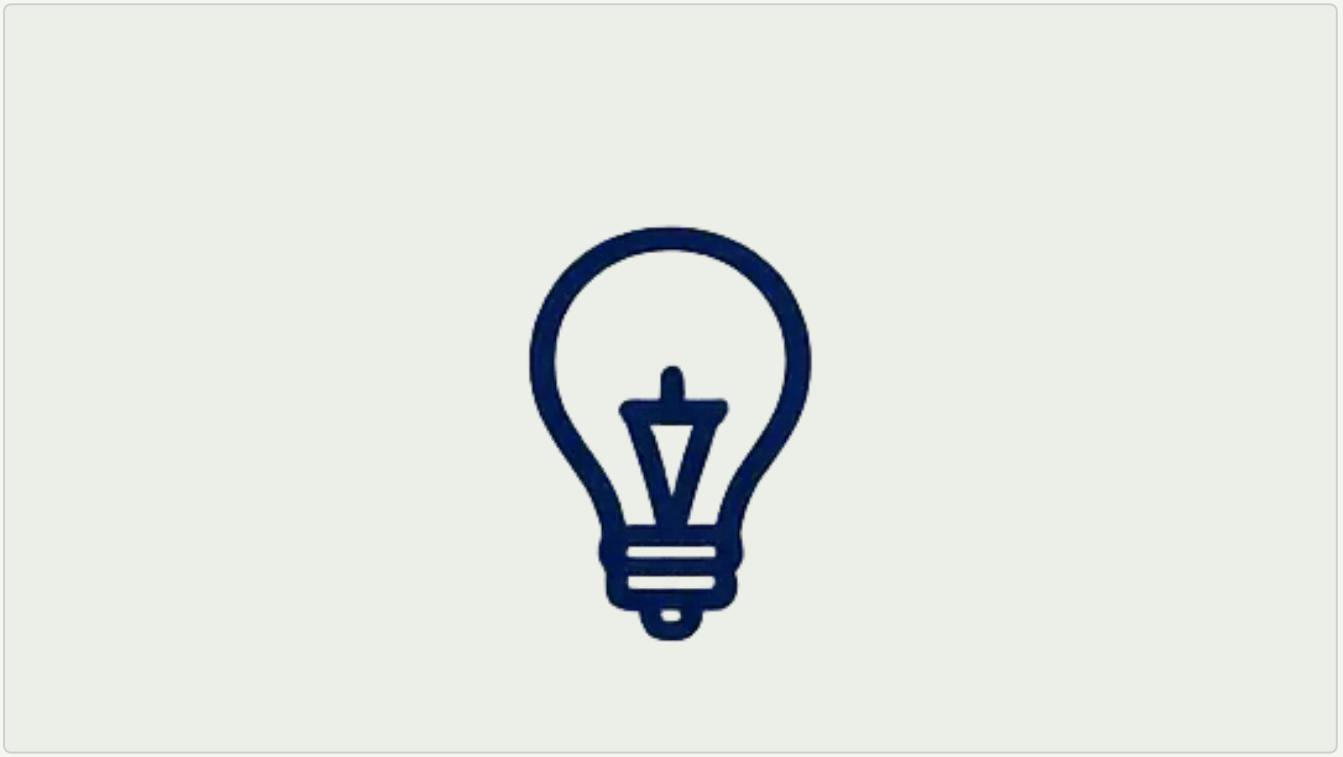
RESOURCE

Best NLUs in India 2026: Complete NIRF Ranking, Fees & Cutoff Guide for CLAT Aspirants

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CLAT 2027 · NLU Guide Best NLUs in India 2026:

Best NLUs in India: The Complete NIRF Ranking,

Twenty-five National Law Universities, one CLAT rank card, and dozens of trade-offs between prestige, fees, location, and placements. Here is a clear-eyed, rank-wise breakdown to help you build a smart preference list.

Updated July 2026 11 min read UG & PG CLAT Aspirants

25NLUs under CLAT

26Total NLUs in India

4,500+UG seats nationwide
#1NLSIU Bengaluru (NIRF)
Every CLAT aspirant eventually asks the same question: *which NLU should I actually aim for?* The honest answer depends on your rank, your budget, and what you want out of law school — litigation exposure, a corporate law placement, or simply the most affordable respectable degree. This guide walks through the NIRF-anchored pecking order, real fee structures, closing CLAT ranks from the last counselling cycle, and placement data so you can set realistic targets instead of chasing name recognition alone.

How NLUs Are Actually Ranked

The Ministry of Education's **NIRF (National Institutional Ranking Framework)** is the closest thing India has to an official law school ranking. It scores institutions on teaching & learning resources, research & professional practice, graduation outcomes, outreach & inclusivity, and perception. Note the NIRF 2026 list was not finalised as of this writing — most portals are still working off **NIRF 2025** data, and NLSIU Bengaluru has held the No. 1 spot for roughly a decade running.
Rankings matter, but for a five-year commitment, weigh them alongside placement consistency, fee-to-outcome ratio, and — if you qualify for a home-state quota — the specific advantage that gives you at your own state's NLU.

Tier 1: The Establishment

Tier 1 — consistently top 5, hardest to crack
NIRF #1Est. 1987
NLSIU Bengaluru

- India's first and most prestigious NLU
- 5-yr fee: ~₹25 lakh
- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 120
- Strong Rhodes Scholar & judiciary pipeline

NIRF #2AILET, not CLAT
NLU Delhi

- Only NLU outside the CLAT Consortium — uses AILET
- 5-yr fee: ~₹21 lakh
- Median salary ~₹18 LPA (among the highest)
- Just 110 BA LLB seats; Supreme Court proximity

NIRF #4-5Corporate + Intl law
NALSAR Hyderabad

- 5-yr fee: ~₹15.35 lakh
- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 250
- ~100% placement, median salary ₹18 LPA
- Strong South India base for corporate law

NIRF #6-7Highest median salary
WBNUJS Kolkata

- 5-yr fee: ~₹17 lakh
- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 400
- Median salary ₹20 LPA — highest among all NLUs
- Excellent law-firm alumni network

Tier 2: The Strong Contenders

Tier 2 — excellent outcomes, wider rank window
NIRF #8Fastest riser
GNLU Gandhinagar

- 5-yr fee: ~₹14 lakh
- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 550
- Sharp upward NIRF movement in recent years

EstablishedDesert campus
NLU Jodhpur

- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 650

- Strong moot court and research culture
- Good balance of fees and brand value

North India hubValue pick
RGNUL Patiala

- CLAT closing rank (Gen): ~top 1100
- Large seat intake (169 in final year)
- Placement rate varies more due to seat volume

ConsistentCentral India
NLIU Bhopal

- Recognised research output
- Reasonable fee structure
- Steady placement track record

Rising names to watch
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HPNLU Shimla and MNLU Mumbai have shown noticeable jumps in median salary and placement percentage in the latest NIRF data submissions — worth considering if your rank sits just outside the traditional top tier.

CLAT Closing Ranks at a Glance

These are indicative General-category closing ranks from the most recent counselling cycle. Ranks shift every year with the difficulty of the paper and number of applicants — always cross-check live data during CLAT 2026 counselling.

NLU	NIRF Rank	~5-Yr Fee	Gen. Closing Rank	Median Salary
NLSIU Bengaluru	1	₹25 L	~120	High (2nd highest)
NLU Delhi*	2-3	₹21 L	AILET-based	₹18 LPA

NLU	NIRF Rank	~5-Yr Fee	Gen. Closing Rank	Median Salary
NALSAR Hyderabad	4-5	₹15.35 L	~250	₹18 LPA
WBNUJS Kolkata	6-7	₹17 L	~400	₹20 LPA
GNLU Gandhinagar	8	₹14 L	~550	Strong, rising
NLU Jodhpur	Tier 2	Moderate	~650	Solid
RGNUL Patiala	Tier 2	Moderate	~1100	Variable (large batch)

*NLU Delhi is outside the CLAT Consortium and admits only through AILET.NALSAR University of Law
NALSAR University of LawNALSAR University of Law



Building Your NLU Preference List: 5 Practical Rules

1. List 15–20 NLUs, not just your dream three

Seat allotment during CLAT counselling runs on your preference order. A short list built only on “dream colleges” can leave you with no seat at all if cutoffs move

against you.

2. Use a three-layer strategy
Split your list into dream picks (above your realistic rank), realistic picks (matching your rank), and safe picks (comfortably within your rank). Order them dream → realistic → safe.

3. Don't dismiss BBA LLB over BA LLB
A BBA LLB from a Tier 1 NLU generally carries more weight than a BA LLB from a newer one — the institution's reputation and placement record matter more than the exact stream.

4. Factor in home-state quota
If your state has its own NLU, the reserved-seat cutoff there is often significantly more forgiving than the open-category cutoff elsewhere — a genuine strategic lever.

5. Stay active through every round
Significant rank movement happens in rounds 3–5 and spot rounds. Don't lock in early out of anxiety — track your options until the counselling window closes.

Quick Check: Test Yourself
1. Which NLU is the only one that does NOT admit through CLAT?

A. NALSAR Hyderabad

B. NLU Delhi

C. WBNUJS Kolkata

D. GNLU Gandhinagar

Correct Answer: B
NLU Delhi is not a member of the CLAT Consortium and conducts its own entrance exam, AILET (All India Law Entrance Test), for UG, PG, and PhD admissions.
2. As per recent NIRF-linked data, which NLU recorded the highest median placement salary?

A. NLSIU Bengaluru

B. NLU Delhi

C. WBNUJS Kolkata

D. RGNUL Patiala

Correct Answer: C

WBNUJS Kolkata recorded a median salary of around ₹20 LPA, edging out even NLSIU and NLU Delhi in this metric — a reminder that rank and salary don't always move together.

3. NIRF law rankings weigh which of the following parameters?

A. Teaching, learning & resources only

B. Placement package only

C. Teaching & resources, research & professional practice, graduation outcomes, outreach, and perception

D. Faculty count only

Correct Answer: C

NIRF uses a composite of five broad parameters, not a single metric — which is why a college can rank high overall while lagging on one specific factor like median salary.

Model Mains Answer (GS/Essay Relevance)

Question

“Rankings alone are an inadequate basis for choosing a professional institution.” Critically examine this statement in the context of legal education in India. (150 words)

Rankings like NIRF offer a useful, standardised comparison of teaching quality, research output, and institutional perception, and they remain the most transparent public benchmark available to law aspirants in India. However, they compress diverse strengths — faculty mentorship, regional placement networks, cost of education, and cultural fit — into a single composite score, which can obscure real trade-offs. A newer NLU may offer lower fees and strong niche placements while ranking below an older, costlier institution on aggregate metrics. Similarly, median salary figures can diverge sharply from overall rank, as seen when a lower-ranked NLU outperforms a top-ranked one on graduate outcomes. A sound institutional choice therefore requires triangulating rankings with fee structures, placement consistency, location, and quota eligibility, rather than treating a single ranking figure as a complete verdict on quality.1. Quality of Legal Education
NLUs follow a rigorous, case-method and seminar-style pedagogy, unlike many traditional law colleges that rely on rote learning. Faculty often include practicing lawyers, judges, and researchers, giving students exposure to real-world legal thinking.

2. Placement Records

Top NLUs (NLSIU Bangalore, NALSAR Hyderabad, NLU Delhi, WBNUJS Kolkata, NLU Jodhpur, etc.) have strong placement pipelines into:

- Tier-1 law firms (AZB & Partners, Cyril Amarchand Mangaldas, Trilegal, Khaitan & Co.)
- Corporate legal departments
- Litigation chambers of senior advocates
- Judicial clerkships with High Courts and the Supreme Court

3. Five-Year Integrated Programme

The BA LLB (Hons.) format lets students complete both a bachelor’s degree and law degree in five years, saving time compared to a 3-year LLB after a separate bachelor’s.

4. Networking and Alumni Strength

NLU alumni networks are deeply embedded in India's legal, judicial, and policy ecosystem — useful for mentorship, internships, and career referrals.

5. Moot Courts, Internships, and Exposure

NLUs have strong moot court cultures (Philip C. Jessup, Willem C. Vis, etc.) and structured internship programs with law firms, NGOs, courts, and government bodies — building practical skills alongside academics.

6. Diverse Specializations

Many NLUs offer electives/specializations in areas like IP law, constitutional law, international law, corporate law, and human rights law, letting students tailor their legal education.

7. Brand Value and Recognition

An NLU degree carries strong recognition with employers, judiciary, and higher education institutions abroad (useful for LLM applications to Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, etc.)

8. Government and Policy Career Pathways

NLU graduates are well-represented in judicial services, UPSC (especially with a legal edge in GS-II and Essay), legislative drafting, and policy think tanks.

Frequently Asked Questions

Is NLSIU Bengaluru worth its higher fee compared to other Tier 1 NLUs?

For students with a CLAT rank inside the top 120–150, most counsellors consider it worth it given the consistent NIRF #1 position and strongest overall alumni network, though NALSAR and WBNUJS offer comparable or better cost-to-outcome ratios.

Can I get into an NLU without CLAT?

A few routes exist outside the main CLAT cycle: NLSIU offers a 3-year LLB via NLSAT, and some NLUs like NLU Odisha and NLU Visakhapatnam run separate admission processes for their 3-year LLB programmes.

Does a lower-ranked NLU guarantee a worse career outcome?

Not necessarily. Placement data shows meaningful variation — some mid-tier NLUs post strong median salaries, while a few top-tier ones with larger seat intakes report lower overall placement percentages. Institutional reputation still matters, but check placement consistency rather than rank alone.

How many rounds of CLAT counselling should I expect?

Historically there have been multiple rounds plus spot rounds, with real movement continuing through rounds 3–5. Staying active in the process matters more than locking in early.

Building your NLU preference list?

Rank realistically, budget honestly, and don’t let a single ranking number make the decision for you.

#CLAT2027#NLU#NIRFRanking#LawAspirants#LegalEducationIndia