



Career Development Office | Vassar College

Pre-Law at a Glance

Pre-Law Advising

At Vassar, pre-law advising is housed in the Career Development Office, with faculty support from Jamie Kelly, Associate Professor of Philosophy. Both encourage students to come to their offices to discuss any questions they have with respect to pre-law studies and the law school application process.

The Career Development Office has a variety of resources available to help students determine their interest in the study of law, schools they can apply to, and opportunities open to them after law school.

Curriculum

Although Vassar assists students interested in law school and a legal career, it does not recommend a special pre-law curriculum. Unlike medical school, there are no specific courses required or suggested for entry into law school. Instead, law schools want students with a broad liberal arts education and a demanding major.

A broad education means selecting courses from a variety of curricular divisions and departments. Just as there is no specific group of courses to take to prepare for law school, there is no single discipline in which students should major. Students should try to take at least two courses from each curricular division: the Arts, Foreign Languages and Literatures, Social Sciences, and Natural Sciences. Vassar recommends that students concentrate in fields that interest them rather than those they think law schools would like to see. The key to successful pre-law study is to take a wide range of courses, to develop a sophisticated understanding in one area of concentration, and to do well in all subjects. Vassar does offer courses that can help students determine how interested in law they are, but these

courses should not be seen as necessary for entrance into law school. The courses are drawn from different departments and provide various perspectives on the legal system. Possible courses include: Constitutional Law; Civil Rights; Philosophy of Law; Law and Gender in the US; and Law and Economics. Consult the course catalog for current offerings.

Skills

Students should try to acquire certain skills while at Vassar that the American Association of Law Schools view as important for law school preparation. They are:

- **Creative thinking** – the ability to do creative research, reasoning and analysis;
- **Comprehension and expression in words** – the ability to read, write, and speak clearly; and
- **Critical understanding of the human institutions and values in which the law deals** – comprehending the social and economic, cultural and political context of law and the legal system.

Any broad-based, liberal arts curriculum and demanding major will impart these skills. You should look for challenging courses that ask you to participate actively in research, writing and speaking in class.

Law School Admissions Standards

Most important to your gaining admission to law school is the formation of good study habits, excellence in your academic work and scoring well on the standardized Law School Admission Test (LSAT).

Grades provide a shorthand indication of the quality of your work, and the higher your grade point average, the better your chance of gaining admission.

Law school admission committees have some difficulty in evaluating courses taken pass/fail (NRO). If you can choose between pass/fail and a grade, take a course for a grade (you do not have this choice in some courses, however). Admissions committees also like to see transcripts with courses on rigorously structured subjects like math, physics, chemistry and foreign languages. Students often raise the question, “Should one take such courses, or take a course for a grade rather than pass/fail, if there is a good possibility that the grade point average will suffer?” This is a difficult question to answer. Some admissions people will closely examine the grade point average; most will look at the courses taken. The best advice is to try your hardest to get good grades in demanding courses!

Law schools also strongly emphasize scores on a standardized test similar to the SAT called the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). This test is meant to test your preparedness for law school by determining how well you read and how well you reason; it measures skills hopefully developed over a long period of time.

Law School Recruitment

Each fall, several law schools send admissions officers to visit the campus and speak with students planning to apply to law school. Since interviews are not granted to applicants at many law schools, these visits present an opportunity for students to have personal contact with admissions officers. Admissions officers can get to know Vassar students, and students can learn more realistically if a particular institution is the best place for their law studies.

Pre-Law Meetings

From time to time, information and advising sessions are held. At any time, students are encouraged and urged to speak with the Career Development Office or Professor Kelly about their interest in law school and/or the application process. As many law schools operate on rolling admissions, it is important to understand deadlines and plan efficiently and effectively.

Pre-Law Mailing List

To receive updates regarding pre-law at Vassar and pre-law events of interest, send an email to the cdo@vassar.edu with “Add me to vcprelaw – Class of (your year)” in the Subject line.

For additional information, please see the “*A Timeline for Applying to Law School*” Career Brief.