
Highlights from *Before the JD:* *Undergraduate Views* *on Law School*



Association of American
Law Schools

GALLUP®

We knew little about why students consider law school...until now

From 2010 to 2015, law schools experienced a sharp decline in applications and enrollment, while many other graduate and professional programs stayed flat or experienced a modest increase in both. Journalists, lawyers, and legal education experts offered theories on why law schools experienced such a dramatic drop, but little research was available about how undergraduate students make decisions—about post-graduate education generally or legal education specifically. This lack of research is a marked contrast to the volume of studies on how high school students make decisions about college.

The nation needs diverse, talented, and well-educated lawyers and judges if it is to continue to strengthen and benefit from the rule of law. Understanding of the factors that lead to the decision to attend law school will enable colleges and universities to provide better information to prospective students. It will also guide schools in developing courses and programs that better match the goals of incoming law students. *Before the JD* is the first known survey in more than 50 years aimed at gathering first-hand undergraduate views on graduate and professional school in general and law school in particular.

About *Before the JD*

Before the JD is a study based on a national survey conducted by Gallup for the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) to understand student views on law school. The project was sponsored by the ABA Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, the AccessLex Institute, the American Bar Foundation, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), and the National Association for Law Placement (NALP). Fourteen major law firms and four corporate counsel offices provided additional support. The survey produced responses from 22,189 undergraduates at 25 four-year institutions whose students are likely to go on to graduate and professional schools, and from 2,727 first-year students at 44 AALS member law schools.

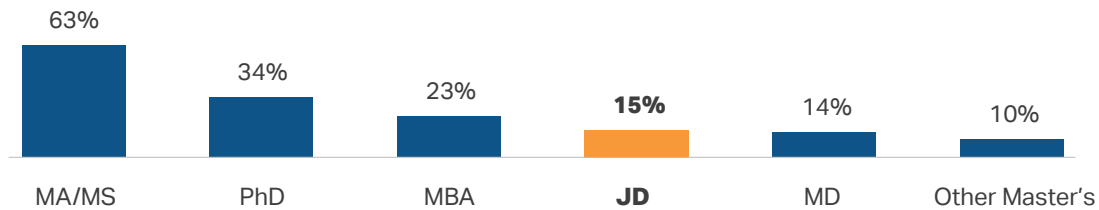
Which Advanced Degrees Are Undergraduates Considering?

63% of undergraduates likely to pursue an advanced degree are considering an MA or MS.

34% are considering a PhD.

23% are considering an MBA.

15% are considering a JD.



Who is Considering a Law or Other Advanced Degree?

One-third of undergraduate students nationwide are first-generation college students.

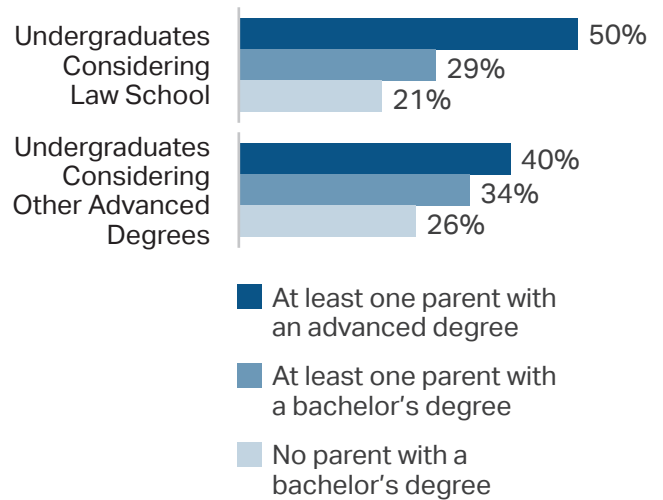
One-quarter of undergraduates considering other advanced degrees are first-generation college students.

One-fifth of undergraduates considering JDs are first-generation college students.

Of undergraduates considering law school, **half have at least one parent with an advanced degree.**

In comparison, about 12% of individuals age 45 to 65 (typical age range of parents of college students) have an advanced degree.

50%
of undergraduates considering law school have at least one parent with an advanced degree.



When Did Law Students First Consider a JD?

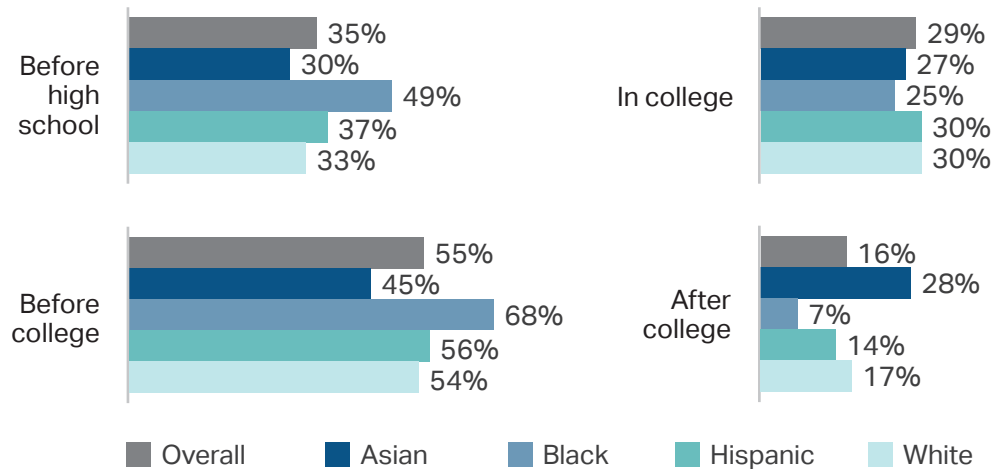
55%

of law students first considered law school before they reached college.

More than half of law students report they first considered going to law school **before they reached college**. Slightly more than one-third of the students first thought about it before high school. Women were more likely to first consider a JD before high school than men.

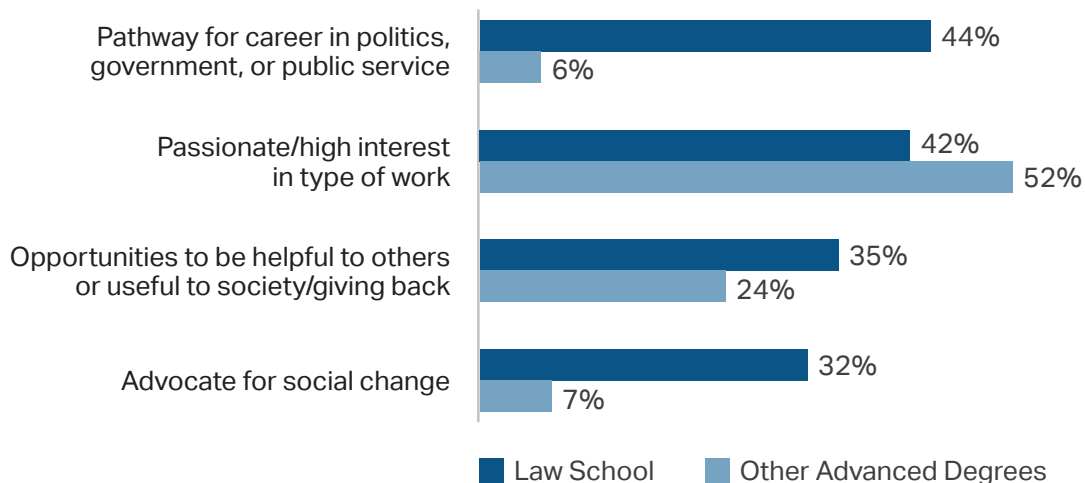
Black law students were the most likely to have considered a JD early—before high school and before college.

Asian law students were the most likely to have considered a JD later, after college graduation.

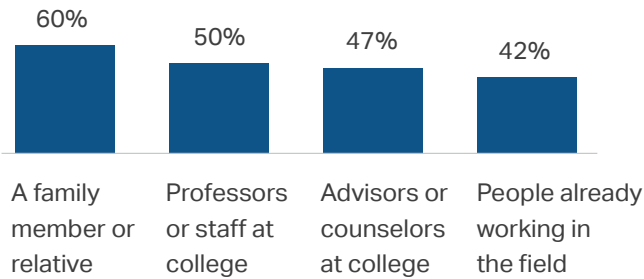


Why Do Undergraduates Aspire to Go to Law School?

Aspiring undergraduates report **public-spirited motivations** as the top reasons for considering a JD, including seeing it as a pathway to a career in public service, being helpful to others, and advocating for social change.



Who are the Most Important Sources of Advice About Graduate or Professional School?



A family member or relative is the most important source of advice for undergraduates considering law school.

Professors or staff, and advisors/counselors at college are also reported to be important sources of advice.



About AALS

The Association of American Law Schools (AALS), founded in 1900, is a nonprofit association of 179 member and 18 fee-paid law schools. Its members enroll most of the nation's law students and produce the majority of the country's lawyers and judges, as well as many of its lawmakers. The mission of AALS is to uphold and advance excellence in legal education. In support of this mission, AALS promotes the core values of excellence in teaching and scholarship, academic freedom, and diversity, including diversity of backgrounds and viewpoints, while seeking to improve the legal profession, to foster justice, and to serve our many communities—local, national and international.

About Gallup

Gallup delivers analytics and advice to help leaders and organizations solve their most pressing problems. Combining more than 80 years of experience with its global reach, Gallup knows more about the attitudes and behaviors of employees, customers, students and citizens than any other organization in the world.

Order Your Copy of *Before the JD Today*

Copies of the full report can be ordered at aals.org/research/



Beyond the Bachelor's: Undergraduate Perspectives on Graduate and Professional Degrees

Beyond the Bachelor's, a companion report to *Before the JD*, prepared jointly by AALS, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC), and Gallup, highlights factors contributing to the decision to pursue a graduate or professional degree in general. More information can be found at aals.org/research/

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