

GUIDANCE NOTES

ON APPLICATION PROCEDURE FOR POST GRADUATE COURSES FOR LAW GRADUATES, WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE MASTER OF LAWS PROGRAMME

Whether or not to pursue LLM?

This question is quite personal and would depend on what one wants to do in her life. While some master's course are value additions, some have the potential of unlocking new career avenues. In some cases, a master's course can provide a quantum leap while in others, it may just be a case of pouring money down the drain.

A specialization too early in life has a potential of foreclosing other options too soon; thus, before a specialization is chosen it would be advisable to work and explore a few more areas. At the same time, specialization has its own advantages as well, including allowing to achieve a lot more in a specific area.

The most obvious advantage of LLM is that it opens up new avenues. Beyond this, there are of course at least two ways of looking at it. First, there is intrinsic value in studying further and would do good to look at subjects in your career-frame from different perspectives, or from a non-legal perspective. Second, though it opens up new career avenues, it is not a guaranteed ticket to working abroad. From the perspectives of law firms, there is certainly a great deal of value addition that happens during a master's program.

A non-law master's?

For those who are bored of law and crave to branch out to other fields, prior legal education does form an excellent base. There are many more possibilities after graduation in law, all you need to do is explore. There are master's course in development studies, law and development, law and economics, law and technology. These subjects bear a legal hue or are potentially deeply influenced by law. (e.g. [M.A. in Development Studies at the Institute of Social Studies](#), or the [Master of Arts in Law and Diplomacy at the Fletcher School](#) or an [M.Phil in Development Studies at Oxford University](#)). A lot of LLM programs also allow you to choose courses from social sciences departments. (e.g. SOAS and University of Michigan)

Deciding where to apply

There are numerous options, and the prospective applicant should research on good faculty, library access, a good tutor, etc. for without all of this, a master's degree could be another Indian law school-esque journey. For those who are real seekers of knowledge and want to be taught by best faculty, it is strictly advisable to find out where the best in that subject are teaching. Say, for instance you want to study international law and want to write a thesis on

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Crimes Against Humanity then may be finding where Cherif Bassiouni is teaching and then apply to that University. Such a University might not be in top two or three universities of the world, but there would be some serious learning. Remember to check whether the Course/Faculty you are looking for is available in that academic term.

On the other hand, for those who are hunting for a mere LLM stamp – I think going to a top-ranking-law-school with a very strong brand value makes complete sense; until you meet someone who will know that subject you had read in fact had the worst teachers.

What a number of students also do, and in fact some of the best professors in the country had suggested to me, which unfortunately I could not translation into action, is to read subjects at institutions that are not over hyped. There are a number of GOOD institutions that offer fabulous courses, and which have very strong academic reputation, but are not in the rat race.

APPLICATION PROCEDURE

Rule 1: Do As Much Reading As You Can About The Course And The Institution You Are Applying To.

Rule 2: Don't Leave Things for the Last Minute.

BASIC RULE: FOLLOW ETHICS. NO FRAUD. NO LIES. BUT REMEMBER: “FACTS ARE SACRED, INTERPRETATION ARE SUBJECTIVE”

Generally you would require the following documents to make an application. There could be more documents that might be required depending on the institution and the course you are applying. For Master of Law programme these documents are required.

1. **Application Form**
2. **Statement of Purpose**
3. **Recommendation Letters**
4. **CV**
5. **Writing Sample**
6. **English Language Test**

Thumb rule for filling out an application and writing these details is to give them what they are looking for. Usually, the course outline and information for applicants will contain crucial information and would often draw a sketch of the kind of candidate they are looking for. It would mention, what they expect of a student and what a student should expect of them. Thus,

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it is important to thoroughly study the course details, highlight-make notes-write comments-etc. and then think a great deal before you begin to write out. Go through the Course Details several times, preferably with a gap of few days between each reading. Every fresh reading will give you new insights on the student-profile that a Law School is searching for.

1. The Application Form

Most universities would provide a template of sorts for filling out the application form; just go through it before you fill the form. At times you will get stuck at places, in which cases you will need to write to them – and they take up to several weeks to reply, and so be careful to keep that much margin. Other than this, most critical part of any application form is the long list of annexures that go with it, which include other documents.

Keep a check on application deadlines. If you plan and fill in advance you would save a lot of money on courier etc. Admission process opens in mid-October generally. Oxford has different deadlines for different courses; for law it has been around January mid. Cambridge is generally November end. Some colleges have rolling admissions, so the sooner you apply, the higher are your chances of you getting in: this includes LSE.

US Law schools usually open admissions around September and close by December or January. Some also have a rolling admission, while some schools have two, different windows of application deadlines.

2. Statement of Purpose

Statement of Purpose should justify why you are the most suitable person for the course and how you would benefit from the course, in the short run and in the long run. You should build on strengths. Everything that you have done and that finds a place in your statement must explain and allude to certain qualities that make you an ideal candidate for the programme you wish to apply for. For example, if you have worked as a research assistant to someone, it might prove that you have interest in research based work, you can do it well, you can read lot of legal text and sift for relevant stuff. Or, say if you have worked with a top Indian law firm on a public offering as an intern, what was your role. Pay attention to details.

Write about your academic achievements, or justify how your moderate academic achievement compensates whatever else you might have done. This is your chance to talk to admission committee and tell them how you have what it takes to be admitted to the course and you have a great potential. Make use of your social, regional, lingual, educational and other such identities and build up on that. As most law schools prize student diversity, any special regional, ethnic, social, or political background can be very helpful in strengthening your application.

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If you have held positions of responsibility, make sure that you write about it because it can demonstrate your ability to take initiative or to manage work on your own.

Basically, just to put it that how everything you have done has made you more suitable for the programme. There is more to positions of responsibility than just being an office bearer; interpret the term widely and see if you have done anything like that. But do not just mention that you have held/are holding a position of responsibility. You should devote at least one or two sentences to mention the qualities/lessons that you imbibed through such a stint and how it will aid in your long-term goals.

Publications, moots, research assistances, travel, hobbies, choices or personalities - anything can be a good enough reason for why you want to take this course. But make sure, it does not become rhetorical and emotional. Ensure that whatever achievement/honours you mention aligns with the narrative flow of your SOP and with the qualities that you aim to convey to the Law School.

TLDR

- Statement of Purpose should not so long that one would get lost in what you are writing.
- Keep it Short and Simple.
- Keep the language as tight as possible and avoid any superfluous word/sentence. Trend is to use plain language.
- Paragraphs should be short and each one should have a central point.
- The SoP should be easy to read and not too long. They have too many SOPs to read, so make sure you say what you want to as soon as you can.
- Try to revise your SOP at least a couple of times, and show it to any mentor(s) that you may have.

Ideally, the first paragraph should summarize your statement of purpose – i.e. why this course, this institution, how it will help in long run - and the last paragraph should be a summation what you have said throughout without being repetitive, and should reflect sufficient confidence and talent. If you have nothing else, you can talk about the subjects you wish to read and how they will help you in doing better what you want to do.

Since such statements are extremely personal documents expressing one's ambitions in life, most people do not like to share their statements.

Remember, there is no formula for writing a statement of purpose – it is very subjective and should be written by person who has to apply.

Personal Statement versus Statement of Purpose

A number of law schools require you to write a separate Statement of Purpose and a Personal Statement. Do remember that in such cases, your SOP should be more of a forward looking

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document explaining why you want to join the concerned Programme - what in the faculty/curriculum/intellectual orientation specifically attracts you and why you are a suitable candidate.

The personal statement, on the other hand, is an explanation of your personal reasons, your inspirations, motivations, what drives you, how you have grown as a person through your professional/academic experiences, and so on.

There will necessarily be significant overlaps between the two essays. You can also use personal statement to reveal interesting parts of your personality that you can't really do in a Statement of Purpose. You can mention any special interests in sports, music, arts, etc. and how they have aided in the evolution of your persona.

You should ask a couple of your friends/peers to read it and iron out the creases. If time permits, you should keep the draft away for few days and then read it with a fresh point of view. A fresh perspective is often very useful in identifying the gaps in your essay.

3. Recommendation Letters.

As a general rule, for undergraduate students their law professors are the person eligible to be your referee. So, all the internship with judges etc. will come in handy only in your Statement of Purpose, as your recommendation will at the end of the day needs to be written by someone who has taught you. Fame or high position of the teacher is not as important as what is being written about you and the basis of her assessment of you; not to say that it is completely unimportant.

Check-up with the institution you are applying to for the qualification of an academic referee, and then choose your referee.

Generally, if you are not a fresh graduate at the time when you have to join the PG course then one of your references will be from your employer. If you are a fresh graduate then only your professors at undergrad level would be your referees. (This rule would vary for scholarship applications, where it is required to submit a non-academic reference.)

Your reference letter should be written by the selected referee, and is not another statement of purpose. It is a comment on your abilities and on your potential with direct testimony from whatever you have done with that teacher.

For instance, if you have done some research work for Prof. A, that Prof. A could comment on the quality of research and that you were very responsible. For lawyers, a comment on analytical ability gauged on the basis of class discussions etc. is of great help. Again, you need to provide your referee with a sketch of the candidate they are looking for, and make a bullet point reminder for your referee (or your CV) for what all great things you have done, under that teacher or such that she could certify.

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It is an advantage if the referee mentions that you have discussed the contours of the LLM Course with her, its relevance for your career goals and why she thinks you are well-suited for the Course.

Depending on how it is written and what is written in it, it can range from half a page to some three pages.

One suggested pattern could be:

Paragraph 1

The opening paragraph must define the relationship between the person writing the reference and for whom it is being written, how long and in what capacity has the referee known the applicant, and how is it that the referee is in a position to recommend him/her.

Paragraph 2

The second paragraph and subsequent paragraphs of the reference letter usually contain information on the applicant, including why they are qualified, what they can contribute in the master's programme, and why is it justified for the referee to write a recommendation.

Information to write this part must be provided by the applicant either through his/her resume or through a document highlighting important points.

Summary

This section of the reference letter contains a brief summary of why are you are recommending the person, and use adjectives to denote the strength of recommendation.

Conclusion

The concluding paragraph of the reference letter template contains an offer to provide more information. Include a phone number within the paragraph, include the phone number and email address in the return address section of your letter, or in your signature. Even though it is rare that a referee is contacted for more information, but providing all these details shows referees interest in you taking up further studies, which establishes a prima facie case for a good student.

Suggested Illustrative Checklist for Academic Reference

1. How does the referee know you (In what capacity)?
2. How long has he/she known you for?
3. Areas where the referee has personally supervised your work
4. Your achievements which the referee knows about and can comment on authoritatively (for example, a Vice Chancellor may not have personally helped you in a moot, but he can comment authoritatively about your performance in it)
5. The referee's analysis of your interests and skills
6. The referee's assessment of your motivation, and your personal suitability for the program (what qualities you have which will make you successful in such an environment).
7. Final recommendation and address etc. for further details.

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Remember, that recommendation letters are confidential documents and must be sealed and signed if accompanied with a paper application. Attach any forms that a referee is requested to fill in along with the reference letter. In the online application these can be directly emailed/uploaded by the referee.

Again, writing references, especially for busy professors could be a tedious task – so make sure that you give enough time to your referee. Remember that your professors are doing you a favour by writing you a reference. Do not take them for granted and those who choose to apply after some work experience must be willing to go an extra yard in accommodating the schedule of the professors within their own professional commitments.

4. CV

There are no set rules of your CV should be. In fact, after applying for internships zillions of times during the law school education there little remains that is not covered by experience. However, it should be understood that a CV is should be tailor-made each time and must be specific to the needs of institution you are applying to.

- CV for employment/internship is different from a CV for admission.
- For admissions, your academic bent of mind, research assistances, publications, conference papers, etc. will take precedence over other things that you might have done which are of prima facie interest to your employers.
- In most cases, re-arranging your CV should do the trick and there is no need to start from scratch.
- Make sure that there is logical transition between segments in your CV; for instance after academics, you should write about research work done, and then probably your moot, and then work experience – unless of course you are building whole of your statement of purpose on your work experience.

Your CV, statement of purpose and recommendation should make one coherent statement. Also make sure that your statement of purpose does not become a-cv-read aloud. CV is all fact based, statement of purpose are interpretations and conclusions drawn from those facts, and what your referees write for you just puts an affirmative seal. Therefore, as far possible make all of these things supplementary/complementary to each other, to the extent to you can.

5. Writing Sample

This obviously is to test your writing skills and your ability to express. You could send your published/unpublished work, but avoid co-authored articles. Follow the word limit provided to you, and try to make the piece analytical. They will test what qualities of their ideal candidate are reflected from the writing sample, so write accordingly. Analysis does not only mean constitutional law or jurisprudence; it can be anything that shows application of mind, ability to think and express clearly, ability to cut across disciplines, clarity of thought etc.

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6. English Language Test

Generally taking English language test always helps. There may be waivers available to students who can otherwise demonstrate required skills in English language or have been taught and examined in English at their undergraduate level. These waivers are given by particular institutions, and you might want to find out whether such waiver is available to you on the basis of whatever evidence you can give to them.

English test is something that is required by admissions committee, by visa authorities and even in most scholarships, it is advisable to take the test. Ideal date would be August/September for final undergraduate year. It takes about a month before you get documentation pertaining to the exam in your hand, so plan your test accordingly. These tests are very simple, and one can easily do pretty well by doing a couple of practice tests.

Taking IELTS or TOEFL is the next question. It is popularly believed that IELTS is valid for Commonwealth countries whereas TOEFL is for US and Canada. This is not completely true. Much would depend on your institution and what scores they want to take. Generally, both could be accepted with riders of eligibility marks changing from course to course. It would be better to go through the institutions website to find out which score. In the event you are applying to UK alone taking IELTS is a safe bet. These days on each of their website you can also find a list of institutions that accept a particular test.

ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF MAJOR SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarship	Tenable at	Application Begins (liable to change every year)	Link for further information
Rhodes Scholarship	University of Oxford	June mid for subsequent year	www.rhodesscholarships-india.com/
Cambridge Trust	University of Cambridge (GRADSAF)	Application is along with Cambridge admission application.	http://www.admin.cam.ac.uk/univ/gsp/rospetus/applying/
Chevening Scholarship	Any University in the UK	October - November	http://www.britishcouncil.org/indiascholarships-chevening.htm

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Felix Scholarship	SOAS/Reading/Oxford	February after a conditional offer of admission.	https://www.felixscholarship.org/
Inlaks Scholarship	Any university of excellence	January, after a conditional offer of admission	http://www.inlaksfoundation.org/
Oxford Cambridge Society of India	Oxford and Cambridge (partial scholarships)	March/April	http://www.oxbridgeindia.com
Fullbright Scholarship	US Universities	Check the website	http://www.fulbright-india.org/
World Bank Graduate Scholarship	Around 30 Universities - But restricted to Courses related to Development Studies – LLM only for	March-April after an Admission Offer	http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/WBI/EXTWBISFP/EXTJJBWGSP/0,,contentMDK:20287115~menuPK:562877~pagePK:64168445~piPK:64168309~theSitePK:551644,00.html
Erasmus Mundus Programme	Specific programs coordinated jointly by 2-3 European universities.	Varies with specific programs	http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/static/en/mundus/index.htm Law and Economics Program is popular amongst lawyers. See http://www.emle.org

If you have identified a particular university, its website would contain information on funding. Make sure that you have browsed through those webpages.

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