



CENTER FOR CAREER & PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Planning for Law School

Approximately 5% of graduating Southwestern University students enter law school directly upon graduation. SU students interested in constructing well-managed professional lives as attorneys should diligently develop 21st century career-readiness skills, like communication, teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, and work ethic, while engaging in SU's academic and co-curricular experience.

The most successful students take every advantage to enhance their profiles. Your first source of information should be the American Bar Association (ABA)'s article on Preparation for Legal Education:

http://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law.html.

Use your undergraduate years to begin to shape your professional identity and determine if becoming a lawyer is the right career choice for you. Faculty pre-law advisor Dr. Joseph Hower and the Center for Career & Professional Development can help you make informed decisions about applying to law school and guide you through the actual application process.

Choosing a Major

The wonderful but frustrating truth is that law schools have no preference for any major or course work, but they do consider very strongly how well you do in your choice of major. All undergraduate majors have characteristics that will help you in law school: science students develop analytical reasoning skills, humanities students gain knowledge about the structure of society as well as experience with intensive reading and writing, and business majors obtain corporate and entrepreneurial insights. SU students from all majors have become successful lawyers.

Don't rush your decision about your major. Take time to investigate your interests, and be open-minded. We advise pre-law students to major in what they enjoy most. Usually, you do better in courses in which you like the material. You may also decide not to go to law school immediately after graduation, or you may change your mind about it completely. Use your electives to dabble in course work required for other majors. This will broaden your educational background and allow you to check out other career possibilities.

Making the Grade

The two most important determinants of admission to law school are your cumulative grade point average and your LSAT score. However, filling your undergraduate semesters with blow-off courses will backfire on you in several ways. First, your LSAT

score will reflect your lack of cognitive growth and flabby thinking skills. Second, law school requires overwhelming amounts of reading and analysis, and talented, determined, and extremely competitive classmates will surround you. A non-challenging educational program will cripple you from the start. Third, in college, you should seek out the excellent professors, not just the easy courses. Most importantly, your undergraduate years help mold the type of person you become. At no other time in your life will you be able to sample such myriad offerings.

When you apply to law school, every grade from every college you have ever attended (including correspondence and online courses) will be compiled into one grade point average. Although the grades earned at a community college do not "count" at Southwestern, they will count when you apply to law school.

There are no required courses for law school. Many prior applicants recommend Introduction to Logic because the LSAT is largely a logical reasoning test. Many students take courses in history, accounting, economics, anthropology, political science, literature, philosophy, sociology, speech, and psychology to round out their curriculum.

The LSAT

Your Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score is the second major determinant of whether you will be accepted into law school and which schools will admit you. This multiple-choice exam contains five 35-minute sections: one Reading Comprehension section; one Analytical Reasoning section; two Logical Reasoning sections; and one unscored, experimental section whose identity you will not know until after you receive your scores. In addition, there is a 35-minute writing sample section at the end of the test. Though unscored, copies of your writing sample are sent to all law schools to which you apply.

The test is scored on a scale of 120 to 180. ***Never take the LSAT for practice!*** Some schools average your scores if you take the LSAT more than once; many do not favor multiple scores at all, especially if the second score is lower. Note that some schools now accept the GRE in lieu of the LSAT.

Extracurricular Activities

In addition to grades and test scores, law schools examine your resume to see what types of activities you have participated in and what leadership opportunities you have taken. All pre-law students should consider joining the SU Pre-Law Society, a law-related student organization. This group provides speakers such as lawyers and admissions officers, field trips to law schools, mock

LSATs, and plenty of camaraderie among students with similar aspirations. In addition to student organizations on campus, you should consider community service opportunities, internships, study abroad, and work experience. There are no “required” activities for law school, but the most competitive applicants tend to have demonstrated leadership experience and have often studied abroad or completed internships. The Center for Career & Professional Development and Dr. Hower can help you determine which activities will best suit your needs and goals.

- SU Washington Semester Program: <https://www.southwestern.edu/career-services/internships/washington-semester/>

Law School Applications

In general, you will begin working on parts of the application at the end of your junior year. Since many schools use a rolling admissions policy (first-come, first-serve), send your applications off by the end of October of your senior year for admittance in the fall after you graduate. All paperwork should be complete by December. This includes transcripts, recommendation letters, and Credential Assembly Services (CAS) Reports. There are generally no interviews. See our “Applying to Law School” handout for more details.

Make Your Plans

- Investigate law as a career by reading about it, interviewing lawyers and judges, and being an active member of a law-related student organization. Obtain realistic information about post-law-school employment rates and starting salaries. Begin networking in the legal community now so you can properly focus your energy and time during law school.
- Explore other career options with your academic advisor and/or CCPD. Make use of your campus resources!
- Address your academic weaknesses *now*. Developing reading speed, study skills, and test-taking strategies are just some of the topics about which you can get help at The Center for Academic Success.
- Develop relationships with professors early for recommendation letters and mentoring later. You do not have to have a problem to see a professor during office hours! Professors are interesting and have a wealth of knowledge. You can’t afford to be shy in the career you have chosen.
- Law-related internships or employment will enhance your ability to make an informed decision to attend law school and allow you to get marketable practical experience. You can volunteer, be a part-time student employee, or work full-time in the summer. CCPD has helpful information regarding legal careers.
- Give your academic performance top priority—don’t let a poor record make your career decision for you.

Other Pre-Law Resources

- American Bar Association: www.abanet.org/legaled/prelaw/prep.html
- Law School Admission Council: www.lsac.org
- National Association of Law Placement: www.nalp.org
- SU Center for Career & Professional Development: <https://www.southwestern.edu/career-services/graduate-school/law-school/>
- SU Faculty Pre-Law Advisor: Dr. Joseph Hower, howerj2@southwestern.edu