

HEALTH PROFESSIONS AND PRELAW CENTER

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Expert Advice on Undergraduate Preparation for Law School:

The following are comments from some of the nation's premier law schools and legal organizations as to what they recommend in terms of undergraduate preparation for the study of law:

The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools (published by the Law School Admission Council)

"The Pros and Cons of a 'Prelaw' Major:

"Unlike the premedical curriculum that contains specific courses, some obligatory, there is no recommended set of prelaw courses. Law schools prefer that you reserve your legal study for law school and fill your undergraduate curriculum with broad, diverse, and challenging courses. Prelaw courses that introduce you to broad legal principles may present you with enough information to decide whether you want to continue with a legal education, but they are rarely taught with the same depth and rigor as actual law school courses....Be sure you know precisely what is meant by 'prelaw' when choosing your undergraduate course of study."

[at p. 6]

The Pre-Law Committee of The ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar [See, <http://www.abanet.org/legaled/prelaw/prep.html> for the entire statement]:

"Thus, the ABA does not recommend any particular group of undergraduate majors, or courses, that should be taken by those wishing to prepare for legal education; developing such a list is neither possible nor desirable."

"Taking difficult courses from demanding instructors is the best generic preparation for legal education." "The student who comes to law school lacking a broad range of basic skills and knowledge will face an extremely difficult task."

"As law has become more woven into the fabric of our society, and as that society is increasingly influenced by disparate national and global forces, a broad knowledge base is essential for success in law school and for competence in the legal profession. Knowledge of specific areas of law can and will be acquired during a good legal education, but students must come to law school with much fundamental knowledge upon which legal education can build."

University of Michigan Law School:

"Virtually any major within a strong general program can be the basis for a good undergraduate education if it is taught demandingly and leads to substantive *mastery* of a discipline. The major need not be related to law; in fact, it is generally considered a waste of time to study law as a preparation for studying law. If we were to sum up our advice in a phrase, it would be: 'Study something interesting and hard.'"

"Wise students will regard their undergraduate instruction as the first fully conscious step toward a lifetime of learning. Law school is a second step. Together, the two should complement each other and inspire continued study and reflection, even in the midst of the most vigorous career. The fully developed lawyer knows much more than the law. With these considerations in mind, we look for evidence that the applicant's course of study has been rich and demanding and that he or she has engaged with it in a wholehearted way, developing in the process some personal intellectual interest—and perhaps a distinctive intellectual style."

New York University Law School:

“Is there any particular undergraduate coursework that the Committee values highly?”

The Committee looks for a broad range of courses, some of which are analytically demanding and others that require heavy reading loads and develop research and writing skills.”

Harvard Law School:

“The Harvard Law School faculty prescribes no fixed requirements with respect to the content of pre-legal education. The nature of candidates' college work, as well as the quality of academic performance, is taken into account in the selection process. Most often, a broad liberal college education is preferable to one that is narrowly specialized. The Admissions Committee looks for a showing of thorough learning in some wide cultural field of your choice, such as history, economics, government, philosophy, mathematics, science, literature or the classics, rather than a concentration in courses given primarily as vocational training [e.g., business law—ed.]. The Admissions Committee considers that those programs approaching their subjects on a more theoretical level, with attention to educational breadth, are better preparatory training for the legal profession than those emphasizing the practical.”

UC Berkeley School of Law--Boalt Hall:

“Preparation for the Study of Law:

“Experience has shown that success in law school and in practice does not depend on one's field of study before law school. Thus, Boalt does not require or even recommend any specific pre-law major. Boalt admits applicants with varied backgrounds and training, and the resulting diversity enhances and enriches the educational experience of all students.

“Students in a position to structure their curricula might do the following: develop skills in communication, both written and verbal, and take courses in which written work is vigorously edited; develop analytical and problem-solving skills; obtain breadth in humanities and social sciences in order to understand the social context within which legal problems arise; and acquire a general understanding of economics because a significant number of legal problems are related to the economic functioning of the society. In selecting specific courses, consultation with an undergraduate adviser may be desirable.”

Indiana University at Bloomington Law School:

“The school does not require applicants to take any particular subjects or to pursue any special course of study in college as a prerequisite for admission.... Applicants are encouraged to acquire precision in written and oral expression and a broad academic background.”

New York University [undergrad]:

“Issues with Law-Related Courses:

“Most law schools specifically advise against taking one category of courses, those--such as ‘business law’--which are vocational in nature. Admissions committees presume that you will spend sufficient time studying ‘law’ while in law school, and they prefer that the undergraduate years be used to acquire a broad field of general knowledge upon which legal studies can be based. Similarly, most law schools actively discourage students from taking too many law-related classes as undergraduates.”

“The undergraduate student taking a variety of law-related courses cannot hope to achieve an ordered understanding of legal fundamentals. Students who overload on such courses may, upon entering law school, mistakenly believe they have achieved a head start. Furthermore, in taking such courses, you will be sacrificing the broader liberal arts background which may better serve you in the graduate program.”

“In short, while law-related courses may help you decide whether law is a field which interests you and may familiarize you with a new vocabulary, undergraduate law courses will neither help you get into law school nor measurably help you once you are there. Be wary of claims made by any professor that a particular undergraduate course will improve law school grades.”

Seton Hall University [undergrad]:

“Seton Hall University does not offer a ‘pre-law’ major or concentration. Indeed the pre-law advisement specifically recommends against such an approach to the preparation for law school. This policy position is entirely in line with the guidelines established by the American Bar Association for the undergraduate student interested in the study of law.”

“Many students make the error in believing that law schools favor certain disciplines, especially those that are considered to be law related. Indeed, a high percentage of students who go on to law school do come from a relatively small number of majors. However, this phenomenon is more the result of those disciplines having students who look forward to studying the law and have completed a rigorous major, than it does to the undergraduate major itself. Your selection of a major should be the result of consideration of what is of interest to you, your abilities to meet its requirements, the rigor of that major and whether the major and its faculty and students offer sufficient challenge and support to enhance your educational experience.”

Health Professions and Prelaw Center

If you have any questions about undergraduate preparation for law school, be sure to consult with a Prelaw Advisor from the Health Professions and Prelaw Center in Maxwell Hall 010. To schedule an appointment, call 812-855-1873 or email HPPLC@indiana.edu.

You should also consult the numerous documents available at the Prelaw section of the HPPLC Web site.

[This document has been prepared for Indiana University--Bloomington students by the Health Professions and Prelaw Center. Please note that specific requirements and policies can change at any time without notice. Students are responsible for obtaining the most current information directly from the application services, schools, and programs in which they have an interest.]