Guide to Law School Applications
# Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION 3
SUPPORT AND RESOURCES TO GET STARTED 3
   Law School Advisory Council (LSAC) 3
   Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning 3
PREPARING FOR THE APPLICATION PROCESS 3
   A Note on Self-Care 3
THE APPLICATION PROCESS 4
   The Timeline 4
      Rolling Admission Process 4
      Early Decision and Early Action 5
   Application Components 5
   The Resume 5
   Transcripts 6
   Preparing for The LSAT (Or The GRE) 7
   LSAT Scores 8
   Should I retake the LSAT? 8
   LSAT Accommodations 8
   LSAT v. GRE 8
   Letters of Recommendation 9
   Personal Statement & Optional Essays 9
   Character & Fitness 13
   Addenda 14
OTHER RESOURCES 14
FINAL THOUGHTS 15
INTRODUCTION

Amherst College produces a prolific number of lawyers. Each year, approximately 50-60 Amherst students and alumni apply to law school, with an acceptance rate of about 95-97% depending upon the year. Of those ~60 applicants, about 5-10 are current seniors. Most Amherst-affiliated applicants work for at least a year or two before heading to law school, and a handful of applicants each year graduated more than 5 years ago.

This guide is for Amherst students and alumni currently in the law school application process. This guide will provide the answers to frequently asked questions about the application process and feedback on major components, particularly the resume, personal statement, and optional statements, as well as insider tips from those who have recently gone through the process.

SUPPORT AND RESOURCES TO GET STARTED

**Law School Advisory Council (LSAC)**
Your first step: visit the Law School Admission Council’s website: [https://www.lsac.org/](https://www.lsac.org/). This is where you register to take the LSAT, learn more about the application process, and sign up to submit your applications.

**Loeb Center for Career Exploration and Planning**
If you have any questions about the application process (whether pre-application, specific questions on aspects of the application, or questions about next steps), Amherst students and alumni alike have full access to the Loeb Center’s resources, both online and personal. We are happy to work with you where you are now, and we can schedule in-person, telephone, or Skype appointments.

Francesca Cicero (J.D., M.Ed) is the current Pre-Law Advisor at Amherst. She attended law school and was a trial attorney at a large firm for eight years, and she is happy to help any pre-law students wherever you are in the process – whether that’s exploration, logistical planning, or help with decision-making.

If you would like to get in touch for any reason, simply call (413) 542-2265, and ask to make an appointment with the pre-law advisor, or email careers@amherst.edu.

PREPARING FOR THE APPLICATION PROCESS

**A Note on Self-Care**
The application process is long and strenuous, and the LSAT and personal statement will be particularly taxing regardless of how well-prepared you might be. It is important to remember to take care of yourself throughout this time: eat, sleep, and exercise regularly; give yourself downtime that does not involve thinking about the application and spend time with friends. At any point in the process, if you feel overwhelmed or like you have hit a breaking point or writer’s block, give yourself space to stop and recover, even if it is just an hour or two — you can always afford to “lose” those few hours of work. Never be afraid to ask for help from family,
friends, advisors, or anyone you trust. Everyone receives a lot of help in this process, and needing support does not make you any less of a strong candidate — if anything, having the self-awareness and humility to reach out will only help you as you prepare your materials.

**THE APPLICATION PROCESS**

There are six main components to the law school application: resume, transcript(s), LSAT score(s), letters of recommendation, the personal statement and optional essays, and the character and fitness report. Some applicants will also need to submit addenda. All applicants will have to complete an application, as well, but it is not complicated and focuses on basic background questions.

As an early step in the application process, you will need to sign up and pay for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) through your LSAC account. This service puts together your application materials and generates a weighted GPA to go along with your application (in addition to housing and sending your academic transcripts) to make it easier for law schools to compare applicants from different undergraduate institutions. CAS stays active for five years – however, you can make a request to LSAC if you need that time extended.

You can open your CAS account and store information in it for up to five years. Some applicants like to get letters of recommendation before they leave Amherst and have their professors upload the documents to their CAS account. This can be useful, if you are planning to work for a few years after graduating, but most applicants wait to get their letters until they are ready to apply. LSAC will also maintain applicants’ LSAT scores in their CAS account.

**The Timeline**

*Rolling Admission Process*

Most law schools accept and review applications on a rolling basis. Applications officially open in September. Final deadlines are typically in the spring, but law schools start reviewing applications in mid-October. You are encouraged to submit your application as early in the cycle as you can to maximize your chances; as seats start to fill, there are by definition fewer seats available. However, plenty of people who submit later still get into law school and it is more important for you to submit the strongest application possible than to get it in as early as possible.

The ideal time to submit your application for regular decision is mid-October to mid-November. While some people will be admitted and notified earlier in the cycle, there are a number of law schools that wait until more applications are reviewed before they make a decision (accept, waitlist, or deny). Ultimately, submitting an application early does not guarantee hearing back earlier than someone who submits a later application. All applicants should hear back by April.

- Applications will open anywhere between early September and mid-October, with most opening around September 15–30, and will run until late February–early March. Make sure you check each specific law school to which you are applying for the exact dates.
Because applications are read and accepted/denied on a rolling basis, it is in your best interest to apply as early in the cycle as possible — though if the choice is between submitting earlier and submitting a better application, always go with the latter.

- Not all law schools will interview, and those that do will often do virtual interviews. Most interview invitations will go out beginning in November until January, depending on the format, but they will generally offer a Skype/video chat option.

**Early Decision and Early Action**

Early Action and Early Decision programs usually require a significantly earlier application deadline than regular decision applicants. In turn, schools usually guarantee a decision (accept/deny/waitlist/hold) for these applicants earlier in the cycle as well.

There is one significant difference between the two options, however. Early Action is a non-binding application which simply guarantees a response by a certain date; Early Decision, however, requires that the applicant agree to a binding commitment to the school, guaranteeing that, if accepted, the applicant will withdraw all other applications and matriculate to the school in the following school year.

This option may make sense if you are so committed to one law school that you would go there regardless of any other offers. However, one drawback is that you must make the commitment without knowing what your financial aid package will look like, which can limit your financial options (although some schools do have specific financial aid offers tied to Early Decision admission).

You are heavily encouraged to research the requirements of the Early Decision option for any schools you’re considering to with this application type.

**Application Components**

A complete application will include: the LSAT, transcripts (final or most recent available, sent to LSAC by the registrar’s office), 2-5 letters of recommendation (most likely two; different schools will have different preferences/requirements), the individual law school’s application on LSAC, and any additional essays, diversity statements, or addenda you submit.

It can be helpful to make a spreadsheet of all of the schools to which you are applying, with their application requirements and deadlines. As a starting point, 7sage has created a spreadsheet compiled of application requirements for the Top 21 (T21) ranked law schools.

**The Resume**

Law schools require a fairly standard resume. It can be longer than a page, and law schools are interested in seeing the depth and breadth of what you have done in your academic and professional career. That said, you should make sure that everything included is substantive and interesting. In the resume, law schools like to see some consistency in interest, that you took on leadership roles, and a commitment to public service/volunteering. Skills to emphasize are
research, written and verbal communication, critical thinking abilities, and ability to work well in a team. Academic honors, conference presentations, publications, a thesis, and fellowships are also great to emphasize. Ensure that there are no gaps in your resume: schools want to be able to see how you spent your summers and any time taken after college.

Schools do not necessarily care what specific activities, internships, jobs, classes, or majors you pursue (i.e., if they are “law-related”). What they like to see demonstrated is that you followed your passions, chose to challenge yourself, and took on leadership roles. Long-term commitment to a few things looks better than a laundry list of lots of activities without any real commitment.

**To note:**

Schools may differ by what they ask for on your resume, as well as its length -- most will limit this to two pages. Some, like the University of Chicago, will ask for hours spent per week on each activity/job. Yale in particular does not require a resume, but instead asks for a list of all extracurricular activities and unpaid work undertaken as an undergraduate in order of personal significance to you, with the estimated time commitment for each, followed by paid work taken on while in college and during vacations. There is a separate, optional section that allows you to list your activities post-graduation.

**Transcripts**

Transcripts are submitted directly from the Registrar to LSAC. The transcript form in the LSAC account does not directly connect to Amherst’s system, so you cannot request a transcript from within your LSAC account. You will need to initiate an online transcript request from the Amherst Registrar’s Office to send your transcript directly to LSAC through a third-party vendor Parchment. There is no cost for sending e-transcripts to LSAC. For more information on electronic transcripts, see the Registrar’s page.

Transcripts represent academic performance. Overall GPA matters a lot, but admission representatives will look more closely than that. They look at both academic rigor (did the student take increasingly challenging classes), as well as trends. If an applicant had a rough first year academically, but did excellently every year after that, they will take that into account; although an applicant may want to address that in an addendum to their application.

In addition to your Amherst transcript, you will need to submit transcripts from any institution where you have taken a college-level course. **To note:** There is some ambiguity with LSAC about study abroad grades. On LSAC’s website it says applicants do not need to submit abroad transcripts unless the applicant was abroad for a year or longer. Because Amherst does not include study abroad grades on its transcript, you should check directly with the law school about whether or not you should submit separate study abroad transcripts (for example, Harvard’s Junior Deferral Program requires all study abroad transcripts directly from the issuing institution).
Preparing for The LSAT (Or The GRE)

Preparing for the LSAT is one of the first concrete steps you will make in the law school application process. You can view test dates and registration deadlines on LSAC’s website and will eventually need to register for an LSAC account in order to register for the test. The LSAT is offered 6 times a year, so you need to plan strategically.

Do not take the LSAT until you feel fully prepared. The LSAT is not so much a test of skill as it is a test of endurance -- it is important to practice often and under test conditions; it is one thing to solve a logic game while you are at your dining table with a snack and music in the background, and another to do so after two hours of reading essentially the same things over and over.

You should plan for four to five months of studying ahead of the LSAT date, although the timeline varies depending on how much time you can dedicate to studying (and how comfortable you feel with standardized testing and the material). Some people are of the mind that it is easier to take the LSAT while still a student and in “study mode.” Scores are good for five years, so this is an okay choice if you are fairly certain you will apply to law school within five years. If you are not sure, you may want to wait, because it requires considerable time and money and will not provide access to other graduate programs like the GRE.

You can prepare in different ways. You can purchase LSAT study materials (books), and there are some practice tests you can complete online. Test companies (such as Manhattan Prep, TestMasters, Kaplan, and Princeton Review) also offer free LSAT practice tests online before you sign up for their services (in-person or online classes), or you can get a private tutor (which can be very expensive). LSAC has also partnered with Khan Academy of offer a free online prep program, which can be a good place to begin. It is a great resource for practice sections and full practice tests that have been administered in the past. Its system gives you a full practice test to start, asks you to enter your test date and desired score, and, based on this information, helps you put together a practice schedule that can be helpful in planning the lead-up to the actual test.

Beginning in September 2019, the LSAT will be fully digital, and the writing portion will be completed separately from the multiple-choice portions of the test. LSAT Writing is conducted on software installed on your own computer. Prior to the exam, you will complete a video check-in process, and the process uses input from your computer’s microphone, webcam, and the screen of the computer to ensure that the writing is your own. You are eligible to take the LSAT Writing on the day of your LSAT administration and for up to one year thereafter. Although LSAC allows you up to a year after the test administration date to complete your LSAT Writing, you are encouraged to complete it as soon as you can, as law schools have different application deadlines; the sooner you complete your writing sample, the sooner you can complete the application process.

The LSAT costs $200 to take; you can apply for a fee waiver, but understand that LSAC has stringent requirements for this type of aid.
LSAT Scores
Your LSAT scores will be submitted through LSAC. Scores range from 120-180. For most of the top 14 ranked (T14) schools, you should aim for a 170 or higher on your LSAT. For the top schools, though, you may need to aim higher, at least a 172. The median LSAT score for Harvard and Yale’s incoming classes for Fall 2018 was 173. However, each year, students from Amherst whose scores are outside the median LSAT/GPA scores also get into top schools (and many other well-regarded programs outside the T14). So, your LSAT score can be a general guide as to where you may be accepted, but it is not definitive by any means.

Should I retake the LSAT?
Law schools automatically see all of your LSAT scores, so you do not just get to choose the best one to submit. Ideally, you will want to take the test once, but things happen, so it is fine to take it a 2nd and possibly a 3rd time. More than that is frowned upon by law schools; it can be indicative of poor judgement, since repeated retakes seldom have a significant impact on scores. You may want to plan at least one retake into your timetable when deciding when to start studying and take your first test. If you take the test and feel like it went poorly, you can cancel your score within a few days after the test. You will not get a refund (and the LSAT is expensive!), but schools will not see that score. They will see that a test was canceled, but law schools do not view that as a negative in the application.

At the end of the day, you are the only one who can make this decision — again by asking the question of whether your score will help you to get the results you want. If you are only a couple points below where you would like to be, it may not be worth it — but this, too, should be measured against your confidence in the rest of your application.

Take yes for an answer; or, you had me at 97% — an admissions perspective on whether to retake the LSAT.

LSAT Accommodations
Accommodations are available for the LSAT (e.g., extra time on the writing sample, use of spell check, stop-the-clock breaks, screen readers, magnification, speech-to-text, and more). LSAC has all the information on requesting accommodations for the LSAT. Due to recent events in the news, if you are asking for accommodations, make sure you have all of your documentation prepared and that it is consistent with accommodations you have requested at Amherst. You can find more information on Accessibility Services at Amherst here.

LSAT v. GRE
About 40 law schools (beginning with the University of Arizona, but becoming prominent after Harvard) now allow students to submit GRE scores in place of the LSAT. The idea behind accepting the GRE is to diversify the application pool, so that people interested in other disciplines or with other graduate degrees do not have to also take a separate law school-only exam. There has been at least one study that validated the use of the GRE as predictive for law school success. The practice of accepting the GRE is expanding, as well as what score ranges are considered competitive for the schools that accept the GRE. Remember to check with individual schools before deciding on whether or not the GRE is right for you.
Letters of Recommendation

Law schools care first and foremost about academic performance and ability to do well in law school, which is why the academic letters are of crucial importance. Different schools will have different requirements/preferences, but in general you will want to have two letters of recommendation from your professors. If you have taken time off, you may want to have an additional one from your employer. This is something you should check by school. Yale, for example, prefers two letters from undergraduate professors, so that they can more equitably evaluate their applicants. It is always better to have letters from people who know you well and can speak specifically to the quality of your (academic) work, character, and preparedness for law school, rather than a generic letter from a big name. A letter that can say “X was one of my best/favorite/etc. students for these reasons” goes a long way. Academic advisors, thesis advisors, or any professors you have done research with are great candidates for this.

For optional letters, you might ask an employer or coach. It is critical that the letter writer know you well and be able to speak to your ability to succeed in law school. Make sure you set your recommenders up for success - provide them with all your materials (resume, personal statement, transcript, etc.), and make yourself available if they want to discuss your future plans. It can also be helpful, if it has been a few years since graduation, to provide them with a refresher on how you did in their class (sending a copy of a representative paper that they graded, for example).

Recommenders can upload their letters directly to the Credential Assembly Service (and are usually required to, so there is no opportunity for you to see the letter before it is submitted). In addition, if you asked your professor for a recommendation before leaving Amherst, professors can update their letter online, if you have updated your experience post-Amherst. Once in their account, they will be able to click the “Letter of Recommendation” tab, then click “edit” next to the applicant’s name. The site will bring them to the “security verification screen” where they can give their reason for editing their recommendation. Once they click submit, they will be directed to upload a new updated file. If a recommender needs technical assistance, contact CAS technical support at 215.968.1393, and someone will be happy to walk them through the process.

Snagging that perfect letter of recommendation — University of Michigan’s Dean of Admissions how-to on requesting letters of recommendation and choosing your recommenders.

Personal Statement & Optional Essays

The personal statement can be one of the most challenging aspects of the application process, because you have to write about yourself. It is typically a couple of pages long (it varies by institution), and each school asks the question differently, but there are two general topics: “tell us about yourself” and “tell us why you are interested in law school/being a lawyer.” You can usually write one essay and then tweak it depending on the specifics of the prompt. Unless the prompt specifies, you are not necessarily expected to say why you are applying to a particular law school. However, do as much research on the specifics of what schools may be looking for as you can. For example, a public state-funded school (being funded partially by taxpayers) may be very interested in your connections to that state and how you will help give back to the state.
after gaining your degree – so having, and mentioning, connections with the state may be extremely important in those cases.

The personal statement can draw from a range of topics; however, it should NOT be a rehash of information that can be found on your resume. It should help the admissions committee understand why you want to go to law school and give them a fuller picture of who you are as a person and the journey you have taken in your life.

Start brainstorming qualities, skills, and/or key experiences that have shaped you and that you think will make you a successful law student/lawyer. No one writes a perfect personal statement on the first try – be prepared to write a lot of drafts, and scrap ideas that are not coming together. Think about what you want admission committees to know that is not already fully explored in other parts of the application.

The personal statement is partly focused on telling your story and helping the admission committee get to know you. The other part is focused on how well you write – this is an opportunity to demonstrate your writing skills! There should be no grammatical or spelling errors in this document; make sure you have many people look it over for errors before submitting.

It is important to realize that every school/admissions committee/admissions officer will have different preferences for the style and content of a personal statement. Some will appreciate humor more than others, while an ill-placed joke may end up working against you. If you have done your research beforehand on the schools to which you are applying, you should hopefully have some idea of what each school values/looks for in its brand and from there have a sense of how your work may be received. Also, law school admissions offices are there to answer questions that you may have about the process or requirements – so do not hesitate to reach out to them! Many schools’ admissions teams also have resources/blogs with plenty of material on the personal statement that could help you understand what you are looking for. Some of the more helpful ones are listed below:

- **Berkeley School of Law’s page on the personal statement and resume**: Includes professors’ notes on content and tone, as well as the pitfalls of writing a “coached” personal statement.
- **Yale Law’s Ask Asha blog**: Asha was the head of admissions at Yale Law for many years. Though this blog has been discontinued and not updated for a couple of years since she left her position, it has several posts that span the gamut of the dos and don’ts of law school application materials, including a P.S. Bootcamp series on writing the personal statement.
  - Worth a read: Asha’s write-up on the “Teach For American (TFA) essay”
- **Dean Sarah Zearfoss’ University of Michigan blog**: Zearfoss reads every one of the thousands of applications her office receives each year, and her writing provides a good deal of insight into the thought process of your audience. Some of the more relevant posts:
  - **The 99%** — What if I don’t have any exciting, compelling life experience to write about?
  - **Personal statements — what not to do**: Zearfoss illustratively critiques her own personal statement from when she was admitted to UMichigan Law.
● **[Don’t] Walk This Way**: a brief piece on why you should not quote other people in your personal statement without good reason (“law school is not the road less traveled”)

● **Writing a winning personal statement**: a conversation Zearfoss had with Barbri Law Preview about the personal statement and how she reads one. The real conversation starts around [5:20]; of particular note is her discussion of tone at [15:10].

● **UChicago’s example statements**: a set of five great personal statements from students who were admitted (and matriculated to) UChicago Law, selected by their admissions office.

● **Spivey Consulting’s example statements**: Spivey Consulting is a law school admissions consulting firm started by Mike Spivey, who leads admissions initiatives at three law schools and has worked at both LSAC and Lexis Nexis. While they do offer paid services, they also write prolifically on law school admissions on their blog and provide examples of stellar personal statements from students they worked with.


Admissions officers are looking for your best, but they also have hundreds of applications to get through in an admissions season. It is important to think about how you want to present yourself, not only so that they can get to know you, but also so that you can do it in a way that will help you to stand out from other applicants who may seem similar on paper. This is a personal statement, so the best thing you can do is to **MAKE IT PERSONAL** – admissions officers do appreciate vulnerability, though you do not want to cross the line into appearing to be a liability.

● **Writing points:**
  ● DO NOT say you want to go to law school because you like arguing.
  ● No quotes or epigraphs unless you have a really good reason for it -- you have limited space, and you should not be occupying it with other people’s words or thoughts.

● If you are struggling:
  ● It can be helpful to find examples of personal statements that have helped other people to succeed — not only for getting a sense of what law schools are looking for but also, more importantly, to feel out for yourself what resonates and how you might want to construct your narrative. **Before you do this kind of research, however, you should write or at least outline a couple of drafts for yourself, so that you do not simply find yourself copying others’ work.** Their personal statements helped them to succeed in the context of a complete application, and their written styles/voices, though perhaps similar in certain respects, are uniquely their own. *Writing something that does not feel authentic to you will not work.*
  ● You will have many reasons you want to go into law, as well as many experiences that have shaped you in getting to this point, but you have limited space to flesh out this narrative -- Harvard’s application has a maximum of two pages, while most other schools will stop you at four. At most you should have one to two main points that drive your statement (and these points should answer the question: **Why do you want to go to law school?**). In theory, this should still be plenty of space to write a narrative that feels full and complex, but you may end
up writing something that tries to touch on so many things that it actually says nothing of substance. To start, ignore the page count and write beyond the limit so that you have the space to write a full narrative, from which you can pull the parts that feel most important to the piece and cull others. The risk here is that you may write something that only feels complete with all its pieces, but you will at least have gotten a better sense of the things about which you most want to write. You can then take this and push it into a new statement. In most cases, you will probably end up writing over the limit and need to edit down.

- Refer back to things that you have written in the past, especially journal entries/self-reflection that might help you to remember how you got to this point, classwork/papers relevant to your interests, or any pieces that you really liked in general. While none of these things may actually make it into your final product, it can be helpful to see how your own style and voice have developed alongside your intent to go to law school, and they can be a fruitful source of imagery, ideas, or even small turns of phrase that you might want to experiment with.

- Write reflectively, or more personally, than you would actually allow yourself to for the real thing. Limiting yourself to something that reads as a personal statement from the get-go may stifle your flow of ideas, or prevent you from touching on topics that matter more than you originally thought they would.

- Find someone to talk things through with — it is always helpful to have an external sounding board as you are processing. Being able to explain your thoughts to someone else is very different from thinking on your own.

- Put yourself somewhere new, or give yourself a break, even if it is just for a short time. Take a shower. Take a walk. Watch a movie in the theater. Take time away from the writing process — it can be helpful if you are feeling stuck to take some space and look again with fresh eyes.

Optional essays are just that: optional. Common ones are the diversity statement or explaining why you want to attend this specific law school. If you feel like you have communicated what you wanted to communicate in the required portion of the application, you should not feel the need to write additional essays. It is worse to write extra essays when you do not have anything substantive to say; not writing an optional statement will not count against you. It exists to make sure applicants have the opportunity to share everything they think is relevant to their application.

The diversity statement considers diversity broadly and does not mean you hold or discuss a marginalized identity. Instead, ask yourself if there is a unique perspective or set of experiences that you bring to the classroom (and have not written about in the personal statement). While these are often tied to identities that you may hold (i.e., gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, national origin, religion) they may encompass other ways in which you identify. Maybe you have an incredible ability to master languages and speak five languages fluently or have traveled to over 30 countries. Law schools are looking to build classes that encompass a range of perspectives in order to enhance the learning environment. Including facets of your life that may not be appropriate for or easily fit into a resume can be written about here. Like the personal statement, the optional essays are a test of writing skills and should be
flawlessly written. If they do not have a limit, stick to a page or two, and to always be as concise as possible while still sharing the relevant parts of the story.

To note: Specific School Requirements

Yale requires an additional 250-word statement on any topic of your choice. Many applicants choose to use this space to write more personally than in the personal statement, or to highlight a particular vignette or anecdote that is meaningful but not relevant anywhere else in the application, in order to better flesh out their presentation of themselves as a whole. In any case, it is best not to overthink this; if the rest of your application is good, this essay need only be thoughtful and solid — that is, consistent with whatever else you are submitting. DO NOT go over the word/page limit if there is one. You will not come off as special, rebellious, or confident; you will just be someone who does not follow instructions.

Some applications, like Cornell’s, will include a “Why [Institution]?” section. Specifics are your friend — browse the school’s website for things you may find attractive, whether it is a certain faculty member or area of study in which the school is strong, a clinical program, the school’s location, or check the “news” section for events and activities in which the law school is involved. Also understand there are schools where your connection and interest in the specific school is very important (e.g., a public university that receives taxpayer money). If you are really stuck, call or email the admissions office and ask about your substantive areas of interest, as they will be able to point you toward their school’s particular offerings.

If you are applying to a specific named program or fellowship under the law school, you will also have additional essays to complete and submit with your application. Follow the instructions, write well/relevantly, edit, edit, edit, and have people read your essays. Be consistent in how you present yourself, and be clear on why you are interested in the particular area on which the specific program/fellowship focuses.

Character & Fitness

The character and fitness portion of the application must be taken seriously, as filling it out inaccurately can have serious repercussions. The questions (including wording) vary from school to school; this is because they mirror the character and fitness questions asked by their state’s bar association. Errors on this portion can have serious implications, both for admission and for passing the bar. If you are caught in a falsehood (even if it was genuinely unintentional) there can be serious consequences, although if there was an unintentional error, and you later correct it on your own, that can mitigate consequences.

You should absolutely take this portion of the application seriously. Law schools will ask you to report things like speeding tickets, traffic violations, if you were sanctioned for drinking in the residence halls, etc. Applicants with these types of items on their records (or even more serious ones, including felonies) still get into law school. However, you will be asked to explain very factually what happened and how you have learned or grown from the experience, if applicable. If it is a speeding ticket from five years ago, you probably do not need to do more than say when and where they received it. If there is an ongoing pattern of offenses, that may affect your chances at admission. If it is a serious offense (like a felony), you may want to consult with the
law school and an attorney about the incident to ensure that it will not keep you from passing the bar if you are admitted and graduate from law school.

It is far more serious to lie or cover up offenses than to have them in an application. Even if the school does not find out about the transgressions, when you take the bar there will be a thorough check of your past, and if there is a record out there, the bar will find it. They will also look at your admission file, and if what you reported in it does not match up with what the bar finds, you will have to at least sit for an interview and perhaps be denied admission to the bar. This can happen even if the applicant shares an infraction on the character and fitness paperwork for the bar but left it off their law school admission application.

- **DO NOT LIE:** if you lie or omit anything, you will be found out at some point, whether it is with the Dean’s Certification that Amherst must submit for you after you pay your deposit, or during your admission to the bar. For admission to the bar, you will need to fill out a lengthy character application, which will be a very thorough background check. This will be taken into account, and if it is found that you have misrepresented something, you could potentially not be admitted to the bar at the end of three years of law school.

**Dean’s Certification and American Bar Association Letters**

This is becoming more rare, but if you require a Dean’s Certification letter for your application, please send an email to communitystandards@amherst.edu. The Community Standards office has information on the Dean’s Certification on its website. If you need a name to put on a form as the person who certifies the Dean’s Certification, it is currently the Director of Community Standards (Corey Michalos). In addition, if you have questions about your Amherst record, please reach out to the Community Standards staff.

**Addenda**

Addenda are opportunities most law schools provide applicants to cover anything else they feel like the law schools should know. Typically, this is a space for you to explain any discrepancies or unusual circumstances in their application. This could connect to character and fitness or for things like explaining weak first year grades, an outlier “D” grade due to certain circumstances, a low LSAT score, a reduced course-load, or a history of bad test-taking. Also, if you took academic leave while at Amherst, you should explain that here.

Without an explanation for discrepancies, law school admission representatives will fill in the blanks themselves. When writing explanations, keep them brief and stick to facts. Law schools want to hear from someone who takes responsibility for their actions and can maturely share what they learned or how they changed to mitigate the issue, so it will not be an issue in the future.

**OTHER RESOURCES**

There are a lot of forums for law school admissions where people come together to compile/share information, ask law school admits for advice, and generally commiserate,
toplawschools and the /r/lawschooladmissions subreddit being two of the largest. They can be very helpful resources, but can also be much more anxiety-inducing, especially once November and beyond hits, when they become flooded with people either receiving decisions or begging law schools to release “waves” of decisions. They are also full of people in the same position as you, who are making the same guesses/assumptions, so do not treat anyone there as a definitive authority. You will find people whose applications look much better than yours on paper; you will also find people whose applications appear much worse. If these end up being more stressful than helpful to you, there is no reason to go anywhere near them.

FINAL THOUGHTS
The law school application process is one that takes time, effort, thought, and resources. Hopefully going through this process has helped you discover why you really want to go to law school and helped you refine your own motivations and interests in the legal field. Being a lawyer is both rewarding and challenging, and we wish you all the best in your journey towards your J.D. Please remember to reach out if you need help as you go through the process. It can be complicated and time-consuming, but you do not need to go it alone.

~BEST OF LUCK!~