



Have you ever considered becoming a lawyer? While you might think that lawyers spend all their time in the courtroom, many lawyers spend little, if any, time in the courtroom during their careers. Indeed, law practice is incredibly diverse, from

daily courtroom drama to contract negotiations, overseeing real estate transactions, drafting wills, negotiating settlements, and representing clients on a variety of public-interest issues. Still others in the profession become prominent business leaders, political leaders, policy analysts, judges, or law school professors.

The law degree (known as a juris doctor, or JD) is a graduate degree that provides countless options for career choices upon its completion. Sound interesting? Then read on!

The course of study for a law degree requires three years to complete. Some schools also offer part-time programs, and students in these programs generally take four years to complete their JDs. Upon completing a JD, a graduate must pass a state's bar examination before he or she is qualified to practice law in that state. In our state, the Washington State Bar Association administers the admissions, licensing, and discipline functions for the 33,000-plus attorneys in the state.

Undergraduate Studies

Importantly, if you are planning to attend law school after graduating from college, you should choose an undergraduate major that is of interest to you. The myth that pre-law students must major in political science, history, philosophy, economics, or business is just that — a myth. Many successful law students have earned their undergraduate degrees in fields such as the natural sciences, mathematics, computer science, music theory, art, or education. Given that attorneys must represent the differing views of various individuals and interest groups, it is no surprise that diversity in experience is essential to the composition of both a law school community and the profession as a whole.

While you are in college, take courses that will enhance your skills in critical analysis, logical reasoning, general research, and written and oral expression. Challenge yourself by taking difficult courses from demanding instructors so you can show your capacity to perform well at an academically rigorous level. Also, consult with your secondary-school advisor and college pre-law advisor — they can help you select the best courses and instructors for developing the skills and knowledge you will need to perform well in law school.

The LSAT

In addition to a bachelor's degree, all accredited law schools require applicants to take the Law School Aptitude Test (LSAT) for admission. This half-day test provides a standard measure of acquired reading and verbal reasoning skills. It is administered four times a year at hundreds of locations around the world. For most law schools, you will need to have taken the exam no later than the December prior to the fall in which you wish to enter. For more information on the LSAT, visit the Law School Admission Council website (www.lsac.org).

Getting Admitted to Law School

In making admission decisions, law schools generally place heavy weight on an applicant's undergraduate GPA and score on the LSAT. Letters of recommendation, personal statements, extracurricular activities, community service, and work experience, however, are crucial for rounding out an applicant's profile. Remember, lawyers must analyze legal issues in a society where law and public policy are constantly changing, so highlighting the skills and abilities you have developed outside of the classroom are important for demonstrating how you will contribute to both a law school class and the profession.

Selecting a Law School

In choosing a law school, gather as much information as you can about each school in which you might have some interest. Law schools' websites are a great source of information as well as admissions bulletins, course catalogues, and other materials each law school will provide upon request. While all law schools must meet the same requirements for accreditation, each school has unique characteristics and specialties that should be investigated when reviewing your choices. Many schools offer clinical law programs

(where students get hands-on experience with actual clients), concentration tracks, and other opportunities for specialization that might be of particular interest to you. Toward the end of the admission process, a visit to the law schools that interest you the most is also highly recommended. Finally, there is no substitute for research when choosing your law school, and relying on ranking systems alone is highly discouraged.

What to Expect in Law School

Once you have entered law school, you will quickly discover that the curriculum and educational process differ greatly from the process you experienced as an undergraduate. First-year students typically take a set group of courses with the same classmates throughout the first year. The first-year curriculum generally requires all students to take courses in civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law, legal writing and research, property law, and torts. In the second and third years, there is wide discretion for students in their choice of courses, and many second- and third-year students will also participate in clinics and other experiential learning opportunities. While the Socratic method is still common in many first-year law school classes, certain advanced subjects are more conducive to use of the problem method, role-playing, and treatment of material in either a lecture or seminar format. Again, different schools place different emphases on the content and types of courses available in the second- and third-year curricula, so investigating these options prior to entering a particular law school is a good idea.

What Law School Will Cost

Like other graduate-school education, the cost of a legal education is substantial. The amount varies from school to school, and whether the law school is a public or private institution. Before embarking on a legal education, you should carefully plan how you will pay for it. Each law school's website should include an estimate of the total cost for tuition, fees, room and board, and other expenses. Loans and scholarships may be available. Financial-aid offices at the law schools can provide counseling and guidance. At the time of graduation, many graduates will have a substantial debt load that may affect their career choices. New graduates who are hired by large

law firms are generously paid, and servicing their debt will be manageable. Those opportunities, however, are quite limited.

Employment Opportunities

The economic conditions that exist when you graduate from law school may affect your ability to find law-related or other employment. According to the National Association of Law Placement's survey of 2001 graduates, nationwide as of February 15, 2002, 90 percent were employed, 57.8 percent in private practice, 11.8 percent in government jobs, 11.6 percent in judicial clerkships, 11.3 percent in business, 2.9 percent in public interest, 1.5 percent in academics, and 1.3 percent in the military. In Washington, of those lawyers in private practice, about 44 percent are solo practitioners, and another 15 percent are in small firms of two to five lawyers.

For More Information

While it might seem like a long process from high school to actually becoming an attorney, the journey is well worth the effort! If you have thought even just a bit about pursuing a career in the law, don't hesitate to explore the option early and often. If you have never thought about it, take a minute to investigate it a little more — you might be surprised at the wide range of opportunities available to those trained in the law. There are many useful resources out there to help with your inquiry.

Useful Websites

University of Washington School of Law - www.law.washington.edu
Seattle University School of Law - www.law.seattleu.edu
Gonzaga University School of Law - www.law.gonzaga.edu
Law School Admission Council - www.lsac.org
Pre-Law Advisors National Council - www.planc.org

The Law School Admission Council and the Association of American Law Schools also publish a book annually called the Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools: Pre-Law Handbook. In addition to other useful information, it has a two-page description of the approximately 200 American Bar Association-approved law schools in the United States. The book should be available at your library, or you can contact LSAC directly to order a copy.

This pamphlet was written by Paula Littlewood, executive director of the Washington State Bar Association and former assistant dean for administration and public relations at the University of Washington School of Law.

This pamphlet is one in a series of consumer-information pamphlets produced by the WSBA. Single copies are available free by sending a self-addressed, stamped envelope for each pamphlet to: Pamphlets, Communications Division, Washington State Bar Association, at the address below. *Please include one envelope with a first-class stamp for each pamphlet ordered.*

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This pamphlet was prepared as a public service by the Washington State Bar Association. It contains general information and is not intended to apply to any specific situation. If you need legal advice or have questions about the application of the law in a particular matter, you should consult a lawyer.

Lawyer Referral Service

Clark County	360-695-0599
King County	206-267-7010
Kitsap County	360-373-2426
Lewis County	360-748-0430
Pierce County	253-383-3432
Snohomish County	425-388-3018



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Law School



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