

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

College of Arts & Sciences

Advising & Career Services

Preparing for Law School

Selecting a Major

At Syracuse University, there is no prescribed pre-law curriculum. There is no formal pre-law major or any specific major in which to enroll to be considered "pre-law." Law school admissions committees have no preferred majors, but the American Bar Association emphasizes the importance of a liberal arts background. Students should seek breadth in their undergrad programs, which is precisely the purpose of the Liberal Arts Core and elective courses. Your academic major should provide an element of depth to your curriculum through the intensity of courses offered from a specific department or interdisciplinary program. Your major should be one you enjoy studying, one that conforms to your interests, skills you wish to develop and one in which your abilities can shine, but you still find challenging.

Selecting Courses

Pre-law students are encouraged take courses which develop and sharpen these skills: writing; reasoning; analytical, quantitative, listening, presentation and research. Discuss course selection with a member of our professional staff. In addition to the core skills listed above, the following knowledge areas are important for pre-law students:

- History, particularly U.S. history;
- Political thought, particularly contemporary U.S. politics;
- Ethical theory and theories of justice;
- Economics, particularly microeconomic theory;
- Mathematical and financial skills;
- Human behavior and social interaction;
- Diverse cultures within and outside the U.S.

Note: Excerpt from the 2013 ABA/LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools, page 5.

Developing Core Skills

The American Bar Association (ABA) has identified some of the primary skills transferable to law:

- *Analyzing* a client's problem, related legal issues, and data
- *Synthesizing* voluminous amounts of complex material from a variety of sources that must be compiled, digested and viewed from multiple angles to create strong arguments
- *Advocating* the client's viewpoint and interests to reach a favorable outcome
- *Counseling* clients by identifying the legal implications of a situation and suggesting an appropriate course of action

- *Negotiating* to reconcile diverse interests and opinions, and to consider all sides of an issue in order to find common ground, areas of conflict and opportunities for compromise
- *Writing* and speaking effectively, with clarity and insight

As an undergraduate, you can cultivate these skills by choosing appropriate courses, internships, work experiences, and extracurricular activities. Consult with a member of our professional staff to guide you in making these choices.

Experience

To catch the eye of law school admissions officers, as well as employers after law school, a resume will be strengthened if it includes employment (on or off campus), internships (paid or unpaid), community service, study or service abroad, participation in extracurricular activities, student organizations, or activities which develop leadership skills. A member of our professional staff can help you to achieve a balance between a rigorous academic plan and a variety of undergraduate involvements. We can then assist you in preparing a well-rounded resume which accurately reflects all of your achievements.

Networking with Professors

In addition to being a conscientious student who actively participates in class discussion, you should also cultivate positive relationships with your professors. Not only do college faculty teach the course content, they also possess a great deal of knowledge about one or more academic fields, university resources, graduate/professional study, potential internships, employment opportunities and career paths. If you invest the time to know and be known by at least one professor each academic semester, you increase your chances of obtaining an influential letter of recommendation which is a significant factor in advanced study and employment.

Selecting your Schools

Research and visit (if possible) prospective schools. Seek schools that will provide a good fit based on your student profile (especially your UGPA and LSAT score) combined with your personal preferences and career goals. It is recommended that you apply to ABA approved law schools (of which there are more than 200 in the United States.)

Considering a Gap Year

According to LSAC, approximately one-third of law students enter directly from college. Other applicants choose to wait at least one year ("gap year") or longer after completing their undergraduate degree. These applicants may choose to enter the workforce in order to demonstrate their ability to succeed and to strengthen their qualifications for law school.

Additional Resources

Pre-Law Advising (<http://casadvising.syr.edu>)

LSAC (www.lsac.org)

American Bar Association (www.americanbar.org)