

PRE-LAW ADVISING

UMass Amherst students considering careers in law should choose majors that best fit their academic interests. The Pre-Law Advising Office provides comprehensive advising services to students and alumni interested in pursuing legal careers. Its mission is to help graduates prepare to attend a law school of their choice, and to make informed decisions that lead to fulfilling, productive careers. To that end, the Pre-Law Advising Office provides a range of services, including options counseling regarding whether, when, and where to attend school and assistance with each step of the application process—from Law School Admission Test (LSAT) or Graduate Record Examination (GRE) preparation and drafting of personal statements, through financial aid applications and the weighing of scholarship offers. The office also sponsors a variety of law-related events to inform students about the practice of law and the law school admissions and financing process.

The Pre-Law Advising Office also has established an informational and mentoring network to connect alumni lawyers with current students and alumni considering law school.

UNDERGRADUATE PREPARATION FOR LAW SCHOOL

There is no “pre-law” major or prescribed course of undergraduate study for admission to law school. The best guide is to follow your own personal and academic interests so that you are motivated to excel. In selecting students, law school admissions committees look for individuals with well-rounded liberal arts educations. Many students pursue double majors to demonstrate their ability to perform well in more than one field. It is especially recommended that students whose primary major is in business or the sciences also pursue courses in the humanities or social sciences.

According to the American Bar Association’s section on legal education, good lawyering requires certain core talents, including analytic and problem-solving skills, critical reading abilities, writing skills, oral communication and listening abilities, general and computer-assisted research skills, task organization and management skills, and commitment to the values of serving others and promoting justice. In addition, lawyers need an increasingly broad range of knowledge, including a good understanding of history, particularly U.S. history; a basic understanding of political and legal institutions; familiarity with ethics and theories of justice; a grounding in economics; basic mathematical and financial skills; and an appreciation for diversity and cultural interdependence.

In law school, you will study the legal principles underlying specific areas of the law; in your undergraduate classes, you need to acquire the core knowledge and skills upon which your legal education will be built. Since law deals with a wide variety of human conflicts, the more you know about the diversity of human experience, the better prepared you will be to study law.

The Pre-Law Advising Office also recommends that students pursue one or more law-related internships during college, or law-related jobs after college and before law school. While such internships and jobs are not necessary for admission to law school, they can provide insights into the day-to-day realities of law practice—critical for affirming that law is the right path before embarking on an expensive legal education.

LAW SCHOOL APPLICATION PROCESS

Applications for law school should be submitted by late November of the year before you plan to begin school. The LSAT is a required part of the application package at most schools and should be taken no later than October of the year you are applying. A growing number of law schools also now accept the GRE as an alternative to the LSAT, and this is fast becoming a viable option for some applicants. It is not necessary to go to law school straight out of college. Taking time off will not disadvantage you in the application process. In fact, about two-thirds to three-quarters of applicants in any given year have already graduated from college.

Law school admissions are competitive. Your application will be evaluated based on your overall grade point average, the rigor of your undergraduate coursework, your LSAT or GRE score, a personal statement, résumé, and letters of recommendation.

In addition to doing well in class, you will need to take time to adequately prepare for the LSAT or GRE. It is also recommended that you take advantage of independent research, office hours, and/or other opportunities to allow your professors to get to know you and your work so they are better able to write persuasive letters on your behalf.

If you're thinking about a career in law, your first step should be to review the comprehensive resources available on the pre-law advising website (prelaw.umass.edu). By following the Pre-Law Advising Office's social media accounts ([facebook.com/umassprelaw](https://www.facebook.com/umassprelaw) and [@UMassPreLaw](https://twitter.com/UMassPreLaw) on Twitter), you will be able keep up to date on the latest news about legal education and the profession, as well as learn about law-related events on or near campus. You are welcome to email or meet with the pre-law advisor at any time, and should do so no later than the spring semester of your junior year if you are applying to attend law school right after college.

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