



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; Race and the History of Jim Crow Segregation; and Law and Economics. Consult the course catalog for current course offerings, including relevant intensives.

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 Advising

Students are welcome to meet with a pre-law advisor at any time, whether they are a first-year student or an alumna/us, to discuss their interest and plans for application to law school. Advising topics may include career discernment (i.e., is the field of law/law school right for me?), school selection, application timelines, personal statement and resume reviews, LSAT preparation advice, and more. As many law schools operate on rolling admissions, it is important to understand deadlines and plan efficiently and effectively. Additionally, the Career Development Office frequently hosts workshops and panels related to the study and field of law. process.

Vassar Outcomes

Each year, approximately 60 Vassar seniors and alumnae/i apply to law school. The vast majority of applicants—about 85-90%—are alumnae/i. Of this group, about ½ are 1-3 years out, and ½ are 3 or more years out. For those who take time between Vassar and law school, activities may include working as a paralegal or legal assistant at a law firm, though this is by no means a requirement. Just as there is no required or preferred major for law school, there is no required job or career. Law schools welcome applications from people with a wide range of post-graduate experiences.

Vassar applicants to law school are very successful. In the most recent admission cycle for which we have data (17-18), 91% of Vassar applicants were accepted to one or more law schools, compared to a national average of 73%. Vassar applicants routinely matriculate into highly ranked law schools, including the following: Yale, Stanford, Harvard, University of Chicago, Columbia, New York University (NYU), UPenn, University of Virginia, University of Michigan, Duke, Northwestern, and UC Berkeley. Other popular law schools for Vassar matriculants include Fordham, Georgetown, UCLA, American, BU, and Cardozo.

Pre-Law Mailing List

To receive updates regarding pre-law at Vassar and law-related events of interest, complete your profile in Handshake (vassar.handshake.com) and update your “Career Interests.”

We recommend filling out all of the sections, but to receive pre-law emails you should select 'Legal & Law Enforcement' in the 'Which industries interest you?' section.

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

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