

THERE IS NO PRE-LAW MAJOR OR PROGRAM AT MU. STUDENTS INTERESTED IN ATTENDING LAW SCHOOL SHOULD READ THE INFORMATION BELOW TO DETERMINE WHAT AN APPROPRIATE PROGRAM OF STUDY WOULD BE.

Preparing for Law School

The American Bar Association **does not recommend** a particular major, and there is no specific major that law schools prefer. You should major in something that will help you develop skills that will be valuable to you as a law student and legal practitioner -- reading, researching, writing, and critical analysis. The College of Liberal Arts offers a wide range of pre-law courses. Political science, business, English, economics, history, criminal justice (legal studies), sociology, and others are acceptable majors. Regardless of the area of concentration, you should choose electives that will facilitate critical understanding of economic, political and social institutions. Since a lawyer must be able to communicate effectively, you should emphasize communicative skills. Also, knowledge of elementary accounting is desirable and highly recommended. You should only double major if you want to. It has no effect in terms of law school admissions.

Courses

Most importantly, your transcript should reflect a broad educational background (i.e. you should take courses in a wide variety of disciplines). While not specifying a major, the American Bar Association does encourage undergraduates to take courses that are conducive to the improvement of certain "lawyering" skills such as reading, writing, and research. According to the ABA's statement on "Preparation for a Legal Education", potential law students should have:

- A broad understanding of history, particularly American history;
- A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory, and of the contemporary American political system;
- A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice;
- A grounding in economics, particularly elementary micro-economic theory, and an understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy;
- Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic pre-calculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data;
- An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world.

Applying to Law School

There are 182 law schools in the U.S. accredited by the American Bar Association. The only way to understand a specific school's admissions process is to obtain its application materials and read them very carefully. Here are some general hints:

- **Follow Directions:** when you are filling out applications for various schools, be sure that you read that school's materials very carefully and provide all (but only) the information the school requests. The quickest way to damage your chances of admission is to indicate that you do not read carefully and/or follow directions.
- **Start Early:** applying to law school is a very time-consuming process. Most law school applications are due in January or February. You should therefore begin working your way through applications as early as possible (i.e. in the summer or fall the year before you plan to attend law school). This is to avoid having to

rush to get things together at the last minute, which increases the likelihood of mistakes. Starting early also allows you to provide writers of your letters of recommendation with the necessary material well before applications are due.

Criteria for Admission

There are numerous criteria that law schools may consider when making admissions decisions. The primary factors for most, if not all, law schools are the applicant's score on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and Grade Point Average (GPA). Law schools vary in the relative level of importance they place on these two criteria, though most seem to weight LSAT score more heavily.

The LSAT is a standardized, written examination that all those applying to law school are required to take. The exam consists of five 35-minute sections of multiple-choice questions containing a total of approximately 100 questions. Your score is based upon your performance on four of those sections:

- one reading comprehension section,
- one analytical reasoning section, and
- two logical reasoning sections.
- a fifth "experimental" section which contains new questions which are being pretested for possible inclusion on future exams. Your score is not based on your performance on this fifth section, but you will not be told which section it is.

In addition, you are given 30 minutes to compose a writing sample that addresses a decision problem that is supplied for you. The writing sample does not count toward your LSAT score, but is provided to all law schools to which you apply.

You will receive your score approximately six weeks after you take the test. However, you can find out your score earlier by contacting the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) -- the organization that administers the LSAT.

Personal Statement

Most law schools require a short essay, generally known as a "personal statement". Different schools ask for different information, but it is generally the case that the essay is designed to help law school admissions officials get a sense of who you are as an individual.

Letters of Recommendation

Choose references who know your academic work. Law schools are most interested in your ability to handle the intellectual rigor of a legal education. Therefore, your professors are the best choice for recommendations.

Major and Difficulty of Courses

While there is no undergraduate major which law schools prefer, a number of law schools will take into consideration majors and courses which they perceive to be relatively difficult (such as chemistry, computer science, math, or physics). For example, a number of law schools will add points to an applicant's GPA if the applicant has taken a major perceived by admissions officials to be relatively difficult.

Writing Skill

This will be displayed most prominently in the Personal Statement and LSAT writing sample. Contrary to popular belief, the writing sample portion of the LSAT is of substantive value to most law schools.

Extracurricular Activities

Extracurricular activity is of marginal importance --at best -- to most law schools. Therefore, in terms of such activities during your undergraduate experience, you should be involved in the organizations and activities that interest you because they will make your undergraduate years more enjoyable. The bonus is that law schools look favorably on those applicants who appear to be "well-rounded", having participated in activities outside of class.

Leadership positions in such organizations may also be indicative of qualities that will make you a good law student.

All prospective law school applicants should consult early in their undergraduate programs with Dr. Barry Sharpe, University Pre-law Advisor and Professor of Political Science (Old Main 230), for further information and advice. They should register for the October (preferably) or the December administration of the Law School Admission Test and apply for law school admission during the fall of their senior year in college. Full LSAT information and registration materials are contained in the Law School Admission Bulletin, which is available in Old Main 230.



Pre-Law

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