



PLANC

Pre-Law Advisors National Council

THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PRE-LAW ADVISORS

PREFACE

Definition and Overview

This statement was developed by the Pre-Law Advisors National Council (PLANC) to suggest general guidelines for effective pre-law advising. Pre-law advising is a specialized function encompassing both personal counseling and career counseling. The pre-law advisor at an undergraduate college or university is called upon to know both the individual being counseled and the educational and career possibilities within the legal profession. Performance of the responsibilities of the pre-law advisor varies according to the individual style of the pre-law advisor, the resources available, and individual advising needs. Though a pre-law advisor should not make specific decisions for an advisee, it is entirely appropriate to suggest questions that stimulate thought and facilitate decision-making.

The basic functions of the pre-law advisor include providing or identifying appropriate resources concerning legal education and the legal profession, and assisting advisees in the law school application process. This assistance usually includes, but is not limited to, providing guidance on preparation for law school, including undergraduate curriculum; providing basic information on Law School Admission Council (LSAC) services, including the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), Credential Assembly Service (CAS), and online application process; informing students about deadlines and fees; providing information on financial aid for law school; writing dean's letters or letters of evaluation for applicants; reviewing application materials such as personal statements for law school; and answering questions. Pre-law advisors may wish to consider such additional functions as hosting recruiting events, coordinating pre-law events for students, sponsoring a pre-law club, facilitating internships or law related experiences, and developing contacts with alumni lawyers and local bar members.

In fulfilling these basic functions pre-law advisors are encouraged to use resources on the LSAC website at www.lsac.org, including the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*,¹ *LSAC's Law School Admission Reference Manual*,² and other resources available in pre-law advisor accounts on the site.³ LSAC maintains a national directory of pre-law advisors at undergraduate institutions, and prepares Pre-law Advisor

¹ The 2013 *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools* is the last print edition of this invaluable resource; the online version is available at www.lsac.org (US Law School Database Search).

² The annual *Law School Admission Reference Manual* is available to pre-law advisors (pre-law advisor login required) at www.lsac.org. LSAC also publishes a print edition, and sends a copy annually to sole/coordinating pre-law advisors.

³ LSAC offers pre-law advisor accounts at www.lsac.org to sole/coordinating pre-law advisors, as designated by the undergraduate institution, making available many resources through a secure log-in. Other "supporting" pre-law advisors may be provided electronic access by the sole/coordinating pre-law advisor. Pre-law advisors should contact LSAC if they have questions about this process.

Action Reports containing law school admission data for each undergraduate institution. Electronic access to these reports is provided through the pre-law advisor accounts (login required).⁴

The six regional pre-law advisor associations (APLAs)⁵ offer many professional development and networking opportunities for pre-law advisors, including training for new pre-law advisors, during regional conferences and meetings; a variety of materials including handbooks and newsletters are available to association members. The Pre-Law Advisors National Council (PLANC) hosts a national conference every Presidential election year and publishes *PLANC POINTS*. PLANC posts contact information for the six APLAs and other valuable information on its website at www.planc.org. NAPLA and SAPLA publish annually the *Law School Book of Lists* which is available to any pre-law advisor upon request. Pre-law advisors are encouraged to contact their colleagues when they have questions or concerns. One of the notable characteristics of pre-law advising is the willingness of advisors to share with others.

I. RELATIONSHIP TO APPLICANTS

A. Delineation of Responsibilities

The primary obligation of the pre-law advisor is to meet the needs of students and graduates of the undergraduate institution the advisor serves. Given that approximately two-thirds of law school applicants nationwide apply to law school after graduation, pre-law advisors provide an important service by advising alumni, particularly recent graduates; at some institutions, however, resources may limit the ability to provide services after a student graduates.

Pre-law advisors often serve in multiple roles at their institutions. For instance, a pre-law advisor in a Career Service office may advise students and alumni about other non-legal career opportunities. Faculty pre-law advisors teach classes while also serving as pre-law advisor. Pre-law advisors in an Academic Advising or Dean's Office often hold other roles in the college or university. There are many configurations of pre-law advising responsibilities around the country, at institutions ranging from small colleges to large universities with multiple undergraduate units.

B. Conflict of Interest

A pre-law advisor at an undergraduate college or university should avoid taking on responsibilities involving a real or perceived conflict of interest. Pre-law advisors are expected to be objective and neutral. Pre-law advisors are encouraged to consult with their regional pre-law advisor associations (APLAs) if they have questions regarding specific responsibilities that may present a real or perceived conflict of interest.⁶

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Midwest Association of Pre-law Advisors (MAPLA), Northeast Association of Pre-law Advisors (NAPLA), Pacific Coast Association of Pre-law Advisors (PCAPLA), Southern Association of Pre-law Advisors (SAPLA), Southwest Association of Pre-law Advisors (SWAPLA) and Western Association of Pre-law Advisors (WAPLA).

⁶ For example, a pre-law advisor should avoid assuming the dual responsibilities of undergraduate pre-law advisor and member of a law school's admission staff. In this situation, advisees may feel concerned about seeking or relying upon advice from the pre-law advisor regarding confidential academic or disciplinary issues or law school admission or financial aid decisions, knowing the pre-law advisor's affiliation with a particular law school. Law school representatives often collaborate with pre-law advisors by participating in campus programs (see II.B. below); this is a successful programming model in which a pre-law advisor and law school representative can work together, in their respective roles.

Another example of a real or perceived conflict of interest is when an undergraduate pre-law advisor serves as an employee or paid representative of a commercial vendor providing LSAT prep or other law admission-related services; advisees may perceive a lack of neutrality in advice given regarding LSAT prep or other law admission-related services.

Pre-law advisors should be cognizant of the goals and standards of individual law schools as they assist advisees in making decisions about law school. However, the primary objective for the pre-law advisor is to help the advisee make the best decision, taking into account the advisee's goals and qualifications.

C. The Pre-law Advisor as Facilitator

The pre-law advisor should seek to be a facilitator in the pre-legal decision-making and admissions process, bringing together knowledge of the advisee's needs and ambitions with information on various law schools and law-related careers. Advisors are in a unique position to combine these variables into satisfactory and rewarding applications and admission patterns.

Properly performed, this role implies asking thought-provoking questions, directing advisees to resources, and helping them make good decisions. Many advisees need assistance in preparing for law school and navigating the law school admission process. Some may know very little about the legal profession, and after investigation and discussion may conclude that a legal career is not the best choice or that more experience is needed before starting law school. It is helpful to suggest criteria and resources to be used by the student in decision-making with reference to choosing law as a career, selecting schools to which applications should be sent, completing the applications, and choosing the school to attend. Pre-law advisors may find it useful to contact appropriate persons or organizations on behalf of students as appropriate, e.g. LSAC, regional pre-law advisors associations (APLAs), other Pre-law advisors, leaders.

The role of facilitator can also be described as that of a coach - who prepares the players and advises during the game, but does not play in the game itself. The advisor may choose, for example, to review a student's personal statement and other application documents and make suggestions, but should not assume the responsibility of actually completing applications or writing personal statements. Above all, the advisor as facilitator should not assume the role of decision-maker.

D. Counseling Students from Underrepresented or Marginalized Backgrounds

Pre-Law Advisors should be aware of the unique characteristics presented by students who come from identity groups that are underrepresented or historically marginalized in the legal profession. Preparation on understanding challenges related to, as well as advocating for resources to support, the needs of various identity groups (including, but not limited to: students of color, students with a disability, students from a low socio-economic background, first-generation college students, veteran students, and LGBTQ students) should be an important priority for pre-law advisors to develop competency. In addition, advisors should have proficiency in understanding programs offered by law schools and other entities to encourage students to consider the legal profession and opportunities for involvement with law school student organizations when assisting these advisees in the admission process. Visit the LSAC website for information and programs on ways pre-law advisors may help this important population of prospective law students.

E. Sponsoring A Pre-Law Club

A student pre-law club can be of great value in helping students gain knowledge of the legal profession, its options, opportunities, and pitfalls. Such a club or organization can serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of information and as a focal point for law school admissions officers, practicing lawyers, and others who are invited to campus. A number of colleges and universities have such organizations, and pre-law advisors can often share their experience and expertise with those who want to organize and sponsor a club on their

campus. Advisors may wish to consider establishing pre-law clubs on their campuses and might look into organizations that relate directly or indirectly to pre-law advising including, but not limited to Phi Alpha Delta (PAD), the American Mock Trial Association (AMTA), and the American Collegiate Moot Court Association (ACMA), and the Council of Forensic Organizations.

F. Providing Information Concerning Specific Law Schools

Most information about law schools is available in electronic format. The pre-law advisor should help advisees find the best objective sources of information about specific law schools, including the *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*, law school websites, and other important websites (www.lisac.org, www.abanet.org; www.nalp.org). Pre-law advisors may share with their advisees non-confidential information from the summary reports in the Pre-law Advisor Action Reports, available in the Pre-law Advisor's account at www.lisac.org. A secure login is provided by LSAC to pre-law advisors designated by their undergraduate institutions. Pre-law advisors may contact LSAC if they have questions about accessing their LSAC accounts. Law schools are also willing to honor requests for print information concerning special opportunities and programs, and other information useful to the prospective applicant.

It is appropriate for the pre-law advisor to suggest to applicants criteria for selecting law schools. Such criteria might include, but are not limited to, admissions standards, costs, and availability of financial aid, location, employment data, special programs, and special opportunities. It may be equally appropriate for the pre-law advisor to suggest specific schools for the student's consideration. Such suggestions should be based on available information, the pre-law advisor's own knowledge of and experience with specific schools, as well as the experience of alumni from the particular undergraduate institution who have graduated from, or are currently, attending law schools. Such specific suggestions should be as bias-free and current as possible. Once a student has examined and explored potential options in terms of specific law schools, the pre-law advisor may wish to assist the student in refining a list of schools, keeping in mind the considerations noted above. The advisor should encourage applicants to apply to as many schools as appropriate and consistent with their individual interests, qualifications, and resources.

G. Evaluating and Ranking Law Schools for Applicants

Pre-Law Advisors are frequently requested to evaluate an advisee's chances of obtaining admission to specific law schools. Through the use of LSAC's Pre-Law Advisor Action Reports, *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved US Law Schools*, and other published information provided by individual law schools about LSAT scores and grade point averages of their accepted and enrolled students, an advisor can help a student prepare a reasonable list of possible schools to which applications may be made. However, non-quantitative factors like work experience, demonstrated leadership ability, and outstanding achievement may well play a role in the reviewing of an application. Additionally, since quantitative standards for acceptance may vary from year to year, the advisor should be cognizant of both subjective criteria and varying data not readily apparent to applicants, and encourage applicants to apply to schools that may appear to be "long shots" as well as to those that are considered as "good chance" and "likely admit."

H. Advising the Pre-law Student on Undergraduate Curriculum

According to the American Bar Association (ABA), "there is no single path that will prepare you for legal education. Students who are successful in law school, and who become accomplished professionals, come from many walks of life and educational backgrounds..." (Pre-law Committee of the ABA's Section of

Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, www.abanet.org/legaled/pre-law/prep.html). Some schools offer a well-defined "pre-law" curriculum while others do not recommend specific courses for pre-law students. Whichever approach is taken, there is a common consensus that a broad-based academic experience well grounded in the liberal arts provides the best preparation for law school.

The sections on "Preparing for Law School," on the LSAC website (www.lsac.org) suggest approaches to advising the pre-law student on an undergraduate curriculum. By common agreement, courses that lend themselves to the creation of a context in which the law may be better understood, courses that augment communication skills and courses that sharpen analytical skills provide valuable preparation for law school. Pre-law advisors should identify themselves to other academic advisors and express their willingness to consult with both students and advisors on matters pertaining to curriculum and course selection.

I. Advising the Pre-law Candidate on Preparation for and Taking the LSAT

The pre-law advisor should be knowledgeable about LSAC's website, Credential Assembly Service (CAS), and online application process. *The Law School Admission Reference Manual* published annually by the LSAC and also available online on the Pre-law Advisor website (login required), provides important information and examples. Students should be advised to register in a timely manner for the LSAT and CAS. Fee waivers for LSAC services are available for students with serious financial need; candidates apply for a fee waiver on the LSAC website. For most students, it is advisable to take the LSAT in the summer or fall prior to the year of entrance into law school. Students should be informed of the advantages and disadvantages of each test date.

There are a variety of opinions on the question of preparation for the LSAT, but most pre-law advisors agree that some kind of preparation for the LSAT is advisable and beneficial. According to LSAC, "most law school applicants familiarize themselves with test mechanics and question types, practice on sample tests, and study the information available on test-taking techniques and strategies. Though it is difficult to say when examiners are sufficiently prepared, very few people achieve their full potential without some preparation" (www.lsac.org/jd/lsat/preparing-for-lsat.asp). The pre-law advisor should acquaint students with various means of preparing for the LSAT in addition to the commercial preparation courses. These alternatives include sample/practice materials available from LSAC and commercial preparation books. In situations where it is practical and advisable, the pre-law advisor may wish to set up preparation sessions. Some pre-law advisors have done this with a great deal of success and may be willing to share their experience.

Commercial preparation courses present the most difficult part of the question of preparation for the LSAT. In advising a student about these commercial courses the following caveats should be kept in mind: commercial preparation agencies are in the business primarily to make money; alternate means of preparation, such as LSAC test prep publications, are available; the student should be skeptical of any course that makes extravagant claims or guarantees about its ability to raise a student's score; the LSAT is not an achievement test; therefore, there are limits as to what any form of preparation can do (i.e., there is a difference between being able to prepare for a test and studying a given body of knowledge for a test).

Although students have the option of retaking the LSAT, they should be made aware of the problems associated with multiple test scores. First, all scores are reported to the law schools and law schools use their own judgment in evaluating multiple scores in the admission process; however, law schools are required to report the highest score when submitting data about each entering class to the American Bar Association. Second, for most students, retaking the test does not result in a significant increase in the score. Pre-law advisors may want to direct advisees to LSAT Repeater data posted at www.lsac.org. Candidates may take the

LSAT a maximum of three times over a period of two years (including a test for which the score was canceled). In deciding whether or not to retake the test, students should consider such factors as their physical health or emotional state at the time of the first test, the extent to which they prepared for prior LSAT(s), and consistency of their LSAT score(s) with scores from previous standardized tests. The overall guideline is to proceed with caution before retaking the test.

J. Advising the Pre-law Student on Financial Issues in Preparation for Legal Education

It is important for the pre-law advisor to talk frankly with advisees about how they plan to pay for law school, the realities of a significant debt burden, and income expectations as a lawyer. Consumer debt and increasing cost of attendance can affect a student's ability to enroll in law school. Education debt (from undergraduate education and law school) can limit options and create hardships after law school, particularly in a weak legal job market. Pre-law advisors can direct advisees to information and resources about the cost of law school and the job market, including those available through the American Bar Association (ABA) employmentsummary.abaquestionnaire.org/home.aspx, NALP www.nalp.org, law school websites, and to resources to help them understand the law school financial aid process, including the LSAC website and the Access Group's WiseBorrower materials on financing a legal education www.accessgroup.org. Students may hesitate to apply to law school because of their financial situation. The pre-law advisor should help advisees understand the possibilities of arranging a combination of grants, loans, personal savings, and part-time earnings to defray the expenses of a legal education. Some pre-law advisors host Financial Aid for Law School programs for students, inviting experts in the field to help students understand the realities of paying for law school. Pre-law advisors are encouraged to attend sessions on Financial Aid for Law School at regional APLA conferences and meetings. Advisees who are considering a career in public interest law or government should be made aware of loan repayment programs. A comprehensive list of such programs is available at www.equaljusticeworks.org.

K. Suggesting Alternative Career Options

The pre-law advisor should encourage self-evaluation of talents, strengths, weaknesses and interests, and at the same time encourage students to seek real knowledge of professions that may match these characteristics. It may be appropriate to suggest and encourage students to consider alternative career patterns. Such an approach may be especially valuable early in a student's academic career if there is evidence that the student may be better suited to another career, the student's academic performance may seriously limit law school options, or if the student has an unrealistic self-image or view of the legal profession. The pre-law advisor should discuss the option of waiting and working a year or more before applying to law school. The student may be reassured by the fact that a typical student entering law school is 24 or 25, and some law students qualify for the category of "senior citizens." Students who choose to take time off before law school are well advised to establish a file of letters of recommendations before graduation from college, either by registering for LSAC's Credential Assembly Service or by establishing a credentials file through their college or university.

II. RELATIONSHIPS WITH LAW SCHOOLS

The interests of student, pre-law advisor and law school can best be met by the establishment of a close working relationship with law school admissions officers. This relationship can be fostered in many ways, the best and most efficient being attendance at regional pre-law advisor conferences.

A. Visits to Law Schools

Many pre-law advisors have found that visits to law schools enhance their knowledge. Increasingly, law schools are inviting pre-law advisors to visit as their guests. These invitations may raise ethical questions for some pre-law advisors. No one should feel under any obligation either to accept an invitation or, if the invitation is accepted and the visit made, to take anything other than an objective attitude toward that law school. Law schools planning such events should be urged to give advisors, during the course of the visit, an opportunity to meet privately with students from their undergraduate institution who are currently enrolled in the school.

B. Visit by Law School Representatives to Campus

Pre-law advisors should encourage law schools to visit their campuses, given available resources and other scheduling priorities. Recruiting visits can take various forms, an individual visit or a law school fair in which a number of law school representatives are invited to visit at a designated time. Where a fair seems to be desirable, participating law schools may be asked to pay a nominal fee. Such charges should be fair and equitable and have a reasonable relationship to expenses incurred. These charges should not be assessed for income-generating purposes.

In planning for visits by law school recruiters, efforts should be made to organize the event well in advance, to notify students adequately, and to see that the event is mutually beneficial for both the student and the recruiter. For maximum efficiency, the pre-law advisor may wish to coordinate such events with neighboring institutions by either holding joint fairs or holding events on successive days. LSAC's Recruitment Work Group of pre-law advisor and law admission representatives has developed guidelines for recruitment events: www.lsac.org/Members/EventsRecruitment/PDFs/Guidelines-for-Planning-a-Law-Fair.pdf Additional information is available in the Pre-law Advisor's Account at www.lsac.org, under Events and Recruitment.

Pre-law advisors often find it valuable to invite law school representatives to participate in programs for students, such as panels on mock admissions, personal statements, financial aid for law school, law school curriculum, legal careers, or other topics. Such programs provide important information to students. When a law school is part of a university campus, students can learn much about legal education and the law school admission process in general by attending law school information sessions and tours, and attending a first year class if available. There are many opportunities for productive collaboration between the undergraduate pre-law advisor and the law school when both are located on the same campus, or when a law school is located near the undergraduate institution. It is important for students to understand that the pre-law advisor does not favor or represent a particular law school, even when a law school is located on the same campus.

C. Interpreting Indefinite Application Responses

Often the initial response from a law school will be to place a student's application in a "hold" or "wait-list" category. The pre-law advisor can be of assistance in two major ways. First, the advisor can assist in determining the implications of being placed on a wait-list at a given school. Since admissions offices vary in their procedures, few general rules apply. Some schools maintain large wait-lists, others keep short ones. In any given year a school's ability to admit additional students from wait lists may vary according to the initial yield or to decisions being made by other law schools. The pre-law advisor should encourage students to contact the law school to ascertain the likelihood of eventual admissions and the operative time frame.

Second, the pre-law advisor should encourage students placed on wait-list or hold category to find out what additional information – updated transcript and résumé, additional letters of recommendation, applicant letter of continuing interest, etc. - might be helpful to the law schools. In brief, both the pre-law advisor and the applicant should assume active roles in wait-list situations. Additionally, pre-law advisors should encourage students to take their names off wait-lists once they have decided not to attend a particular school.

D. Multiple Acceptances/Deposits

Applicants may be accepted at several law schools and, in an extension of Murphy's Law, will frequently hear from their last choice first. Initial deposits are often due before the student is able to make a final decision. In its *Statement of Good Admission and Financial Aid Practices*, LSAC recommends that no law school should require an enrollment commitment of any kind to an offer of admission or scholarship prior to April 1, except under binding early decision plans or for academic terms beginning in the spring or summer (LSAC's annual *Law School Admission Reference Manual for Law School Administrators and Pre-law Advisors*). Any failure by a law school to adhere to this deadline should be reported to the appropriate regional Pre-law Advisor Association. The pre-law advisor should urge the student to seek an extension of the deadline for a deposit, especially if the student has not received a decision on financial aid or has heard nothing from a more preferred law school. Should a law school deny the request, the student should be urged to make a deposit at the most desired school where admission has been offered. Sometimes it may be appropriate for a student to place deposits at more than one school in order to create more time for making a decision, but multiple deposits should be discouraged unless there is a valid reason. When multiple deposits are made, the student should be urged to release a seat no longer wanted as soon as possible, in fairness to both the law school and other applicants. Beginning on May 15 of each year, law schools that participate in the Commitment Overlap Service will be provided with information concerning all enrollment commitments to any law school made by those applicants who have indicated an intention to enroll in that school's entering class. The Pre-law Advisor should direct advisees to read and understand each law school's policy on multiple enrollment commitments.

III. Dean's Certifications and Letters of Recommendation

At many institutions, the pre-law advisor is the official designated to write dean's letters and to complete dean's certifications, college questionnaires, or other forms required by law schools; the pre-law advisor may also write letters of evaluation or recommendation. Though these tasks can be time consuming and demand a great deal of effort, they are both a necessary and a valuable part of the process.

Dean's letters and forms should be completed promptly. As a part of the pre-law advisor's professional responsibility, all deadlines should be met if the request from the student was made on a timely basis. When, for valid reasons, pre-law advisors cannot meet stated deadlines, law schools should be informed of this. Students should be urged to monitor their files to insure that all materials have been received. Since many law schools use a "rolling admissions" procedure, it is valuable to submit letters prior to stated deadlines.

A. Confidentiality/Waiver of Right to Access

Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), the so-called Buckley Amendment, students applying to law schools in the United States have the right of access to letters of evaluation/recommendation written for them. Though students may exercise this right, they should be aware that a number of law schools have indicated that the most helpful letters are those for which the right of access by the student has been waived, thus ensuring confidentiality and candor. Pre-law advisors should also be familiar with their own

institution's policy on the release of information. Regardless of whether or not the student has signed a waiver, all transactions between student and pre-law advisor should be treated as confidential.

B. Dean's Certification or Letter/College Questionnaire

Some law schools require documentation, commonly known as a "Dean's Certification, "Dean's Letter" or "College Questionnaire," from undergraduate and graduate institutions attended by the applicant. The primary purpose is to obtain information about academic and disciplinary misconduct (or lack thereof); some law school forms also include questions about the applicant's academic performance, leadership, motivation and character. Law schools vary widely in their approach to obtaining this information. Many law schools do not use a dean's certification process, relying entirely upon the applicant to disclose relevant disciplinary information. A few law schools require a dean's certification for all applicants. Others require a dean's certification or dean's letter only for applicants who answer "yes" to a question relating to disciplinary misconduct on the law school application. A number of schools require a dean's certification for matriculating applicants only; such requests are made late in the spring semester or during the summer. Currently, dean's forms must be sent from the undergraduate institution directly to the law school in question. LSAC is developing a common dean's certification form, and is considering an optional service for submitting dean's forms (law schools would elect to participate in this service).

Undergraduate institutions vary on the handling of dean's certifications or letters. Pre-law advisors should be thoroughly familiar with their institutions' methods of processing such requests and are advised, where the situation permits, to be designated as the college official responsible for completing law school dean's forms. Since this documentation is required in order for the applicant's file to be complete, pre-law advisors should be aware of what information their particular school provides (e.g., class standing, the nature of disciplinary actions that are deemed reportable, etc.) and so inform the student. Information about how to request a dean's certification or letter should be posted on the undergraduate institution's website and elsewhere, so that current students and alumni have clear information about the process.

Most law school applications also require the applicant to provide information about prior disciplinary, judicial, or academic history, whether or not a dean's certification is required. The law schools typically ask "have you ever been subject to disciplinary action for scholastic or other reasons?" This question is broader than the information provided in the dean's letter or dean's certification, which is based upon university records. Applicants should be advised to answer such questions truthfully and completely, disclosing information even when records have been expunged or sealed. Failure to disclose this information can trigger severe consequences in the admissions process and later in the bar admission process. A law school application is considered to be a "continuing" application; it must be updated if anything occurs that makes the initial response inaccurate or incomplete. It is appropriate and helpful for a Pre-law Advisor to discuss and review an applicant's response to application questions regarding disciplinary or judicial history. Applicants should be advised to keep copies of their law school applications and any addenda submitted, so that this information is readily available when applying for admission to the bar after law school.

C. Letters of Recommendation/Evaluation by Pre-law Advisors

In addition to the "Dean's Letter" or "College Questionnaire," pre-law advisors may be requested to write letters of recommendation or an evaluation on behalf of an applicant. Pre-law advisors can perform a valuable

service in writing these letters because they have a unique opportunity to view the student in a total setting: academic; non-academic; and personal. In general, these letters should include:

- (1) a statement describing how the recommender knows the applicant;
- (2) an assessment of the student's overall academic performance, including difficulty of curriculum, course selection, improvement (or decline) in performance, factors affecting performance, and testing history;
- (3) an assessment of the student's contributions to campus life; and
- (4) an assessment of personal qualities relevant to the student's performance as a law student and lawyer.

The pre-law advisor is under no obligation to write a letter of recommendation or evaluation for any applicant. The advisor should inform the applicant that the letter will be written with candor. Neither the applicant nor the law school benefits from a letter lacking candor.

IV. BEST PRACTICES FOR ADVISING APPLICANTS ON PERSONAL STATEMENTS

A personal statement is exactly what it says it is, a "personal statement." Law school admission officers often refer to this as the applicant's "interview" with the law school admission committee. There are a number of publications that offer advice on the crafting of these essays and applicants often seek advice from their pre-law advisors. Pre-law advisors are, of course, free to establish their own policies in terms of working with applicants on personal statements (and other essays) and may choose not to offer assistance in essay writing. For those who do assist in reviewing essays, PLANC suggests the following best practices for assisting applicants in their essay writing. The guidelines below are consistent with the metaphor used in I.C. above: pre-law advisors can serve as coaches but they do not play the game for students.

(1) The personal statement must be the work of the applicant. Pre-law advisors should not write or edit extensively these essays. Applicants should be encouraged to consult each prospective target school's guidelines and requirements for the personal statement before soliciting guidance from a pre-law advisor or others (writing tutors, editors, etc.). If the applicant has a question about the law school's guidelines and requirements, the applicant should consult the school directly.

(2) When asked to assist in the writing of the personal statement, pre-law advisors may want to ask applicants to verbalize their reasons for applying to law school and engage in conversations that force applicants to clarify their reasons. It is appropriate to request a copy of an applicant's résumé, transcript, and other information that will facilitate brainstorming and discussion about possible approaches and topics for the personal statement. Pre-law advisors may also alert applicants to variations in law school instructions and requirements for personal statements, word or page expectations and limitations, and the possibility and purpose of additional optional statements.

(3) Pre-law advisors may offer to read a draft of the personal statement or other essay and to comment and make suggestions. Pre-law advisors should not feel obliged to serve as proof readers or final editors. Perhaps the best analogy at this point is for pre-law advisors to take the stance of a book reviewer who does not write or edit the material but offers a critique.

(4) Applicants should be reminded when signing an application stating “this is my work” that this is considered by the Bar Examiners to be an integrity issue.

V. INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Pre-law advisors should stress the value of their function and promote it as an important service to both students and the institution by:

(1) raising the level of awareness of pre-law advising on the part of both students and administration

(2) requesting financial support to the fullest extent possible for programs, publications, secretarial assistance, membership in regional pre-law advisor associations (APLAs), attendance at regional and national conferences, and purchase of materials from LSAC;

(3) securing adequate space for print resources, and computer access to electronic resources about law school and the legal profession;

(4) reporting annually their activities to appropriate administrative officers of their institution;

(5) seeking adequate time to perform pre-law advising duties; this may involve release time or a reduced teaching load, in the case of a faculty pre-law advisor or a reduced general advising load for a pre-law advisor with general academic advising responsibilities;

(6) obtaining professional recognition of pre-law activities.

(7) establishing and/or advising law-related student organizations to enhance the knowledge of undergraduates at their institutions.

VI. PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

Pre-law advisors are encouraged to share their knowledge, experience, publications, and ideas with other pre-law advisors. When publications are shared, any use by the recipient should give appropriate credit to the originating source.

The most effective way of getting to know other advisors and law school admission officers is by actively participating in one of the regional pre-law advisor associations (APLAs): the Midwest Association (MAPLA), the Northeast Association (NAPLA), the Pacific Coast Association (PCAPLA), the Southern Association (SAPLA), the Southwest Association (SWAPLA) and the Western Association (WAPLA). The primary goal of these associations is to increase the effectiveness and professionalism of pre-law advising. At the same time, getting to know other advisors and admission officers provides an opportunity for networking with an interesting and enjoyable cadre of people whose common interest, the pre-law student, can lead to valuable interchanges of ideas and resources. The Pre-law Advisors National Council (PLANC) acts as a liaison among the APLAs and serves as a link with the agencies and organizations involved in legal education and the legal profession. For further information about the APLAs, go to www.planc.org.

VII. RELATIONSHIPS WITH COMMERCIAL VENDORS

A. Relationships Between Individual Pre-Law Advisors and Commercial Vendors

The term “commercial vendor” is defined, for these purposes, as any for-profit organization, group or individual, who is not officially connected with an institution of higher learning and whose pre-law advising function is primarily for profit. Although pre-law advisors have no real authority over commercial vendors, pre-law advisors, with the backing of regional pre-law advisor associations (APLAs) and PLANC, ought to be able to exert some influence over the activities of these vendors. The following actions are suggested:

(1) In areas where the commercial vendors operate, the local pre-law advisors may meet with representatives of the vendors to reach an agreement that will benefit both parties. Pre-law advisors will let their students know of the availability of the commercial test prep courses. Advisors may clearly state that this is for information purposes only and in no way implies an endorsement of the vendor. Pre-law advisors may offer handouts identifying their services which commercial vendors agree to make available.

(2) Pre-law advisors should make a concerted effort to advertise on their campuses the services and materials provided by their offices, and emphasize the fact that these services are provided at no cost by their institution. Where feasible and appropriate, the students should be informed that it is the institution’s pre-law advisor who has direct connection with law school admission officers, has the latest information from Law Services, is a member of the regional APLA, and receives updates on admission practices from the APLA and from PLANC.

B. Relationships Between the APLAs and Commercial Vendors

The question of the relationship between the commercial vendors and APLAs presents an interesting problem. When APLAs hold their annual conferences, to what extent may the commercial vendors participate? Should they attend our workshops and have access to materials prepared by pre-law advisors? Materials prepared by pre-law advisors are generally available at no charge to applicants and other pre-law advisors but when commercials have access to these materials they are used for profit. Conversely, since commercial vendors do, in fact, advise applicants, is there an obligation on our part to see that all applicants have access to the best information available?

In view of these questions, the Committee recommends the following guidelines:

(1) Commercial organizations, including individual for-profit pre-law advisors may attend our annual conferences but will be charged at a “commercial rate.” This is the current practice for most APLAs. They may have display tables in areas designated by the APLAs.

(2) Commercial vendors may have access to all materials distributed at the conferences but may not reproduce any of these materials for in-house use or distribution to applicants without the consent of the authors or organizations, as appropriate. If such reproductions and distribution is requested and approved, an appropriate fee will be charged and paid to the institution of the author, or the APLA or PLANC as appropriate.

(3) Commercial vendors may send representatives to all sessions, except business sessions, they may participate in panels and discussions only by invitation of the APLA.

C. Relationships with PLANC and PLANC's Role in the Monitoring Process

PLANC, in cooperation with the APLAs, will serve in a monitoring capacity. When an individual pre-law advisor wishes to lodge a complaint against a commercial vendor, the pre-law advisor will report to his/her APLA. The APLA will then investigate the matter, and if the matter is found valid, the president of that APLA will write an appropriate letter to the local offending commercial with a copy to the national office. If a suitable response is not forthcoming, and appropriate action taken, the APLA may refer the matter to PLANC. The Chair of PLANC will draft a letter to the national office of the commercial, with a copy to the individual offending office. If a appropriate action is still not take, then both the APLA newsletter and PLANC POINTS will publicize the matter. The commercial vendor may no longer be allowed to participate in APLA events until the matter has reached a mutually agreeable resolution.

*This document was initially approved by the Pre-law Advisors National Council (PLANC) in 1985. It has been revised and edited periodically since then. The current version was approved by PLANC on March 3, 2013. **The Roles and Responsibilities of Pre-law Advisors** is included as an Appendix in LSAC's **Law School Admission Reference Manual for Law School Administrators and Pre-law Advisors**.*