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We posed questions to admissions officials at the [University of Miami School of Law \(http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/items/03038\)](http://grad-schools.usnews.rankingsandreviews.com/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/items/03038) regarding the application process, what they look for in applicants, and what sets their school apart. These are their responses:

### 1. What can applicants do to set themselves apart from their peers?

Each person has a story to tell that will be relevant to those reading the file. Applicants should use all aspects of the application to reflect their strengths, skills, accomplishments, and goals so that we have a sense of what type of student they'll be in the classroom and what they'll contribute to the law school community and the legal profession. Hopefully recommenders will confirm what applicants are saying about themselves: I am a bright, motivated, disciplined, and professional individual who will be someone you'll enjoy as a member of the law community and be proud to claim as an alumna/alumnus.

Submitting the [application \(http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/ps\\_04.php?op=3\)](http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/ps_04.php?op=3) early places applicants in the best position for both admission and scholarship consideration. At the beginning of the season, we're just starting to read files so we're fresh and eager to dig in. Later in the cycle, after having read thousands of files, it is harder to stand out, especially for individuals who fall in the "gray" area. Therefore, applicants should optimize their chances by being first in line.

### 2. What do you look for in the application essays? What do the essays tell you about a candidate?

If you had five minutes in a room with the individuals reviewing your file, what would you highlight and why is it relevant? Your essay tells us who you are, what you'll bring to the table, what type of student you'll be, what you'll contribute and whether you'll be a good match for our institution. The

essay should be well written, concise and short (approximately two pages).

### **3. How important is the applicant's LSAT score? How do you weigh it against undergraduate GPA and work/internship experience? Which of these carry the most weight? The least?**

Realizing that there is no one formula that fits all applicants, our goal is to approach each file holistically. The weight of the GPA and LSAT score shifts with the strengths and weaknesses of each applicant. The LSAT might be more important if someone has a low GPA but presents other factors such as a number of years of work experience, or a graduate degree along with a solid LSAT score. Applicants who present high LSAT scores but have consistently underperformed academically will have to provide convincing arguments that this lack of achievement will not repeat in law school. We value the writing experience of applicants who have engaged in a senior or honors thesis or have other significant writing experience. Regarding GPAs, grade trends, rigor of courses, and majors and minors are all reviewed with a serious eye.

### **4. How much does prior work/internship experience weigh into your decision making? What's the typical or expected amount of work experience from an applicant?**

Maturity (regardless of age), professionalism, seriousness of purpose, and time management skills are valued at Miami. Thus, while work/internship experiences are not expected, we appreciate that professional, internship, leadership or volunteer experiences indicate exposure to team work, time management, responsibility, and accountability. We pay heed to applicants who have taken interest in the world outside of their scope of well-being through public service and volunteer work. Miami likes to see applicants who have made it their business to learn how to navigate and get the most out of each experience, whether in an academic or professional setting.

### **5. What sets you apart from other schools? What can students gain from your school that they might not be able to find anywhere else?**

Leadership! In her first year alone, Dean Trish White (<http://www.law.miami.edu/facadmin/pwhite.php?letter=W>), a leader with vision and experience, has ignited an exciting momentum at Miami. She has greatly expanded collaborative efforts with other departments within the University (such as the newly created J.D./Masters in Music Business and Entertainment Law ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/jd\\_music.php?op=1](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/jd_music.php?op=1))) and for undergraduate business majors a triple degree option—J.D./M.B.A./LL.M. in Taxation or Real

Property ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/jd\\_triple\\_business.php?op=1](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/jd_triple_business.php?op=1))), heralded an extensive externship program ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/externship\\_program.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/externship_program.php?op=3)), actively supported the new specialization in international arbitration ([http://www.law.miami.edu/iglp/international\\_arbitration/](http://www.law.miami.edu/iglp/international_arbitration/)) (headed by one of the world's most powerful international arbitrators, Jan Paulsson (<http://www.law.miami.edu/facadmin/jpaulsson.php?op=3>)), approved new clinics (the immigration clinic ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_01\\_02.php?op=1](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_01_02.php?op=1)) and the human rights clinic slated to begin in spring, 2011), as well as added several new study abroad options ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/study\\_abroad.php?op=6](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/study_abroad.php?op=6)) in Versailles, France ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/versailles\\_exchange.php?op=6](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/versailles_exchange.php?op=6)), Hamburg, Germany (<http://www.law.miami.edu/currentstudents/bucerius.php>), Haifa, Israel and the Africa Neutral Trial Observer Initiative (<http://www.law.miami.edu/news.php?article=1500>). These outstanding new offerings hold promise for many more to come.

Additionally, Dean White constantly advocates on behalf of the law students: for the 2010-11 academic cycle, she negotiated no tuition increase (<http://www.law.miami.edu/news.php?article=1464>) as well as close to a \$300 per credit tuition decrease for part-time attendance during the summer.

Miami's new Law Without Walls offering (initiated under Dean White's leadership) is a collaborative, educational "course" implemented through work projects which develop creative ideas for how to solve current problems, issues, or inefficiencies in legal education and practice.

No other school in the country offers Miami's Student Development Program in which staff members (all of whom hold law degrees) connect with law students individually and work with them one on one to find greater success, satisfaction, and happiness during their law school years.

Miami does not have a sink or swim mentality. We offer a culture of collaboration (<http://www.law.miami.edu/aap/>) and an environment which encourages innovative ideas and opportunities. Serious but not stuffy, Miami celebrates and supports differences.

Miami, while at the crossroads to Latin and South America and the Caribbean, has an international positioning that touches all areas of the globe.

Miami offers a combination of strengths: an outstanding faculty (<http://www.law.miami.edu/facadmin/index.php?op=0>), engaged not only in teaching but also mentoring our accomplished, active ([http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/student\\_spotlights.php?op=0](http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/student_spotlights.php?op=0)) and multidimensional student body (<http://www.law.miami.edu/studentorg/>) (a majority of whom are bilingual); our location on the University's gorgeous main campus is only 6 miles south of Miami's vibrant legal and business communities, all the courts (federal, circuit, appellate, family, bankruptcy, criminal, immigration etc.) and governmental agencies.

Miami provides exceptional curricular offerings (<http://www.law.miami.edu/currentstudents/curriculum/>) (200+ offered annually) from tax ([http://departments.law.miami.edu/tax/joint\\_jd\\_llm\\_program.htm](http://departments.law.miami.edu/tax/joint_jd_llm_program.htm)) to environmental ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/environmental\\_law.php?op=7](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/environmental_law.php?op=7)), entertainment and sports ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/sports\\_entertainment\\_law.php?op=7](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/sports_entertainment_law.php?op=7)) and ocean and coastal ([http://www.law.miami.edu/iglp/ocean\\_coastal\\_law/](http://www.law.miami.edu/iglp/ocean_coastal_law/)) to estate planning (<http://www.law.miami.edu/estateplanning/>) and international law ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/international\\_law.php?op=7](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/international_law.php?op=7)) (which intersects with almost every area of law in the world we live in today).

Miami's first year Legal Communication and Research Skills ([http://www.law.miami.edu/about\\_us/legal\\_communication\\_and\\_research\\_skills.php?op=1](http://www.law.miami.edu/about_us/legal_communication_and_research_skills.php?op=1)) course is a comprehensive program taught by full-time instructors who guide students in creating efficient research designs, conducting sophisticated legal analysis, and drafting legal documents geared to the reality of practice, thereby becoming effective communicators on all levels.

Miami's outstanding [clinics](http://www.law.miami.edu/clinics/index.php?op=0) (<http://www.law.miami.edu/clinics/index.php?op=0>), [centers](http://www.law.miami.edu/ceps/) (<http://www.law.miami.edu/ceps/>), and [externships](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/externship_program.php?op=3) ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/externship\\_program.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/externship_program.php?op=3)) provide a strong balance between legal theory, classroom learning and hands-on opportunities. [Laurence Tribe](http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/directory/index.html?id=74) (<http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/directory/index.html?id=74>), a professor at Harvard Law, renowned constitutional scholar, and senior counselor for access to justice in the U.S. Department of Justice, recognized Miami's outstanding public interest programs and initiatives, stating in his 2010 commencement address, "Yours is among the finest array of law school clinics in the nation."

Miami further demonstrates its commitment to public service through the [Miami Scholars Program](http://www.law.miami.edu/finaid/ofa_03_03.php?op=3) ([http://www.law.miami.edu/finaid/ofa\\_03\\_03.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/finaid/ofa_03_03.php?op=3)), a scholarship program that targets individuals who have a demonstrated interest in working for the public good.

At the end of the day, you want a degree that is respected and travels well. Miami's [Career Development Office](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/index.php) (<http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/index.php>) has [nine advisors](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_01_02.php?op=1) ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_01\\_02.php?op=1](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_01_02.php?op=1)) with law degrees who specialize in specific career areas. They are all here to assist students in navigating the national and local job market. Further, our [alumni](http://www.law.miami.edu/alumni/index.php) (<http://www.law.miami.edu/alumni/index.php>) base, near and far, is [accomplished](http://www.law.miami.edu/news.php?article=1397) (<http://www.law.miami.edu/news.php?article=1397>) and supportive.

While law schools are similar in many ways, Miami offers a dynamic that is not easy to describe—every day visitors who come here tell us the overall friendliness and excitement of the place—not to mention that the beauty of the campus and Miami in general—are different and refreshing. Visit

our [website \(http://www.law.miami.edu\)](http://www.law.miami.edu) and [our campus \(http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/ps\\_03.php?op=9\)](http://www.law.miami.edu/ps/ps_03.php?op=9) and you'll see why Miami is really different in many interesting ways.

And finally, at Miami you can forget about ice, snow, and wind chill!

**6. What do you look for in recommendation letters? How important is it that the letter's writer has worked regularly with the candidate in an office or school setting?**

Applicants should be careful in selecting their recommenders. In most cases, we prefer to see at least one academic recommendation. Professors can assess applicants' academic work, overall skills, discipline, and potential to succeed in the rigorous environment of law school. If applicants have been out of school for a number of years and are unable to obtain recommendations from former professors, they may substitute recommendations of employers or other persons with whom they've worked closely. Applicants shouldn't presume anything when approaching their preferred recommenders. They should approach their recommenders by asking "Do you feel comfortable writing me a strong letter of recommendation?" If they hesitate, look down, etc., this will give applicants an indication of their tepid enthusiasm.

In addition to telling us about applicant's academic potential, recommenders can highlight talents and characteristics in ways that the GPA and LSAT cannot. Choose recommenders who not only know you well but whom you feel will take the time to write you a strong letter (unfortunately, plugging in names on canned letters has become more commonplace). Once individuals have agreed to write the letter, give them your résumé and ask to spend a few minutes with them to

answer any questions they may have. The more a recommender knows about the applicant, the more relevant and genuine the LOR will be. Give recommenders plenty of advance notice—you don't want your LORs to be written in haste.

Miami Law asks for two LORs. At least one (and preferably both) of these recommendations should be from a faculty member who is familiar with your academic performance. LORs can be very useful in our assessment of your ability to succeed and willingness to work hard. If you have two strong academic LORs and wish to submit additional letters, e.g., from someone who has knowledge of you in a professional setting or a leadership role, you may submit those as well (up to four). As far as LSAC's new optional standard evaluation, Miami will accept any combination of LORs and/or LSAC evaluation forms (whichever your recommender feels the most comfortable submitting for you).

### **7. Can you give a brief description of the life cycle of an application? What's the timeline applicants should expect?**

We start receiving applications in early September, begin the review process in early November, and continue on a rolling basis thereafter. Applicants are encouraged to complete their file prior to the December holidays (avoid the holiday rush) to be in prime position for review and possible scholarship. Decisions are posted on the myUM portal and take anywhere from two to four weeks after a file is complete.

### **8. Which firms/organizations recruit heavily from your school? Which ones hire the highest percentage of your graduates?**

Reflecting the geographic and academic diversity of our student body, a wide array of employers from both the private and public sector recruit and hire our students for summer (<http://www.law.miami.edu/pdf/DOCUMENT - Employers who recruit students for summer positions.doc>) as well as post graduate (<http://www.law.miami.edu/pdf/DOCUMENT - Employers who recruit students for post-graduate positions.doc>) positions. A majority of our graduates are employed by law firms ranging from boutique firms focused exclusively on one area of practice to national and international law firms with numerous practice groups. Over 15% of our graduates are employed in the public sector with government agencies, members of the judiciary ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_03\\_06.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_03_06.php?op=3)) or public interest ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_03\\_09.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_03_09.php?op=3)) employers. Another 9 percent are employed in business and industry, reflecting the close relationship that exists between the legal and business sectors. Students seeking employment within the region ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_03\\_07.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_03_07.php?op=3)) as well as nationally can participate in ample job fairs ([http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc\\_03\\_04.php?op=3](http://www.law.miami.edu/cdo/cpc_03_04.php?op=3)) throughout the United States.

## **9. What are some of the most common mistakes that applicants make that hurt their chances of being accepted?**

The obvious mistake is not taking the proper time to put together a strong overall application packet. This lack of attention results in grammatical errors, poorly written essays, rushed letters of recommendation, the name of another school inserted instead of Miami Law, late submission, etc. Also, some candidates spend too much time dwelling on weaknesses rather than



highlighting strengths. It makes sense to explain issues that may raise a red flag (such as a significant decrease in grades caused by a personal or health issue); however, extensive explanation is not advised.

#### **10. Can you describe the archetypal student for your school?**

While it goes without saying that we look for bright, diligent, and resourceful applicants, we hope to draw students who want to be inspired and to inspire others. Our mission is to celebrate the individual but also look to the whole because this is, after all, a community striving to accomplish much on many levels. Students—past, current and future—are a critical component of who we are as an institution; therefore, we feel strongly about generating a student body with multifaceted strengths, serious engagement, and ownership in building a career here as a student, as a member of our law school community, and in the world at large.

Law school is a life changing experience and Miami is not just a place to jockey for a career. The student who tends to accomplish the most intellectually, personally, and professionally is the dedicated and proactive individual who takes advantage of the resources we provide (from the AAP and Student Development Programs to the Career Development Office), values and engages the faculty and their fellow students, gets involved in one of our clinics, centers, organizations, or a public interest endeavor, and is looking forward to the challenges ahead.