

## Health Professions and Prelaw Center

### A GUIDE TO THE RECOMMENDATION SERVICE FOR PRELAW STUDENTS

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#### THE EIGHT STEPS OF THE RECOMMENDATION PROCESS:

**Step 1:** Read this Guide. Getting letters of recommendation (LOR) delivered to the schools *on time* can be a confusing process; yet 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. They will return this form with their letter.

b. **Credential Assembly Service (CAS, formerly LSDAS) LOR form.**  
**Required** for sending letters to the CAS (99% of applicants): do NOT give to your writers, but bring to the HPPLC office (detailed instructions included after conclusion of this document).

**Step 4:** Ask your recommenders **at least 6 WEEKS in advance if possible**. Make sure they understand whether you want a generic (95%) or school-specific letter.  
*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 your CAS account and ALL Law Schools to be sure your LOR 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 6 weeks.
2. **HPPLC backlog** during peak season: up to 10 business days.
3. **CAS 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!**

**Note: YOU will be held responsible for the mistakes of others. Plan ahead!**

**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 CAS 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.
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 or internship supervisors, advisors, coaches, military superiors, etc. For more detailed information, see the section of HPPLC 's website entitled "Letters of Recommendation for Prelaw Students" at <http://hpplc.indiana.edu/law/law-lor.shtml>

## **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 CAS has its own "LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION Form".

- HPPLC's "Faculty Evaluation of Law School Applicant."** Use this yellow 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 white form should be used for everyone else, including faculty if you have NOT had them in a class.
- CAS LOR form.** This form is **REQUIRED IF YOU INTEND TO SEND YOUR LETTERS TO THE CAS.** You will need one form for each writer. Just bring them directly to the HPPLC receptionist—the writer does NOT sign this form.

You will access this form from the letter of recommendation section of your LSAC account. For detailed, step-by-step instructions on how to obtain such forms, contact HPPLC.

## **CHOOSE WHETHER OR NOT TO WAIVE YOUR RIGHT TO READ YOUR LOR:**

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.

**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 4-12 weeks 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 CAS 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 CAS processing delay. However, we suggest that you ALWAYS provide copies to the CAS as well—because some schools *require* it. Even if none of your current schools require CAS 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 CAS 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 alternate LOR's 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. Do not be shy about asking for a LOR or an update! Writing LOR's is a big part of every professor's job!

2. When you ask, be sure you give your recommender an easy way to decline. We suggestion 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.

3. 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.
4. 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 LOR AND FORMS ARE SIGNED AND 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 CAS, 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 CAS AT LEAST FOUR WEEKS PRIOR TO SENDING IN APPLICATIONS.**

The CAS processing delay is normally two weeks. However, they can make mistakes, which take more time to detect, and then correct. And please first give HPPLC 10 business days notice to process your letters.

**HPPLC will NOT automatically send your letters!** Your signed "Request for Letters to be Sent" form is required to do that. This 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.

### **Warnings:**

1. 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 CAS "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 prior to submitting your applications.

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

3. BE PREPARED FOR HUMAN ERROR:

Your writers, the CAS, 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.*

## **STEP 8: CHECK WITH THE CAS 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!***

**CAS:** 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 CAS 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 HPPLC WHEN YOU ARE ACCEPTED!**

And.....Congratulations!!

## **DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS REGARDING** **Letters of Recommendation and the Credential Assembly Service (LSDAS)**

Note: in the summer of 2009 the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) changed its name to the Credential Assembly Service (CAS).

**Introduction:** Each letter of recommendation (LOR) in your CAS account must be accompanied by its own CAS LOR form with the author's name on it. In other words, you will need to print out a separate LOR form created specifically for each of your writers. If you have 3 LOR, you will need 3 forms—one for each letter. Below are the instructions on how to obtain them. [Note that currently there may be problems printing out these forms on a MAC computer].

**Preface:** IF you have a LOR file with the Health Professions and Prelaw Center (HPPLC) office, you must bring (or fax: 812.856.2770) these CAS forms to the HPPLC receptionist in Maxwell Hall 010 and s/he will put them in your HPPLC LOR file. With a HPPLC file, you do NOT give these forms to your writers. When you later forward your letters from HPPLC to the Credential Assembly Service, the secretary will make sure that the proper CAS form accompanies each letter. (Note: you will still have to give each writer either a HPPLC "faculty" or "personal" waiver form that they will return to HPPLC with their letter.)]

[IF you do NOT have a LOR file with HPPLC, then you must give this CAS LOR form to your individual LOR-writers. They in turn MUST mail their form together with their letter in the same envelope to the Credential Assembly Service. The address is on the top of the form. We suggest that you provide a pre-addressed, stamped envelope for each writer. (Note: if you do NOT have a HPPLC file, you would NOT give your writers the HPPLC "waiver" form referred to in the previous paragraph.)]

**Instructions:** You will build your own individual "master list" of *potential* letter-writers on your LSAC LOR account. This list can be as long or as short as you like. Note that just listing a person does not mean that you are committed to even asking this person for a letter, let alone sending it to any particular law school. These names will be only your *potential* sources for *future* letters. Only you will see this list.

*Later in the process*, you will also assemble a list of law schools to which you will *potentially* be applying. For each individual school you will have to designate specific letters it will receive from your "master list" of all letters that you have accumulated. Thus you will decide *later* which letters will go to which schools. Again, the list of letter-writers that you will be building is only for potential future use. As you enter the LSAC site and attempt to follow the instructions below on your computer, these procedures should become more clear and make more sense. It is complicated, but hang in there!

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- First, log onto your LSAC account with your username and password:  
<https://os.lsac.org/Release/Logon/Access.aspx>.
- Be sure your popup blocker is turned off for this site!** For Internet Explorer, click the "Tools" folder. For Firefox, click "Tools," then choose "Options," then go to the "Content" tab, and uncheck the first box (entitled "Block pop-up windows").
- On the next page, see the section entitled "Credential Assembly Service." Click the second link under this section, called "[Letters of Recommendation](#)."
- You will be taken to your own personal "Letters of Recommendation" page.
- Find the section on that page called "My LORs and Recommenders".
- Click on the first blue box on the right side of the page, called "Add Recommender."

- Fill out the form that appears next—it consists basically of contact information for the writer (NOT YOU!). Note that your “description” of the letter will appear on this form, and will be seen by the law schools! So be careful what you write! Also, once you “submit” the form, you will NOT be able to edit or change any information on it, except for this description (but do NOT change this after you have given the form to the writer—the CAS may be confused if the description on the form they receive does not match with what is written by you on your online account). You only have **30 characters** available for this description. If you do have a letter that is designed only for one particular school, the description might read: “For DePaul Law School.” However, you can use any description that might be useful to you, for example: “Professor Simon;” “Internship;” “Middle Way House”, etc. Note that a single writer can submit more than one letter—one for all law schools and another targeted for one specific school. Again, however, each such letter must be accompanied by a unique CAS LOR form. For the LSAC’s instructions on how to complete this webform, see: <http://www.lsac.org//Applying/letters-of-recommendation.asp>. Note that most writers will submit only one letter, which will be sent to all of your law schools after it arrives and is process by the Credential Assembly Service.
- When you have completed this form, click the “Submit” button.
- You will then arrive back at your “Letters of Recommendation” page---but the “Recommender Name” column should now contain the name of the writer for whom you just filled out the webform. The “Letter ID/Description” column should also now contain your description of the letter, which will be in blue and underlined as a weblink. Click on this link, and the LOR form should finally appear! **You can now print out a copy of this form.**

**If you are using the HPPLC LOR service, bring (or fax) this form to our office and give it to the receptionist.**

**If you are NOT using the HPPLC service, give the letter to your writer, who MUST send it together with the letter (in the same envelope!) to the CAS.**

Eventually (this can be done much later)---you’ll select a tentative list of law schools to which you’ll possibly be applying, and this list of schools will also appear on your “Letters of Recommendation” page, underneath your list of LOR.

To begin the process of assigning specific letters to be delivered to individual law schools, you’ll first have to click on the “Add Term” button for each individual school on the list and then select the “term” or semester that you’ll be applying for admission (the term you want to actually begin your studies at the law school—usually the fall).

After you “submit” *this* information, you’ll be able to designate which of the letters listed on this page (your so-called “master-list”) will go to which law schools. You do this individually for each law school by clicking on each school’s “Assign Letters” tab (this tab will suddenly appear only *after* you click the “Add Term” button, above). When you do that there will be a short explanation of that school’s LOR requirements and policies (for example, the *number of letters* that they want you to select). Then just click on the letters from the drop-down menu on the next page, click submit, and the “Letter ID” on your “Letters of Recommendation” page will now indicate your LOR assignments for that school.

**Note: most applicants will send the same letters to all schools** (the one variable would be the number of letters that each school will accept).

That’s it!

The above will make much more sense if you actually follow along on your actual LSAC account online and try to duplicate the procedures.

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**If the above procedure doesn't work, call the LSAC directly at 215.968.1001 (options 5, then 0, to speak to a human being). They should be able to walk you through it.**

Please keep in mind that this system is BRAND NEW and is a work in progress. I'm sure there will be bugs and glitches that they'll have to discover and then fix. Please let the LSAC (and HPPLC) know about any problems you encounter. Meanwhile, do not hesitate to send us your questions!

Finally.....good luck!!