

E-guide | U.S. 2020

CAREER PATHWAYS IN LAW:

Using Your International Education in the U.S.



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The information contained in this e-guide is currently undergoing additional review by experts in the field of law.



INTRODUCTION

Immigrating to the United States is an opportunity to use your international training to either advance in your field or pursue a new career that builds on your education and experience. Because practicing law involves obtaining a license—a process that can be costly and time-consuming—it is especially important to fully consider your options.

The Pathways Guide at a Glance

If you have completed your education in another country and are now starting your career in the United States, you will need to understand to what extent you meet the academic requirements of your chosen career.

- The **Gaining Recognition for Your International Education** section (p. 8) will explain how to determine the U.S. equivalency of your foreign degree to help you explore career pathways in law and other fields.
- The **Educational Pathways in the Field of Law** section (p. 10) provides examples of careers in law that may match your qualifications.
- If you want to continue your legal career in the United States, you must obtain a U.S. license to practice. See the **Licensing and Certification Requirements in Law** section (p. 19).
- Not all internationally trained lawyers decide to pursue a law license in the United States, either because of the time and expense involved, or because they want to pursue a different career. See the **Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers** section (p. 21).

Let's get started!

Strategies for Success

Ask Lots of Questions

While you may have a strong idea of what your career will be in the United States based on the professional experience you already have, establishing yourself in a new country is a chance to reach new goals and possibilities. Analyzing your career options in the U.S. can be challenging, but by remaining flexible you can use the education and experience you already have to take steps to succeed in the U.S.

As you research your options, ask yourself:

- What are my short term and long term employment goals?
- What options are available to me based on my skills and qualifications?
- What are the steps and requirements in terms of time, costs, and additional training to pursue my goal?
- Who can I talk to about my options?

Make a Plan

After you've explored some of the career options available to you in the United States, it is time to make decisions and come up with a plan. In the U.S., developing your career path requires a life-long commitment to learning, networking, and taking risks.

A successful plan includes realistic steps and time frames for completion. Your plan should also make it possible for you to work towards multiple goals at once and allow for some setbacks along the way. It will take patience to reach your goals and it is normal to change your mind or adapt to new circumstances as you move forward.

Think about the steps it will take to reach your goal. A clear goal-oriented plan may look something like this:

GOAL: Improve my language skills.

STEPS TO GOAL:

- Take an English language course that suits my needs.
- Meet with an English language conversation partner weekly.
- Learn terminology and professional language in my field.
- Read the newspaper every day.

*You can use the **SMART Goal Worksheet** (p. 26) to guide you as you outline your plan.*

Take Initiative

While your **academic and professional credentials** are very important in your professional success, so are skills like your communication style, English language level, and ability to adapt to U.S. workplace culture. **Networking** with legal professionals you know, meeting professionals in the field, joining a professional association, attending conferences, and volunteering with a program that provides pro bono legal assistance are great ways to practice the skills you will need to succeed in your job.

Finding meaningful work as an immigrant can take time and you may face challenging obstacles. Although many factors are out of your control, try to remain flexible, be persistent, and take initiative. As you explore this guide, you will find a number of helpful resources to support you.

GLOSSARY

Academic and professional credential: The degree, diploma, or license you receive when you complete a program, pass examinations, or meet a set of requirements.

Networking: Interacting with other people to exchange information and develop contacts, especially to further one's career.

YOUR CAREER PATHWAY IN THE UNITED STATES

Like many immigrants, you may initially struggle to gain entry into your professional field in the U.S. While you may have adequate knowledge or experience, the challenge often occurs in translating your skills and qualifications in a way that local employers will value and understand. You may also need further education and training, an understanding of your local labor market, and knowledge of how to navigate your options to choose a **career pathway**.



Your career pathway is made up of the educational and professional decisions that will open doors to new opportunities. Education and training are the building blocks of your career—with the skills you acquire, you can earn promotions and take on additional professional responsibilities.

To start thinking about your career options, you will need to understand the difference between regulated and non-regulated professions.

Understanding Regulated Professions

Each state decides which professions it will regulate and what level of formal education or training is required for entry into the field. In the United States, specific authorities or regulatory bodies are responsible for recognizing professional credentials required for state licensing. Since the time and cost associated with licensing varies by state, contact the relevant regulatory body before deciding to proceed with licensing. In this guide, careers usually requiring licensure are clearly marked – but again, this varies from state to state.

Understanding Non-Regulated Professions

Some occupations in the United States are either internally regulated by professional associations, or are entirely non-regulated. However, although less strict than **regulated professions**, certain standards of professional practice or **designations** might still be preferred by employers and professional associations in non-regulated professions. You can demonstrate that you meet these standards through a certification process linked to training programs provided by employers or community colleges.

GLOSSARY

Career pathway: A series of connected education and training programs that enable individuals to secure a job or advance in an industry or occupation.

Regulated professions: Professions that require a license or certification.

Designation: A title earned by an individual through a certification process.

Can I work as an attorney in the United States?

Lawyer vs. Attorney

A lawyer is simply a person who has graduated from law school. You do not have to pass the bar exam or hold a license to practice law in order to be a lawyer. An attorney-at-law (“attorney”) is a lawyer who has passed the bar exam and is licensed to practice law.

If you do not have a United States law license, you cannot practice as an attorney, and your options for working as a lawyer in the U.S. are limited.

The practice of law in the U.S. is highly-regulated to protect public safety. That means that most law-related occupations in the U.S. require either a license or **certification** to practice.

The law license you may have from your home country is not valid in the U.S. Internationally trained attorneys need to meet the same requirements as U.S.-educated attorneys.



In this guide, occupations that require a state certification or licensure process are clearly marked.

Many internationally trained professionals decide not to pursue employment in regulated professions due to the challenges of **relicensing**. The field of law provides access to less-regulated employment opportunities, often with voluntary certification.

If you decide against relicensing as an attorney in the United States, you can still work in the field of law in a non-regulated occupation. Some related careers are discussed in the **Transferable Skills and Using Them in Related or Alternative Careers** section of this guide (p. 21).

GLOSSARY

Certification: A voluntary credentialing process by a non-governmental, private professional association.

Relicensing: Having to meet licensing requirements in the United States, even if you have a license from another country.

THE LEGAL PROFESSION IN THE UNITED STATES

Attorneys represent individuals, businesses and government agencies in criminal and civil trials and other legal proceedings. They typically advise clients on legal issues, transactions, and disputes. Attorneys usually perform their work with a team of legal professionals that are licensed, as well as unlicensed professionals in the field. They may be employed by law firms, government, the legal departments of businesses or organizations, or be self-employed; and they may specialize in a particular aspect of the law, such as real estate, family, or international law.

Working as an Attorney in the United States

An attorney's roles and responsibilities in the United States may be different than in other countries. Internationally trained lawyers need to meet the same requirements as U.S.-educated lawyers, so even if you have many years of experience, you must obtain a new license in the U.S if you plan to work as an attorney.

In the U.S., each state/territory regulates the practice of legal professionals and establishes its own set of requirements and **scope of practice** concerning professional licensure.

Internationally educated lawyers can obtain licenses in the U.S., although it can be a costly and time-consuming process.

For example, to become licensed as an attorney in New York in 2019, you would have to pay \$220 in fees for the Credential Assembly Service (CAS), as well as fees of \$30 for each law school receiving a copy of the report,¹ \$50,000-\$115,000 in tuition and fees to attend a NY based LLM or advanced standing JD program, a fee of \$250 (if you have a JD) or \$750 (if you have an LLM) to take the Bar Exam² and a \$375 registration fee to the Chief Administrator of the Courts³.

The costs associated with relicensing change over time and vary depending on your state, so check what the specifics are for your location.

GLOSSARY

Scope of practice: The procedures, actions, and processes a practitioner is permitted to undertake in keeping with the terms of their professional license.

Since law license requirements vary by state/territory, consider these key points:

- Each state/territory in the U.S. is responsible for the licensure of attorneys within that state/territory. Jurisdiction-specific licensure information can be found in the **Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements**.
- All U.S. bar associations require candidates to pass the bar exam for their state/territory.

Roles and Responsibilities

The main designation for a licensed lawyer in the United States is as an attorney-at-law.

In the U.S., attorneys are responsible for:

- Working with a variety of clients, including individuals, governments, and organizations, and may specialize in one area such as tax law or civil rights law.
- Counseling clients regarding their legal rights and obligations.
- Representing clients in trials and other legal proceedings.
- Drafting and filing legal documents such as contracts, wills, and lawsuits.
- Supervising paralegals and legal secretaries.

Understanding Job Titles

The roles and responsibilities of attorneys are highly dependent on areas of expertise and experience. For example, when searching for employment as an attorney, you may see job postings with the following titles:

- Associate Attorney
- Litigation Attorney
- Personal Injury Attorney
- Contract Attorney
- Immigration Attorney
- Real Estate Attorney



You can read more about academic and professional credentials in the **Educational Pathways in the Field of Law** section of this guide (p 10).

GAINING RECOGNITION FOR YOUR INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Your education is the foundation of your career. Although there may be challenges to using your foreign credentials in the United States, you do not have to start over. For an internationally trained professional, exploring career pathways begins with an understanding of the value of the education you received in your home country.

Obtaining a **foreign credential evaluation** is often the first step an immigrant takes to gain access to educational and employment opportunities in the U.S. A credential evaluation helps you gain recognition for your previous studies by considering your country's educational system, the status of the institution you attended, the content of the program, and any entry and graduation requirements.



A credential evaluation compares the education you received in your country to a similar degree or diploma in the United States and provides a **degree equivalency**.

In the United States, employers, licensing boards, and universities use credential evaluations to judge the quality and level of your academic achievements in comparison to U.S.-educated candidates.

- Universities, for example, use the information to make admissions decisions and to award transfer credit or advanced standing in a program.
- Employers and licensing boards refer to credential evaluations to evaluate whether or not you meet their academic requirements.

Unlike many other countries, the U.S. does not have a national education ministry to evaluate foreign degrees. As a result, some academic institutions and state licensing boards—and nearly all employers—rely on agencies like **World Education Services** (WES) to examine official documents. Others perform their own evaluations or use preferred agencies. Most U.S. states/territories require that internationally educated lawyers obtain either a Master of Laws (LLM) or advanced standing Juris Doctor (JD) degree from an American Bar Association (ABA)-approved program in order to take the bar exam for licensure. Most ABA-approved law schools require that internationally educated applicants to LLM programs use the LLM Credential Assembly Service (LLM CAS), including the International Transcript Authentication and Evaluation Service (ITAES); and applicants to advanced standing JD programs use the Credential Assembly Service Authentication and Evaluation (CAS A&E).

GLOSSARY

International credential evaluation: An expert analysis of a international degree or diploma.

Degree equivalency: The extent to which a degree or diploma earned abroad compares to a similar U.S. credential.

Before requesting a credential evaluation from any agency, contact the institution that needs the evaluation to understand their requirements. These institutions are responsible for the final recognition decision.

If you are exploring a new career, it may be helpful to have an idea of the U.S. equivalency of your foreign credentials.

WES allows you to preview the U.S. equivalency of your highest completed degree by using the **WES free equivalency tool**.

Note: This preview does not replace a formal credential evaluation that may be needed for official purposes.

While the ITAES evaluation is required for most LLM and other graduate law programs, and the CAS A&E is required for most advanced standing JD programs, those evaluation services are **ONLY** available to applicants to those law programs. Alternative evaluations may be accepted for other purposes, such as determining eligibility for certification exams. You may check with your educational institution or credential issuing organization to find out whether a WES evaluation is recognized and accepted. If so, you can apply for a **WES Credential Evaluation**.



Watch the **WES Credential Evaluation & Recognition** video to learn more about credential evaluation.

Advanced Standing and Transfer Credit

If you are applying to an academic program, you may be eligible for advanced standing or transfer credit for previous education.

- **Advanced standing:** This means you may be allowed to skip prerequisites for admission into a course, or not repeat a required course, reducing the time to complete a degree.
- **Transfer credit:** This means that your previous education is counted toward the total number of credits required for the degree.

For internationally educated individuals, advanced standing and transfer credit is usually determined at the time of application through a foreign credential evaluation.

EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS IN THE FIELD OF LAW

Once you know the value of your foreign degree, you can use the information in this section to move forward in your career.

Law is a growing and rewarding field that offers many exciting career options. In this section you will find some examples of law careers that you may be qualified for, including their key roles and responsibilities and where further education may be helpful. You will also find information on how to meet the academic requirements for some popular law careers.

There are many ways to enter the legal field. Some internationally trained attorneys gain U.S. experience in entry-level professions as they pursue licensing and certification. Others begin by enrolling in degree programs to gain access to higher-level jobs.



HELPFUL TIPS

Research shows that immigrants who add a U.S. degree or certification to their international education and training are more likely to progress faster in their careers.



A career pathway is a series of “stackable credentials”—achievements that build on each other based on continuing education, specialization, and certification to allow you to move up a career ladder.

ASSOCIATE
DEGREE

BACHELOR'S
DEGREE

MASTER'S
DEGREE

DOCTORATE
DEGREE

ASSOCIATE OF LEGAL ADMINISTRATION

ASSOCIATE DEGREE IN LEGAL ASSISTANCE/PARALEGAL STUDIES

Legal Secretary

- Perform regular secretarial duties, such as answering phones and drafting correspondence.
- Prepare legal papers; may also assist with legal research.
- Must be familiar with legal terminology and procedures.

- Associate degree or post-secondary certificate required.



Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment. NALS: The Association for Legal Professionals (NALS) offers Accredited Legal Professional (ALP) and Professional Legal Secretary (PLS)/Certified Legal Professional (CLP) credentials.

Paralegal/Legal Assistant

- Perform a variety of support tasks for lawyers, including research and preparation for legal cases.
- Draft legal documents.
- Interact with clients, witnesses, and other lawyers on behalf of employing attorney.
- Associate degree required. Many employers prefer a bachelor's degree plus a certificate in paralegal studies.



Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment.

- **The National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) offers Certified Paralegal (CP) and Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP) credentials.**
- **The National Federation of Paralegal Associations offers CORE Registered Paralegal (CRP) and Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam Registered Paralegal (PACE RP) credentials.**



GO FURTHER

While you can find jobs with just an associate degree, a bachelor's degree may increase your chances of finding employment.

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE OR BACHELOR OF ARTS

Arbitrator/Mediator/Conciliator

- Facilitate conflict resolution between disputing parties outside of the court system.
- May work for state or local governments, or in the legal services industry.
- Field is growing rapidly due to mediations and arbitrations being faster and less expensive than bringing disputes to trial.
- Bachelor's degree required, and may be in any field. Additional training usually acquired on the job, or through independent mediation programs, professional associations, or colleges.



Certification requirements vary by state/territory. Some U.S. states/territories require certification in order to work on certain kinds of cases, and some courts require a law or CPA license.⁴

JURIS DOCTOR (JD)

Attorney at Law

- Advise clients about their legal rights and obligations.
- Prepare and file legal documents.
- May represent clients in criminal or civil trials.
- Clients may be individuals, businesses, organizations, or government agencies.
- May supervise support staff, including legal secretaries and paralegals/legal assistants.



License required.

Law Clerk

- Assist judges by conducting legal research, drafting opinions and documents, and copyediting the judge's writing.
- May also assist the judge during courtroom proceedings.



Law license required.

Judge/Hearing Officer

- Always employed by federal, state, or local government.
- Oversee the legal process in court.
- Conduct pretrial hearings and trials, hear evidence from opposing sides, and resolve disputes or hand down verdicts.
- Research legal issues and write opinions.



Law license required.

While the LSAT exam is required for admission to regular three year JD programs, many two year advanced standing programs do not require it. Contact the law school you are applying to for details on their requirements. The LSAT is not required for LLM programs.⁵



GO FURTHER

You can upgrade your education and skills to qualify for more jobs in the field of law by earning a Master of Laws (LLM) degree.

MASTER OF LAWS (LLM)

Attorney at Law

- Advise clients about their legal rights and obligations.
- Prepare and file legal documents.
- May represent clients in criminal or civil trials.
- Clients may be individuals, businesses, organizations, or government agencies.
- May supervise support staff, including legal secretaries and paralegals/legal assistants.
- LLM degree confers specialized legal knowledge, and so can open up more employment opportunities in the field of specialty, such as international law or tax law.



License required.



GO FURTHER

Upgrade your education and skills to qualify for more jobs in the field of law by earning an advanced degree.

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN LAW (PHD)

DOCTOR OF JURIDICAL SCIENCE (SJD/JSD)

Law Professor

- Plan and teach courses in a university law school.
- Work closely with students to help them achieve their academic and career goals.
- Stay informed about changes and innovations in the field of law.
- Research, write, and publish scholarly articles on matters of the law.
- May be able to find work with just a JD and sufficient work experience, but many employers prefer a PhD.



Work experience practicing law usually required, which means you must have a license. However, if your licensure and experience practicing law were in another country, then you may not need to hold U.S. licensure in order to teach.

Both a PhD and an SJD/JSD are doctoral degrees, and considered equivalent in terms of being the highest level of law degree attainable. However, PhD in Laws programs are designed specifically for graduates of U.S. JD programs. If you received your law degree in another country, you must either obtain a JD degree from a U.S. program (possibly from one of several advanced standing programs for internationally trained lawyers) in order to apply to PhD in Laws programs, or else obtain an LLM instead, and then pursue an SJD/JSD as your doctoral degree.⁶

Academic Requirements in Law

Consider these educational requirements for careers in the field of law, from entry-level to advanced professions.

✓ Requirements for Legal Secretary

- ✓ Associate degree or post-secondary certificate required.
- ✓ In order to be admitted to associate degree or post-secondary certificate programs, you must have the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- ✓ Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment. NALS offers **Accredited Legal Professional (ALP)** and **Professional Legal Secretary (PLS)/Certified Legal Professional (CLP)** credentials.

✓ Requirements for Paralegal/Legal Assistant

- ✓ Associate degree required, preferably from an ABA-approved program, although many employers prefer a bachelor's degree plus a certificate in paralegal studies.
- ✓ In order to be admitted to associate degree or bachelor's degree programs, you must have the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- ✓ Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment.
 - The National Association of Legal Assistants (NALA) offers **Certified Paralegal (CP)** and **Advanced Certified Paralegal (ACP)** credentials.
 - The National Federation of Paralegal Associations offers **CORE Registered Paralegal (CRP)** and **Paralegal Advanced Competency Exam Registered Paralegal (PACE RP)** credentials.

Case Study: Marco



Marco is a 30-year-old attorney with a degree from the University of Bologna. He practiced law in Modena for four years before immigrating to the United States, where he settled with extended family in New Jersey. Although New Jersey does not offer an accelerated path to licensure for foreign attorneys, neighboring New York state does allow foreign law school graduates to take the bar exam after earning a Master of Laws (LLM) degree. Knowing this, Marco had initially hoped to continue his law career by commuting into New York to earn an LLM and then to work at a law firm, but when he started looking into LLM programs, he realized that the commute was just too long to do every day. He also realized that he would need to improve his legal vocabulary in English if he wished to continue working in his field at all.

Marco took an online course in legal English and found a conversation partner at a local law school who was willing to help him practice English in exchange for Italian lessons. With his legal education and experience, and his improved legal English skills, Marco was able to find work as a paralegal, giving him firsthand experience in an American legal office and insight into the differences between Italian and American work culture. He is also earning enough money to start saving for a move to New York, where he plans to finally pursue the LLM degree that will allow him to resume his career as an attorney.

✓ Requirements for Arbitrator/Mediator/Conciliator

- ✓ Bachelor's degree required, and may be in any field. Additional training usually acquired on the job, or through independent mediation programs, professional associations, or colleges.
- ✓ In order to be admitted to bachelor's degree programs, you must have the equivalent of a high school diploma.
- ✓ Certification requirements vary by state/territory. Some U.S. states/territories require certification in order to work on certain kinds of cases, and some courts require a law or CPA license.⁷

Case Study: Ya'el



Ya'el is a 28-year-old lawyer with a degree from the University of Haifa in Israel. Because Ya'el moved to Los Angeles shortly after graduation to marry her American wife, she hoped to start her career as a practicing attorney in the U.S. Fortunately, California is one of the few states that allows internationally educated lawyers to take the bar exam after earning a Master of Laws (LLM) degree; and since Ya'el was already fluent in English when she arrived in the U.S., she began applying to programs right away. She focused on low-residency programs in her state, so she would not have to be away from her wife for more than a few months. Ya'el was ultimately admitted to a program that required only one summer semester on campus, with the rest of the coursework completed online. She recently graduated from the program and is now preparing to take the California bar exam—a months-long study process that she hopes will culminate in her finally being able to start the legal career for which she has studied so many years.

✓ Requirements for Law Professor

- ✓ May be able to find work with just a JD and sufficient work experience, but many employers prefer a PhD.
- ✓ In order to be admitted to JD programs, you must have the equivalent of a bachelor's degree. In order to be admitted to PhD programs, you must have a JD degree; and in order to be admitted to SJD/JSD programs, you must have an LLM degree.
- ✓ Work experience practicing law usually required, which means you must have a license. However, if your licensure and experience practicing law were in another country, then you may not need to hold U.S. licensure in order to teach.

✓ Requirements for Attorney at Law, Law Clerk, and Judge/Hearing Officer

- ✓ Requirements vary widely by state/territory. Juris Doctor (JD) degree generally required, although there are some exceptions for internationally trained lawyers.
 - 20 U.S. states/territories do not allow internationally trained lawyers to take the bar exam. To become licensed in any of these states/territories, you must obtain a JD degree from an ABA-approved law school.
 - In a small number of states/territories, including New York and California, internationally trained lawyers may take the bar exam if they have graduated from an ABA-approved LLM program, which usually takes just one year of full time study.
 - In the states/territories that do allow internationally trained lawyers to take the bar exam, additional requirements usually apply. Consult “CHART 4: Foreign Legal Education” in the **Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements 2019** for state/territory-specific details.

 - ✓ In order to be admitted to JD programs, you must have the equivalent of a bachelor’s degree. In order to be admitted to LLM programs, you must have the equivalent of a JD degree or international first degree in law.
 - While the LLM allows you to take the bar exam in New York and California, a JD will give you the option of licensure in all U.S. states/territories.
 - Some U.S. law schools offer accelerated programs for internationally trained lawyers, where you can be credited advanced standing for your foreign law education. These programs generally offer no more than one year worth of advanced credit, reducing the amount of time it takes to obtain the degree from three to two years’ full time study.

 - ✓ License required.

 - ✓ Citizenship requirements also apply for law clerk and judge/hearing officer positions. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you must be “admitted as a refugee or granted asylum [and have] filed a declaration of intention to become a lawful permanent resident and then a citizen when eligible” or be “a lawful permanent resident who is seeking citizenship as outlined in 8 U.S.C. 1324b(a)(3)(B).”⁸
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LICENSING AND CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS IN LAW

This section of the guide provides general information on licensing and helpful resources to guide you as you move forward. Consult the [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements 2019](#) for state/territory-specific details.

Licensure for Lawyers

If you want to practice as an attorney at law, or any other legal profession which requires licensure, you must obtain a state-issued license from your state bar association.

- Licensing requirements for internationally trained lawyers vary by state/territory. Each state/territory has a bar association that regulates licenses.
- In most states/territories, to be eligible for licensure, you must successfully pass the bar examination.
 - The only instance in which you may NOT need to pass the bar exam for the state/territory where you intend to practice law is if you are already licensed to practice law in another U.S. state/territory. (See “Interstate Licensing Agreements” below.)
- A Juris Doctor (JD) degree is generally required in order to take the bar exam, although there are some exceptions for internationally trained lawyers.

While an LLM degree allows you to take the bar exam in New York and California, a JD will give you the option of licensure in all U.S. states/territories. Some U.S. law schools offer accelerated JD programs for internationally trained lawyers, where you can be credited advanced standing for your foreign law education. These programs generally offer no more than one year worth of advanced credit, reducing the amount of time it takes to obtain the degree from three to two years’ full time study.

- 20 U.S. states/territories do not allow internationally trained lawyers to take the bar exam. To become licensed in any of these states/territories, you must obtain a JD degree from an ABA-approved law school.
- In a small number of states/territories, including New York and California, internationally trained lawyers may take the bar exam if they have graduated from an ABA-approved LLM program.
- In the states/territories that do allow internationally trained lawyers to take the bar exam, additional requirements usually apply. Consult “CHART 4: Foreign Legal Education” in the [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements 2019](#) for state/territory-specific details.

- Licensing takes time. Make sure to plan sufficient time for this process.

Interstate Licensing Agreements: Working in Other States

“Admission on motion” refers to a procedure which allows a lawyer admitted to the bar in one U.S. state/territory to also be granted licensure by the bar association in another U.S. state/territory, without having to take any further exams. Details vary by state/territory, but generally include requirements regarding length of time you have practiced law in your original state/territory, as well as a fee that can range between \$400 to \$2,500. See "CHART 12: Admission on Motion—Years of Practice and Definition of Practice" in the [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements 2019](#) for more information.

The information presented in this guide should not be considered exhaustive. It is always important to consult state licensing boards and professional associations for the latest and most authoritative guidance.

TRANSFERABLE SKILLS AND USING THEM IN RELATED OR ALTERNATIVE CAREERS

Transferable Skills

Many immigrants find that they may not be qualified for the same job they had in their home country because job titles and requirements in their field are different in the United States. On account of a lengthy licensing process or a need for immediate employment, they may pursue other options that use their training and experience.



The key to finding alternative paths to a fulfilling career is to identify your *skills* (what you know how to do), *knowledge* (what you know), *competencies* (what you are good at), and *aptitudes* (what is easy for you to learn) that can be useful in a related or alternative career. These **transferable skills** are essential for career success and will enable you to adapt to changing circumstances, especially when your education and experience are from another country.

As you identify your transferable skills, it can be helpful to think about the difference between *hard skills* and *soft skills*. Employers place great value on *soft skills*, such as your ability to communicate, lead others, organize projects, and work effectively on a team—skills you probably already use on a daily basis. You can also apply your more technical *hard skills*, such as computer skills, foreign language fluency, and understanding specialized vocabulary, to a completely different career.

Soft skills in particular depend on your ease and ability to communicate in English, which can be a challenge when it is not your first language. In order for your soft skills to benefit you in a U.S. job search, you must practice both your written and spoken English, and familiarize yourself with English terminology that is specific to your field. You may want to consider taking a course or obtaining self-study materials that will teach you the vocabulary specific to working in your industry. Some offerings for learning legal English are:

Online Course:

- The **BARBRI Certificate in Legal English** is a 35-40 hour online course for professionals in the legal services field. Students must have existing proficiency in spoken and written English, as all course materials are in English.
- **TransLegal** offers online courses at a range of levels from introductory to advanced, and geared towards different needs in the legal profession, such as support staff or LLM students.

GLOSSARY

Transferable skills: Skills developed in one situation or occupation that can be transferred to another context.

Print:

- “**Narrowing the Gap: Legal English for the New International Legal Practitioner**”
- “**Inside the American Legal Mind: An International Practitioner Guide to American Legal Reasoning**”

Many American universities and legal institutes offer on-campus intensive summer courses in legal English. The Fulbright program compiled **an extensive list** of such programs in 2018, many of which are offered every year. This list is not comprehensive, so if you do not see a program in your area, contact your local law school to find out if they offer anything similar.

Are you including your transferable skills on your résumé?

Lawyers typically have the following skills and expertise that could be applied to a different career:

- Public Speaking
- Communication
- Persuasion
- Analysis of complex information
- Writing
- Problem solving
- Ability to work under pressure

Related and Alternative Careers in Law

Why consider a different career?

Finding employment in a related or alternative job can:

- Open doors to new career possibilities.
- Provide income while you work toward your license.
- Grow your **professional network** in the United States.
- Help you gain American work experience.

If you have spent many years committed to an occupation, it is understandable to feel that your career—just like your relationships, hobbies, and beliefs—is a key part of your identity. It is not unusual to experience a sense of identity loss or failure at having to explore a new career path.⁹ In the United States, however, going back to school to switch careers is quite common.

Some of the careers described in this section require additional education or training. It is possible to find options that take only a few months, as well as more in-depth options that can take a year or more.

GLOSSARY

Professional network: Acquaintances with whom you stay in contact based on professional rather than personal connections.

Examples of Related Careers

Some careers in the legal field do not require you to be licensed or certified. These are ideal options for internationally-licensed lawyers who want to continue working in the field of law but do not want to undergo the relicensing process, or who want to work while relicensing in the United States.

Court Reporter

- Create word-for-word written records of everything spoken at trials and other legal proceedings.
- May also work in non-court settings, such as producing captioning for television, or real-time written translation for deaf or hard-of-hearing people in business meetings, schools, and at public events.
- Citizenship requirements apply for all jobs within the U.S. judiciary. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you must be “admitted as a refugee or granted asylum [and have] filed a declaration of intention to become a lawful permanent resident and then a citizen when eligible” or be “a lawful permanent resident who is seeking citizenship as outlined in 8 U.S.C. 1324b(a)(3)(B).”¹⁰



Licensure or certification may be required for work in legal proceedings, depending on state/territory.¹¹

- ***The National Court Reporters Association (NCRA) offers the Registered Professional Reporter (RPR) certification. About half of U.S. states/territories will accept the RPR certification in place of their regular state certification or licensing exam.***¹²

Court Interpreter

- Translate for people with limited English proficiency during legal proceedings.
- Requires a firm understanding of legal terminology in both English and your other language.
- Citizenship requirements apply for all jobs within the U.S. judiciary. If you are not a U.S. citizen, you must be “admitted as a refugee or granted asylum [and have] filed a declaration of intention to become a lawful permanent resident and then a citizen when eligible” or be “a lawful permanent resident who is seeking citizenship as outlined in 8 U.S.C. 1324b(a)(3)(B).”¹³



Certification is required for work in both state¹⁴ and federal¹⁵ courts.

Foreign Legal Consultant

- Generally employed as an adviser on the laws of the country in which you received your legal education and in which you practiced law before coming to the U.S.



Licensure required. As of 2016, 33 U.S. states/territories allowed for the licensure of foreign legal consultants.

Compliance Officer

- Ensure that companies and organizations are in compliance with the laws and regulations governing the business that they conduct.

- May be employed internally by a business or organization, or may be employed by a compliance company to conduct external investigations on businesses and organizations.



Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment. Many different compliance certifications are available, and which one(s) you pursue depends on which industry you service.

- **Finance:**
 - ***Certified Community Bank Compliance Officer (CCBCO), offered by the Independent Community Bankers of America (ICBA).***
 - ***Certified Regulatory Compliance Manager (CRCM), offered by the American Bankers Association.***
- **Healthcare:**
 - ***Certified in Healthcare Compliance (CHC), offered by the Compliance Certification Board (CCB).***
 - ***Certified Compliance Professional (CCP) and Certified Compliance Executive (CCE), offered by the Health Ethics Trust.***
 - ***Certified Professional Compliance Officer (CPCO), offered by the AAPC.***
- **General:**
 - ***Certified Compliance & Ethics Professional (CCEP), offered by the Compliance Certification Board (CCB).***

Labor Relations Specialist

- Mediate between labor unions and company management.
- Draft collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) to serve as legal guides to employee/management relations and procedures.
- Interpret labor contracts regarding wages and benefits, and ensure that agreements between labor and management comply with the CBA.



Certification not required.

Examples of Alternative Careers

Alternative careers are careers outside of the field of law in which you can use the skills and knowledge you gained as a lawyer.

Consider these types of careers if you are interested in exploring a different career path.

Technical Writer

- Prepare instruction manuals, how-to guides, journal articles, and other resources to clearly communicate complex information.

- Work in a variety of industries.
- A college degree is usually required, as well as experience or expertise in a specific subject.



Certification not required.

Public Relations Specialist

- Craft and maintain a positive public image for the employer's organization.
- Write press releases and direct social media and advertising campaigns to inform public opinion of the organization, and to raise awareness of the organization's work and mission.



Certification not required.

Advertising/Marketing Manager

- Plan advertising campaigns to generate public interest in the employer's products or services.
- Order and analyze market research.
- Negotiate advertising contracts.



Certification not required.

Human Resources Professional

- Recruit, interview, and hire workers.
- Mediate conflicts that arise between employees.
- May administer payroll and benefits.



Certification not required, but may make you a more attractive candidate for employment. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) offers the SHRM Certified Professional (SHRM-CP) and SHRM Senior Certified Professional (SHRM-SCP) credentials, and the HR Certification Institute (HRCI) offers a variety of credentials for different levels of expertise.

SMART GOAL WORKSHEET

Now that you have reviewed this guide, the next step is to think about your career plan. We recommend using Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Based (SMART) goals. You can use this SMART goal template to help you identify your next steps.

GOAL	SPECIFIC	MEASURABLE	ACHIEVABLE	RELEVANT	TIME-BASED
What do you want to achieve?	Who? What? Why? Where? When?	How much? How often? How many?	Can it be done?	Is it relevant to your ultimate vision?	When?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES IN THE FIELD OF LAW

You can explore the following helpful resources for more information on education, employment, licensing, and financial assistance to pursue a career in the field of law.

Educational Resources

- The American Bar Association maintains a **list of ABA-approved law schools**.
- The **Law School Admission Council (LSAC)** offers resources on choosing a law program, applying to law school, and taking the LSAT, including the **Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools**, which is co-produced by the ABA.
- LSAC also offers a **search tool** for finding LLM programs by state.
- The ABA offers a book for purchase on “**Narrowing the Gap: Legal English for the New International Legal Practitioner.**”
- The **American Association for Paralegal Education (AAfPE)** offers information on **finding a quality paralegal program**.
- The ABA maintains a list of **ABA-approved paralegal programs**.
- The American Bar Association (ABA) maintains a **career center** with articles, webinars, and a **job board**, as well as a **career guide for paralegals**. They also maintain a page with resources on **alternative careers for lawyers**.

Career/Employment Resources

- The **National Asian Pacific American Bar Association (NAPABA)** is an association of Asian Pacific American attorneys, judges, law professors, and law students. They maintain a members-only job board, and offer fellowships, scholarships, and internships, as well as conferences and other programming.
- The **National Bar Association** is a network of predominantly African-American attorneys and judges. They offer a **job board** and conferences, among other programs.
- The **Hispanic National Bar Association** offers a **career center** and conferences, among other programs.
- The U.S. Judiciary maintains a **job postings** page. If not a U.S. citizen, **all job applicants must be** “admitted as a refugee or granted asylum [and have] filed a declaration of intention to become a lawful permanent resident and then a citizen when eligible” or be “a lawful permanent resident who is seeking citizenship as outlined in 8 U.S.C. 1324b(a)(3)(B).” There is a **wide range of career paths** within the judiciary, including financial and administrative careers, in addition to legal and criminal justice careers.

- The Michigan Law Review published [this article](#) on how to become a law professor.
- The [National Association of Judiciary Interpreters and Translators](#) created [this video](#) on how to become a court interpreter
- Some additional job boards devoted to employment in the legal field are:
 - www.lawjobs.com
 - www.lawcrossing.com (membership only)
 - www.jobs.nalp.org/jobseekers
 - www.specialcounsel.com/legal-jobs

Licensing Resources

- The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) and the ABA publish a [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements](#), with information on taking the bar exam by state/territory. See “Chart 4: Foreign Legal Education” for information specifically targeted to internationally trained lawyers.
- The NCBE also offers a [search tool of bar admission information by state/territory](#). On the homepage, under “Jurisdiction Information,” select a state or territory from the drop-down menu for a summary of bar admission information specific to that jurisdiction, as well as contact information for its bar admission agency.
- NCBE offers [study guides and practice tests](#) for their various exams, as well as a yearly compilation of [bar admission statistics](#), including the percentage of foreign law school graduates that took the bar exam and did or did not pass it in each state/territory.
- Upwardly Global offers [licensing information](#) for California, Illinois, Michigan, New York, and New Hampshire.

Financial Resources

- The Office of the U.S. Department of Education provides [resources for eligible non-U.S. citizens](#).
- The Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation maintains a list of [Education and Training Scholarships for New Americans](#). Some are specific to Maryland residents, but many are open to applicants living anywhere in the U.S.

INDEX OF REFERENCES

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Our Expertise. Your Success.

 wes.org/partners/global-talent-bridge

 gtb@wes.org

WES Global Talent Bridge is a program dedicated to helping skilled immigrants fully utilize their talents and education in the United States. Global Talent Bridge joins with institutional partners and community organizations to help skilled immigrants leverage their training, achieve their professional goals, and contribute their talents to their full potential.

Global Talent Bridge provides technical assistance, staff training and specialized resources to community organizations, adult education programs, government agencies and academic institutions so they can better support, advise and integrate highly-qualified immigrants. It also conducts research and policy advocacy efforts to advance opportunities for skilled immigrants at the local, state and national level.

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