
Law Review Publishing

In the US, the highest form of legal scholarship is published in law reviews (sometimes called law journals) that are housed at university-based law schools. Although well understood by legal scholars, the law review system is unique when compared to academic publishing in other disciplines and therefore this brief introduction is for those outside the field.

■ What are the top journals in law?

There is an inexact hierarchy based on the general reputation of the law school. The closest categorical ranking divides law schools into 4 different tiers, with the top 50 (of the 200 accredited law schools) being “tier 1” law schools.

■ What is so unique about law reviews that precludes a short list of top journals?

Law reviews associated with the top tier law schools typically accept for publication approximately fifteen unsolicited research articles per year and most have a 1% acceptance rate or lower (many with an acceptance rate of 0.5% or lower). These law reviews publish articles in all fields of the law (not just fields related to business law, but many other fields as well, such as criminal law, torts, civil rights, civil procedure, etc). A recent study found that fewer than 15% of the articles in law reviews relate to business topics.¹ This means that there is an average of 2.25 business related articles published per journal per year.

For comparison, consider a management or strategy scholar seeking to publish an article in one of just three well-recognized top journals: Academy of Management Journal, Strategic Management Journal, and Organization Science. On average, these journals publish a combined total of 186 articles per year.² Thus, it would take over 80 law reviews to create publishing opportunities equal to just those three publications.

The above refers to the general law reviews published by law schools. Some law schools also publish law reviews focused on a field of law, which includes journals focused on fields of special interest to business law scholars, such as corporate law, employment law, intellectual property, environmental law, public policy, gender, and others. However, these journals publish fewer issues (2 – 4 issues per year) than general law reviews, which means fewer research articles per year. These journals are highly competitive, well-known, and well-respected; thus, they are also considered top journals in those fields.

■ Where do legal scholars seek to publish?

We publish in the law reviews associated with tier 1 schools, both general law reviews and field journals. Publication in these journals is highly competitive, highly respected in the legal academy, and has the greatest impact on legal scholarship, as well as on regulation, legislation, and court decisions.

¹ Based on data from William J. Turnier, *Tax (and a Lot of Other Scholars) Need Not Apply: The Changing Venue for Scholarship*, 50 Journal of Legal Education 189, 195 (2000).

² In 2009, the Academy of Management Journal and Organization Science both had 6 issues with an average of 9.5 articles per issue, and the Strategic Management Journal had 12 issues with an average of 6 articles per issue.