

## LEGAL EDUCATION IN THE US

In this document you will find an overview of legal education in the US, as well as information about choosing a law school, applying to law school, financing a law degree, US professional qualification exams and post-study career options. Information on additional resources related to legal education is also available in this document.

For general information on pursuing postgraduate study in the US, please refer to the 'Postgraduate Study in the US' section of the Fulbright website at: [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)

### OVERVIEW:

In the US, the formal study of law is only available at the postgraduate level. To attend a US law school, a student must already hold at least an undergraduate degree. Thus, students with A-levels or Scottish Highers *cannot* expect to attend a law school in the US without first earning an undergraduate degree. Universities may offer first degrees in law-related fields (e.g. a Bachelor of Arts degree in Law and Society) or a pre-law track, but such degrees are not sufficient to practise law in the US or UK.

#### *Degrees on Offer:*

The most common law degrees offered by US law schools are the professional **Juris Doctor (JD) degree** and the **Master's degree in law (LLM)**. The professional JD degree is meant for those who wish to practise law (or work within the legal field) in the US. Therefore, JD programmes primarily focus on American law. The LLM degree is generally meant for already-qualified lawyers who wish to undertake further study in a particular area of the field of law. Please note that to practice law in the US, you must first pass the bar exam and have legal right to work in the US.

Degrees awarded at the doctoral level are the **Doctor of Juridical Science (SJD or JSD)** and the **Doctor of Comparative Law Studies (DCL)**. These are the most advanced degrees in law and generally intended for those pursuing an academic career in the legal field.

Most law schools also offer the option of **joint degrees** in various disciplines. The most common degrees are a **JD/MBA** or a **JD/MA** or **JD/MSc** in fields such as economics, international relations, public policy or political science. Joint degrees will take more time to complete than the JD degree alone due to the added degree requirements, but are shorter than completing the two degrees separately.

#### *Structure of the JD Programme:*

The first year of study is relatively structured with compulsory modules such as civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and procedure, legal method, legal writing, property law and personal injury law. The first year may also include mock trials in which students argue cases against one another.

During the second and third years of study, courses may include evidence, civil litigation, taxation, wills and trusts, administrative, corporate, commercial, family, environmental and international law. Although the design of the JD does not allow much specialisation, students have more freedom during the final two years to choose elective courses in their field of interest.

Opportunities for gaining professional skills are also often available after the first year through a clinical or externship course, which allows for actual or simulated work with clients. These opportunities vary among law schools but usually take the form of an actual on-site clinic dealing with minor cases, an external clinical placement at a law firm or public agency or a course with simulated clinical work. Students often gain professional experience by completing work placements or internships during the summers.

#### *Structure of the LLM Programme:*

LLM degree programmes can be individually tailored to suit a candidate's interests and normally require a thesis or independent research component. LLM programmes are typically one year in length and can offer concentrations in particular fields such as taxation, international law and comparative law. Some law schools also offer LLM programmes such as US Comparative Law or US Legal Studies, which are designed to give foreign law graduates an insight into the American legal system.

For admissions checklists for JD programmes and LLM programmes, please see the end of this handout.

## CHOOSING A LAW SCHOOL:

In order to practise as a lawyer in the US, many states require a candidate to have a JD degree from a law school that has been approved by the **American Bar Association (ABA)**. The ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is recognised by the US Department of Education as the accrediting agency for professional JD programmes. The American Bar Association does not provide accreditation for LLM degree programmes. Non-ABA accredited law schools may only qualify attendees to practise in the state in which the school is located; consequently, graduates of non-ABA accredited schools often have difficulty being licensed to practise law in other states. For a list of ABA approved schools, see: <http://officialguide.lsac.org>

If you plan to practise law in the US, attending a well-known school with a strong academic reputation and high level of prestige can set your CV apart when applying for jobs. Further, being part of a network of alumni from a particular school can provide networking opportunities as your career progresses. Therefore, when choosing a law school and in particular, a JD programme, students may wish to carefully research the school's academic reputation and to refer to rankings such as *US News and World Reports*.

When choosing a law programme, prospective students should also consider opportunities to specialise in a particular area of law. Law school websites should describe the curriculum of the JD or LLM programme in detail. JD students may wish to take into account opportunities to complete clinics, internships, mock cases and research, while LLM students may wish to take into account courses on offer both in and outside the law school as well as opportunities to complete research or a thesis in your area of interest. For JD students, it is important to choose a school in the state in which you wish to take the bar exam and practise law.

When choosing a law school, it is also advisable to weigh factors such as class size, atmosphere, location and funding, which are described on the Postgraduate Study - Choosing a Postgraduate Degree Programme page of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)

## APPLYING TO US LAW SCHOOLS:

Admission to US law schools is extremely competitive, especially for international applicants. Admissions criteria include:

- Undergraduate and postgraduate (if applicable) coursework
- Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) scores – for JD applicants
- 2-3 letters of recommendation
- Statement of purpose
- CV and/or writing sample for some schools – extracurricular activities and previous work experience will be taken into account during admissions
- Interview for some schools
- Financial arrangements (applicants may be asked to provide information on how they intend to fund their legal education)

In terms of previous coursework, JD programmes do not require that applicants take an undergraduate degree in a particular subject or to have completed specific courses. Instead, they emphasize the importance of a demanding and well-rounded education with experience in a variety of disciplines.

Students should choose an undergraduate major based on their interests; it is possible to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for admission into a law programme while majoring in an unrelated subject. However, to succeed in law school, you will want to develop skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, analytical reading, oral and written communication and general research skills. Prospective law school candidates may also wish to gain a basic understanding in certain subjects, such as American history, political theory, ethics and theories of justice, economics, human behaviour and international relations.

Please note some LLM programmes will only grant admission to international applicants who already hold an undergraduate law degree and are qualified to practise in their home country. Other US universities will not require a law degree as long as the applicant is qualified to practise in a common law country and, in some cases, has a few years of work experience. Admissions requirements should be readily available on the law school websites.

For JD applicants, it is also important to keep in mind that admissions officers rank the LSAT among the top three selection factors. Students should take the LSAT in the spring of their penultimate year of undergraduate study. Please note that LLM applicants may be required to sit the GRE exam, which will play a slightly lesser role in selection than the LSAT for JD applicants.

For admissions checklists for JD programmes and LLM programmes, please see the end of this handout.

## FINANCING A LAW DEGREE:

### Expenses:

As the cost of higher education increases in both the US and UK, it is important for students to know what costs to expect and to develop a plan to cover these. Keep in mind you will need to demonstrate access to funding for the first year of study in order to apply for a visa.

Students should expect to pay application fees that range between \$50 and \$120 per application. Additionally, you may need to factor in the cost of sitting the LSAT exam (\$127 for JD applicants) and registering with the LSDAS service (\$117).

Tuition and fees rates can vary significantly from university to university, as there are no standard government set fees as in the UK. Rather, each university sets its own tuition and fees rates. Tuition for JD and LLM programmes can range from \$20,000 to \$45,000 per academic year, so you will want to consult each law school's websites for their specific fee rates. When considering funding for your degree, you should also consider living expenses, books and personal costs. Estimates should also be on the law school's website.

### Funding:

There is limited university funding available for law degrees; however, you should explore all options for university scholarships and fellowships and make sure you are considered for applicable awards. You may also wish to investigate funding from external funding bodies, such as the Fulbright Commission. For more information on university funding, external funding bodies and loans, please see the Postgraduate Study – Finances section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)

The US-UK Fulbright Commission offers a number of competitive, highly-prestigious awards for postgraduate study and research in the US in which LLM applicants may be interested. For more information about eligibility and the application process, please refer to [www.fulbright.co.uk/awards](http://www.fulbright.co.uk/awards)

## QUALIFYING TO PRACTISE LAW IN THE US:

In order to practise law in the US, in addition to having the legal right to work in the US, one must first be admitted to the bar in an individual state. This entails passing the **state bar exam** and any other exams required by the state bar examiners. Most states only allow a student to sit the exam if the law school from which he/she holds a JD degree has been approved by the ABA. Students who have completed a LLM *may* qualify to sit the bar exam in New Hampshire, New York, Virginia, North Carolina and California. The criteria for eligibility to take the bar examination or to otherwise qualify for bar admission are set by each state's bar association. Contact the bar association of the state in which you intend to practice law for information on test dates and sites. A list of state bar associations can be found on the ABA website at: <http://www.abanet.org/barserv/stlobar.html>

In addition to the state bar exam, 47 states also require the **Multistate Bar Exam (MBE)** and the **Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (MPRE)**. Other multistate exams include the **Multistate Essay Exam (MEE)** and the **Multistate Performance Test (MPT)**. The licensing process also involves the assessment of an applicant's character and fitness to engage in the practice of law.

## CAREER OPTIONS IN THE UK:

You should check with the appropriate professional association in your home country to see if a US degree meets your home country's requirements to practise law. This is particularly important for JD students, as most LLM students will already be qualified lawyers in their home country.

The US legal system has its basis in the common law tradition of English law. However, as the most important source of US law is the United States Constitution, UK nationals returning to their home country after completing a JD in the US will have to qualify to practise law in the UK.

To qualify as a solicitor in England and Wales, internationally-educated lawyers must pass the **Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT)**. This test is administered by **Central Law Training (CLT)** and consists of four main subject areas: property, litigation, professional conduct and accounts and principles of common law. Please note that before sitting the test all candidates must apply to the **Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA)** for a Certificate of Eligibility. This Certificate will state which of the main subject areas of the test a candidate is required to pass and any requirement for further training. For more information on the QLTT, and to register, visit the website at: <http://www qltt.co.uk>

Organisations such as the **Law Society** can also provide information for international law graduates pursuing a career in law in the UK. For more information, refer to the Law Society website at: <http://juniorlawyers.lawsociety.org.uk/career>

#### **FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

Please note that the Fulbright Advisory Service offers a number of resources on postgraduate study in the US, through our advising website – [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk), annual USA Grad School Day event and commercial partners.

For more information, you may wish to consult the following websites:

- Test Tutors & Educational Consultants: [www.fulbright.co.uk/study-in-the-us/postgraduate-study/resources](http://www.fulbright.co.uk/study-in-the-us/postgraduate-study/resources)
- American Bar Association: [www.abanet.org/legaled](http://www.abanet.org/legaled)
- Association of American Law Schools: [www.aals.org](http://www.aals.org)
- Law School Admissions Council: [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)
- National Conference of Bar Examiners: [www.ncbex.org](http://www.ncbex.org)
- The Law Society (UK): <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/home.law>
- UK Bar Council: [www.barcouncil.org.uk](http://www.barcouncil.org.uk)
- Qualified Lawyers Transfer Test (QLTT): <http://www.qltt.co.uk>

#### **JD ADMISSIONS CHECKLIST:**

##### 1-1 ½ Years Prior to Enrolment:

- Begin by reading the postgraduate study in the US section of the Fulbright website, this handout and several law schools' admissions webpages to gain an overview of the JD admissions process.
- Attend **USA Grad School Day – 5 March 2009 (London) or 28 April 2009 (Edinburgh)**: Have the unique opportunity to attend information sessions on a variety of topics related to postgraduate study in the US, including the Fulbright Awards.
- Early June – LSAT** testing date: Most JD (but not LLM) programmes require that applicants sit the LSAT. Generally, applicants must sit the exam by the December testing date. However, it is strongly advisable to take the LSAT in June or October. This will allow the opportunity to re-sit the exam in October or December if necessary.

The LSAT is a half-day exam including five, 35-minute sections with questions in reading comprehension, analytical reasoning and logical reasoning. Four of five sections will be scored, and a fifth section, which can take place at any point during the exam, is used to test new questions. Students will not know which is the test section during the exam.

The exam also includes a writing section. The writing sample will not be scored, but will be sent to law schools and taken into account during the admissions process.

The LSAT is offered in London at the Iron Mongers Hall three times per year. Registration deadlines are typically one month prior to the testing date, and the registration fee is approximately \$127. To register, visit: [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)

To **prepare for the LSAT**, you may wish to review the sample questions on the LSAC website: <http://www.lsac.org/LSAT/lsat-prep-materials.asp> Alternatively, you may wish to purchase a book from the Buy Books page on [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk), take advantage of the LSAT courses provided by one of our partners listed on the Postgraduate Study – Resources page or access one of the LSAT preparation books in our Resource Library.

##### 8-10 Months Prior to Enrolment:

- Narrow your law school choices** to the 4-6 schools to which you will apply. Take into account your LSAT score and undergraduate degree results to judge the relative competitiveness of your application and ensure you apply to a range of schools, including 1-2 schools at which you feel confident you will be accepted. If you do not have an LSAT score, sit 1-2 mock exams to determine an estimated score.

- **Eight-ten weeks before you submit your applications:** Prospective JD applicants will most likely need to **register for the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS)** provided by the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) and complete your applicant report. The fee to register is approximately \$117, and you may register from the LSAC website: <http://www.lsac.org> Please note many LLM programmes also advise applicants to register with LSDAS.

To complete your report, you will need to **request a transcript** from your undergraduate and, if applicable, postgraduate institutions and have it posted to LSAC. The LSDAS will generate a report based upon your transcripts (listing of your undergraduate modules and marks), a writing sample and LSAT scores. This report will be sent to the universities to which you apply for a fee of \$12 per report.

See the Postgraduate Study in the US – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) for more information about preparing transcripts.

Please note some universities also ask that foreign educated applicants complete the **LSAC JD Credential Evaluation Service** to have their undergraduate results certified and evaluated against US educational standards. The university's admissions page should tell you whether it is required to register for the LSDAS and/or LSAC JD Credential Evaluation Service. For more information on the LSAC JD Credential Evaluation Service, please see: <http://www.lsac.org/Applying/lstdas-candidate-requirements.asp>

- **Six-eight weeks before you submit your applications:** Most law schools will require 2-3 **letters of recommendation**. Some law schools also ask that you use the LSDAS service for your letters of recommendation. However, others prefer to receive the letters directly. See the university's admissions webpage for more information.

Please see the Postgraduate Study in the US – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) for more information about requesting reference letters.

- **September – Applications online:** Many schools will begin placing their applications online in September and will begin receiving applications. Though admissions processes vary from school to school, many programmes will accept applications once they have gone online and will begin reviewing applications in the order received on a rolling basis from late October / early November, even if the published closing date is in December – February. If the school you are applying to uses a rolling admissions process, you should aim to have your application to the school by the first date at which they begin reviewing applications.

In addition to rolling admissions, some law schools will evaluate applications in rounds with early admission deadlines in October/November and regular deadlines in December/January. If possible, it is recommended to apply by the early admission deadline.

Please note many US universities encourage, if not require, applicants to complete their applications through the LSDAS portal. Applying through LSDAS will save you time, as many fields will be auto-filled from your LSDAS report on each university's application form. You will then need to submit a separate personal statement and/or short essay(s) alongside the application form and report. For information on writing personal statements, please see the Postgraduate Study – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)

- **Autumn:** As time permits, apply for funding from US universities and external funding bodies as you complete your admissions applications.
- **Late September / early October – LSAT testing date**
- **November** – Many schools will begin rolling admissions.
- **December – Final LSAT testing date**
- **December – February** – Many universities will officially close their application processes for JD programmes at this point. However, as described above, it is advisable to apply earlier than the closing date.

#### Lead up to Enrolment:

- *Spring:* Receive admissions decisions by post or e-mail.
- *Summer:* Notify the universities of your decision, pay a non-refundable deposit and apply for your visa.
- *Summer:* Read the pre-departure information on [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) to prepare for your arrival in the US.

- *August/early September*: Begin study in the US!

## LLM ADMISSIONS CHECKLIST:

### 1-1 ½ Years Prior to Enrolment:

- Begin by reading the postgraduate study in the US section of the Fulbright website, this handout and several law schools' admissions webpages to gain an overview of the LLM admissions process.
- Attend **USA Grad School Day – 5 March 2009 (London) or 28 April 2009 (Edinburgh)**: Have the unique opportunity to attend information sessions on a variety of topics related to postgraduate study in the US, including the Fulbright Awards.
- Consider applying for a **Fulbright Award** for postgraduate study and research in 2010-11. The deadline for applications for several categories of Awards will be **31 May 2009**: the Fulbright International Science & Technology PhD Awards, UK Fulbright Alistair Cooke Journalism Award, Fulbright-UK Film Council Award and Traditional Postgraduate Awards. Applications will be available from **1 February 2009**.

### 8-10 Months Prior to Enrolment:

- **Narrow your law school choices** to the 4-6 schools to which you will apply. Ensure you apply to a range of schools, including 1-2 schools at which you feel confident you will be accepted.
- **Eight-ten weeks before you submit your applications**: You may need to **register for the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS)** provided by the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) and complete your applicant report. See the LLM admissions page of the universities to which you're applying for guidance as to whether LSDAS registration is required.

The fee to register is approximately \$117, and you may register from the LSAC website: <http://www.lsac.org> To complete your report, you will need to **request a transcript** from your undergraduate and, if applicable, postgraduate institutions and have it posted to LSAC. The LSDAS will generate a report based upon your transcripts (listing of your undergraduate modules and marks) and a writing sample. This report will be sent to the universities to which you apply for a fee of \$12 per report.

See the Postgraduate Study in the US – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) for more information about preparing transcripts.

Please note some universities also ask that foreign educated applicants complete the **LSAC JD Credential Evaluation Service** to have their undergraduate results certified and evaluated against US educational standards. The university's admissions page should tell you whether it is required to register for the LSDAS and/or LSAC JD Credential Evaluation Service. For more information on the LSAC LLM Credential Evaluation Service, please see: <https://llm.lsac.org/llm/logon/splash.aspx>

- **Six-eight weeks before you submit your applications**: Most law schools will require 2-3 **letters of recommendation**. Some law schools also ask that you use the LSDAS service for your letters of recommendation. However, others prefer to receive the letters directly. See the university's admissions webpage for more information.

Please see the Postgraduate Study in the US – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) for more information about requesting reference letters.

- **Autumn**: As time permits, apply for funding from US universities and external funding bodies as you complete your admissions applications.
- **December**: Many schools will begin placing their applications online in the autumn and will set an **admissions deadline** as early as December. Unlike for JD admissions, you will likely apply directly to the law school.

In addition to the application form and fee, you will likely be required to submit a separate personal statement, CV and/or short essay(s) alongside the application form and report. For information on writing personal statements, please see the Postgraduate Study – Application Process section of [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk)

### Lead up to Enrolment:

- *Spring*: Receive admissions decisions by post or e-mail.
- *Summer*: Notify the universities of your decision, pay a non-refundable deposit and apply for your visa.
- *Summer*: Read the pre-departure information on [www.fulbright.co.uk](http://www.fulbright.co.uk) to prepare for your arrival in the US.
- *August/early September*: Begin study in the US!