

PRE-LAW AT VASSAR COLLEGE

PRE-LAW ADVISING

There are two offices concerned specifically with pre-law advising: a) Director of the Office for Preprofessional advising, Lisa Kooperman Room: Main N-162; and b) Professor Adelaide H. Villmoare, Room: Rockefeller Hall #205. Mrs. Kooperman has office hours from 9:30 to 4:00, Monday through Friday. Ms. Villmoare's office hours vary from semester to semester. Please check with the secretary for specific hours. Both encourage students to come to their offices to discuss any questions or problems they have with respect to pre-law studies and the law school application process.

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The Office for Preprofessional Advising has available publications that are valuable to students in determining their interest in the study of law, schools they can apply to, and opportunities open to them after law school.

CURRICULUM

Although Vassar has special offices for assisting 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, not those who have taken a particular series of courses. 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 genuinely 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 which 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. Among these courses are: Constitutional Law; Blacks and the Law; Sociology of Law and Administration of Justice.

SKILLS

There are certain skills students should try to acquire at Vassar which the American Association of Law Schools states are most important for preparation for law school. They are:

- a) "Creative power in thinking" – the ability to do creative research, reasoning and analysis;
- b) "Comprehension and expression in words" – the ability to read, write, and speak clearly;
- c) "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 the more challenging courses which 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 short-hand 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 (NRO) pass/fail. 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). 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 most 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; how well you reason – it measures skills hopefully developed over a long period of time. If you do not have such skills, law school will be extremely difficult.

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 most law schools, these visits present an opportunity for students to have personal contact with admissions offices. Admissions offices 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 Mrs. Kooperman or Ms. Villmoare 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

A mailing list is generated by Mrs. Kooperman and is used frequently to notify potential law school students of meetings, forums, visits by recruiters, etc. One can sign up for this service in the office for Preprofessional Advising – Main North, Room 162. There is also an e-mail list.

IS LAW THE RIGHT CAREER?

Try to ascertain during your years at Vassar whether law school and a legal career are really what you want. The study and practice of law are not normally as glamorous as the glimpses you get from the media. You should try to visit students you might know who are now attending law school; sit in on law school classes. In the summer, look for jobs or volunteer work with lawyers and in the paralegal field. At Vassar there are a number of courses dealing with the law, and the Field Work office offers a variety of off-campus work experiences related to law.