Law School (J.D.)

The Study of Law

A J.D. (Juris Doctor) is the perfect degree to lead to a range of law-related careers and can be an important background and stepping stone for careers in government, business, higher education, health care, communications, and many other fields. Legal Practice is intellectually challenging and requires the use of ethics, reason and judgment.

What do I major in?

No single path leads to law school—students must create their own path. Students come from all majors and successfully complete legal study. In fact, the American Bar Association has no recommended major in preparation for legal study. You may choose any area that interests and challenges you. You should also plan on taking courses that will develop your research and writing skills. Some majors may complement your work in a particular area of law. For example, if you have a science background, you might find patent law or health law particularly interesting and your undergraduate background may be very helpful to you. While specific coursework may be helpful in corporate, environmental or intellectual property law, the JD is a generalist degree and applicants come from all academic backgrounds.

Research, analysis and writing skills

Law schools are most interested in your ability to rigorously analyze research, present information clearly in both written and oral form, and to persuade people with your arguments.

Preparing for law school—the basics

Select a Major

Choose a major that interests you. This is your opportunity to study what you really like. Law schools will look at how you performed in your discipline. A solid GPA will be expected—especially in your major. Taking courses outside your major also demonstrates an intellectual curiosity that is important for law school.

Lecture courses provided a good foundation for your legal studies but seminar courses will allow you to present, discuss, critique, and defend your ideas.

Develop a Record of Interest

Create opportunities for yourself to provide service to others, participate in research, join the pre-law club, volunteer to work at law firms. Take initiative and show leadership.

Make Connections with Evaluators

You will need faculty, internship directors, volunteer coordinators and others to write evaluations for you. Take the time to get to know them and give them a chance to get to know you so that they can write informative evaluations.

Costs of Law School

The need to pay back law school loans may affect the career choices of new graduates. So think carefully about whether law school is a good investment for you.
Core Skills and Values Sought by Law Schools

To read more about these core values, head to the American Bar Association website, www.americanbar.org.

A sound foundation for a legal education includes important skills, values, and knowledge. The American Bar Association indicates the importance of these skills including:

- Analytic/problem solving skills
- Critical reading
- Writing skills
- Oral communication/listening abilities
- Research skills
- Task organization/management skills
- Interest in public service and promotion of justice

Writing Skills
Language is the most important tool for a lawyer and they must be able to express themselves clearly and concisely. Seek as many experiences as possible that require analytical writing. Classes that require writing of substantial length, re-writing, and constructive criticism are particularly useful in preparation of legal studies.

Task Organization & Management Skills
As a lawyer you will need to be able to manage large amounts of information, identify objectives, and create a structure. Undertaking projects that require substantial research and writing will be good preparation for law school.

Desire to Serve Others & Promote Justice
Legal professionals are dedicated to improving fairness and the quality of justice in the legal system. If you want to enter the legal profession, you should seek experiences in which you devote substantial effort to assisting others. Participate in public service.

General Knowledge
Some of the types of knowledge that would maximize your legal education include: a broad understanding of history, political thought, basic math, financial, and statistical skills, general understanding of human behavior, an understanding of diverse cultures.

Analytic/Problem Solving
Seek courses and experiences that engage your critical thinking, challenge your beliefs.

Critical Reading Abilities
You will need experience at close reading and critical analysis of complex textual materials. Courses in literature, history, philosophy, political science and other areas can help you work on these skills.

Oral Communication & Listening Abilities
Lawyers must be able to speak clearly and persuasively. You will also need to be able to listen carefully to your clients and others. Before attending law school endeavor to develop your speaking and listening skills, debate skills, formal presentation abilities, and speaking before groups.

Research Skills
It will assist you in law school to have developed basic research skills including undertaking projects that require significant library research and the analysis of large amounts of information.

Taking the LSAT
The LSAT is offered 4 times a year—generally in June, September or October, December and February. Test sites fill quickly so register in advance. You can find more information at www.lsac.org.

What’s on the LSAT?
The LSAT includes: One Reading Comprehension section, one analytical reasoning section, two logical reasoning sections, one experimental test questions section (not scored), 35-minute writing sample (also not scored but copies are sent to the law schools where you apply)
Realities of a Legal Education

After seeing portrayals of lawyers on television shows through the years, many people have expectations of a law career that do not necessarily match the realities of law practice.

Legal work often requires considerable amounts of tedious and painstaking research. Competition for jobs in some markets is quite fierce. In addition, depending on the type of law practice and the location, the salaries can vary greatly. For example, a corporate lawyer in a private firm may earn $135,000 or more the first year, but they may work 12 hours a day 6-7 days a week. Those interested in public interest law may start their career making $40,000.

Employment Statistics of the 2010 graduating class from law schools reported:

- 34% of salaries reported were $55,000 or less
- 50.9% of the class chose private practice in law firms
- 27.5% took positions in public service, including judicial clerkships, government agencies, and public interest organizations
- 15.1% entered business
- 68.4% had a career that required passage of the bar exam

Credential Assembly Service and Your Application

To centralize and standardize the application process, ABA approved law schools require applicants to use the Credential Assembly Service (CAS). This is essentially a common application which allows you to enter some information just once. You then complete each school’s individual application and submit your application electronically. You will send in a number of items and CAS will create a report from these materials. You order and pay for the report and have it sent to the schools at which you are applying.

Materials submitted to CAS and included in your report include:
- Year-by-year grades/credits
- Copies of all transcripts

CAS also offers a letter of recommendation and evaluation service. These items can be sent directly to CAS. CACA by your evaluators.

Admissions Criteria

Law school admissions committees will look at both objective criteria and subjective criteria.

Objective Criteria

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is a half-day standardized test offered on four test administration dates annually. Scores range from 120-180. Applicants submit their transcripts to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS), which converts their grades using consistent values. Many schools use a combination of LSAT and GPA to produce a single number they can use to assess and compare candidates.

Subjective Criteria

Students write a personal statement that explains their why they want a legal education and helps schools learn more about the applicant.

Letters of recommendation from professors and employers give law schools a different perspective on the applicant.

Evaluations are also required. These evaluate cognitive and non-cognitive attributes of the student. Law schools will also look at your experiences. From undergraduate curriculum to extracurricular activities, your resume will demonstrate your interest, skills and abilities.
Where can I find more information?

American Bar Association (ABA) http://www.abanet.org

including statement on pre-law prep at http://www.abanet.org/legaled/prelaw/prep.html

Law School Admission Council (LSAC) http://www.lsac.org/


Credential Assembly Service http://www.lsac.org/jd/apply/cas.asp

LSAC Account Registration https://os.lsac.org/Release/Logon/Access.aspx

Council on Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) http://cleoscholars.org

Programs in the state:

IU Robert H. McKinney School of Law (IUPUI) http://indylaw.indiana.edu/

Maurer School of Law (IU Bloomington) http://law.indiana.edu/

Valparaiso University Law School http://www.valpo.edu/law/

University of Notre Dame Law School http://law.nd.edu/

Indiana Tech http://www.indianatech.edu/Law

Student Organizations

Purdue Pre-Law Society

General Preparation Timeline (based on graduating in 4 years)

Freshman & Sophonores:

- Go to class!
- Select a major in a field that interests you.
- Approach your classes professionally.
- Learn where to go for help in your courses.
- Join a student organization.
- Get to know faculty—you will need recommendation letters from them later.
- Expand your education by seeking summer jobs or internships in fields of interest.
- Plan ahead for off campus study.
- Read as much as you can—it will help you on your aptitude tests.
- Meet with a pre-professional advisor to assess your preparation.

Juniors:

- Learn all you can about the application process.
- Gather info about the LSAT and create a plan of study.
- Register for the June administration of the LSAT.
- Secure a summer job or internship ideally in a law-related field.
- Consider carefully whether you are entering the field for the right reasons.
- Research law schools and compile a list of tentative schools.
- Create a parallel plan—which should include how to strengthen your application if you have to apply again.

Seniors:

- Register for CAS and have transcripts from all undergrad institutions sent.
- Make sure CAS is correct.
- Ask letter writers to supply letters/evaluations—give them plenty of time to do this.
- Arrange sending dean’s certifications when required.
- Take LSAT in September/October if you did not take the June test.
- Complete application by early November.
- Check with schools to make sure file is complete.
- Complete FAFSA and any institutional financial aid applications as soon after January 1 as possible.
- Before leaving campus, have a final transcript sent to the law school you plan to attend.