Academic Preparation for Law School

At the University of Texas at Dallas, there is no prescribed pre-law curriculum. “Pre-law” simply denotes a student’s intention to pursue admission to law school following completion of the baccalaureate degree. Because the careers of those trained in law are widely varied and therefore call for widely differing skills, law schools do not generally recommend any particular course of study. With the exception of those students interested in practicing patent law, for which they must have a hard science background, pre-law students can major in any discipline.

Pre-law students should approach their curriculum as developing a set of useful skills, transferable to the law school setting. One should keep in mind that the spoken and written word are the principal tools of the legal profession. Those who intend to study law must develop an excellent knowledge and grasp of the English language as well as a clear and concise style of expression. Students should seek out courses which require substantial research and writing assignments, and provide critiques of those skills.

Courses in literature, foreign language, speech, composition, philosophy and logic can develop the analytical skills necessary for success in law school and the legal profession. Furthermore, the study of history, political science, economics and statistics helps students to understand the structure of society and the problems of social ordering with which the law is concerned. The examination of human behavior in sociology and psychology will aid a prospective law student in understanding the human behavior with which law is involved. The systematic ordering of abstractions and ideas acquired by studying logic, mathematics and the sciences contributes to a student’s capacity to analyze and rationally organize his or her thoughts.

In choosing a major, students should concentrate in a discipline which holds genuine interest for them and in which they will be motivated to produce their best work. They should, however, avoid any undergraduate major that is narrowly focused on specific vocations, or those majors which will not challenge them to reach their fullest academic potential. What counts most is the intensity and depth of the undergraduate program, demonstrating a capacity to perform well at an academically rigorous level. Double or triple majoring or choosing one or more minors will make very little difference in your admissions decisions, but may enrich (or restrict) your intellectual growth and exploration.

Preparing for the LSAT

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) is required for all law school applicants. It is designed to measure the skills law schools value in prospective students: reading comprehension, analytical reasoning and logical reasoning. There is also a non-scored writing sample portion of the exam. While one cannot memorize facts or otherwise cram for the LSAT, one can prepare for it by learning about the different types of questions in each section, and how to approach each type. We strongly encourage you to develop and put into practice a test preparation regimen several months in advance of the time you are scheduled to take the test. Nothing takes the place of rigorous preparation.

For most students, the best time to take the LSAT is June between the junior and senior year. A June test date gives you the flexibility of submitting your applications very early in the admissions cycle or, in the case of an unforeseen emergency or lower-than-expected score, the chance to take the test again in October or December. Students planning on participating in the Archer Program should take note that the program prohibits studying for or taking the LSAT during the Archer semester in DC. The LSAT is offered only four times a year, so it is important to plan ahead and avoid scheduling obstacles.
LSAT scores stay on your LSAC Academic Summary Report for at least five years. Although most law schools do take your highest score in the case of multiple scores, they will still see the scores from all of your test administrations, including cancellations. You are only allowed to take the test three times in two years, barring special circumstances, so plan accordingly.