



Law as a Career

Lawyers are often called upon to fill many varied and complex roles. At various times they function as advocates, social planners and mediators. Because society turns most frequently to the legal profession when it looks for a method of balancing changing conditions and traditional values, lawyers are social planners. Lawyers play a weighty role in our society and have a tremendous responsibility, not only to the citizenry which they serve, but also to the law itself, and to the concept of justice, to which they must be committed.

Pre-Law Education

The student's undergraduate GPA and his/her score on the *Law School Admissions Test* (LSAT) are the primary factors on which law schools base their admissions decisions. The importance of these factors cannot be overestimated. Assuming that you qualify in this manner for admissions, your undergraduate course of study plays a role in preparing for the study and practice of law.

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Additional Information

Visit the Government Department web page at www.csus.edu/govt/ and click on Pre-Law Advising.

UNDERGRADUATE PROGRAM

It would be unwise and, perhaps, impossible to prescribe a specific course of study and assert that it is the best one can receive in preparation for entering law school. Therefore, there is no established major for pre-law students. In 1988, the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) expressed the view that the "quality of education is concerned with the development of basic skills and insights. It thus involves education for: 1) comprehension and expression in words; 2) critical understanding of the human institutions and values with which the law deals; 3) creative power in thinking; 4) knowledge of computers and word processing." While no one major embraces all of these characteristics and, while personal development in these areas is an individualistic effort molded to one's particular strengths, weaknesses, and interests, the University offers numerous courses which give training in these skills. The following areas of study encompass these recommendations and suggest courses which prepare students for the study and practice of law.

- **Business:** When an individual becomes a lawyer, he/she also becomes a member of the business community; hence, classes in business are beneficial to the pre-law student. Competence in this field can make the difference between an organized, successful lawyer and a bewildered, ineffective one. Furthermore, the practical judgment one develops in business classes frequently allows one to penetrate the legal maze and to quickly reach the important issues of any case.
- **Computer Science:** In an age where information storage and problem solving is increasingly accomplished by computers, a lawyer cannot afford to venture into the future without a working knowledge of computers.
- **Criminal Justice:** The Division of Criminal Justice includes three law courses in its core curriculum and offers the option of additional law and constitutional theory courses among its electives. The department offers intern placements in law related positions. Law courses are instructed in the case study method used in law schools. This instruction allows a student to determine their level of interest and aptitude for legal studies while still an undergraduate. Several members of the teaching faculty are attorneys, and law courses are taught by attorneys licensed by the bar. In addition, the major in criminal justice offers a general orientation to the justice field and provides students a suggested pre-law course of study engineered to provide an excellent foundation for the study of law.

- **Economics:** As the AALS asserts: "Economics is a science that calls upon the student to master patterns of thought, to explore questions of causation and to probe potentials for solutions." Since many legal problems ultimately involve economic issues, a study of economics will benefit the pre-law student.
- **History and Government:** We are a product of yesterday in our society, our customs and our laws. Without a general understanding of history and how it relates to our present state, the lawyer cannot appreciate the intimate relationship laws have with our culture. By failing to comprehend the relationship between our society, its governmental institutions, and its laws, one risks not understanding certain laws intelligible only in terms of their historical and institutional significance.
- **Logic and Mathematics:** Since the law is abstract, those considering law school need training in the reasoning powers essential for dealing with abstract concepts. The study of logic and mathematics provides the practice needed for developing the ability to think logically.
- **Oral and Written Communication:** The lawyer is primarily a communicator; whether in the courtroom or in the legislature, as a counselor or negotiator, he/she must know how to communicate on many levels with precision and style.
- **Philosophy:** A sizable number of students of philosophy go on to law school and there are now many successful philosopher-lawyers. This is no mere coincidence. Legal questions often raise issues of profound philosophical import. The two fields share many of the same methods of reasoning and argumentation.
- The **Philosophy Department's Major Concentration** in Applied Ethics and Law is specifically designed to prepare prospective students for the intellectual rigors of law school.
- **Science and Engineering:** Students who concentrate in the sciences or in engineering develop the ability to think clearly and concisely. The rigor and discipline required in these courses is valuable training for the law school years.
- **Social Sciences:** Since both law and social science deal with behavior and its implications, lawyers draw on the social sciences for an understanding of human behavior. Applying the tools of the other social sciences to the practice of law enhances the effectiveness of the attorney.

Obviously, one cannot receive degrees in all of these areas; it is suggested that the pre-law student choose a major which interests him/her and supplement this curriculum with as many courses from other areas as possible. In addition to this, the pre-law student should read widely in areas outside the major.

Pre-Law Student Organization

The Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity International has been formed by pre-law students to meet the needs of students interested in preparing for a career in law.

Grades

Good grades are essential to those interested in being accepted at a well regarded school. However, it should be clear that one does not benefit from being so grade conscious that the major criterion for course selection becomes the likelihood of receiving an "A." Tough, demanding professors and courses are essential for training the mind to perform well under the pressures of law school. Challenging, thought-provoking courses are the best way to prepare for the LSAT, for success in law school and as a member of the legal profession. Moreover, when undergraduate transcripts are viewed by law school admission committees, a great deal of attention is given to the difficulty and the desirability of the courses chosen by the student. For law school admission, grades of "I" (Incomplete) or "W" (Withdrawal) are not included in computing the overall GPA. However a grade of "NC" (No Credit) is counted as an "F," and if a course is repeated, the two grades are averaged.

LSAT

The LSAT is the second major factor considered by law schools in determining admissibility. The test measures abilities and skills related to problem identification, analysis, logical reasoning and reading. In addition, the LSAT includes a written essay, copies of which will be sent to individual law schools to enable them to evaluate a candidate's writing ability. Because many law schools consider the LSAT as influential, or more influential, than the GPA, it is important that students prepare for the test very carefully.

There are a number of preparation courses available for students intending to take the LSAT. Students are advised to investigate particular review classes and to assess their ability to prepare successfully for the LSAT without benefit of these often costly courses. The best LSAT preparation materials are those published by the Law School Data Assembly Services. Information booklets are available in the Government Department office.

Letters of Recommendation

Most law schools require between one to three letters of recommendation from individuals who can comment on the applicant's potential as a law student. The individuals selected to write letters of recommendation should be able to comment extensively on the applicant's academic capabilities. And, obviously, the evaluation should be a positive one. Letters should also discuss the applicant's ability to comprehend, to communicate and to critically analyze concepts.

Personal Statement

Most law schools require the applicant to submit a personal statement in which the applicant tells the law school something about the applicant's background, the reasons why the applicant wants to study law, and, in some instances, what the applicant hopes to do following law school.