

The Best 2021 Law Schools for Breaking into Big Law Firms Or Federal Law Clerkship

You might hear the phrase "Top 14" or "T14 law schools" whenever discussing law school admissions with other applicants, law students, and lawyers. What do they refer to? They are the top 14 law schools in the United States law school rankings. Generally, the 14 schools in this group are considered the most selective and prestigious law schools.

Many BigLaw jobs, federal clerkships, and other legal positions can be secured through attendance at one of the top 14.

Big Law is a term used to refer to large, high-revenue law firms in major U.S. cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Multi-location companies often operate in smaller cities as well as internationally. A lawyer at a large law firm is likely to make a higher salary than in another law firm.

According to the National Association of Law Placement, \$190,000 was the most common starting salary for first-year Big Law associates in 2019. Law clerks or judicial clerks assist judges with writing decisions and determining legal issues by providing direct counsel and assistance. Lawyers who work as law clerks are likely to be recent law school graduates who do very well in school. Law review or moot court experience is often required of applicants for law clerk positions at federal courts, especially at the appellate level. Thus, law clerk applications are highly competitive, with most federal judges receiving hundreds of applications each year for just a few open positions.

Listed below are law schools ranked solely according to how successful they were in placing students in BigLaw jobs or federal law clerkships.

Rank	School	Location	LSAT Median (2021)	GPA Median (2021)	Acceptance Rate
1	Yale	New Haven	173	3.94	6.90%
2	Stanford	Palo Alto	171	3.89	8.70%
3	Harvard	Cambridge	173	3.88	12.90%
4	Columbia	New York City	172	3.82	16.80%
5	University of Chicago	Chicago	171	3.89	17.50%
6	NYU	New York City	170	3.82	23.60%
7	University of Pennsylvania	Philadelphia	170	3.89	14.60%
8	University of Virginia	Charlottesville	170	3.9	15.30%
9	University of California, Berkeley	Berkeley	168	3.81	20.20%
10	Duke	Durham	169	3.8	20.20%
11	University of Michigan - Ann Arbor	Ann Arbor	169	3.76	19.60%
12	Northwestern University	Chicago	169	3.85	19.30%
13	Cornell University	Ithaca	168	3.86	21.10%
14	University of California, Los Angeles	Los Angeles	169	3.79	22.50%

An Analysis of T14 Schools

According to U.S. News rankings, the top three law schools have been Yale, Harvard, and Stanford since 1992. Yale has consistently ranked first, despite Harvard and Stanford switching places now and then. Due to their higher selectivity and prestige, these three schools are traditionally considered part of their own tier

called "HYS." Getting into "HYS" is basically a sure-fire way to make your legal career; almost any option you want in the legal world will be yours.

Columbia, Chicago, and NYU make up the next tier of universities. The schools in this group have historically been ranked fourth through sixth. There are a few differences between CCN and HYS, but they do not matter unless you want to be a [Supreme Court clerk](#) or law professor.

U.S News consistently ranks these schools as among the top six in its rankings of the HYS and CCN tiers. After the top 6, ranking changes are so frequent that no solid tier can form below. 7th-14th are typically the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Virginia, University of California-Berkeley, University of Michigan, Duke University, Northwestern University, Cornell, and Georgetown are still highly selective and prestigious in the [legal community](#) nationally competitive when looking for employment. Attending any of these schools means you do not need to worry about employers knowing about your school and valuing it.

How American Law Schools Are Ranked

According to U.S. News published methodology, the rankings are based on several factors:

Quality assessment (40% of a school's ranking)

Selectivity (21% of a school's ranking)

Employment success (25.25% of a school's ranking)

Faculty, law school, and library resources (13.75% of a school's ranking)

Schools have a hard time changing some of these factors, like quality assessment, based on factors beyond their control. Generally, quality assessment depends on how other law schools, lawyers, and judges judge the school. A [law school admissions](#) committee cannot change a graduate's opinion of the school-based in 1995.

Because of this, law schools invest their time and resources into improving their rankings with U.S. News. In addition to the school's acceptance rate, this factor considers the entering class's median LSAT (and GRE) scores and median undergrad GPA. A law school can control these factors more easily.

Schools will attempt to increase the medians of their [LSAT and GPA](#) every year by attracting more applicants with stronger scores and offering scholarships to high-scoring students.

A Guide to Getting into the Top 14 Law Schools

The median LSAT and GPA are particularly important to law schools. A school may find it hard in the future to attract high-scoring students if it admits a class with fewer students than it did last year, negatively impacting its ranking.

Getting a high LSAT score and GPA is the number one factor to getting into a top 14 law school. However, even the highest numbers on their own will not guarantee admission to T14 law schools. Additionally, you should craft a [quality application](#) that convinces the admissions committee that you will be an outstanding class member and have a promising legal career.

Taking The LSAT and Achieving a Suitable GPA

Out of the top 14 schools, 168 is the lowest median LSAT score. The number might change from year to year, but it generally hovers between 167 and 169.

The lowest median LSAT score among the top 6 schools is 170. Another year might have 169 to 172 points. Therefore, if you plan on applying to the top 14 schools, you will need an LSAT score of at least 160. You will need 170 to get into the top 6 schools.

Regarding GPA, there is less of a gap between the top 6 and the rest of the top 14. The most significant difference is between the top 3 (HYS) and the rest. In the HYS, the median GPA ranges between 3.85 and 3.95. GPA medians typically range between 3.75 and 3.85 among the top 14, but certain schools, including Chicago and the University of Pennsylvania, often have higher rates.

In summary, you need to [study hard and keep your grades high in undergrad](#). You will qualify for admission to the top 14 schools if you have a GPA of at least 3.8.

Effortless and Compelling Application

In addition to your LSAT and GPA, a compelling application is important for admission to a top 14 school. [Personal statements](#), [supplemental essays](#), [recommendations](#), and your [resume](#) should all engage the reader and demonstrate how you will be an important part of the student body and have a promising future.

Put these elements of the application together in advance, not at the last minute. Before you apply, make sure you revise and proofread your resume. Make sure you give your recommenders enough time to write their recommendations and be prepared to explain the qualities you hope admission committees will learn.

In some cases, you may benefit from providing your recommenders with your resume and a statement detailing your background and plans for the future. It would help if you accepted a [recommendation writer's offer](#) to write the first draft.

Final Thoughts

It is important to attend a [top-ranked law school](#) to have the best chance of getting into top law firms. In the absence of motivation, drive, and charisma, you may not care so much about which school you attended. One of the biggest decisions you will make in your legal career is choosing a law school.

In many cases, it can open the door to the legal profession that otherwise might not have been possible. Many successful attorneys do not attend fancy law schools. Even if you attend a less prestigious law school, you can become a happy, [successful attorney](#) (indeed, some say that graduates of such schools are more successful at law firms.) But you may not be eligible for certain jobs (law professor, Supreme Court clerk, etc.).

See also:

[How Can Law Students Decide Whether or Not They Should Clerk for a Judge: Should You Do a Clerkship or Not?](#)

[8 of the Most Common Questions Attorneys Have About Legal Recruiters Answered](#)

[How Attorneys and Law Students Should Write a Legal Resume: Resume Examples, Suggestions, and Resources](#)

[Why Law School Grades Do Not Matter Forever: Law School Grades and Your Legal Career](#)

[The Best Law Schools For BigLaw Jobs Paying \\$180,000 Or More: The Top 10 Law Schools](#)