



# OUT & IN

A GUIDE FOR LESBIAN, GAY,  
BISEXUAL, TRANSGENDER,  
AND QUEER/QUESTIONING  
LAW SCHOOL APPLICANTS





SEAN

**BEING TRANSGENDER INHERENTLY INVOLVES LEGAL DIFFICULTIES.** My struggles with discrimination, documentation, and obtaining health care are what truly encouraged me to apply to law school. I think most people who are trans feel like a minority within a minority. Facing discrimination by other members of the LGBTQ community has always been particularly difficult for me. If we all looked the same and did exactly the same things, the LGBTQ community would be horribly boring. All my frustration with the way the LGBTQ community has been used as a political tool over the past several years led me to joking around about going to law school. I slowly became more serious about it and realized this was a way I could make a positive impact on the community.

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JESSICA

**I'M ORIGINALLY FROM A SMALL TOWN**...where most people are either farmers or factory workers. I moved to upstate New York at the beginning of high school; I attended college in New York. It was an amazing experience! For the first time, I was completely out to friends, classmates, professors, etc. And it was also the first time that I got a chance to be part of the larger LGBTQ community. I knew that I wanted to go to law school, but I also knew that I needed to start paying off some of those undergrad loans. I spent three years working for a communications company...then I enrolled in law school. I attended law school because I knew I wanted to be a lawyer.... I've always considered devoting some of my practice to LGBTQ legal issues...there are so few practicing attorneys who are up to date on the latest in the field.

# ■ INTRODUCTION

This is an exciting and opportune time for LGBTQ individuals to consider obtaining a legal education. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender, and queer/questioning people have found places in every area of legal practice as well as legal academia. They have succeeded in organizing their own small law firms, risen within the ranks of legal education, taken seats on the bench, and, of course, worked in law firms specializing in the LGBTQ rights movement.

Without a doubt, the law school admission process can be complicated and confusing. For lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender applicants to law school, your LGBTQ identity might raise unique issues, such as:

- Should you be open about your sexual orientation in your application?
- Even if you have already “come out” as a member of the LGBTQ community, will you be accepted, valued, and supported by the law school at which you enroll? If you have a partner, spouse, or significant other, will the law school you choose be welcoming of your relationship?
- As you plan your professional career after law school, will you find supportive and understanding career services professionals with whom you can be open about your sexual orientation? How might your LGBTQ identity be perceived by future employers?

This guide was created by the Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity (SOGI) Subcommittee of LSAC’s Diversity Committee to help you with these questions and others. The real LGBTQ law students introduced in this brochure have generously shared their perspectives, gained from going through the process of applying and being admitted to law school, to help you with your consideration of a legal education. You will find their comments throughout this publication.

As you will see, not every student found the path to be an easy one, but all of them have found satisfaction during law school. We hope that you, too, are encouraged and inspired to pursue your academic and professional goals and dreams.

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**I SEE MY LGBTQ STATUS AS BEING ONE BRICK IN THE WALL THAT IS ME.** I am a half black, half Italian-American, gay woman.... I don't like to separate my identities or categorize myself. I am just me. I think that my diversity has lent itself to many great experiences in law school. I have used it as a platform to join many different types of student groups, talk to many different types of people, and discuss many socially relevant issues. The many aspects of my identity, sexuality included, have made me more aware of, and engaged in, important legal issues, such as marriage equality for the LGBTQ community. Though that may not be the direction my career is heading, it is important to be part of the discussion.



**I WENT FROM HIGH SCHOOL TO A COMMUNITY COLLEGE** and then transferred to a large state university. I finished college with a bachelor's in sociology and then began law school. I transferred in my second year to the law school I currently attend. I assumed that my law school's religious ties would create a campus which was likely to be uninviting for its LGBTQ students, but I was willing to risk that. I was surprised once I got there how inviting the campus actually was. I ultimately became president of OutLaw and was able to coordinate many events with the LGBTQ students on campus.





MARY

**I ORIGINALLY WENT TO COLLEGE STRAIGHT FROM HIGH SCHOOL**, but after two years, both my college and I decided (separately) that I needed a break. What was to be a one-year hiatus turned into eight. I had enormous difficulties with being gay; I was the epitome of internalized homophobia and became “born again” as a college freshman.... No part of my identity made me feel so entirely “other” as did my being gay—not being female playing on male sports teams nor even being a first-generation Filipina who remembers standing in food bank lines as a child, who attended a private high school and a private college surrounded mostly by white students from upper-income to straight-up wealthy families. However, I have found my experience in law school to be open, welcoming, and supportive.



# ROBERT

## The Justice Papers



**BEFORE COMING TO LAW SCHOOL,** I was a nurse for 14 years.... My life experiences encompass an interesting gamut of things, including attending seminary in Miami where I studied for several years to be a Roman Catholic priest. I knew that no matter where I went as a gay student, my political, social, and religious beliefs could present a possible struggle. Attending a law school where I would not be ostracized or feel like a black sheep was important to me.

# RESEARCHING LAW SCHOOLS

**It is important that you do your homework to learn as much as possible about the schools in which you are interested before choosing where to go.**

Most law schools welcome all applicants and promote a diverse and inclusive community. In fact, you may find that the choices available to you are somewhat overwhelming. As a savvy consumer of legal education, you will ultimately want to attend the law school that is the best fit for you, which means doing some research and asking a lot of questions.

All LSAC-member law schools had an opportunity to respond to the following six questions. View their answers at [LSAC.org](https://lsac.org) under Future JD Students/LGBTQ Applicants.

- Does the law school have a nondiscrimination policy that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity?
- Does the law school have a lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender student organization?
- Does the law school have any openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender faculty members?
- Does the law school have any openly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender administrators?
- Does the law school offer any courses primarily focused on lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender legal issues?
- Does the law school offer any form of domestic partnership benefits to faculty, staff, or students?

If a school has not provided data for the LSAC survey, you should seek out this information. Surveys of LGBTQ law students reveal that the institutional support provided for LGBTQ students academically, financially, and in career planning is a critical part of students' satisfaction with, and success in, law school. A law school's admission and promotional materials provide some evidence of the extent of this support, but cannot provide the full picture. It is important that you do your homework to learn as much as possible about the schools in which you are interested before choosing where to go. The information on the following pages and on the website will help you find the answers you need.

**I ACTUALLY LOOKED AT THE LGBTQ TAB ON THE LSAC WEBSITE FIRST.**

I also looked online to try to find information about the school's LGBTQ student club. All of the university's handouts, as well as various publications ... described my school as one of the most diverse in the country, so I didn't dig too much further than that. In hindsight, however, I now realize that it's hard to take generalized statements about diversity at face value. Some schools may simply be more LGBTQ friendly than others. You can only figure that out by seeking out as much firsthand information as possible. —JESSICA



**BEFORE DECIDING WHERE TO GO TO LAW SCHOOL,** prospective students should try to contact a current LGBTQ student through the LGBTQ student organization or a faculty advisor for LGBTQ students. —ALI



# RESOURCES FOR YOUR LAW SCHOOL SEARCH

## Law School Support

Try to find out as much as you can from law school websites, admission offices, students, professors, and alumni. Every law school admission professional should be able to answer the kinds of questions listed in this guide or at least refer you to someone who can. If the law schools that interest you have an LGBTQ student organization or if there is one as part of the larger university, ask for the name and contact information of one of the students and/or the faculty advisor.

## Other sources of information include:

- *ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools*. This searchable guide, updated annually by LSAC and the law schools, contains descriptions and data about all ABA-approved law schools. It is available online or in print. Most undergraduate prelaw advising offices have a copy.
- *The Climate in Law Schools for GLBT Persons: Results from a Survey of Law Students*. This report provides insightful data about how LGBTQ students choose a law school and about their law school experience. You can read it on our website, LSAC.org. Go to Future JD Students/ LGBTQ Applicants.

## Other Sources of Support

The support that law schools provide for LGBTQ students is very important, but there are other sources of mentoring, career planning, and networking support for LGBTQ law students. The following organizations or resources can help you, regardless of the law school you ultimately choose.

**NALP-GLBT.** NALP (The Association for Legal Career Professionals) was organized to facilitate career planning for law students and to promote the exchange of information and cooperation between law schools and employers. NALP offers a number of resources for law students and for LGBTQ students in particular. Go to [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org) and choose GLBT Resources in the Diversity Initiatives menu.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Many states and cities have LGBTQ bar associations whose mission is to provide a strong presence of LGBTQ persons in the legal profession and community at large.

**Local LGBTQ Bar Associations.** Many states and cities have LGBTQ bar associations whose mission is to provide a strong presence of LGBTQ persons in the legal profession and community at large. These organizations often sponsor events that facilitate education, legal advocacy, and civic participation relating to LGBTQ issues. They also hold social networking and career-planning events for LGBTQ students and legal professionals.

To find out if there is a local LGBTQ bar association in the area where you plan to attend law school, check [www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org) (Diversity Initiatives/GLBT Resources); go to the National LGBTQ Bar Association website at [www.nlga.org/affiliates.html](http://www.nlga.org/affiliates.html); or search the Web for LGBTQ bar associations.

**Lavender Law Career Fair and Conference.** This is an annual national career fair attended by self-identified LGBTQ law students and over 150 recruiting law firms, LGBTQ advocacy groups, and corporations. It is a three-day event, with one day devoted to the career fair. Dozens of panels, symposia, and courses are held on the other two days to discuss cutting-edge litigation and legislative issues. The event is held in a different city each year, usually in the fall. Some law schools will pay for students to go to this conference as part of their ameliorative efforts for allowing military recruiting on campus. For more information, go to [www.lavenderlaw.org](http://www.lavenderlaw.org).



# ■ THE LAW SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

## Classroom Climate and Academic Programming

Exposure to LGBTQ issues in law school classrooms is important for all students who will ultimately be practicing in a diverse society. It is particularly important to students who may have come to law school hoping to pursue a legal career focused on the LGBTQ population. Incorporation of LGBTQ issues in the curriculum and programming signals that LGBTQ persons are fully valued and integrated into the law school environment. The offering of one LGBTQ-specific course is a good start, but does not necessarily indicate real integration for LGBTQ persons at that school. Talking to current students or faculty and asking the following questions will help in assessing the degree of integration for LGBTQ persons and issues at a law school.

- Is an LGBTQ-specific course offered consistently from year to year? If not, why not?
- Are LGBTQ-specific issues addressed in non-LGBTQ specific courses, such as Constitutional Law, Family Law, or Torts?
- How respectful are the faculty and other students when LGBTQ issues are raised in the classroom? Do LGBTQ students feel free to raise these issues in class?
- Are LGBTQ persons or issues represented in any faculty-sponsored workshops or by speakers invited to campus?
- Do faculty research and write about LGBTQ issues? (This information should be included in faculty profiles on the school's website.)
- Are there internships, externships, or clinical programs specific to LGBTQ-related law practice?

### DID YOU KNOW?

Incorporation of LGBTQ issues in the curriculum and programming signals that LGBTQ persons are fully valued and integrated into the law school environment.

## Student Organizations and Activities

Many law schools have LGBTQ student organizations, which can serve several purposes. They can increase LGBTQ visibility and create a safe place for LGBTQ students to be themselves. They can also organize educational programs that inform the law school and broader community about LGBTQ legal issues. Some student organizations are very active, mobilizing students and faculty to advocate for important institutional reforms, such as increasing LGBTQ course offerings, hiring LGBTQ faculty, and developing LGBTQ-specific programming.



While the fact that a school has an LGBTQ organization is important, if you are interested in how active the organization is and how well it is supported by the institution and students generally, you may want to get answers to the following questions.

- How supportive are faculty of the LGBTQ student organization and its activities? For example, is there a faculty advisor, or do faculty informally support or attend LGBTQ-sponsored activities?
- How often does the LGBTQ student organization meet, formally or informally? What kinds of activities does it organize? Does it ever cosponsor activities with other student groups?
- Do LGBTQ students feel supported, or is a lack of organized activity due to fear of discrimination or simply due to lack of time or interest?
- Is there a university-wide organization that is open to LGBTQ law students?

## Career Planning

According to a recent LSAC survey of applicants, job success of graduates is the most important factor considered by all applicants when choosing a law school. LGBTQ students may have unique concerns in this area. For example, some students have questions about whether they should be “out” in the interviewing process, how to field questions that may seem inappropriate or contain “hetero” assumptions, and how to find law firms that are LGBTQ-friendly.

It is important to try to find out how proactive and qualified a school’s career services personnel are in addressing LGBTQ concerns. These are some questions you may want to ask your contacts at the law schools that interest you.

- Do LGBTQ students feel comfortable raising their concerns with career services?
- Does the career services office sponsor workshops or informational sessions to address concerns unique to LGBTQ students?
- What does the career services office do, if anything, to help students identify LGBTQ-friendly law firms or other employers?
- Are there volunteer or public-interest opportunities for LGBTQ-related work?
- Is there an active and engaged LGBTQ-alumni association?
- Does the career services office or dean of students publicize external sources of support, such as the Lavender Law Conference or local LGBTQ bar events? (See Resources on page 10 for more information about these organizations and other career planning resources.)

## NOTE

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An inactive student organization does not necessarily mean that a school is not LGBTQ-friendly or that LGBTQ students do not feel supported by the school. Ironically, students at some of the most LGBTQ-friendly schools may be less active in these organizations because they feel less of a need to join an organization for support. The degree of student activity depends heavily on student leadership, which changes from year to year. Organizations may be incredibly active one year, but may not plan any events the next year simply because the student leaders that year are too busy with other things or are less engaged.

Many law schools are proactive in acknowledging and addressing these issues, and have instituted policies to try to combat these barriers.

## Other Institutional Support

Despite significant improvement in the climate for LGBTQ students in law schools and the legal profession over the past 10 years, LGBTQ students may still face discrimination or barriers that are different from other traditionally disadvantaged groups. Many law schools are proactive in acknowledging and addressing these issues, and have instituted policies to try to combat these barriers. The following are examples of ways to assess how proactive and responsive schools are to the needs of LGBTQ persons.

- Does the school publicize its nondiscrimination policy, and does it include sexual orientation?
- Have there been any incidents involving discrimination or offensive remarks made about LGBTQ persons? If so, how promptly were these incidents addressed? Does the school have an official plan or policies for handling such incidents?
- Does the school have a dedicated scholarship or grant for students pursuing LGBTQ-related legal work?
- Do current LGBTQ students feel supported by the administration—especially by the dean of students, dean of career services, and other officials who interact with students on a regular basis?
- Are there gender-neutral bathrooms where transgender students feel comfortable?
- Does the school offer domestic-partnership benefits?
- Does the school's insurance plan cover transgender transition expenses?

**ALTHOUGH IT WAS JUST BY CHANCE THAT I TOOK A JOB**

in a law office after having returned to school, it soon seemed to me that studying law would be a natural extension—and practical application—of my interest in secular and religious ethics. —MARY



**ONCE YOU ARRIVE AT LAW SCHOOL, IT IS REALLY NICE TO HAVE A CONNECTION**

with the other LGBTQ students on campus. You really feel like you belong in the legal field knowing that other LGBTQ students are pursuing your same goal. The legal field is not one which is necessarily inviting LGBTQ people to join its ranks. If anything, it is a conservative field. I encourage you to get involved with the LGBTQ student group on campus, and if your school doesn't have one, start one. —ALI





# COMING OUT IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS

As an LGBTQ person, you may find yourself in situations where you must decide whether or not to be out, under what circumstances, and with whom. One place you will face the decision about whether or not to come out is on the application itself. To some people, sexual orientation or gender identity is irrelevant and they will choose not to mention it. Others view it as an integral part of who they are and will discuss it openly. Many fall somewhere in between. When making your decision about where to apply or how out to be on your application, consider carefully each school that interests you:

- Will the school value the diversity you may bring as an LGBTQ student?
- Does the school value the perspectives that you may bring to the classroom?
- How are members of the admission committee likely to consider this information about you?

Ultimately, you may be out on some applications and not out on others. The choice is yours.

Remember, different law schools look for different things in the personal statement, so read the application requirements carefully. Regardless of what you choose to write about, your statement should be personal—admission committees use this essay as a way to learn about you, your background, what you will bring to their law school, and how you will enhance and fit in with the school's culture and community. If you choose to be out on your application, you will have to decide how to convey that message. You may want to focus your personal statement on your experiences as an LGBTQ individual. Perhaps your identity is the main motivation for attending law school. Will your sexual orientation be the central theme of your personal statement or just get a mere mention?

## DID YOU KNOW?

As an LGBTQ person, you may find yourself in situations where you must decide whether or not to be out, under what circumstances, and with whom.

Topics you may want to write about include significant accomplishments, leadership, community activism, employment with LGBTQ-related organizations, discrimination or adversity you have faced because of your identity, or future career goals shaped by your sexual orientation or transgender status. There are less obvious ways to be out on your application, such as mentioning LGBTQ activities or involvement on your résumé. You may also want to discuss with your recommendation letter writers your choice about being out on your applications.

If you have trouble making the decision, try seeking the advice of a recruiter from each school that interests you. You can meet many recruiters at one time at the Law School Forums (go to LSAC.org for dates and locations). Explain your situation and ask how they would respond. If you prefer to seek the information anonymously, you can call a school's admission office. If you are able to locate LGBTQ students at each school, ask them how they addressed this issue.

## I WAS COMPLETELY OUT AS BEING TRANSGENDER ON

my application, because I was through with hiding and I consider my experiences to be an advantage, rather than a disadvantage. When I made the decision to write about being trans, I knew it would probably be offensive to some people. It was sort of a test to see which schools would be more welcoming, and it allowed me to find a school where I truly feel welcome. Part of me was afraid that I'd be rejected by every school I applied to, but that wasn't the case at all. I've found the experience to be generally positive. Although I was concerned at first that being out in law school would be difficult, my professors and classmates have been very respectful. —SEAN



## I WAS NOT OUT IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS.

This was not a conscious choice. If the application had asked me to categorize my sexual orientation, I would have; however, most of the applications did not ask for that information. Although I am proud of who I am and very open about my sexual orientation, I believe that my sexuality does not define me. There are so many more interesting facets of my personality that make me who I am, and those were the things that I wanted to write about in my personal statement. —CARA



## ■ CONCLUDING ADVICE

Diversity is a broad term that includes sexual orientation. A law school's definition of diversity should be in sync with your definition. Consider how a particular law school and its community are best prepared to facilitate the type of legal education and practice you envision for yourself. Ask law school representatives about their school's policies and programs that are designed to bring about diversity in legal education, and visit the school's website to look for programs/events that pertain to your interests.

Other significant considerations in your decision about where to attend law school should include programs of study, financial aid availability, campus climate/diversity, location, and outcomes (jobs and bar passage). LSAC's website ([LSAC.org](http://LSAC.org)) is the best place to find general and law school-specific information about these topics.

### “FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF A LAW SCHOOL FACULTY MEMBER,

the presence of LGBTQ students is essential for many reasons. Issues relating to LGBTQ people regularly arise in the classroom, in subjects ranging from criminal law to family law and constitutional law. Openly LGBTQ people add immeasurably to discussions of these issues. Also, the presence of a diverse student body enriches life on law school campuses, and helps prepare all students to practice law in a diverse world.”—PAMELA D. BRIDGEWATER  
PROFESSOR OF LAW

**I FEEL LIKE SHAKESPEARE**, “Above all, to thine own self be true.” If you feel you want to apply to a school but you can’t come out or let on that you are gay, then that might not be the school for you. People will like you so long as you are a good person, you are a hard worker, and you do what is required, regardless if you are gay or straight. Law schools have open and encouraging environments, so give the school you are going to apply to the benefit of the doubt. Don’t let your own fears creep in, because ultimately all it will do is stop you from accomplishing what you actually want in the long run. —ROBERT



**WHEN YOU FINALLY START SCHOOL, WHEREVER YOU END UP**, make sure to participate in LGBTQ events and activities on campus and in the community. Sure, you’re going to spend most of your time reading, but it’s also really important to keep perspective on the whole experience, and taking some time out to play is a good way to do that. —JESSICA





## CHOOSING A LAW SCHOOL CAN BE A DIFFICULT PROPOSITION.

You may feel that being LGBTQ is core to your identity. While I appreciate that, selecting a law school based upon its LGBTQ community may not be the best way to go. Pick a school based on its faculty, the programs offered, and the networking opportunities, and view the presence of a gay organization as a plus. I think by giving too much weight to LGBTQ considerations, you may be limiting yourself and closing yourself off to other exciting opportunities and experiences. —CARA

I APPLIED PRIMARILY TO SCHOOLS IN AREAS WHERE MY PARTNER was looking for a job.... When my partner accepted a teaching position, this quickly narrowed my search prospects to that geographic area, and I visited each of the four law schools there. During my visit, I was able to see first-hand the culture of the schools, student interaction, and how faculty and staff engaged with the students. —ROBERT







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