International Law Students: Career Outcomes & Best Practices

Shanza Qureshi | Georgetown Law
Bryce Loo | WES

Office of Graduate Careers
GEORGETOWN LAW

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Objectives

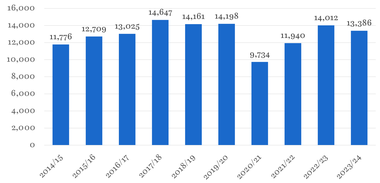
Participants will be able to:

- Describe the overall landscape of international students studying law, including numbers, types of incoming credentials, and institutions and programs in the United States
- Identify career pathways available to law school students and graduates and the known outcomes among these students
- Explain the needs of law school students and how institutions can support students' post-graduation goals based on students' academic credentials and visa restrictions

Overview of International Law Students in the U.S.

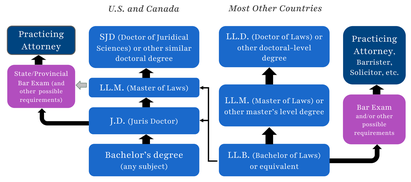
There is a far from complete picture of international students studying law in the U.S. Data and research, particularly recent releases, are scant. However, we can start piecing together a picture. According to IIE *Open Doors*, there were over 13,000 students studying in the broad field of "legal professions and studies."

Number of International Students Studying Legal Professions and Studies



Source: IIE *Open Doors*, 2024.

Overview of Legal Education and Pathways to Becoming a Practicing Attorney: U.S. & Canada vs. Other Countries



Sources: Harvard Law School; Law School Admission Council (LSAC); see also Anggadol, "A Roadmap to Studying Law in Canada," 2023

International students enter all major law degree programs in the U.S. But the program that attracts most international students of law is the LL. M. (Master of Laws). That's because most international students seeking to study law in the U.S come from countries where the first professional degree for practicing law is at the bachelor level (typically the LL.B.). LL.M programs are shorter and geared toward those with a strong basis in law, either through a U.S. or Canadian J.D., LL.B., or other bachelor's-level law degree from another country.

Level of study of top law credentials evaluated by WES (January 2023–March 2025)

48%	Bachelor's degree (e.g., LL.B.)
31%	Master's degree (e.g., LL.M.)
7%	Partial professional degree study
6%	Juris Doctor (J.D.)
8%	All others

Top countries of education among law credentials evaluated by WES (January 2023–March 2025)

25%	China
15%	Nigeria
8%	United Kingdom
8%	India
5%	Japan

International Students at Georgetown Law:

Total F-1/J-1 students at Georgetown University: **3,441** Total F-1/J-1 students at Georgetown Law: **593**

Opportunities and Restrictions for International Law Students

Career Opportunities

International graduate students in one-year academic programs (such as LL.M.) are eligible to work on-campus for the duration of their program and may be eligible for off-campus practical training depending on program requirements.

Many schools allow law students to work off campus on CPT (Curricular Practical Training) to gain practical experience at local employers with a "legal" focus (local law firms, non-profits, international organizations, corporations, and so on).

International law graduates are eligible to work paid or unpaid in a legal capacity during their OPT (Optional Practical Training) period.

Visa Considerations

International students must apply for CPT to work off campus during their academic program.

Postgraduation employment is allowed through OPT for F-1 students.

After OPT, international students are eligible for the H1-B lottery or employer sponsorship.

Academic Considerations

Most U.S. law firms require a law student to obtain a J.D. to be hired.

A law degree from outside of the U.S. (e.g., LL.B.) is not equivalent to a J.D.

International students should consider courses towards bar admission to make themselves more marketable to U.S. legal employers.

Foreign-trained LL.M. students may be eligible to sit for a U.S. bar examination after completing their academic program in one or more, but not limited to any, of the following jurisdictions:

- New York
- California
- District of Columbia

For state by state requirements, refer to the Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admissions Requirements of the National Conference of Bar Examiners and the American Bar Association.

Best Practices: International Law Student Career Pathways

International students should:

Meet with the Office of Graduate Careers and the International Student and Scholars Office early to discuss the job search timeline.

Be encouraged to gain practical experience while pursuing their academic program.

Keep their career options open in their home countries (and other jurisdictions).

Keep in mind that a U.S. graduate degree is very attractive to employers outside of the U.S.

Consider global firms, international organizations, international courts, non-profit organizations, corporations, and others to gain experience after completing their graduate (i.e., LL.M.) program.

Take the New York bar exam or California bar exam to be able to practice in jurisdictions outside of the U.S.

Look into non-barred/non-law firm career paths, for which they are mostly eligible, when considering off-campus (CPT) and post-graduation (OPT) employment while in the U.S., if they hold a law degree (e.g., LL.B.) from outside of the U.S.

What International Students at Georgetown Law Have to Say:

"The Office of Graduate Careers is very helpful in preparing a U.S. style legal résumé. I uploaded the same information onto my LinkedIn and that's how the headhunter connected with me."

"The Office of Graduate Careers has been tremendously helpful throughout my job search process, from helping me brush up my résumé to preparing for interviews. Job search is a tedious, tiring, and stressful process. Reaching out to and meeting with a lot of professionals helped a lot-not only to build a professional network but also to understand what firms are looking for. It helped me in presenting myself and gaining confidence when speaking with legal professionals."

"I recommend seeking support from the Office of Graduate Careers and leveraging their resources. For example, the LL.M. Career Manual and the Mock Interview Program are valuable tools for international students."

"Connecting with Georgetown Law alumni helped me make educated decisions on job offers I was considering. I am happy about the offer I accepted mainly because of the alum I spoke to as I was deciding which offer to accept."

Known Career Trajectories and Outcomes

Little is known about the career outcomes of international students studying law in the U.S. There are no comprehensive datasets.

Research (Esaki-Smith, 2022; Loo, Lu, & Ye, 2017) shows that most international students overall (not law students specifically) wish to utilize OPT or other short-term work opportunities, with the plan then to return home. Only a smaller number want to stay long term or permanently.

In a survey of law schools hosting international students (Hendley & Straka, 2022), 86% noted that some of their international students took a U.S. bar exam. The mean percentage of international students who took the exam per school was 34%.

"The LLM was considered by both students who pursued it and by their employers as preparation for working with U.S.-based clients and organizations and perhaps clients from other countries as well" (Silver & Ballakrishnen, 2022, p. 483).

Some students, such as those from Japan and South Korea, may be interested in taking a U.S. bar exam along with obtaining a U.S. law degree itself for opportunities and stature back home (Silver & Ballakrishnen, 2022).

Key Takeaways

- **Reasons for Studying Law in the U.S.:** International students have complex and varied reasons for studying law in the U.S. In many cases, a U.S. law degree, often combined with passage of a U.S. bar exam (typically California or New York) provides prestige and stature, as well as the broader ability of students to work in their home countries with U.S. and global clients.
- **Restrictions on Working in the U.S.:** International students studying law face the same work and visa restrictions as other international students. Additionally, they have the added challenge of meeting requirements to take and pass a U.S. bar exam.
- **Data & Research:** We need stronger, more comprehensive data and research on international students studying law in the U.S., as current or recent efforts are scant.

Recommendations for Student Support

- Encourage international students to meet with their respective career offices early in their academic program.
- Advise students not to underestimate the power of prior experience practicing law in their home country.
- Suggest to students that they consider transferable skills when applying for jobs in the U.S.

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