



PREPARING FOR LAW SCHOOL

Amy Urbanek aurbanek@advising.utah.edu

Shelley Nicholson snicholson@advising.utah.edu

Alessandra Holt aholt@advising.utah.edu

Building 44, 2nd Floor North side of building

Website <http://ppa.utah.edu>

Appointments: Schedule online on the website or call (801) 581-5744

ACQUIRE A RIGOROUS, WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

There are no specific course requirements or recommended majors for law school, so choose a major that truly interests you. Challenge your thinking and reasoning skills by pursuing a rigorous and diverse undergraduate education. Consider enriching your program of study by pursuing a double major, a minor or secondary emphasis of some kind, or an Honors degree. Seek ways to distinguish yourself and enhance your academic experience.

IMPORTANT GRADING POLICY INFORMATION

When you apply to law school your transcripts will be processed by a service called the Credential Assembly Service (CAS) through the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) <http://LSAC.org>. There are **two important differences** between the way your GPA is calculated on your U of U transcript and the way your GPA will be calculated by CAS.

1. **CR/NC:** A CR grade will not be included your CAS GPA (the same as the U of U policy). **However**, unlike at the U of U, an NC grade will be converted into a failing grade (an E) by CAS. *This includes exercise and activity classes*, so it is important to avoid receiving NC grades.
2. **REPEATS:** When you repeat a course previously taken at the U of U, your U of U GPA will only include the most recent grade. **However**, the first grade remains on your transcript, and CAS *will count both grades in your GPA*, so it is important to do your best the first time.

‘W’s (Withdrawals): ‘W’s do not affect your GPA on the CAS report. One or two ‘W’s on an entire transcript is not of concern, and a ‘W’ is far better than a poor grade. Law schools *are* concerned with a pattern of ‘W’s throughout a degree, which can lead to questions about grade manipulation and/or an applicant’s judgment.

CORE SKILLS

Listed below are important skills and knowledge you should acquire prior to law school. These will provide a sound foundation for a legal education. For more details see Preparing for Law School written by the *ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar* <http://www.americanbar.org>.

Analytical and Problem-Solving Skills

Seek courses and other experiences that engage you in critical thinking about important issues, challenge your beliefs, improve your tolerance for uncertainty and criticism, and those that teach you to think analytically within a logical framework. Courses in philosophy, logic, ethics, math, the sciences, and computer science can help you develop these skills.

Critical Reading Skills

As a law student and lawyer, much of what you will do involves careful reading and comprehension of judicial opinions, statutes, documents, and other dense written materials. Opportunities to develop critical reading skills can be found in a wide range of experiences, including the close reading of complex material in literature, political or economic theory, philosophy, or history.

Writing and Editing Skills

Language is the most important tool of a lawyer. Fundamental writing skills—the ability to express yourself clearly and concisely in writing—must be acquired and refined before you enter law school. Seek as many experiences as possible that will require rigorous and analytical writing, including preparing original pieces of substantial length and revising written work in response to constructive criticism.

Oral Communication and Listening Skills

The ability to speak clearly and persuasively is important for success in law school and the practice of law. You must also have excellent listening skills if you are to understand your clients and others with whom you will interact daily. Develop these skills through activities such as engaging in debate, making formal presentations in class, or speaking before groups in school, the community, or the workplace.

Organization and Management Skills

To study and practice law, you will need to organize large amounts of information, identify objectives, and create a structure for applying that information in an efficient way in order to achieve desired results. You can develop this skill through undertaking school projects that require substantial research and writing, or through the preparation of major reports for an employer, a school, or a civic organization.

Research skills

You do not need to be familiar with research sources and techniques specific to the law before entering law school. However, it is to your advantage to have had the experience working on a research project that requires significant library research and the analysis of large amounts of information obtained from that research. Research experience can be from many different areas – it does not have to be law related.

CORE KNOWLEDGE

There are certain basic areas of knowledge that will be helpful to you during your legal education and your development as a competent lawyer. Types of knowledge that will maximize your ability to benefit from a legal education include a broad understanding of the following:

- History, including the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of our society in the United States
- Political thought and of the contemporary American political system
- Economics (particularly micro-economics and an understanding of the interaction between Economic theory and public policy)
- Basic mathematical and financial skills, such as algebra, statistics, and an ability to analyze financial data
- Human behavior and social interaction
- Diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, International institutions and issues, world events, and the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

When you apply to law school, you will be competing with many applicants who have demonstrated the academic ability to succeed in the rigorous curriculum of law school. What you do outside the classroom is important to make your application stand out and show that you excel in more than just academics.

A list of some of the U of U resources is on the PPA website, <http://ppa.utah.edu>. ***You are not limited to activities on that list, and they are not better than other activities you might enjoy.***

Community Service

Each member of the legal profession should be dedicated to the objectives of serving others honestly, competently, and responsibly, and to improving fairness and quality of justice in the legal system. You should seek some significant experience in which you devote substantial effort toward assisting others. Participation in public service projects or similar efforts at achieving objectives established for common purposes can be particularly helpful. This should be ongoing throughout your college years.

Leadership, Relationship-building, and Collaboration Experience

Lawyers are leaders in their communities. However, their work also requires collaborating with others, so interpersonal skills are essential for attracting and working productively with clients, co-counsel, opposing attorneys, expert witnesses, and many others. Examples includes offices held in organizations, committee work; leadership in church activities; coordinating a project; managing, training, or supervising at work or in other activities; teaching experience of any kind; peer counseling or mentoring, etc.

Things to Remember

- These activities *supplement* your application. They will not make up for poor grades.
- Keep contact information for supervisors for future recommendation letters.
- Writing your reflections on what you learned through each experience in a journal will be helpful when you write your personal statement.

ASSESS YOUR CAREER DECISION

While legal experience is not required for admission to law school, there are many good reasons to explore the legal profession beforehand. You will gain a more realistic view of the actual practice of law and the realities of the legal employment market. You may identify potential practice areas that suit your personality, interests, and values. You will develop relationships with practicing lawyers.

Visit law schools and sit in on a class (most law school admissions offices will set this up for you.) Talk with law students, attorneys, and judges. Visit courtrooms and observe trials. Read articles and books on the study of law and the legal profession. Seek internships in law-related settings. Consider law-related employment between college and law school. Making informed decisions will lead to an informed decision about law school and a successful career.

PLAN FOR LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION *EARLY*

Most law schools require 1-3 letters of recommendation. ***At least*** one letter should be from a faculty member who is able to make specific observations about your personal and academic achievements and your potential for graduate study. Other possibilities for letters include a mentor, an internship or project supervisor, or an employer. Begin early to establish a network of professors and supervisors (for volunteer or paid work) who are familiar with your work. It is important to choose recommenders who know you well.

GETTING TO KNOW PROFESSORS

Most professors sincerely want to get to know their students. Besides impressive letters of recommendation, getting to know your professors can have other advantages including higher grades, individualized instruction and independent study, and a more personal interactive learning experience. Use a professor's office hours effectively by asking for clarification on the syllabus, consulting on a draft of an assignment, and asking for suggestions on the best way to prepare for exams. Remember to practice moderation! Do not prevail upon the professor so often that you become a pest. Make sure you space your visits out with a couple weeks in between.

Additional Strategies

- Attend short programs by the professor
- Work as a research assistant for the professor

- Keep in touch with the professor after the class is over
- Take more than one class from the professor

UNDERSTAND THE APPLICATION PROCESS

You can find an Application timeline on our website <http://ppa.utah.edu>. Meet with a prelaw advisor 18-24 months before you wish to start law school. You will need to take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) prior to applying. It is important to make a plan for LSAT preparation, researching law schools, and putting together a strong application.

Deadlines to apply to law school are typically in the spring to start the following fall, but since most schools have rolling admissions, applying in the fall or early winter is recommended. *However, the best time for you to apply is when you have the best application.* An excellent application in the spring is better than a mediocre earlier application. Ideally, you should take the LSAT **no later** than the fall you are applying. A solid 3-4 months of preparation is recommended.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

- **Annual Law School Expo.** Every fall a law school expo is held in the Union Building. Law school representatives from across the U.S. are available to talk with students and distribute information. Usually ninety or more law schools are represented.
- **Law School Application Workshops** in Fall and Spring semesters, and **Law School Financial Aid Workshop** in Fall, at the University of Utah, S.J. Quinney College of Law. <https://www.law.utah.edu>.

PRELAW WEB RESOURCES

PreProfessional Advising PreLaw web page <http://ppa.utah.edu>
 Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) <http://www.lsac.org>
 American Bar Association (ABA) <http://www.americanbar.org>
 National Association for Law Placement (NALP) <http://www.nalp.org>
 AdmissionsDean <http://www.admissionsdean.com/>
 Law School Transparency <http://www.lawschooltransparency.com/>
 Council on Legal Opportunity (CLEO) <http://www.cleoscholars.com/>
 DiscoverLaw.org <http://discoverlaw.org/>
 Free Application for Federal Student Aid <http://www.fafsa.gov>

LOCAL LAW SCHOOLS

- University of Utah, S.J. Quinney College of Law <https://www.law.utah.edu/>, For information on visiting campus and sitting in on a law school class, select *Admissions and Degree Programs*, then *Visit Us*.
- BYU, J. Reuben Clark Law School, <https://law.byu.edu/> Contact the Admissions office to ask about visiting campus, and sitting in on a class, (801) 422-7871, admissions2@law.byu.edu