

Pre-Law Programs

SSU Pre Law Advisors

Dr. Judith Abbott, History
Mr. David Benjamin, E.N.S.P.
Dr. Victor Garlin, Economics
Dr. Pat Jackson, C.J.A.
Dr. Elizabeth Martinez, Modern Languages
Dr. Philip McGough, Business
Dr. Gillian Parker, Philosophy
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Dr. Richard Zimmer, Hutchins School

Pre-Law at SSU

The School of Arts and Humanities and the School of Social Sciences have developed within various majors a number of pre-law programs that are directed toward the needs of students who wish to attend law school. Although there are no courses specifically required for admission by the American Association of Law Schools, and thus no prescribed pre-law curriculum or list of recommended majors, certain skills and academic experiences are essential for students who wish to enter law school and succeed: effective use of written and spoken language; an understanding of human institutions and values; competency in the critical analysis and communication of ideas. Pre-law programs are designed to develop these required skills and to offer relevant academic experiences. Special pre-law programs are offered within the following departments:

- American Multi-Cultural Studies
- Anthropology
- Criminal Justice Administration
- Economics
- English
- Environmental Studies
- Modern Languages
- History
- Hutchins School
- Philosophy
- Political Science

Students wishing to pursue a pre-law program should consult the pre-law advisor in the appropriate department. In addition, Sonoma State University alumni who are practicing attorneys have undergraduate majors as diverse as their present fields of specialization: Anthropology, Criminal Justice Administration, English, French, History, Hutchins School, Business, Mathematics, Chicano & Latino Studies, Philosophy, Physics, Sociology.

Departmental pre-law advisors and Advising Center staff can help students plan a program with the balance and rigor to provide sound preparation for the field of law. The Resource Library in the Career Development Center contains law school catalogs and information about special affirmative action programs in law. The Testing Center can provide information about the LSAT. The "Careers in Law Workshop" held in early fall brings together law school representatives, advisors, alumni and interested students, who can focus on specific aspects of preparation for the process of admission, study and career development.



Admission to Law School

The quality of a student's academic record and score on the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) are the two most important factors in being admitted to law school. While at first glance it might seem advantageous for students to take light course loads or less difficult subjects so as to attain the highest grades, this is not recommended. Students who wish a competitive edge in gaining entrance to law school and who wish to function well there do best if they select courses in traditional disciplines, in the humanities and social sciences and the sciences. In this way students can build up a record that indicates to the law school admission committee reviewing student records a solid undergraduate education. Students should also note that law school admission committees look with disfavor on "Credit Only" options, since the student's level of achievement cannot be determined. In addition, the grade "W" is generally counted as an "E" in the student's overall grade point average since admissions committees assume that the most common reason for withdrawing from a course is to avoid receiving a poor grade. In short, hard work in challenging courses will produce the most effective academic record.

LSAT scores are also likely to reflect favorably this kind of education. The Educational Testing Service, which devises and administers the LSAT, states in its study guide that the examination

"questions are designed to evaluate the abilities to reason and to use verbal or quantitative data in several ways: to use standard written English clearly and effectively, to make simple mathematical calculations, to think logically and coherently, and to determine the validity of assumptions, analogies, and inferences. It is important to recognize that the LSAT measures skills that develop gradually and types of knowledge that accumulate over relatively long periods of time. The LSAT does not test specific knowledge obtained in recent coursework, and it does not seek to measure achievement in any specific areas of study. Rather, it is one measure of an examinee's ability to confront new situations and new problems successfully, using only careful and logical thought."

(Law School Admission Bulletin and LSAT Study Guide)

For this reason, challenging courses are likely to have a positive effect on the LSAT score. For the same reason, fulfillment of college credit by means of CLEP examination may keep students from developing necessary skills. An intensive, carefully planned academic program during the undergraduate years is important. Students should also be aware that there is growing evidence that preparation and review for the LSAT may enhance their scores.

Success in Law School

First-year law students report that they find it difficult to adjust to the increased reading assignments of law school and to the necessity of preparing fully for every class meeting. Further, they say that there is much written work and that all law school examinations are essay tests. In fact, they report that in some law courses the entire grade is based upon a single examination written at the end of two semesters. Students with limited experience in taking such tests feel themselves at a considerable disadvantage. They urge undergraduates to select courses that will prepare them for the rigors of law school. Such courses share several important characteristics: a) reading lists are substantial in size and content; b) papers are required and are judged not only for logic and accuracy but for the quality of writing as well; c) essay examinations are required; and d) student participation in class discussion is encouraged. In the opinion of many, the selection of courses like these is far more important than the choice of any particular major or minor. That is to say, students who spend their undergraduate years getting well educated are the ones who have the best chance of getting into law school and doing well there.

We hope this information will be helpful. Official requirements of all majors and programs are published in the Sonoma State University catalog. Sonoma State University is an Affirmative Action/Equal Opportunity Institution and has a strong commitment to the principal of diversity. A member of the California State University

