she needs to cast the net a bit more widely and apply to additional schools that are more within his or her reach."

- Senior Consultant, Derek Meeker

Derek reminds applicants to look carefully at the conditions of a particular school's early admissions program before deciding whether to apply to it. "Different schools have different guidelines," he says. "Be especially careful to check whether or not the program is binding, meaning that you promise up front to attend the school if it accepts you.

"Be warned that, in the world of admissions, 'binding' means 'binding.' When you apply early, your application includes a signed statement saying you will attend the school if you are accepted. The school will expect you to honor that commitment. You don't want to start off your legal career by renegeing on a signed agreement.

"Obviously, this means that binding ED programs might be valuable if you're absolutely sure you want to attend a specific school, but they're not the right choice if you prefer to keep your options open."



**Contributed by
Senior Consultant
Michael Machen**

Off the Bubble and Into Your Target School

Michael B. Machen has a JD from the University of Michigan. Michael was the Director of Financial Aid and a key admissions and recruiting officer for the University of Chicago Law School from 2002 to 2007. While there, he reviewed more than 9,000 law school applications. He also oversaw the school's transfer application process, revamped the Loan Repayment Assistance Program, and created a new public-interest focused scholarship program. Before joining Chicago, Michael was an associate with a Chicago law firm where he focused on mergers and acquisitions, as well as venture capital transactions.

You've narrowed down your list of target schools and have begun preparing your application. You've got the LSAT coming up and have lined up your recommendations. So do you think you've got what it takes to get in? Or will you end up on the bubble?

"A 'bubble' applicant is someone who is on the cusp of being either admitted or denied," says Michael Machen, a former admissions officer from the University of Chicago. "They are either not quite strong enough to be admitted, or they're just strong enough to be waitlisted, rather than denied." The goal of a bubble applicant is to be on the good side of the bubble: being admitted if your application is not the strongest, or getting on the waitlist instead of being denied straight away if your profile is below their standards.

So what exactly is the profile of a bubble applicant? There are three solid indicators, according to Michael. "If your LSAT/GPA is in the middle range of the school you're applying to and those scores aren't comfortably above the median," he says, "that's a good indicator. Also, 'mixed' scores - such as a high LSAT with a low GPA, or vice versa - is also a 'bubble flag.'" Finally, if your 'soft' application materials such as your essay, resume and recommendations are not particularly strong, then chances are good you'll end up on the bubble with the admissions committees.

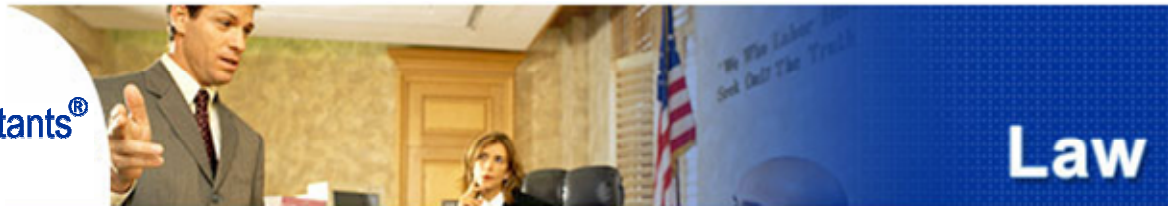
"They don't occur with any obvious frequency in regards to what round you're in," Michael comments. It mainly depends on those indicators and how they stack up against the current applicant pool. Michael does warn that later in the cycle, "it gets tougher to stay in the game and not get denied straight away."

Michael did tell us that there are some things an applicant can do to avoid being on the bubble and more firmly in the realm of consideration. "You need to show the extra effort, personality, enthusiasm and interest in the school you're trying for," he says. "If your numbers are only average for the school, then you have to demonstrate that you're going to be the nicest, happiest, most involved student they have in the class." Communicating that an applicant is especially interested in that particular school is key. "Try to let them know that you are just dying to go there, and that you would definitely accept if they admit you."

Applicants can avoid the bubble by making sure their application is as comprehensive as can be, and tailored to the school. "Make sure your application is as strong as possible for the particular school you're applying to." Michael notes that "applications are becoming more and more customized, so schools are seeing more school-specific essays, recommendation letters and additional materials that help the committees consider every aspect of the application in the light most favorable to the applicant, and put your application over the top."

The larger the applicant pool, the greater amount of bubble candidates. Michael notes that schools with large and competitive pools will have a larger number of 'maybe' students. "Schools like Harvard and Yale - who have rigorous standards and thousands of very strong applicants - can be very choosy to the point that any flaw in an application can put you in the 'bubble' category."

And if you find yourself on the bubble by being put on 'Hold' or 'Waitlist' status? "It's important to continue to show interest and submit whatever you can to address the weaknesses in your application," Michael notes. "Additional essays, recommendation letters, updated resumes or transcripts - whatever you can do to politely convince them you're a great fit" can increase your chances of getting off the bubble - and being admitted.



Contributed by
Senior Consultant
Mark Meyerrose

Finding the Right Fit for a Nontraditional Candidate

Mark Meyerrose holds both undergraduate and graduate degrees from Harvard. After spending 1 year in Harvard Law School's financial aid office as a staff assistant, Mark spent three years in the Harvard Law School admissions office. In 1998, Mark left his position as an admissions officer at Harvard Law School to join the admissions committee at Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business as an Assistant Director of Admissions. In 2001, he was promoted to Associate Director of Admissions at Tuck.

One thing I do for clients is help them find the best fit law schools for their educational and career goals among all law schools out there. That's often the key that can effectively position them in the admissions process, especially for "non-traditional" applicants.

One time I worked with a client who, in statistical terms, would have sunk from view in the applicant pool. His LSAT was below 160, and he had a 3.5-ish GPA from a decent but no-name college. It didn't help matters that his major was considered very 'soft.'

His personal story was a lot more impressive. He had immigrated to the US from a developing country, arriving here with exactly 100 dollars in his pocket. He really pulled himself up by the bootstraps. He took the entrepreneurial route, starting and then selling his own business. He later moved on to health care management, which was the field he was currently working in, very successfully. But while that's an impressive life story, the bare facts of it weren't going to persuade most law schools that he was J.D. material.

The client had his sights set high. He wanted to get into one of the top 20 law schools. I told him it was going to be a stretch, given his LSAT and GPA.

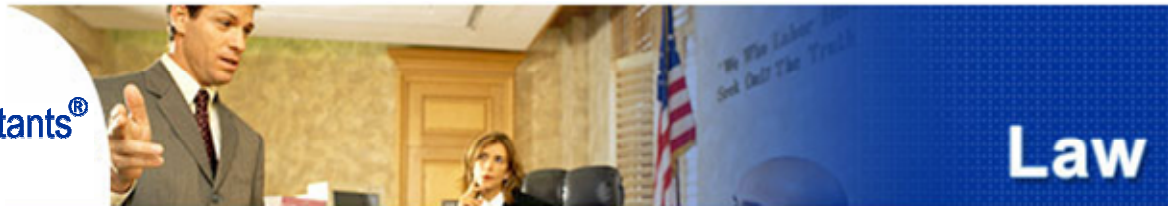
I knew that the key to law school, for him, lay in 1) school selection and 2) emphasizing his 'bootstrapper' background -- without sounding whiny.

I persuaded him to trim his list of target schools to those which I know appreciate applicants with substantial professional experience. Northwestern really fit the bill. The average age of Northwestern students is a bit higher than at other top programs, and – more importantly – they interview applicants. Given my client's personality and background, I knew that the interview would be a great opportunity for him to put some extra 'wow' into his candidacy.

Before he could get to the interview stage, though, we needed to prepare an application that leveraged his strong points: a fascinating background and a successful career. The part of his story that we agreed we should focus on was that he had a desire to help other new citizens starting businesses navigate the pitfalls of entrepreneurship that he had experienced first-hand.

His essays were of a total piece. His personal statement discussed his background generally and his professional and entrepreneurial experiences specifically. The other essays he wrote about his background gave more detail about his life experience. Finally, the essay he wrote about his career goals and his desire to attend law school tied it all together perfectly.

He was not only admitted to Northwestern, but was offered a hefty scholarship there as well.



Large Law Firm Employment Considerations

If you have decided you may want to work for a large law firm after completing your J.D., then make sure you carefully consider the following steps. A little leg work now, can save you considerable time and effort later and keep your career path on track!

Do as much research as possible before committing to law school

Talk to associates at the types of law firms you want to target. Ask them about the firms' cultures and work hours. We understand you may not know if you would be happy working there until you get an internship, but the more background research you can do now before selecting your target law schools, the better.

Select your target law schools carefully

Although the top national firms have been casting their nets wider as hiring competition increases, they regularly recruit from the very top schools, and having a degree from one of these will give you a leg up in the recruiting process. Mid-sized firms are reported to be shifting their recruiting to lower-profile national schools and regional schools because they can't compete with big firms' demand for J.D.s from the very top schools. Regional firms may have their own recruiting preferences. Try to make sure that the type of employer you have in mind recruits through the school you plan to attend.

Work hard at your studies

Your law school GPA will make a big difference in your post-graduation career options. Slacking off once you get to a top law school will greatly diminish the effort you put into gaining admission to that top law school.

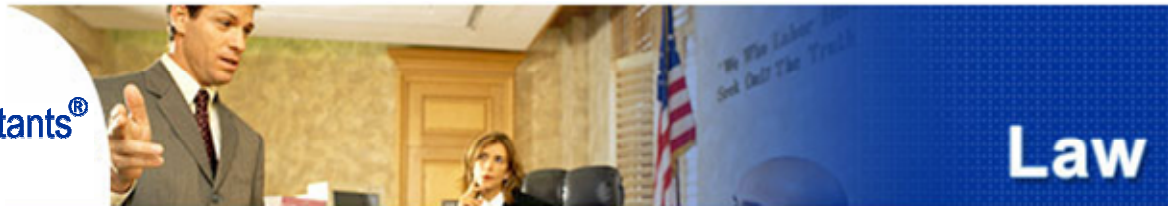
Utilize your summer internship

Use summer internships to gain the practical skills that firms demand of associates and to prove your interest and mettle to your prospective employers.

Know what you're about to get into

But also use summer internships to make sure that an associate's life is what you want. The top firms pay associates handsomely – but they also expect a lot in return for their money. If long hours and limited vacations aren't what you want in a job, re-think your interest in this career track. And if you like the work but don't like the vibe at the office you're clerking at, expand your job search to other firms. You'll be spending most of your waking hours at work for the next few years; you'll want to do that someplace where you'll be happy.

We have the help you need to determine if law school is the right investment decision for you. Do you know how to calculate your expected return on investment? How to handle your finances? How to incorporate career goals? Find out with our Return on Investment Calculator at www.admissionsconsultants.com/lawschool/return-on-investment/



Here's Why the Top Law Schools May Be the Best Pick for Public Service

Everyone knows that law school graduates who opt to work in government or for a non-profit earn far less money than their peers who go into private practice do. With the latest rounds of raises for associates at the top national firms, a J.D. who goes to work in the private sector can wind up with a first-year salary three times higher than that of a classmate who goes into public service.

Logically, this would suggest that anyone aspiring to a public service law career should target the less-expensive schools, since their best hope of repaying law school loans on a public service salary will be to minimize the amount they have to borrow in the first place – right?

Not necessarily. One of the ironies that law students face is that the more expensive schools might turn out to be the more affordable option for future law clerks, prosecutors, defenders, and advocates.

That's because the more expensive schools tend to be those with the richest endowments and the wealthiest alumni networks. They can afford to be more generous with scholarships and loan repayment assistance programs than less well-funded schools can.

For example, say someone has been accepted to Law Schools A and B. School A is the law school at the state university. It has a good regional reputation but no national reach. Its in-state tuition is a bargain by law school standards, setting back a qualifying student by less than \$20,000 per year. Our hypothetical applicant could get a law education for under \$60,000, which seems like an amount of debt he could handle on a public service salary.

School B is one of the top dozen law schools in the country. Our applicant is flattered to have been accepted there. But School B costs twice as much as School A does, and our applicant tells them he'll have to decline their admissions offer on those grounds alone.

But then School B comes back with an offer of a scholarship that will cover half of the applicant's tuition for all three years. In addition, it has a generous loan repayment assistance program (LRAP) that will pay off up to half of the applicant's law school debt if he goes to work for the government or for a non-profit agency after graduating. Our applicant does the math and figures out that School B could wind up costing him about half what School A would.

Of course, applicants can't count on getting a financial aid outcome like this. You have to be an outstanding applicant to get that kind of scholarship offer. And LRAPs vary enormously from one school to another. Some schools essentially have a program in name only, with little funding to give out. Others prefer to distribute their LRAP funds to the largest possible number of graduates, leaving any individual alum with only modest support. As with other aspects of law school selection, it's important for applicants to research the actual financial aid history of the schools they're thinking of applying to.

But the bottom line is that law school applicants should not automatically dismiss the top law schools because they assume they would not be able to afford them on a public service salary. The top schools are especially concerned about the dwindling number of J.D.s going into government and public service, and they are willing to use their financial resources to do something about it. Keep your options open. If you're a strong applicant and present yourself well, you may find that one of the very top schools is your best bet, not only in career but in financial terms.

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How to Get Into the Ivies

An admissions consultant's perspective

By Elka Maria Torpey
Occupational Outlook Quarterly

Aiming for the Ivy League? Admissions consultant Derek Meeker can give you advice on how to get in.

"There are a lot of myths out there about what school officials are looking for in an application," said Meeker, who specializes in law school admissions. Part of his job is to steer clients in the right direction and, hopefully, increase their chances of getting into a school that's right for them. He helps with everything from selecting an appropriate school to writing personal statements.

An admissions consultant's work often begins with assessing clients' strengths and weaknesses and discussing possible schools to consider. During this initial consultation, Meeker covers a few basics. "It's sort of a counseling process," he said. "I ask them about their personal background, academic interests, jobs that they've held. And I help people to identify what's unique about themselves."

One challenge in this work arises when clients' aspirations outshine their qualifications. "While I get clients from all over the spectrum, the majority want to go to the top schools -- those that have a 6- to 15-percent acceptance rate," said Meeker. "I am very realistic with people. Sometimes, that's not an easy conversation to have."

But, other times, admissions consultants are challenged with convincing their clients that they actually have more potential than they think. For example, one of Meeker's clients originally hadn't planned to apply to the most competitive schools. After hearing her story and her background, though, Meeker encouraged her to apply to top-tier schools; he knew that she had an excellent chance of getting accepted anywhere she applied. And he was right: Ultimately, the woman was accepted to one of the highest-ranked law schools in the country.

How much help an admissions consultant provides, and the amount of time spent with a client, vary based on each client's needs or desires. In addition to helping clients choose schools, consultants frequently offer advice on letters of recommendation, résumés and essays or personal statements. They might, for example, suggest that a client write about a specific topic, such as overcoming a challenge, to provide the admissions committee with a more complete picture of who he or she really is.

Being able to identify good writing -- and suggest improvements -- is critical for admissions consultants, as is attention to detail. **"I love helping people with their writing and with becoming better writers,"** said Meeker, whose undergraduate degree is in journalism. "It's not just about helping them get into the best school. **I try to give detailed and specific advice that can help my clients even after they get into school."**

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Admissions consultants work with prospective undergraduates and with law, medical, business and other graduate students. Meeker said there is ample work for admissions consultants because there is strong competition to get into good schools -- particularly graduate or professional schools.

Formerly the dean of admissions at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, Meeker and others on the admissions committee reviewed as many as 6,500 applications for 250 openings. And that was several years ago. "All of the top schools have more than enough applicants who are qualified," said Meeker. So, he says, prospective students have become increasingly willing to seek help in applying. "Admissions consulting has definitely become more common in the last decade."


Many of Meeker's clients are older, working adults who are interested in returning to school. "I've had some really great success stories," he said, "and those clients are really happy."


People seek consultation for a range of reasons. Some applicants struggled academically in high school or as undergraduate students. Others have personal issues that affected their grades or admissions test scores. Still others might have a criminal record and want to know how to handle it on an application. "It's really rewarding to help someone through the process who comes to you and is lost," he said.

A common problem, said Meeker, is that applicants often are so focused on trying to impress the admissions committee that they say only what they think the committee wants to hear. This can hurt applicants if they don't understand what admissions officers are really looking for.

For example, he says, working the night shift at a fast-food restaurant is just as important to note on your application as a prestigious internship or part-time job at a law firm. And if a teaching assistant is the best judge of your academic work, then that's the person who should write your letter of recommendation -- not necessarily a department chair or a high-profile faculty member.

Derek's advice highlights the importance of being genuine. Applicants' credentials are important, but it's their character that counts. **"At the end of the day," he said, "you just have to be who you are."**

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