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Methodology: 2022 Best Law Schools Rankings

Find out how U.S. News ranks law schools.

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THE U.S. NEWS' BEST LAW Schools rankings evaluate institutions on their successful placement of graduates, their faculty resources, the academic achievements of entering students, and opinions by law schools, lawyers and judges on overall program quality. The rankings measure 193 law schools that are fully accredited by the American Bar Association, or ABA. Changes for the 2022 edition included two new placement indicators on graduate indebtedness and a fully revamped approach to measuring library resources.

In fall 2020 and early 2021, U.S. News collected statistical and reputation data directly from law schools for the 20 (up from 13 previously) indicators used in the overall rankings and 13 law school specialty rankings and to populate each school's usnews.com profile.

Ranking Indicators

Quality Assessment

Quality assessment was composed of two indicators of expert opinion that contributed 40% to the overall rank.

Peer assessment score (weighted by 0.25): Law school deans, deans of academic affairs, chairs of faculty appointments and the most recently tenured faculty members rated programs' overall quality on a scale from marginal (1) to outstanding (5), marking "don't know" for schools they did not know well enough to evaluate. A school's score is the average of 1-5 ratings received. U.S. News administered the peer assessment survey in fall 2020 and early 2021. Seventy percent of recipients responded.

Assessment score by lawyers and judges (0.15): Legal professionals – including hiring partners of law firms, practicing attorneys and judges – rated programs' overall quality on a scale from 1 (marginal) to 5 (outstanding), marking "don't know" for schools they did not know well enough to evaluate. A school's score is the average of 1-5 ratings it received across the three most recent survey years. U.S. News administered the legal professionals survey in fall 2020 to recipients that law schools provided to U.S. News in summer 2020.

Selectivity

Selectivity is a proxy of student excellence. Its three indicators contributed 21% in total to the ranking.

Median Law School Admission Test and Graduate Record Examination scores (0.1125; previously 0.125): These are the combined median scores on the LSAT and GRE quantitative, verbal and analytical writing exams of all 2020 full- and part-time entrants to the J.D. program. Reported scores for each of the four exams, when applicable, were converted to 0-100 percentile scales. The LSAT and GRE percentile scales were weighted by the proportions of test-takers submitting each exam. For example, if 85% of exams submitted were LSATs and 15% submitted were GREs, the LSAT percentile would be multiplied by 0.85 and the average percentile of the three GRE exams by 0.15 before summing the two values. This means GRE scores were never converted to LSAT scores or vice versa. There were 60 law schools – 31% of the total ranked – that reported both the LSAT and GRE scores of their 2020 entering classes to U.S. News.

Median undergraduate GPA (0.0875; previously 0.10): This is the combined median undergraduate GPA of all the 2020 full- and part-time entrants to the J.D. program.

Acceptance rate (0.01; previously 0.025): This is the combined proportion of applicants to both the full- and part-time J.D. programs who were accepted for the 2020 entering class. A lower acceptance rate indicates greater selectivity.

Placement Success

Placement success is composed of five indicators that total 25.25% of each school's rank. The two most heavily weighted indicators pertain to employment.

Employment rates for 2019 graduates 10 months after graduation (0.14) and at graduation (0.04): For both ranking factors, schools received maximum credit when their J.D. graduates – in alignment with ABA reporting rules – obtained long-term jobs that were full time, not funded by the law school, and where a J.D. degree was an advantage or bar passage was required. In contrast, jobs that were some combination of short-term, part-time, funded by the law school and/or did not require bar passage received less credit by varying amounts, determined by the combination. See Notes on Employment Rates below for a more detailed explanation.

Bar passage rate (0.0225, previously 0.02): This is the ratio of the bar passage rate of a school's 2019 graduating class to that jurisdiction's overall state bar passage rate for first-time test-takers in winter and summer 2019.

The jurisdiction listed is the state where the largest number of 2019 graduates took the state bar exam. The National Conference of Bar Examiners provided the state bar examination pass rates for first-time test-takers in winter and summer 2019.

Average debt incurred obtaining a J.D. at graduation (0.03, new) and the percent of law school graduates incurring J.D. law school debt (0.02, new): According to a 2020 American Bar Association [report](#), many new lawyers are postponing major life decisions like marriage, having children and buying houses – or rejecting them outright – because they are carrying heavy student loan debts. J.D. graduate debt is impacting Black and Hispanic students the most since they borrow more, according to the ABA. We added two new indicators to take into account this J.D. graduate debt load and its impact on law school graduates, the legal profession and prospective law school students.

This data is based on J.D. candidate graduates in 2019-2020. The indicators were calculated by comparing each school's value with the median value (midpoint) for that indicator. Schools whose values were farthest below the median scored the highest, and schools that were most above the median scored the lowest on each indicator.

Faculty, Law School and Library Resources

Faculty, law school and library resources is 13.75% of the ranking and is composed of two indicators on expenditures, one on student-faculty ratio and seven on library resources. The two metrics on expenditures per student, below, pertain to the 2019 and 2020 fiscal years.

The average spending on instruction, library and supporting services (0.09; previously 0.0975) and the average spending on all other items, including financial aid (0.01; previously 0.015): As part of the faculty resources calculation for instruction, library and supporting services – new this year in order to adjust for cost of living variations in law school salaries between school geographic locations – U.S. News replaced Runzheimer indexes with publicly available Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Price Parities index data.

Student-faculty ratio (0.02; previously 0.03): This is the ratio of law school students to law school faculty members for 2020. The definition that U.S. News uses is a modified version of the [Common Data Set's](#) student-to-faculty ratio definition, a standard used throughout higher education based on the ratio of full-time equivalent students to full-time equivalent faculty. For law schools, full-time equivalent faculty is defined as full-time faculty plus one-third part-time law school faculty. Full-time equivalent students are defined as full-time law school students plus two-thirds of total part-time law school students.

Library resources and operations (0.0175 in total; previously 0.0075): We created seven new ranking indicators using data for fiscal year 2019-2020, each weighted 0.0025. See indicators below.

- Number of hours per day law students have access to library study space during regular semester and exam schedules.
- Number of hours per week law students have access to real-time reference/research/library services during the regular semester schedule.
- Total number of licensed or owned digital/electronic databases available to law students as members of the larger college or university.
- Total number of titles available to law students.
- Ratio of full-time equivalent professional and paraprofessional library staff to full-time equivalent law students.
- Ratio of the number of seats with library spaces to full-time equivalent law students.
- Ratio of the total number of presentations by library staff to full-time equivalent law students.

Overall Rank

Data was standardized so that each school's value was compared with the mean and standard deviations of all other schools, and standardized scores were weighted, totaled and rescaled so that the top school received 100; others received their percentage of the top score. Law schools were then numerically ranked in descending order based on their scores.

Schools Listed With a Ranking Range

U.S. News has individually ranked the top three-quarters of law schools. For schools in the bottom quarter of the rankings, U.S. News made an editorial decision to only display the bottom quartile ranking range and display them alphabetically.

U.S. News will supply schools listed in the ranking range with their numerical ranks if they submit a request following the procedures listed in the [Information for School Officials](#).

Unranked Schools

To be ranked, a law school must be accredited and fully approved by the ABA. The University of North Texas—Dallas is unranked because, as of February 2021, it's provisionally approved by the ABA. Also unranked are Inter-American University in Puerto Rico, the University of Puerto Rico and Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico.

Notes on Employment Rates

In recent years, enhanced ABA reporting rules have led to more information becoming available from law schools about the many types of positions law students take after they graduate. Each year, the schools are required to report to the ABA how many of their most recent graduates had various types of jobs lined up after graduation.

As in previous years, the ABA mandated that schools report law school and university positions separately from all other nonuniversity-funded positions to make the difference between the two types of jobs very clear. U.S. News continued to use this standard for data collection for the class of 2019 at graduation and 10 months later.

These ABA standards require the law schools to go into great detail by reporting 45 different job types, as well as employment status and duration. That includes, for example, whether each graduate's employment was long term – defined as lasting at least a year – or short term, whether it was full or part time, and whether it required passage of a bar exam.

U.S. News collected these same statistics when the schools were surveyed for the annual rankings and gathered the same data on members of the class who were employed at graduation and 10 months after graduation. U.S. News also collected data on students' jobs when the law school was unable to determine length of employment or full- or part-time status, as well as when employment status was unknown.

U.S. News incorporated this rich data into its computation of the employment measure for the class of 2019 at graduation and 10 months later. Placement success was calculated by assigning various weights to the number of graduates employed in 45 of these different types of post-J.D. jobs, employment statuses and durations.

Full weight was given for graduates who had two types of jobs. The 100% weighted jobs were those who had a full-time job not funded by the law school or university that lasted at least a year and for which bar passage was required, or a full-time job not funded by the law school or university that lasted at

least a year where a J.D. degree was an advantage. Many experts in legal education consider these real law jobs.

Less weight went to full-time long-term jobs that were professional or nonprofessional and did not require bar passage, to pursuit of an additional advanced degree, and to positions whose start dates were deferred. The lowest weight applied to jobs categorized as both part-time and short-term and those jobs for which a law school was unable to determine length of employment or whether they were full time.

Nevertheless, in terms of all law school and university positions, U.S. News continues to apply a greater discount in our rankings calculations to the value of jobs graduates held that the law school or university funded compared with the weight used for positions in the same category that were not funded by the law school or university.

What this means is that full-time jobs lasting at least a year for which bar passage was required or a J.D. degree was an advantage did not receive full weight in the calculations if they were school or university funded. All other types of jobs, which already receive less weight in the rankings calculations, were further discounted if they were funded by the law school or university.

All these weighted employment figures were divided by the total number of 2019 J.D. graduates. They were used in the ranking formula only and are not published.

Employment statistics displayed on [usnews.com](https://www.usnews.com) reflect actual rates, out of the total number of 2019 J.D. graduates, for all jobs, excluding positions funded by the law school or university, that are full-time and long-term and for which a J.D. and bar passage are necessary or advantageous.

Actual rates for the other types of positions appear in the profiles of each school's latest graduating class.

Employment data for both types of positions – those not funded by the law school or university and those that were – is only available with a [U.S. News Law School Compass](#) subscription.

Library Questions

U.S. News worked with organizations to develop the new library questions and make suggestions on the analytical framework used to analyze library data, including:

- American Association of Law Libraries.
- Academic Law Libraries: Statistics, Analytics and Reports, and NELLCO library consortium.
- Society of American Law Library Directors.
- Association of American Law Schools, section on law libraries and legal information.

Specialty Rankings

Law school specialty rankings, such as [clinical training](#), [tax law](#) and [health care law](#), are based solely on peer assessment surveys administered to law school faculty who teach in that specialty area. The peer

assessment surveys for the specialty law school area rankings were conducted in fall 2020 and early 2021 by U.S. News.

In summer 2020, law schools provided U.S. News with the names of the law school faculty who teach in each specialty area. This year for the third consecutive year, law school faculty members who teach in each specialty area rated the other law schools in that specialty area on a 5-point scale. Schools are ranked in descending order from highest to lowest based on their average peer assessment scores in their specialty area.

The number of schools ranked in the 13 law school specialty rankings and the response rate among those law school faculty surveyed in fall 2020 and early 2021 were as follows:

- 187 schools ranked for business/corporate law (response rate: 54%).
- 182 schools ranked for clinical training (64%).
- 187 schools ranked for constitutional law (52%).
- 187 schools ranked for contracts/commercial law (48%).
- 187 schools ranked for criminal law (57%).
- 111 schools ranked for dispute resolution (49%).
- 181 schools ranked for environmental law (59%).
- 181 schools ranked for health care law (54%).
- 187 schools ranked for intellectual property law (65%).
- 185 schools ranked for international law (56%).
- 176 schools ranked for legal writing (60%).
- 186 schools ranked for tax law (58%).
- 187 schools ranked for trial advocacy (56%).

In the law school specialty rankings, all programs that received 10 or more ratings are numerically ranked in that specialty. Schools with less than 10 ratings in a specialty, schools that were unranked in the overall rankings and schools that didn't return the U.S. News law school statistical survey for the most recent data collection aren't listed in any specialty ranking.

School Data, Directory and Search

The schools provided the data listed in the rankings and their individual profiles in U.S. News' directory. If a data point is listed as "N/A," the school did not provide it.

Users can filter rankings and profiles by characteristics like location, tuition, LSAT scores and average starting salary, and create personalized short lists of schools to examine further.

Check back every now and then, as we occasionally add content to the website when we obtain additional data we think is useful – whether on job placement, GPA, LSAT scores or other factors – or we learn information that changes the data.

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