

Admission Requirements

To be eligible to practice law in the state of Georgia, you must meet certain requirements in education, examination scores and moral fitness. Regarding educational requirements, you must hold an undergraduate degree from an accredited school and a J.D. degree from an ABA-accredited law school or from a law school approved by the Georgia Board of Bar Examiners. You must also take the Multi-State Professional Responsibility Exam and score at least a 75 on it. (This is the national ethics exam.)

In addition, you will have to complete an Office of Bar Admissions application and undergo a personal investigation of moral fitness. This is part of the legal profession's effort to assure the people of Georgia that attorneys admitted to practice in this state are of good moral character.

The investigative process culminates with a Certification of Fitness issued to the Supreme Court by the Office of Bar Admissions. The Office of Bar Admissions offers the bar exam twice each year in February and July. This exam lasts two days and is composed of an objective multi-state, multiple choice test, a skills (performance) test and a comprehensive essay examination. (For more information, write the Office of Bar Admissions, 244 Washington St. SW, Suite 140, Atlanta, GA 30334 or visit www.gabaradmissions.org.)

Opportunities in the Law

As noted earlier, careers in law are extremely varied. Many attorneys are in private practice, while some work within corporations as in-house counsel; others work in banks, financial institutions or government legal departments, such as the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Environmental Protection Agency or the state attorney general.

General practice. Most attorneys are general practitioners. This involves serving the needs of the general public in such areas as real estate transactions, contracts, family law (divorce, adoption, etc.), personal injury litigation, criminal defense, taxes, wills and probate matters and general business problems. The majority of time is not spent in court, but is spent counseling clients, researching, drafting contracts and other legal documents, planning estates, drafting wills and similar activities. Contrary to popular belief, attorneys prefer to solve their clients' problems by negotiating a settlement out of court or, preferably, through good advice to prevent the problem. Trial is an attorney's last resort.

Corporate counsel. Most large corporations employ their own legal staffs referred to as corporate counsel. Corporate counsel involves day-to-day legal problems of a company's relationship with the government, other companies, customers and employees. In addition to corporations, attorneys serve in similar positions for labor unions, trade organizations, universities and many national and international organizations.

Government attorneys. Federal, state and local governments employ many attorneys. Most administrative agencies have full-time legal staffs. Other government attorneys serve as prosecutors, public defenders and legal aid attorneys. Judges are also a part of the government although they constitute a separate and equal branch. Judges serve at the municipal, state and federal levels.

Public sector. A rather new area of legal practice is referred to as the public sector. Attorneys in this field of practice represent special interest groups in such areas as civil rights, environmental law, safety, consumer rights and other problems generally having to do with individual rights.

Statistics of the Profession

Presently, more than 40,000 attorneys are members of the State Bar of Georgia. During 2008 alone, over 1,100 members were admitted into the Bar. More and more women and other minority groups are coming into the profession.

According to the National Association for Law Placement (www.nalp.org), the median starting salary for all full-time jobs rose from \$52,000 for the class of 2000 to \$62,000 for the class of 2006. Escalating salaries at large firms widened the salary differential between private and public sector jobs. In 2008, the median private practice salary ranged from \$80,000-\$145,000, depending on the size of the firm, while medians for jobs in government, public interest organizations and as judicial clerks ranged from \$40,000-\$50,000.

Of the class of 2008 graduates whose employment status was known, 82.8 percent accepted legal positions and 6.2 percent accepted positions not directly involved in the practice of law. Employment in part-time legal positions rose to 6.5 percent (compared with 5 percent in recent prior years). More than 2 percent were pursuing an advanced degree full-time, leaving 8 percent unemployed and not pursuing further education. The most common employment setting was that of private practice within a law firm. Public service employment, including government jobs, judicial clerkships and public interest positions, accounted

for 26.8 percent of jobs taken by employed graduates, a slight decrease from the figure for the class of 2007.

Conclusion

As you pursue your course in the study of law, remember that the road is a long and rough one. Money is always a consideration, but should not reflect your primary goal. Many people picture an attorney as a glamorous professional, financially successful and socially prominent. If this image is the main reason you want to become an attorney, you should reconsider your decision.

An excellent discussion of career alternatives can be found by visiting the ABA's website at www.abanet.org/careercounsel/finding.html.

At times, an attorney's job is far from glamorous and requires long hours. Success as an attorney depends on your skill, dedication, motivation and willingness to abandon personal endeavors to devote yourself to your practice. Being an attorney is far from easy, but for the right person, it can be one of the most rewarding professional experiences around.

Opportunities in the legal profession for rewarding service to individuals and society are abundant. The law traditionally has been regarded as a learned profession and the need is for well-educated attorneys. Most teachers of law agree that one of the most important qualifications for law school study is a disciplined and imaginative mind. Therefore, pre-legal education is extremely important.

This pamphlet was prepared by the Communications Committee of the State Bar of Georgia as a public service. This pamphlet is intended to assist those who are considering careers in law or law-related fields. It is not intended as legal advice.



Legal Careers



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Consumer Pamphlet Series

A Definition of Law

Law, in its generic sense, is a body of rules of action or conduct prescribed by a controlling authority and having binding legal force. Rules by which society governs itself are called laws. Such rules originated with the dawn of civilization. They began as simple tribal rules passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. Eventually, these rules developed into formal written rules known as laws.

In addition to the laws furnished by the judiciary, other laws are formulated by legislative and executive branches of government. There are numerous sources of laws—the U.S. Congress, state legislative bodies and the legislative bodies of county and municipal governments. In addition, federal, state and local agencies exercise executive branch power by setting forth rules and regulations which have the force and effect of law. The concept of law thus encompasses a wide range of considerations. The source of laws is as diverse as our country itself. It is the acts of legislatures, the rules and regulations of executive agencies and the decisions of our courts which, taken together, comprise the complex but unique body of law we know today.

The Legal Profession

The field of law includes more than the work of attorneys. It encompasses an entire range of activities that not only interpret but also make, administer and enforce our laws. The administrative staff within each court, such as the clerks and the librarians, also fulfill an important function. If you are interested in any one of these as a possible career choice, you should contact your city or county personnel office.

In addition, if you are interested in a position with Civil Service, contact:

State Personnel Administration
Floyd Veterans Memorial Building
Suite 504, West Tower
2 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive SE
Atlanta, GA 30334-5100
404-657-5823
www.spa.ga.gov

Perhaps you would like to become a court reporter who uses a special short-hand machine and takes down each word of a trial, a hearing or a court-related meeting. You can obtain more information from National Court Reporters Association, 8224 Old Courthouse Road, Vienna, VA 22182-3808; 800-272-6272.

An attorney's administrative assistants are a necessary element in a law office. Legal secretaries and paralegals play important roles in the profession. While legal secretaries assist the attorney in daily execution of the work, a paralegal helps by researching legal questions or investigating certain legal matters. Currently, more and more attorneys are using paralegal assistance. This position requires professional schooling unless you are fortunate enough to find an attorney who will give you on-the-job training. If you are interested in this, you can write to the National Association of Legal Assistants, Inc., 1516 S. Boston Ave., Suite 200, Tulsa, OK 74119; 918-587-6828.

What is an attorney?

An attorney is a professional person admitted to practice law in his or her respective state or states of choice. An attorney's responsibilities may involve both civil and criminal legal functions for clients, including drafting legal documents, giving legal advice and representing them in courts, administrative agencies, boards, etc. An attorney may assist someone in drafting a will, help a merchant collect unpaid bills, advise someone seeking a divorce, prepare mortgages and other loan documents for a bank, answer regulation questions from a television station manager, assist a corporate executive in researching tax law and international trade or help an underprivileged tenant with a landlord dispute.

Theoretically, an attorney serves a dual role as advocate and adviser. As an advocate, the attorney is an officer of the courts in the administration of justice under the U.S. Constitution, acts of the U.S. Congress, state constitutions and state and municipal statutes. In this way, the court receives a more organized and formal presentation of the facts as it makes its decision. As an adviser, the attorney counsels his or her client in avoiding adverse legal consequences of proposed actions, tailors legal documents which conform business and personal arrangements to comply with the law, and advises a client as to what his or her rights and obligations are in dealing with other people and entities. The variety of practice in the field of law is practically unlimited.

Pre-Law Education

High school. The high school years are a crucial time for developing basic study habits and learning skills which will be particularly useful in the later study of law. Generally, courses which develop your ability to read and write more precisely are important. It is crucial that a student

take college preparatory courses required for admission to the college of choice for an undergraduate degree.

College. Prospective law students should choose the undergraduate school which offers the best available training for their particular interest and financial resources. The traditional perception that everyone should major in political science or history to go to law school is misleading. It is the development of skills, rather than a major, which is important.

Concentration in courses that require term papers and other writing exercises is important. In addition to political science and history, courses in science, math, philosophy and logic will facilitate the development of analytical skills. Consider courses that develop organized thinking, a command of the English language (both written and oral) and the ability to work well with others. Choosing the least demanding courses for a high grade point average (GPA) will be at the expense of achieving valuable learning skills.

Choosing a Georgia Law School

Of the Georgia schools offering programs in law, Emory University, Georgia State University, Mercer University and the University of Georgia are presently accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA). In addition, Atlanta's John Marshall Law School has been provisionally approved by the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association since 2005. Full-time programs take three years and part-time (for working and night shift students) usually take four. Your selection of the proper law school involves not only the school's academic standing but also the cost and location. Consulting your career counselor and recent graduates of the particular school should steer you in the right direction.

Admission Procedures

In applying for entrance into a school of law, you should first contact the admissions office of the school which interests you. These schools all require a college transcript, as well as a score from the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) which the Educational Testing Service of Princeton, N.J., administers four times a year. While each Georgia law school weighs the LSAT scores differently, they all consider it important in determining an applicant's credentials, so be certain to plan for it in advance. The schools also consider your undergraduate GPA, extracurricular activities and work experience.

ABA Approved Emory University

School of Law - Admissions
1301 Clifton Road, Atlanta, GA 30322
www.law.emory.edu

Georgia State University

College of Law - Admissions
P.O. Box 4049, Atlanta, GA 30302-4049
http://law.gsu.edu

The University of Georgia

School of Law - Admissions
Herty Drive, Athens, GA 30602
www.law.uga.edu

Mercer University

Walter F. George School of Law - Admissions
1021 Georgia Ave., Macon, GA 31207-0001
www.law.mercer.edu

ABA Provisionally Approved Atlanta's John Marshall Law School

Admissions Office
1422 W. Peachtree St. NW, Atlanta, GA 30309
www.johnmarshall.edu

Cost and Financial Assistance

The first cost you will face with regard to law school is the application. Tuition costs vary a great deal. Tuition varies depending on whether you decide to enroll in a full-time or part-time law program. A full-time program for resident students begins at about \$9,000 per year. Tuition for a full-time program of a private school may be as much as \$39,000 per year. Other costs to consider are housing, food, textbooks and other living expenses. Fewer than 20–25 percent of Georgia law school students receive private scholarship grants and about 60–70 percent finance their own law education. Most receive loans from other sources such as state, federal and private loans. To find out the available scholarships or loan programs, contact the financial aid office of the selected law schools.