



Preparing for Law School

ANSWERS TO THE MOST COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS





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WHAT IS THE BEST MAJOR/MINOR TO GET INTO LAW SCHOOL?

The happy truth is that there is no “best” major or minor. Law schools want intelligent, broadly educated liberal arts students. Beyond that, they are not overly concerned about your major/minor. It is far more important to maintain a high grade point average across a varied and challenging curriculum.

HOW IMPORTANT IS A MINOR OR A DOUBLE MAJOR?

Law schools like to see evidence of broad interests and competence in more than one subject. A minor is usually advisable. A second minor or a double major are not necessary, but may be helpful under some circumstances.

WHAT ABOUT A PRE-LAW MAJOR/MINOR?

This is an unfortunate myth about law school. There is no such thing as a pre-law major/minor. You should be suspicious of anyone who claims to have such a program — it will not help you to get into law school and may hurt your chances of admission.

SHOULD I TAKE ANY LAW-RELATED CLASSES AT USD?

USD offers a variety of law-related classes at the undergraduate level in several departments, including Political Science, Business, Philosophy and Sociology. These classes are neither expected nor required for admission to law school, and they will likely not affect your chances of admission. Regardless, taking a few of these classes is probably a good idea. First, law-related classes can help you get more out of law school once you get there, because you will be more knowledgeable about the legal system than most first-year law students. Second, these classes can also help you determine whether law school is really for you before you invest a lot of money in your legal education.

WHAT OTHER COURSES SHOULD I TAKE?

Take classes that will help you develop the basic skills you will need as a lawyer. Writing classes are particularly useful, especially those that require you to do independent research and to convey complex ideas in a clear, organized way.

Also consider classes that provide necessary background on the social, political, economic, and ethical foundations of law. At least one course in American government and either American or English history are essential. A cross-section of selected courses in history, political science, economics, sociology, philosophy and psychology are advised.

A good lawyer knows a little about almost everything. Take advantage of your core requirements by taking a wide selection of liberal arts courses. Proficiency in a foreign language is helpful. A basic understanding of the natural sciences can also be useful; lawyers often need to evaluate scientific evidence involving complex matters such as DNA tests, environmental impact statements, patents and accident reports.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD I DO WHILE AT USD?

Among other things, participate in extracurricular activities. Evidence of a sincere commitment to community service and activities that demonstrate individual initiative, responsibility and achievement are especially beneficial. Develop interests, skills and experiences that allow you to stand out from the crowd. No matter how high your grade point average or LSAT score, you will need other evidence of exceptional promise and achievement to make it into one of the more competitive law schools.

WHEN DO I NEED TO GET SERIOUS ABOUT APPLYING TO LAW SCHOOL?

During your freshman and sophomore years, study hard and keep your grades up. Otherwise, there is no need to worry overly much about law school until about halfway through your junior year, when you need to begin thinking about the application process in earnest. Most students take the LSAT exam after their junior year (in June or October) and then apply to law school during the fall of their senior year. The application process can be arduous, so be prepared.

SHOULD I TAKE A PREPARATION COURSE FOR THE LSAT?

The LSAT exam is the single most important factor that will determine where you will go to law school. Before taking the exam, most students take a prep course that runs for approximately six weeks. Unfortunately, these courses are quite expensive. It is possible to do well on the LSAT with independent study, but most students do not study as effectively on their own as they do in the more structured environment these courses offer. The exam is highly competitive, and a good prep course can offer some advantages.

IS THE LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS STRESSFUL?

Some stress is normal. It is a competitive process and a competitive profession. But there is no need to go overboard. If you feel yourself getting overly stressed, you should talk to friends, your advisor or the counseling center. It might reassure you to know that law school is not as difficult as many make it out to be. If you prepare properly and work hard, you will be fine. Getting into law school is often more difficult than law school itself!



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TO HOW MANY LAW SCHOOLS SHOULD I APPLY?

Most students apply to between four and eight schools. Any fewer may be risky, while applying to more is probably excessive. Try to improve your odds by applying to a range of schools: one or two dream schools, three to five schools where you have a good chance of admission, and one or two safe bets.

DO I HAVE TO GO STRAIGHT TO LAW SCHOOL?

No. While most students still go directly from college to law school, a growing number are taking time after graduation to obtain additional experience or to save money.

I WANT TO SPECIALIZE IN A PARTICULAR KIND OF LAW. ARE THERE LAW SCHOOLS THAT SPECIALIZE IN ENVIRONMENTAL LAW, COMPARATIVE LAW OR OTHER SPECIFIC TYPES OF PRACTICE?

As a rule, you go to law school to get a broad, general legal education. There will be some modest opportunities to concentrate on a particular area of law, but for the most part you will not develop specialized expertise until you become a practicing lawyer. Be cautious about law schools that claim to offer a specialized or unique curriculum, as these claims are often exaggerated.

SHOULD I PAY ATTENTION TO LAW SCHOOL RANKINGS?

Do not pay too much attention to rankings published by popular magazines, because these are often misleading. Academic reputation, however, is an important factor that you should not ignore. Graduating from a more highly regarded law school can give you real career advantages. Talk to the pre-law advisor to get an idea of which schools best fit your needs.

HOW ELSE CAN USD HELP?

Most importantly, USD provides a superior liberal arts education with small classes and the chance to build close professional relationships with faculty. This is the best environment possible to learn and to develop your academic potential. Your ability to interact closely with faculty will also help when the time comes to ask for letters of recommendation.

Second, think about joining Phi Alpha Delta. This student-run, pre-law organization arranges for lawyers, judges and law school officials to speak to members and give new insights into law school and the legal profession.

Third, talk to the campus pre-law advisor, who is available to answer questions about law school.

WHERE DO USD STUDENTS GO TO LAW SCHOOL?

We have an excellent placement record and are proud of our students who have been admitted to Berkeley, Columbia, Cornell, Georgetown, Gonzaga, Harvard, Loyola, NYU, Pepperdine, Santa Clara, Stanford, UC Davis, UCLA, USC, USD, Virginia, and other leading universities.