

Health Professions and Prelaw Center

A GUIDE TO THE RECOMMENDATION SERVICE FOR PRELAW STUDENTS



HPPLC

Indiana University – Bloomington

Maxwell Hall 010

Bloomington, IN 47405

Phone: 812.855.1873

Fax: 812.856.2770

recserve@indiana.edu

www.hpplc.indiana.edu

THE EIGHT STEPS OF THE RECOMMENDATION PROCESS

Step 1: Read this Guide. Getting LOR from the writers to the schools *on time* is a long, confusing process. One mistake can result in a denial.

Step 2: Identify potential writers. All may NOT come through on time, so *plan for more than you will need!*

Step 3: Obtain, sign, and distribute all appropriate forms:

- a. **HPPLC waiver forms** (either “faculty” or “personal”) — give ONE to each writer when you ask for a LOR.
- b. **LSDAS "Generic LOR Request Form"**. **Required** for sending letters to LSDAS (99% of applicants): do NOT give to your writers, but bring to the HPPLC office (instructions below).

Step 4: Ask your recommenders **at least 8 WEEKS in advance**.
Try to get two letters in your file by the end of your junior year.

Step 5: **Mandatory:** Make sure all letters and forms are signed and are actually IN YOUR FILE *before* you request that they be sent.

Step 6: Optional: ask a Prelaw Advisor to review your letters.

Step 7: Request HPPLC send out recommendations *at least 4 weeks prior* to sending in applications.

Step 8: **Mandatory:** Check with LSDAS and ALL Law Schools to be sure recommendations were sent and received. **THIS IS CRUCIAL!**

Note the following potential **DELAYS** built into the system and **beyond your control:**

1. **Time for recommenders to write and send letters:** at least 8 weeks.
2. **HPPLC backlog** during peak season: up to 10 business days.
3. **LSDAS processing delay:** 1 - 2 weeks—occasionally longer.
4. **Detection and correction of errors made by others:** possibly another 2 weeks.

TOTAL TIME: 3 ½ MONTHS between your request and arrival at the law schools!

STEP 1: READ THIS GUIDE

Every year applicants are DENIED simply because they failed to understand the multiple procedures necessary for getting LOR to the LSDAS and then to the Law Schools ON TIME. IT IS NOT EASY. ASK FOR HELP.

The following requirements are necessary for the HPPLC service to maintain the credibility and integrity that is required by law schools:

1. In accordance with Indiana University policy, the contents of your file, including all recommendation letters and forms, **become the exclusive property of HPPLC** and can only be forwarded as provided herein.
2. This service is for IUB students applying to law schools. Letters may not be forwarded or otherwise released to any individual, **or you**, *even if you have not waived your FERPA right to read the letters.*
3. While every effort is made by HPPLC to send your letters out ASAP after a request is submitted, it can take up to **ten business days** to process your request. Please allow sufficient notice for your request to be processed.
4. Information of immediate importance (HPPLC closings, deadlines to submit requests before holidays, changes in policy, etc.) can happen **without notice** and will be communicated only through email. Students with a recommendation file **MUST** maintain a current subscription to the HPPLC Prelaw Email Listserve and use their official IU account. To prevent messages from being bounced, keep your e-mail account under quota.

TO OPEN A RECOMMENDATION FILE

All the forms you need are located in front of the reception area at HPPLC, and online. You do not need an appointment—just ask the HPPLC receptionist for instructions. To open a LOR file, complete the "Graduate and Professional School Recommendation File" form.

THE RECOMMENDATION SERVICE COST:

- \$25.00 to open a file and to send the first six packets
- \$10.00 to send the next three packets
- \$ 5.00 to send each additional packet

Upon opening your file you will be charged \$25.00, which will be billed through the Office of the Bursar. To process this billing, you will need your IU 10-digit ID number.

STEP 2: IDENTIFY POTENTIAL WRITERS.

Law schools prefer academic letters, meaning from professors, AI's, or grad students who have had you in a class. In general, law schools prefer a detailed letter from an AI who knows you well over a boilerplate letter from a famous professor. Other sources can be anyone with whom you've had a professional relationship: employers, volunteer supervisors, internship supervisors, advisors, coaches, military superiors, etc. Again, they generally would prefer a

detailed letter from your direct supervisor over a generic letter from the famous boss. They find even less useful strictly “character references” from friends of the family, high school teachers, clergy, attorneys, judges, or famous politicians who have known you or your family for many years (unless you have also actually worked for this person). The one exception is for alumni from a law school to which you are applying. Such a letter should be sent only to that particular school.

Evaluations should be from those who can comment in detail about such attributes as writing and reasoning abilities, research skill, originality and creativity, communication skills, class performance, motivation, judgment, leadership and maturity. Letters that speak in generalities provide little assistance. Although no one person can comment on all of your qualities, your recommendations should give a comprehensive view of your qualifications. HPPLC Prelaw Advisors can review your file and recommend the most “useful” combination of letters.

It can sometimes be helpful to find recommenders whose comments reinforce ideas you plan to convey in your personal statement.

STEP 3: OBTAIN AND SIGN THE APPROPRIATE “WAIVER” FORMS

Many schools provide their own forms with the application for recommenders to attach to their letters. All law schools accept the HPPLC forms in lieu of these individual forms. HPPLC has one form for “faculty”, and another “personal” waiver for everyone else. Choose correctly.

In addition, the LSDAS has its own “Generic LOR Request Form”.

- HPPLC’s “Faculty Evaluation of Law School Applicant.”** Use this form for all academic recommendations. This form is for faculty (including AI’s and graduate assistants) who have had you in a class for which you received a grade that appears on your transcript.
 - HPPLC’s “Waiver Option for Personal Recommendations.”** This form should be used for everyone else, including faculty if you have NOT had them in a class. If you have any question as to the suitability of a potential personal recommender, please consult your Prelaw Advisor.
- The LSDAS “**Generic LOR Request Form**”. This form is **REQUIRED IF YOU INTEND TO SEND YOUR LETTERS TO THE LSDAS**, which 99% of applicants should do.

To find the LSDAS form, log onto your “Online Services” account from www.lsac.org. Go to the “MyDocs” tab, and select “Forms” from the drop-down menu. Print out and bring in one “**Generic LOR Request Form**” to the recommendation service in Maxwell 010. Sign it only if you want to waive your right to read your letters. Leave the contact information BLANK! The recommendation secretary will fill this part out for you.

YOU MUST CHOOSE WHETHER OR NOT TO WAIVE YOUR RIGHT TO READ YOUR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION:

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (“FERPA”) gives you the right of access to an evaluation written about you; it also allows you to give up or “waive” this right. While you alone must make the decision, HPPLC advisors generally recommend that you consider maintaining a closed file by waiving your right of access to your recommendations. While most admissions officials are completely neutral on this issue, some believe that recommendations from an open file may not be as candidly written and therefore provide less credibility. However, the decision is

entirely yours. If you would like to retain your right to read your letters (and there may be very good reasons for doing so), we suggest that you speak with a Prelaw Advisor.

Open file: If you **do NOT waive your right**, you may see your recommendations. However, this right is **strictly limited**. It may be done only **in person** in the HPPLC office and in the presence of HPPLC personnel. We cannot provide you with hard or e-copies, faxes, or read you the letter over the phone.

Closed file: If you **waive your legal right** to see your recommendations, you may **never** legally gain access to recommendations in your HPPLC file.

You must make your decision before the recommender writes the recommendation. Each form has a place for you to indicate whether you waive your right of access or not, and you must complete and sign that section before giving the form to your recommenders.

STEP 4: ASK RECOMMENDERS.

A. AVOID PROBLEMS: GIVE YOUR EVALUATORS SUFFICIENT TIME TO WRITE.

1. Writers typically take from 2-4 months to write a LOR. Begin accumulating recommendations long before you actually need them. **Please try to get at least two letters in your file by the end of junior year.** Waiting until fall semester of your senior year can be dangerous!
2. IF YOU HAVE WAITED UNTIL SENIOR YEAR TO ASK FOR LETTERS, we strongly suggest that you ask your writers early in the fall: **AT LEAST 8 WEEKS** before you want them to arrive in your HPPLC file and **12 WEEKS** before you will mail your applications.
3. *IF TIME IS VERY SHORT, SEND LETTERS SIMULTANEOUSLY TO THE LSDAS AND DIRECTLY TO YOUR SCHOOLS:* If you are applying close to a deadline (NOT recommended), it may behoove you to have HPPLC send your letters directly to your schools, thus bypassing the LSDAS processing delay. However, we suggest that you ALWAYS provide copies to the LSDAS as well—because some schools *require* it. Even if none of your current schools require LSDAS delivery of letters, you may later decide to apply to a school that does. In such case it would be best if your letters were already processed by the LSDAS and ready to go.

B. IF A WRITER IS LATE IN SUBMITTING A LETTER.

1. A *tactful reminder* to the recommender is completely appropriate and can be quite helpful. Most will appreciate a reminder. Ask them if there is any information you can provide to facilitate their task, or include a link to HPPLC's guidelines for writing letters.
2. BUT – to be safe, we suggest you assume the worst and ask another writer immediately.
3. **Make contingency plans in advance.** Get substitutes written before you need them!

C. HOW MANY RECOMMENDATIONS:

Most law schools ask for two or three letters, although many will read more. Check with each school for their policy. If you have extra letters in your file, HPPLC's Prelaw Advisors, upon request, can recommend which to send.

Some recommenders may not come through for you on time. Plan from the start to ask for more letters than you will need. ***Every year some applicants are delayed for weeks through no fault of their own.***

D. FACULTY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. An evaluation from a junior professor or an associate instructor who makes perceptive personal comments about your abilities and achievements provides the committee with much more valuable information than a general letter from a famous professor who barely knows you. Get to know your professors and request a letter soon after the conclusion of the class. Have the letters updated should you take subsequent courses, or have subsequent interaction with the writer.
2. Do not be shy about asking for a LOR or an update! Writing LOR's is a big part of every professor's job!
3. When you ask, be sure you give your recommender an easy way to decline. We suggest something on the order of: "I took your class in ABC, and received a grade of X. I'm going to be applying to law school this fall. Would you feel comfortable writing a LOR on my behalf?" If there is any hesitation, do NOT insist!! Such reluctance may signal that they do not feel they can write a strong letter for you.
4. It is important to at least offer to schedule an appointment with your professor to discuss your recommendation letter request. Consider bringing: a resume, brief autobiographical sketch, draft of a personal statement, copy of any work you have done for them, and/or a "statement of purpose" in attending law school. The idea is to give the writer material IN WRITING that you'd like included in the recommendation.
5. A few days after your professor agrees to write you a recommendation letter, send a thank you note (hardcopy or e-mail) for taking the time to assist your professional endeavors. This will serve as a reminder as well.

E. PERSONAL RECOMMENDATIONS:

Prefer personal recommenders with whom you have had some kind of professional relationship: employers, internship or volunteer supervisors, advisors, coaches, military superiors, etc. Strictly "character references" from family friends, attorneys, judges, politicians, etc., even if famous, are generally less useful.

STEP 5: MAKE SURE ALL LETTERS AND FORMS ARE SIGNED AND ARE IN YOUR FILE.

You cannot request that letters be sent **unless and until your HPPLC file is complete**: all letters must actually be in your file at the time the request is made. They must be signed and accompanied by the appropriate, signed, HPPLC waiver form. If sending LOR to the LSDAS, its LOR Form must be in your file as well. No exceptions. **It is your responsibility** to make sure that all LOR are signed, and accompanied by the appropriate, signed waiver forms.

HPPLC cannot hold your request pending the future receipt of a letter, waiver form, or

signature! If you submit a “Request Form” to send letters or forms that are unsigned or not in your file, the entire request will be considered void and the form will be destroyed. A new form will then have to be submitted *after corrections are made*. That can take time.

NOTE: HPPLC tries to catch all errors as letters and forms are received. However, due to the volume of mail this is not always possible. It is your responsibility to make sure that your file is complete PRIOR to making your request. Allow more than enough time for errors to be detected and corrected prior to asking that LOR be sent!

Step 6: ASK A PRELAW ADVISOR TO REVIEW YOUR LETTERS.

The FERPA Statute requires that we preserve the confidentiality of letters from a “closed” file (where you waive your right to read the letters). Therefore, for such letters the advisors at HPPLC cannot tell you if any recommendation, in whole or in part, is “good” or “bad”.

They may tell you, however, which recommendations contain information appropriate to your application; i.e., the recommender has commented on relevant characteristics and is an appropriate recommender. They can recommend which letters they feel would be most “useful” to the law school, without commenting on whether they contain any positive or negative comments *per se*. Note that in reality 99.9% of LOR are only positive.

In light of the confidentiality requirement, you should select your recommenders carefully and only choose those whom you think will write strong letters of support.

Step 7: REQUEST HPPLC SEND RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE LSDAS AT LEAST FOUR WEEKS PRIOR TO SENDING IN APPLICATIONS.

The LSDAS processing delay is normally two weeks. However, they can make mistakes, which take more time to detect as well as to correct. Therefore, we suggest you initially submit your letters to the LSDAS four weeks in advance of applying—and please give HPPLC 10 business days notice to process your letters.

However, do note that **you CAN submit applications before your LSDAS file is complete.**

HPPLC will NOT automatically send your letters! Your signed “Request for Letters to be Sent” form is required to do that. *If you will be sending any letters directly to law schools, you will need an additional “Request” form for each school (one form per mailing address).*

Warning: Requests can only be made for letters actually in your file at the time the request is made. ***HPPLC cannot hold your request pending the future receipt of a letter, waiver form, or signature!*** If you submit a “Request Form” to send letters that are not in your file, in whole or in part, the entire request will be considered void and the form will be destroyed. It is your responsibility to make sure that your file is complete when the request is made.

The “Request for Letters to be Sent” form can be hand delivered, mailed, or faxed to the HPPLC office. When mailing or faxing requests, **please telephone the office** to be sure that the request has been received and that your file is complete.

TAKE NOTICE OF BUILT IN DELAYS:

1. **HPPLC:** November through January is peak time for applying to law school. While HPPLC will always try to send out your letters ASAP, it can take up to **ten business days** to process your request. Failure to give sufficient notice can result in missed deadlines.

2. **LSDAS:** In addition, the LSDAS may take **up to two weeks** to process your letters after they have been received. You can monitor the status of your letters in the “Account Status” area of your LSAC online account. If you sense a problem, do not hesitate to call them at 215.968.1001 (options 5, then 0, to speak to a human being). AFTER this processing, your LOR become part of the LSDAS “Candidate Report.” The law schools will request this report ONLY AFTER it receives an application from you. Thus *if you are on time* we suggest you submit your letters well ahead of mailing in your applications.

3. IF it is getting late you should send your letters directly to your schools as well as to the LSDAS. In addition, you CAN submit applications before your LSDAS file is complete—e.g., before all of your LOR are processed! Consult a Prelaw Advisor and your law schools for details.

4. BE PREPARED FOR HUMAN ERROR:

Your writers, the LSDAS, you, and even HPPLC can and do make mistakes. Please allow more than enough time to detect and correct any such errors. It is ultimately your responsibility to monitor all activities conducted on your behalf and to make sure everyone does what they are supposed to do. Assume nothing, and double-check everything.

Law schools do not care why your material is late.

TOTAL TIME YOU SHOULD ALLOW BETWEEN ASKING YOUR WRITERS AND EXPECTING THEM TO ARRIVE AT THE LSDAS AND LAW SCHOOLS: 3 ½ MONTHS!

STEP 8: CHECK WITH THE LSDAS AND EACH LAW SCHOOL TO BE SURE RECOMMENDATIONS HAVE BEEN RECEIVED

Do not assume anything in regard to your application process, and double-check everything!

You will be held responsible for the mistakes of others!

LSDAS: Check the online status of your account to make sure all LOR have been received. After you submit applications to the law schools, you can monitor which law schools have requested your material at the LSDAS website.

Law Schools: approximately two weeks after submitting your application(s), call EACH school to be sure ALL letters were received and that your file is complete.

STEP 9: PLEASE NOTIFY US WHEN YOU ARE ACCEPTED!

And.....Congratulations!!