What to Consider When Choosing A Law School

Check out rankings but realize that there are many intangibles that can’t be measured and rankings are constantly challenged with many disagreements about their validity. The most important aspect you care about may not be rated at all.

When making a decision about which schools to apply to, ask and consider the following:

1. Will they accept you?
   Is your LSAT score within 4-5 points of the 75th percentile for that school? You may face uncomfortable competition if it isn’t.

2. What is the cost?
   Tuition and fees
   Have they increased recently; do they expect an increase soon?
   What are the living expenses for the area?
   Are there living quarters nearby, public transportation, parking?
   Help from the school
   What are the chances of getting loans, scholarships?
   Is there a policy about students working?

3. What kind of facilities and technology does the school offer?
   A. Computers
      How many computers are available to students?
      Do you have to have a laptop?
      How are computers used in classes?
      Are there classes you help you learn how to use software?
   B. Library
      How is the Library staffed?
      What resources do they offer?
      When is the Library open?
   C. Staff
      Is the school adequately staffed by friendly, helpful personnel?
   D. Surroundings
      How old are the facilities, how comfortable?

4. Student/Faculty
   How many students are there in the law school?
   Ratio: the lower the ratio of student to faculty the better
   Faculty—accessible, well known? Ask Faculty members:
      Do they use the Socratic method?
      What is the grading system?
      Can you specialize in a certain field?
      How many faculty members practice law?
      If you are interested in working in a particular sector, ask about what percentage go on to jobs in private practice, public interest, etc.
   Students—is the environment competitive or cutthroat? Ask students:
      How much group work is there?
      Do they find faculty members helpful or aloof?
      How do they rate the work? Can they keep up?
      What is the attrition rate?
      Does the school help with finding summer clerkship placements?

5. Graduation Issues
A. Amount of debt at graduation—high average, mid average, low average (judging your lifestyle, which category are you more likely to be?)
B. Bar passage rates
C. Placement
   How much and what type of help do they offer—do law firms come on campus to interview?
   How long will they help you after graduation?
   Where do graduates go to work?
   What are the average starting salaries in the private and public sectors?

It is crucial to visit the schools you are considering. You may find that ‘dream school’ isn’t so dreamy in person. Trust your instincts when making the final decision.

Much of this information came from Pre-Law Insider, Fall 1999, “Law School Planner.”