Top Law Schools in India and Abroad

The verdict is clear: while Indian legal education has developed at undergraduate level, legal education at the graduate level needs to be upgraded.

Law is rapidly becoming one of the most desirable career choices in India, and this is in no small measure due to the advances in legal education made in the country with the establishment of the National Law Universities. Additionally, the booming economy has led to an increased demand for lawyers of calibre, and a good Indian lawyer today commands as high, if not better, a starting salary as peers from the IIMs and IITs. This story looks at the leaders of the pack in legal education, for undergraduate education in India and for graduate studies abroad.

The Best in India

In India, the last ten years have been the decade of the national law universities. This section examines...
the top law schools in India for undergraduate studies (at the LLB level), and seeks to place them in a tier system. The criteria used for this arrangement are:

- Industry Reputation
- Reputation amongst Foreign Law Schools
- Peer Reputation
- Academic Standards/Quality of Faculty
- Performance at International Moot Court Competitions
- Recruitment Statistics
- Location
- Student Community/Campus Life
- Hostel Quality
- IT Infrastructure/Library
- Quality of Entrance Process

Based on the criteria listed above, the top three tiers are:

**Tier 1:**
**The National Law School of India University, Bangalore**

Established at a time when traditional legal education was perhaps at its nadir in terms of public perception, the National Law School of India University transformed legal education in India with the new five-year law programme. The college boasts very good infrastructure (the recently-completed Shri Narayan Rao Melgiri Library is the current showpiece), good faculty, a superb track record at international competitions (winner, Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition, 1999), and a recruitment process that boasts a hundredpercent track record and international recruiters such as LinkLaters and McKinsey.

**The National Academy of Legal Studies and Research University of Law (N.A.L.S.A.R.), Hyderabad**

The second National Law University to be established in India, N.A.L.S.A.R. has more than given N.L.S.I.U. a run for its money. In the perception of many in the legal industry, students from this college are already pulling past their peers from Bangalore. With easily the best infrastructure among Indian law schools, excellent faculty, superb performances at international and national competitions, an industry-friendly administration, a Rhodes scholar in its first graduating batch, and a recruitment process that is as good as that of N.L.S.I.U. and N.U.J.S., N.A.L.S.A.R. is easily one of the top law schools in the country.

**The West Bengal National University of Juridical Science (N.U.J.S), Kolkata**

An academic initiative of one of India’s legal education pioneers, Prof. N.R. Madhava Menon, N.U.J.S. has, very early in its existence, come out of the shadows of its predecessors. The college has also made its mark at international competitions (winning the prestigious Willem C. Vis Moot, even before its first batch graduated). Its graduates have received some of the most prestigious scholarships at premier universities abroad, including the Felix Scholarship to Oxford University, and its placement process is at par with the other two colleges in the top tier, with international recruiters present here as well.

**Tier 2:**
**The National Law Institute University, Bhopal**

Modelled on the lines of the N.L.S.I.U., N.L.I.U. has excellent infrastructure, and is developing its student facilities further. Although there is still a lot of room for improvement in the placement process, the college has a good reputation at moot competitions across the country, and students have been accepted for graduate studies at institutions such as Harvard and the London School of Economics.

**The National Law University, Jodhpur**

N.L.U. was among the first to offer a choice of undergraduate degrees to its students (a choice that includes...
even a ‘BBA, LLB’ combination), and has made efforts at establishing a fairly good core faculty that includes experts in management, science, and policy sciences, in addition to law. The college has good infrastructure, and has had an above-average performance at moot court competitions in the country. Placements have been good (including at Allen & Overy, U.K.), but they still need to catch up with those at Tier-1 law schools.

**The Indian Law Society College of Law, Pune**

Set amid a sprawling green campus in the heart of Pune (the campus even boasts its own hill!), I.L.S. is among the oldest institutes imparting legal education in India. I.L.S. has had sterling alumni (three Chief Justices of India being among them), and student placements have been improving steadily for the last few years. The college also has a healthy track record at national moot court competitions. While academic innovations have failed to keep pace with some of the better National Law Universities, this may be because of the transition that the college has had to make from a traditional three-year system to the modern five-year law programme. The lack of an entrance examination process (entry is based upon scores in the school-leaving examinations) is also regarded as a disadvantage.

**Tier 3:**

**The Faculty of Law, Delhi University**

The Faculty of Law was established as a part of Delhi University in 1924, and has been a pioneer in the field...
A great LLM programme comprises of a dynamic class with diverse backgrounds, cutting edge faculty, wide-ranging array of courses, a school environment welcoming of foreign students and an experience that ultimately helps students upgrade their existing knowledge/skills and build strong transnational networks.

—Puja Sondhi, LLB (NLSIU 2002), LLM (NYU 2003), currently Chief of Staff, Teach for All, a Teach for America global initiative.
come increasingly difficult to decode of late), most Indian lawyers prefer to travel abroad only for their LLM and other graduate studies. The most popular destinations are the U.S. and U.K. though Singapore and Australia are rapidly gaining ground.

The most highly regarded LLM programmes, by jurisdiction, are:

**The U.S.**: 
1. Yale University
2. Harvard University
3. Stanford University
4. New York University
5. Columbia University
6. University of Chicago
7. University of Pennsylvania
8. University of California-Berkeley
9. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor
10. Duke University

While considering U.S. law schools, one must bear in mind that they are different from Indian law schools in the sense of having developed a reputation for certain areas of law; the Franklin Pierce Law Center, for example, is widely regarded as the best place to study Intellectual Property law and Yale is revered for Law and Policy related specialisations. Indian law schools have not yet developed such specialisations, and are more ‘generalist’ in nature.

**The U.K.**:
1. Oxford
2. Cambridge
3. London School of Economics
4. King’s College, London
5. University College of Law
6. Warwick
7. School of Oriental and African Studies
8. Edinburgh
9. Birmingham
10. Aberdeen

**Other Options**

National University of Singapore (NUS) and Monash University in Australia are also preferred destinations for law students from the leading Indian LLB programmes.

The verdict, therefore, is clear; while Indian legal education has made enviable progress in undergraduate studies since the days when law was regarded as a poor country cousin to medicine and engineering, vast changes are required to the manner in which graduate studies in law are conducted in this country. The LLM in India must come out of the shadow of the LLB in order for the Indian law schools to compete with the leading U.S. and U.K. law schools in terms of research and scholarship. Till then, the popular combination will remain the LLB in India combined with an LLM abroad.


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