



What to Know Before Applying:

**A Guide to
Earning Your
Master's in
Legal Studies**

Northeastern University



Historically, lawyers have been the prime source of legal expertise for businesses, offering services through private firms or as in-house counsel. Now, rather than relying solely on attorneys for legal advice, businesses are looking to non-lawyer professionals who possess industry-specific legal knowledge to help navigate complex legal and business issues.

These “non-lawyers” are particularly valuable in disciplines such as human resources and healthcare administration, where having an understanding of the industry’s common legal challenges can increase the efficiency and efficacy of their work. These individuals are strategic assets to organizations, helping to ensure compliance while fulfilling other responsibilities in parallel.

As businesses become increasingly dependent on these legal-savvy professionals, [the global law industry is transforming](#) from a narrow, lawyer-centric trade to a more interdisciplinary field. It is no longer only lawyers who can benefit from a deep understanding of the law.

In response to this shift in demand, the higher education industry has developed formalized programs, such as the [Master of Legal Studies \(MLS\) degree](#).

Find out how pursuing your MLS can help you advance both your organization and your career in today's competitive landscape.

MLS, JD, and LLM: What's the Difference?

Master of Legal Studies (MLS)

A Master of Legal Studies degree provides professionals with the skills to understand, navigate, and leverage legal concepts that arise in highly regulated industries.

Dan Urman, director of the Northeastern School of Law's online and hybrid programs, considers this degree a "law degree for non-lawyers." By earning a Master of Legal Studies, he says, professionals across many industries can learn to speak the language of the law to advance not only their careers, but the organizations they work for.

The MLS is a graduate degree in the study of law that provides a deeper dive than undergraduate coursework or paralegal training, but it does not qualify an individual to sit for the bar exam or be licensed to practice law. An MLS is ideal for individuals who may not want to be a practicing attorney, but would like to apply legal



knowledge to achieve goals in environments where law is too often seen as an obstacle. Unlike traditional law degrees, an MLS can be earned in as little as one to two years.

Juris Doctor (JD)

“JD” is the abbreviation for Juris Doctor or Doctor of Jurisprudence, which is the standard degree for individuals looking to become a legal attorney. This research- and academic-based degree takes approximately three years to complete, and is the graduate degree required to take the bar exam and practice law.

Master of Laws (LLM)

The LLM is an advanced degree for individuals who have already completed a law degree, at either a U.S. or foreign law school. Foreign lawyers attend LLM programs to learn about the legal system of a particular country they would like to practice in. In the U.S., practicing attorneys pursue an LLM to develop specialized knowledge in a particular practice area, such as taxation.

Who Should Pursue a Master of Legal Studies?

Master of Legal Studies programs are designed to enhance professional capabilities and employability in a range of disciplines, including business, human resources, healthcare, and technology. In each of these fields, it is recognized that the advanced study of law can provide a stronger foundation to support industry-specific responsibilities. Because the law touches every industry, however, legal training is a plus for virtually anyone who would like to enhance their professional value or redirect their career.

Urman says that anyone who works regularly with lawyers, laws, or regulations, such as accountants, realtors, business owners, healthcare professionals, court employees, or human resource specialists, would gain significant personal benefit from the degree.



In Northeastern's Master of Legal Studies program, students can select one of four concentrations—human resources, healthcare, business, or intellectual property—to help advance their careers in fields where legal knowledge is highly advantageous.



In 2016, more than 177,000 job postings requested candidates with legal skills at the graduate level.

The Benefits of a Master's in Legal Studies

As legal concepts become increasingly relevant for non-lawyer professionals, the number of students pursuing an MLS is increasing. According to a survey from the American Bar Association, student enrollment in non-JD programs increased by 39 percent between 2005 and 2012. Today, this means nearly one in seven students enrolled in law schools are not part of a traditional JD program, as non-lawyer professionals recognize the benefits an MLS degree can provide.

These benefits include:

Legal Knowledge

After completing an MLS program, you'll be equipped to better understand general legal concepts and specific laws related to your industry, enabling you to make a more significant impact at work. During your coursework, you'll examine case studies, laws, and regulations applicable to your industry, giving you the capacity to



understand, analyze, and interpret legal concepts as they are commonly applied in the real-world.

Communication Skills

Working with attorneys, you'll learn how to ask the right questions and gain communication and negotiation skills that will make you a more valuable employee and help you advance your career. You'll develop high-level communication skills in order to act as a liaison to various stakeholders in your organization, and you'll be able to translate legal concepts to both legal and non-legal audiences.

Competitive Advantage

This degree will empower you to proactively identify potential legal issues and save organizations from future litigations, making you a highly valuable asset to prospective companies. An MLS degree can help you stand out within your organization as someone who can interact with legal counsel, protect ideas and organizational assets, assess the need for outside legal advice, and work efficiently with changing legislation.

An MLS program will give you the skills to exert influence in your field and promote your company's goals efficiently and



effectively. In this way, the MLS is helpful for professionals who would like to continue a career in their chosen field but shift their focus to management responsibilities, by arming them with knowledge about the legal architecture and role of compliance within their industry.

Flexibility

In an MLS program, you have the unique opportunity to learn legal concepts without having to obtain a JD. Urman says many working professionals recognize they would benefit from additional legal knowledge, but may not want to or be able to attend law school, which can take up to three years. An MLS, he says, allows industry professionals to gain the critical legal knowledge that can help them advance their career in just a year or two.

Marketability

In every industry, companies face a constantly evolving regulatory framework that can be complicated and costly to manage. Failure to comply with industry regulations can amplify these costs in terms of time, money, market share, and reputation damage. To manage these risks, more than 177,000 businesses requested job candidates with legal



skills at the graduate level in 2016, according to [research by Burning Glass Technologies](#). Having these skills, you can increase your attractiveness to prospective employers.

With increased legal knowledge and the ability to speak the language of the law in your industry, you become a resource for your current and future employer. To be legally aware is to be empowered, Urman says. “Employees who are well-versed in legal studies can help detect and prevent legal problems before they become significant issues, saving their employers time and money.”

Global Perspective

In one class, Urman says, there can be a small business owner, a technologist, an insurance agent, and a healthcare administrator. The diversity in students’ backgrounds makes for robust classroom discussions and allows students to hear multiple perspectives based on real-world application of law and policy. During MLS coursework, you can build your global knowledge of the law and develop related networks that can benefit you throughout your career.

How Can You Apply an MLS in Your Career?

There is no single way to apply the knowledge and skills you'll gain from earning an MLS. The expertise you'll hone can instead be applied to a variety of industries. Depending on your specialization, you can focus your legal knowledge in the direction of your personal and career interests.

For instance, Urman says, one graduating class may produce someone researching legal issues for a healthcare organization, another performing regulatory analysis for a financial services company, an individual concerned with their company's cybersecurity and data privacy standards, and another student looking to evaluate their organization's anti-discrimination and HR policies. The applications of the degree, he says, are endless.

Here are some of the industries that rely heavily on these non-lawyer professionals to keep organizations running smoothly:

Human Resources (HR)

Today's HR managers work in a complex environment that involves laws and legislation governing employee rights and employer obligations. A key function of their role is to effectively manage the flow of employees to and from an organization while remaining compliant with these ever-changing regulations. In order to do this, they must proactively minimize legal risks. As such, there's an increasing demand for HR professionals who possess an understanding of [common legal issues in the workplace](#).

HR managers often face on-the-spot decisions that have legal consequences. Earning an MLS degree arms these professionals with the knowledge and confidence to make these decisions and to know when to contact outside counsel. Common legal topics that HR professionals encounter include:

- Workplace discrimination and protected class regulations
- Affirmative action
- The Americans with Disabilities Act
- Sexual harassment
- Rightful termination and employment eligibility
- Wage, benefit, pension, and labor laws
- Health and disability insurance benefits

- Workplace safety
- Military, medical, and family leave
- Workplace violence

Common human resources jobs that frequently rely on legal expertise include:

Human Resource Manager

Human resource managers plan, implement, and evaluate human resource and employee policies, programs, and practices. These individuals help ensure the company's legal compliance by implementing federal and state requirements.

Average Salary:
\$106,910

U.S. Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2017

Labor Relations Manager

Labor relations specialists interpret and administer labor contracts for employees. Common legal issues for these individuals include wage and salary disputes, pensions, and union and management practices.

Average Salary:
\$91,000

PayScale.com, 2018

Healthcare

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, job opportunities for health service professionals are expected to grow 20 percent by 2026. Major responsibilities of these individuals will include adapting processes to conform to changes in healthcare laws and technology.

It comes as no surprise, then, that 31 percent more healthcare employers are now requesting candidates with compliance skills at the graduate level, according to research by Burning Glass Technologies. With a master's degree in legal studies, healthcare professionals can gain the skills to understand and interpret the complex legal issues in their field to stay in demand.

Legal areas of interest for healthcare professionals include:

- Affordable Care Act
- Healthcare fraud
- Medicaid and Medicare abuse
- Ethical and legal obligations regarding patient privacy (HIPPA)
- Electronic health records (EHR) and protected health information (PHI)

Some healthcare careers that frequently intersect with legal matters include:

Healthcare Administrator

Medical and health services administrators plan, direct, and coordinate medical and health services.

Average Salary:
\$96,540

U.S. Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2017

Nursing Home Administrator

Gerontology is a growing field that intersects closely with a discipline known as elder law. Common legal matters include property law, estates, end of life rights, social security, and Medicare/Medicaid issues.

Average Salary:
\$85,470

PayScale.com, 2018

Legal Nurse

Legal nurses help bridge the gap between medicine and law, lending their combination of legal and medical expertise to assist in legal cases involving medical malpractice, wrongful death, and injury. The job outlook for legal nurses shows estimated growth of 21 percent—a much higher growth rate than is predicted for most other professions in the U.S.

Legal Nurse

Average Salary:
\$96,540

U.S. Bureau of Labor
Statistics, 2017

Health Information Manager

These professionals organize and manage large hordes of health information data. This is a rapidly growing field, with the BLS predicting employment growth of 13 percent by 2026.

Health Information Manager

Average Salary:
\$53,557

PayScale.com, 2018

Business

In business, there are a myriad of roles that have compliance components and responsibilities with legal implications. Advanced legal knowledge and the ability to understand legal vernacular can give you an advantage at the negotiating table. Because while many business decisions come with potential risks, having a sound legal foundation can give you confidence in your decisions, even in the face of potential litigation.

The legal knowledge gained from a business-focused MLS degree can apply across many industries. In the real estate industry, for example, brokers and sales agents with legal experience are considered extremely valuable. They regularly work with attorneys, so their ability to understand and translate contractual and legal issues proactively makes them more helpful to their clients.

In finance and banking, compliance knowledge can help your organization prepare for audits and avoid government sanctions. For startup founders and small business owners, a legal background is invaluable.



These individuals come across many legal issues, from incorporating a business, to hiring employees, and protecting their assets.

Professionals who understand these law areas will have a competitive advantage in the corporate business world:

- Tax law
- Immigration
- Corporate finance
- International trade
- Trademark
- Defamation
- Business registration and licensing requirements
- Consumer rights
- Advertising and marketing laws

Intellectual Property (IP)

We live in a startup culture that values innovative business models, products, and technologies. As new, successful ideas and products are developed, companies must find a way to protect their assets from competition. Business professionals who are party to domestic and international business transactions, advise



on the purchase, sale, or licensing of IP assets, or make packaging, franchising, and trade decisions all could benefit from the legal foundation established by an MLS.

Technology is another burgeoning industry for those pursuing an advanced degree in legal studies. Individuals with backgrounds in engineering, science, technology, software development, and mathematics also have increasing opportunities to work at the intersection of STEM, law, and business, as it is projected that there will be [six million cybersecurity job](#) openings with U.S. companies that operate globally by 2019.

An MLS degree can teach graduates to communicate across these disciplines, navigating the legal and regulatory structures that exist in their professional settings, while protecting and managing their IP. With the expertise from an MLS, graduates can offer employers of all sizes—from startups to corporations—sophisticated knowledge and skills to manage the increasing data privacy and cybersecurity risks and help protect against legal exposure and liability.

Important legal topics in IP law include:

- Patent law
- Trademarks
- Trade secrets
- Copyright infringement
- Social media communication
- Data privacy

Additional Degree Applications

As there is no clearly singularly defined career path for MLS graduates, many work in other disciplines not listed above, such as:

- Entertainment or sports management
- Publishing
- Insurance and loss adjustment
- Finance and accounting
- Commercial and residential real estate
- Legal software development
- Mediation and arbitration
- Criminal justice
- Social work and human services

Where Can I Go for More Information?

If you're looking to explore additional legal resources for non-lawyers, Urman suggests getting involved with industry-specific organizations, such as the [Health Care Compliance Association \(HCCA\)](#) or the [Professionals in Human Resources Association \(PIHRA\)](#). These associations offer training, networking, and other resources to compliance officers and staff in a wide range of professional responsibilities.

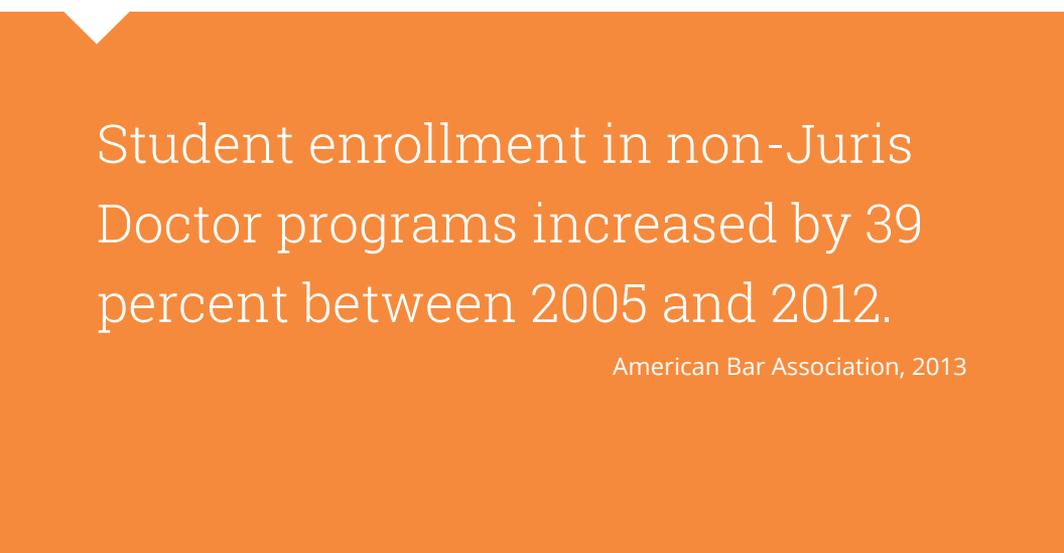
Urman also notes that compliance is a constantly evolving discipline. For this reason, he says, it's critical for compliance professionals in all industries to stay up-to-date on the latest trends and regulations affecting their line of work.

To do this, he suggests attending specialized, industry-specific conferences aimed at compliance professionals



looking to increase their legal fluency. Some popular conferences include:

- [HR and Employment Law Conference](#) for business owners and HR professionals
- The Society for Human Resource Management's [annual conference](#) for HR professionals looking to learn more about compliance and legislation in their field
- HCCA's healthcare-compliance [events](#) across the globe.



Student enrollment in non-Juris Doctor programs increased by 39 percent between 2005 and 2012.

American Bar Association, 2013

An Insider Perspective

Here's what industry insiders have to say about how earning a Master of Legal Studies furthered their careers:

“ **Tiffany Haines, MLS '18**

The MLS Program has provided me with a unique perspective to explore various complex industries and fields of law. The skills and knowledge I have gained give me the confidence to grow personally and professionally. I am ready to pursue my Doctor in Executive Business Leadership and influence change in one of the most challenging and rewarding communities of business.

The law is ever-changing and it is essential to know how to find the current and valid resources to stay informed. There are many times that I can learn a new concept while studying for class one night, and apply the exact information the next day at work. My professors have provided me with tools to research applicable legal material, analyze it and conclude. I look forward to strengthening these skills in my future classes.

“ **Nicole Solomos, MLS '18**

The MLS program has enlightened me and is guiding me to change my career and become more focused on health law. My hope is to attend law school once I obtain my MLS. I believe by background in science will aid in how I represent the heart of the issue, advocating for those who struggle with their health. I understand the pain that comes with each disease, and hope to fight for my clients, leaving them to only worry about their health.



Are you ready learn the language of the law to advance your career?

To learn more about the Northeastern experience, including its [Master of Legal Studies](#) program, visit northeastern.edu/graduate or [connect with our team](#) to receive personalized advice.

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