

## Law School

This handout addresses making the decision to attend law school, preparing for law school, and includes a listing of resources available at the Career Services Center and through the Internet.

### **Do I Want to Go to Law School?**

This is a difficult question to answer. Some people claim that they knew they wanted to be a lawyer since they were quite young, but most struggled with this decision up until the time they applied to law school. In fact, many law students and even recent graduates are still unsure of the answer to this question.

While it is impossible to know for certain the answer to the question "Do I Want To Be A Lawyer?" before entering law school, there is some value in talking with practicing lawyers, attending criminal and civil trials, attending law school classes or even working as a messenger at a law firm. The value of these activities is in gaining some insight into what a lawyer does; however, it will be somewhat of a superficial view of the legal profession, highlighting the excitement and overlooking the real complexity, difficulty and demands of the job. Television shows dealing with lawyers have perfected this superficial view of the legal profession.

One's decision-making process can also be skewed by the difficulty of defining what a lawyer does on a day-to-day basis. There is no "typical lawyer." The legal profession today has embraced specialization to a significant extent. There are differences in workload, client contact, work environment, compensation and overall quality of life, depending upon whether one specializes in criminal law, family law, personal injury or defective product litigation, trust and estate law, business transactions and litigation, tax law, employment or labor law, environmental law, patent and trademark law, civil rights litigation, or in other specialized areas. There are many "professions" within the profession of law.

The only meaningful way of determining whether you may want to be a lawyer is to look at the type of skills that a person must develop and ultimately become proficient at in order to be a competent lawyer in any area. Even though there are significant differences in the various practice areas of law, the essential skills required of any lawyer are very much the same.

Ask yourself the following questions:

### **Do I enjoy working closely with people regarding significant events or issues affecting their lives?**

The practice of law is a "people business." Lawyers do not work merely on "cases" or research interesting legal issues. A lawyer makes a living by helping people who have come for aid and advice regarding personal, criminal, social, or business related problems. Necessarily, a client already has concluded that he or she cannot solve the problem on his or her own. The client knows it will be necessary to divulge very personal or private facts to a lawyer.

Personal and confidential relations are created. The client most often will not perceive the problem as merely "ordinary," but as a personal or business crisis. A lawyer must enjoy working with people and must derive specific satisfaction from helping people work through difficult, threatening, and significant events in their lives.

**Can I empathize with a client's situation, yet have the ability to objectively analyze the issues and their consequences in light of the existing law?**

The main task of a lawyer is to solve a client's problem. People come to a lawyer for help in solving their problems. A lawyer must be able to empathize in order to properly understand the needs and concerns of his or her client, but a lawyer must develop objective, analytical skills to identify the potential legal issues that must be addressed and then to formulate a plan to reach a result that is consistent with the desires of the client, as well as the requirements of the law.

**Do I enjoy educating or teaching a person about a subject about which he or she may be ignorant or have significant misconceptions?**

We live in a very complex society which has required the development of very far-reaching, technical laws. Understandably, most clients are either wholly uninformed about the existing law or have significant misunderstandings of what the law prohibits or requires. A lawyer must be able to educate competently his or her clients. This teaching task is complicated by the fact that the "student" has a direct interest in the subject area. The degree of comprehension will be affected by the client's vested interest, an unwillingness to hear the bad news, a strong disagreement about the goals of the law, etc. The need to educate is critical, though, so that a client can make an informed choice about how to proceed. Tact is required in telling a prospective client that his or her view of the applicable rules is wrong.

**Am I able to articulate in a clear and concise manner my analysis of a problem to others, whether it be verbally or in writing?**

Two vital skills of a lawyer are the ability to speak and write in a clear, articulate manner. Since a lawyer's job is to solve problems, the key to success is the ability to convince others of the correctness of one's analysis of the factual problem, the requirements of the law, and the best result that can be reached for all concerned parties. A lawyer must be able to educate and convince his or her clients, other lawyers, juries, judges or mediators. He or she must have the ability to perform this task equally well by speaking or writing. One may be a genius, but it will be to no avail if others cannot understand what he or she is saying. The skill and art of verbal communication is an important key to success of becoming a competent lawyer.

**Do I enjoy being an advocate? Can I argue both sides of the question with enthusiasm?**

A lawyer's personal satisfaction must come from helping others achieve a desired result or avoid or ameliorate the consequences of a difficult situation. A lawyer must provide the client with sufficient information concerning all possible alternatives to allow the client to make an informed decision. Ultimately, the client must decide what is best for himself or herself. The lawyer must be able to accept and advance the client's decision, even if he or she would not have personally chosen the particular course of action, so long as the attorney stays within the ethical parameters of the Code of Professional Responsibility. Whether one is writing a will, negotiating a contract, litigating a lawsuit, or settling a divorce, a lawyer is advocating the personal needs, desires, and goals of the client. One need not be flamboyant or overreaching to be an excellent lawyer, only capable of persuasively articulating concrete positions.

**Do I like detail work? Do I enjoy searching for the facts of a situation?**

The practice of law is a jungle filled with pockets of quicksand for the sloppy, lazy lawyer. The law has made great strides in eliminating unnecessary requirements of form to allow cases to be resolved on the merits rather than by one's ability or failure to follow rules of procedure. However, rules of form, practice and procedure are necessary for the orderly conduct of business within the law. A lawyer must pay strict attention to facts and detail, for detail work is a significant aspect of the practice of law.

## **Do I like to read and study?**

A lawyer never stops reading the law. From the day one enters law school until the last day before retirement, a lawyer must keep abreast of the ever-changing law. Whether it be statutes, agency rules and regulations, or court decisions, a lawyer may never assume the law remains static. Each and every competent lawyer must dedicate a significant number of hours on a regular basis to educating himself or herself. This study time may be added on top of the many hours spent in the law library completing legal research on very specific issues of law pertaining to particular cases.

## **Conclusion**

How many questions did you answer "yes"? Did you enthusiastically say "yes" or were you thinking, "If I have to do it, I will?" To be a competent lawyer, it is not necessary that you have all of these skills now nor that you have presently developed them to a high degree. You will have plenty of time to do that. Utilizing these types of skills on a weekly, daily or hourly basis is, however, the "life" of a lawyer.

Television dramas portraying attorneys are correct on one point. The practice of law is exciting, meaningful, and rewarding. You will have the ability to beneficially and significantly affect the lives of many people throughout your career. You will be exposed to a variety of people, events, and areas of knowledge that you might not otherwise have experienced within the confines of your own personal life. The practice of law is a broadening and educational experience. However, the practice of law is not for the lethargic, the lazy or the clock watcher. It is an ongoing, never-ending, demanding life experience. As is true in any area of life, whether you are in medicine, science, education or law, your attitude towards life and your work is all important. In simple words, you should be one who truly enjoys learning and who strives to do all that you can with your work.

## **How Do I Prepare for Law School?**

### **Introduction**

As you may have concluded from the discussion about what it is like to be a lawyer, the well-prepared student is one who is well-rounded, broadly educated, and mature. Lawyers deal with clients from all segments of society regarding almost any potential significant personal, social or business problem that could arise in everyday life. Thus, a prospective applicant who has not yet completed his or her undergraduate work should consider this in planning a course of study. For example, a well planned liberal arts education, in which the student has intentionally attempted to gain the broadest knowledge possible while concurrently focusing on a chosen major of study is an ideal preparation for law school and law practice. Law curricula are designed based on the assumption that the student has no specific knowledge of the law. Law schools are seeking mature, well-rounded individuals who demonstrate the aptitude to excel in legal analysis. All laws are a product of our history, our governmental structure, our social, religious and political norms and policies, and the past and present technological developments. Therefore, a broadly educated person with an aptitude for critical thinking and analysis is the best prepared student to appreciate and understand the function of legal analysis planning and advocacy in our society.

### **Undergraduate Curriculum**

#### ***Choosing a Major and a Degree Plan***

No specific undergraduate major can be recommended. In a very real sense, there is no such thing as a "pre-law" major. Your decision regarding a major should be based on personal desires and needs. One approach is to select a major that would prepare you for an occupation other than the law. You can pursue an alternative career in this manner and simultaneously be "preparing" for law school. This will allow you the option of foregoing a legal education for whatever reason, or will allow you to pursue an alternative career for a few years before entering law school in order to gain experience and maturity. For example, it is not uncommon for students to choose a

major in accounting, finance, economics, or business, with the intention of working for a few years before applying to law school.

Another approach is to select a major in one of the subject areas recommended by most law schools as an area in which students should take at least one course sometime during their undergraduate education. Those subject areas include literature, history, political science, logic, philosophy, language, psychology, sociology, economics and accounting. A background in history and political science is necessary because our laws are a product of our culture, our history and our governmental structure. Psychology and sociology give a student an understanding of human interaction on an individual and social basis. Economics and accounting may be helpful due to a large number of law courses that deal with business transactions. Logic, philosophy, and even math and natural science courses will all train a student in analytical thinking, the core skill of a competent lawyer. Language education recognizes the globalization of our world in recent years.

None of these subject areas are "required" for entrance to law school. A lack of knowledge or skill in any of these areas, however, may impede your ability to excel as a law student or lawyer. Thus, choosing any one of these areas for your major will be beneficial in law school.

The most important aspects of choosing a major are that (a) you choose it, not someone else, and (b) you enjoy the discipline and believe that you can excel in this area academically. Why? A very important criteria for admission to law school is one's G.P.A. If you select a major based on what someone else wants you to do, there is a high likelihood that you will be unhappy, and your grades will reflect that dissatisfaction. Never choose a major based on the ease of attaining high grades, but realistically, it makes sense that you likely will not excel if you have no interest in the subject area.

### ***The Ability to Write and Speak***

It should be evident from this discussion that an undergraduate student is encouraged to develop his or her verbal and written skills. Rigorous courses in English grammar and persuasive writing are encouraged highly. A course in journalism would be helpful. One should also seek out courses that require essay exams and term or research papers. Law School grades frequently will be based solely on one's performance on one essay exam or a research paper. The inability to write coherently under the time pressure demands of an essay exam will bode ill for success in law school.

A lawyer must also be able to speak articulately and persuasively in the presence of one person or a small group of persons and also before a large audience. You can develop these skills by participating in extracurricular activities. Deliberate and knowledgeable training can be achieved by electing to take speech courses in the areas of public and persuasive speaking. Participating on debate teams is an excellent way to develop your skills, although certainly not a necessity. The key is to seek out any opportunity to refine your ability to speak, for it is a skill that is improved by repetition.

### ***Extracurricular Activities***

An integral aspect of a well-rounded person is your involvement in social, religious, and service activities within the community. A total focus on academics will result in a one-dimensional personality that will be incapable of working with clients who are so often facing crisis situations. You develop common sense by working with people from various ethnic, racial, and socio-economic backgrounds in diverse settings within the community. You are encouraged to become a meaningful participant in, and contributor to, the community.

Extracurricular activities, however, are just one aspect of a person's life. Over involvement in this area may result in a deficiency in another aspect of one's development. Too much time spent in extracurricular activities, no matter how meaningful, will not make up for or be an excuse for inadequate grades. A balance is necessary to maintain proper development.

## **Admission to Law School**

### ***Selecting a Law School and the Law School Admission Test***

There is no need to think about admission to law school during your freshman and sophomore years. Study hard, become involved in university and community life and enjoy the social activities of college life. In one's junior year, a prospective applicant should commence his or her research to determine which law schools may potentially fulfill one's needs in light of reputation, curriculum, size, faculty availability, and cost. Pre-law societies, pre-law advisors and other faculty can be a good source of information. Visiting law schools also can be a valuable resource, as well as attending any major law fairs at your school or within the community.

You must also plan to sit for the LSAT exam. A person should not take the exam until the completion of three academic years of college. The exam is designed for students at that stage of their academic career. You cannot study for the exam because it is an aptitude test. However, there are study courses available to aid you in understanding the testing techniques and to allow you to become familiar with the type of questions presented during the exam. Contact your pre-law advisor for references to study book and professional organizations that may be helpful to you in preparing for the exam.

**DO NOT TAKE THE LSAT FOR PRACTICE.** All scores will be reported to every law school to which you apply for admission. Most schools average your scores. Plan to take the LSAT only once. Old LSAT exams are available. You can take a practice exam on your own or through your pre-law society, but never take the real exam to practice.

### ***Admission Criteria***

There is no set criteria that all law schools follow in selecting students for admission. However, most law schools attempt to make selections based, in part, on objective criteria. The two most common criteria are an applicant's LSAT and G.P.A. The common approach is to utilize a formula that combines the two scores allow for preliminary comparisons of different applicants. For example, Baylor Law School uses the following formula:  $10 \times \text{G.P.A.} + \text{LSAT} = \text{Index number}$ .

As you can see, this formula considers one's general aptitude as evaluated by the LSAT and your aptitude and work ethic as demonstrated by your G.P.A. In your undergraduate years, you can increase your likelihood of admission by working diligently to maintain the highest G.P.A. that is reasonably possible, while also maintaining an overall balanced life. Also, hard work in your studies logically will impact your performance on the LSAT. Extracurricular activities, work experience, letters of reference, and other criteria may impact a law school's admission decision, but the predominate factors are LSAT score(s) and G.P.A.

## **Conclusion**

The practice of law is a very exciting and rewarding profession. The skills you need to prepare for law are those skills also needed to prepare for a full and meaningful life. Your goal is to become a well-educated person who has developed a common sense attitude by your involvement and commitment to the community, state, nation and world.

*Published by Baylor Law School*

# Law School Resources

## University of Delaware Career Resource Center Materials Available:

- ❑ Majoring in Law (GS 93)
- ❑ Getting into Law School: What You Need to Know Before You Go
- ❑ Pre-law Advisor Action Reports (GS 96)
- ❑ Judging the Law Schools (GS 97)
- ❑ Law School Survivor Guide
- ❑ The Lure of the Law (GS 99)
- ❑ LSAT Success (GS 100)
- ❑ Game Plan for Getting into Law School (GS 101)
- ❑ Essays that Worked for Law Schools (GS 102)
- ❑ Law School Admission Reference Manual (GS 104)
- ❑ Best 117 Law Schools (GS 108)
- ❑ Law School Programs (GS 109)
- ❑ LSAT (GS 110)
- ❑ Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools (GS 111)
- ❑ 29 Reasons Not to Go to Law School (GS 112)
- ❑ Opportunities in Nonprofit, Government, and Public Interest Law (CSD 281)
- ❑ Law Firms (CSD 287)
- ❑ Law and Legal Information Directory (CSD 286)
- ❑ Opportunities in Law Careers (CSE 434)
- ❑ Careers in Law (CSE 436)
- ❑ Careers in Focus: Law (CSE 432)
- ❑ Careers for Legal Eagles and Other Law and Order Types (CSE 420)
- ❑ Opportunities in Paralegal Careers (CSE428)
- ❑ Paralegal (CSE 427)

**Internet Resources:**

- ❑ University of Delaware Pre-law Advisement  
<http://www.udel.edu/prelaw/index.html>
- ❑ Princeton Review—Law Schools  
<http://www.review.com/law/>
- ❑ U.S. News and World Report Law School Rankings  
<http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/grad/rankings/law/lawindex.htm>
- ❑ Internet Legal Resource Guide (with law school rankings and more)  
[www.ilrg.com/schools.html](http://www.ilrg.com/schools.html)
- ❑ Law School Search  
<http://www.gradschools.com/law.html>
- ❑ Law School Admission Council (LSAC)  
<http://www.lsac.org/>

Visit the Career Library at 401 Academy Street for testing information, application guides, personal statement preparation, and guides to graduate schools. LSAT/LSDAS registration materials can be found in the Career Resource Center or the University Testing Center, 011 Hullahen Hall.