

Scholarship Negotiation Guide



Some of you may have already engaged in some form of scholarship negotiations by simply letting admissions officers at a given law school know about your other offers. If so, that is great. Most scholarship negotiation takes place from the middle of March through the early summer. The optimal **timing** of your negotiation depends on when you have your best leverage, which may be later if you feel that you are waiting on offers.

Please remember good leverage comes from lower EATRs at peer schools.

Scholarship Negotiation Communications.

Tone. Scholarship negotiations communications should take the tone of a friendly exchange of information. You want admissions officers to know about your other good offers and the admissions officers want that information because they do not want to lose a coveted applicant over a, sometimes, small difference in scholarship money. You should avoid arrogant language because if you do not have a full ride, then the balance of power is still with the admissions officers no matter how great your numbers.

Awareness. To manage your own expectations and to create the best image of yourself, you should consider the position of the admissions officer. First, remember that most **application deadlines** pass on March 1st. So, though you may have waited for a long time since applying, most law school admissions officers attained a full understanding of their applicant pool in the first week of March. Second, remember that after the **deposit deadlines** pass, admissions officers will have further sharpened their understanding of the remaining applicant pool, typically making them more likely to make additional scholarship offers.

Mode. The communication of information should be (1) the body of an email, OR (2) an attachment to an email, OR (3) in person on a visit or at any sort of admitted students event, OR (4) phone communication.

- If you are initiating the negotiations, then do so via

the body of an email or an attachment to an email. The distinction between using the body of an email and an attachment to an email makes no difference.

- Do not initiate negotiations in person or by phone. However, admissions officers may initiate negotiations in these ways, so you just need to be ready to recite your best offers at any point, especially on visits or at admitted students events.

Information Conveyed. To best facilitate the admissions officers' task, you should convey the following information, however, you should do so as succinctly as possible.

- You should recite the effective annual tuition rates at the law schools that you are using as leverage. Alternatively, you may use a total tuition rate for the three years. You can recite these numbers by stating the exact number or by saying "approximately \$25,000." Do not recite "cost of attendance" numbers unless the law school has started the conversation in those terms.
- You should validate the existence of your other offers with attachments, either a screenshot of the email that contains the offer OR a scanned copy of the letter that the law school sent to make the offer.
- You should graciously thank the law school for their initial offer, even if the offer was just an acceptance with no scholarship money.
- If you have already visited the law school, then you should refer to your visit in some positive way.
- You should use language that insinuates that you have narrowed your law school options to just two to four law schools, target law school included. This makes the admissions officers believe that a boost in scholarship money might just get you to commit.

Scholarship Negotiation Tactics.

Finances matter and these are my offers. Most scholarship negotiations include simple statements about the im-

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importance of financial implications of the applicant's law school decision and about the applicant's other offers. For these communications, the applicant merely puts the law school on notice regarding these issues to put the onus on the law school to come up with a better offer to avoid losing a valued applicant.

"I just cannot justify." If the difference between a peer school offer and the target school's offer is more than \$15,000 per year, then saying that you "simply cannot justify the difference in cost" is justifiable language that can really drive home the point that the difference in EATR would prompt you to turn down the target school's offer.

Make admissions officers sweat. By waiting until the day that the deposit is due to put down a deposit at a target school, you may prompt an admissions officer to contact you to ask why you have yet to put down an offer. At that point, you respond by indicating that the cost is forcing your hesitation. The following story worked out very well primarily because the student had developed a strong rapport with the admissions officer on his visit a few weeks prior.

Story: Last year, one of our students had a very small offer from a tier one law school, which left him facing enormous OOS tuition. His cold feet regarding the enormous financial commitment kept him from putting down a deposit. On the day that the deposit was due, an admissions officer called him to inquire about why our student had not put down a deposit. Our student explained the hesitation over money. Within hours the target school tripled his scholarship offer and he put down the deposit.

Double deposit. If you have narrowed your best existing options down to two law schools and you want more scholarship money, then you should show both law schools that you are quite serious about both options by putting a deposit down at both on the days

that the deposit is due. Then, the day after putting the deposits down, email both law schools, letting them know that you put two deposits down. Indicate that you did so because you simply need more time to make this enormous life decision and you are having difficulty deciding between the two. Admissions officers sometimes take this opportunity to help the applicant choose by offering more money.

Let the deadline pass. If you are confident that you would not attend a law school at the given EATR, then you should let the deposit deadline for that school pass. Then, the following day, email the admissions officer who you befriended during your visit or during the law fair to let

WARNING: This intense strategy should only be engaged if you are certain that you would not attend the target school at the existing EATR. You must be prepared to lose your seat entirely because the law school may move on to the next applicant.

Dear Ms. [Law School Admissions Officer],

Sample Letter

First, thank you very much for sending your emails full of information! I have thoughtfully read the materials and I am ever more grateful for your choice to admit me to SMU Law and to offer the generous scholarship. I am deeply humbled to be given such an offer.

Early in my law school application process, I prioritized SMU because of its reputable legal education, alumni network, and location. When I visited SMU this past Monday, I saw entirely positive attributes and I continue to hear positive things about SMU Law from alumni and current students.

During this application process, however, I have received generous scholarships from Baylor Law, Houston Law Center, and George Mason University Law. Each of these scholarships would reduce my effective annual tuition rate to zero. Moreover, the total annual cost of attendance for SMU is higher than all those schools after I factor in scholarships. The size of the difference in scholarship offers makes a choice to attend SMU almost impossible since I will be funding my own legal education and cost of living. If SMU's offer were comparable, I would regard SMU as my first choice.

The uncertain legal market and large debt I must accrue to attend law school force me to prioritize other offers. Nonetheless, if there is anything SMU can do to make its offer more comparable, I will happily reconsider SMU as a top choice!

Thank you for your time and effort during this application season. I hope to hear back from you and even meet you as a 1L SMU student!

Sincerely,

Sukanya Danuchix

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that person know that you will not be attending their law school this fall. Hint that money was the primary factor and state that you really loved the admissions officer's law school. The pretext of the email is that you are thanking that person for his or her time during the

application process. However, you really want the admissions officer to provide more scholarship money.

Scholarship Negotiation Samples Letters. The sample letters provided represent models, but do *not* copy and paste language from them. If multiple students copy and

paste phrases from my examples, then admissions officers will notice similarities across letters. This decreases the impact of your attempt to negotiate.

Ms. [Law School Admissions Officer],

Sample Letter

I first want to thank you for hosting me during Admitted Students Day on April 14th. Between the programming offered that day and the opportunity to sit in on Professor Kwok's Criminal Law class the following Tuesday, I gained a wealth of knowledge about the University of Houston Law Center. I am very grateful to have received a scholarship from UHLC. I appreciate your efforts during Admitted Students Day and the generous offer.

From the start of the application process, I have been dedicated to the University of Houston Law Center. Your program possesses the perfect combination of qualities I am looking for in my legal education. During this process, I have received additional offers from other programs as well. Tulane University Law School, Texas A&M University School of Law, and South Texas College of Law have all extended generous scholarship packages to me, such that my effective tuition rate at each will be different than at UHLC. I have outlined the effective tuition rate for all three years of law school considering scholarships below:

- **Texas A&M University School of Law: - \$1,146**
- **Tulane University Law School: \$ 67,662**
- **South Texas College of Law: \$ 46,800**
- **University of Houston College of Law: \$ 76,203**

I am doing my best to make the best financial decision for my future. The scholarship differences are making my choice of a law school increasingly difficult, especially as the reality of signing an enormous student loan promissory note approaches. If the financial reality was equal across programs, my decision to attend UHLC would be a quick and easy one.

Given the economic realities for graduate education, it is challenging to overlook differences in scholarship offers. If there is anything your school could do to make the offers more comparable, it would be incredibly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this letter. I look forward to hearing from you and hope to see you again soon.

Sincerely,

Sukanya Danuchix

enclosures: Tulane scholarship offer, Texas A&M scholarship offer, STCL scholarship offer

NOTES.

"EATR" refers to effective annual tuition rate.

"Target" refers to the law schools that you are trying to convince to award more scholarship money.

"OOS tuition" refers to out-of-state tuition.