



A Course of Study for

PRE-LAW

American Bar Association (ABA) approved law schools require a bachelor's degree and completion of the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) to be considered for admission. Three years of full-time study is generally required to earn the Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree. The A.B.A. requires that no full-time student hold an outside job for more than 20 hours per week. Schools with part-time programs require four years of part-time study to earn the J.D. degree. Students then take the bar exam in the state in which they wish to build their legal practice. California's exam is considered among the most difficult, with approximately a 66% pass rate.

Academic preparation for law school takes place at the undergraduate level through a rigorous, comprehensive educational experience. Law schools are looking for well-rounded individuals with highly developed skills in the following areas: written and verbal communication, critical reading, analysis and problem solving, listening, general research, and task organization and management.

PRE-LAW IS NOT A MAJOR

Law schools do not require or prefer any particular major; the most successful students have a broad range of knowledge. According to the Statement of Skills and Values contained in the 1992 Report of the A.B.A. Task Force on Law Schools and the Profession, recommended knowledge includes the following:

- A broad understanding of American history and the factors that have influenced the development of our pluralistic society (**History** 11, 12)
- A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory (**Political Science** 1, 51, 52)
- A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice (**Philosophy** 2, 5)
- A grounding in economics, and understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy (**Economics** 1, 2)
- Basic math skills and an ability to analyze financial data (**Accounting** 1; **CIS** 30)
- A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction (**Psychology** 1, 5, 14; **Sociology** 1, 2)
- An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, of international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of nations and communities within our world (**Sociology** 12, 30-34; **History** 42, 52) *(The Santa Monica College courses listed in parentheses above, address the knowledge skills recommended. However, not all courses listed are needed to transfer or enter law school)*

HOW LAW SCHOOLS ARE CATEGORIZED

A.B.A. APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS VS. NON-A.B.A.-APPROVED LAW SCHOOLS

Graduates from A.B.A.-approved law schools may take the bar exam in any state. Graduates of non-A.B.A. approved schools usually can only take the bar exam in the state in which the school is accredited unless they have practiced law for a significant period of time, five years for most states. Refer to <http://www.abanet.org/legaled> for specifics. Non-A.B.A. schools are generally less competitive for admission, and may not require completion of a bachelor's degree. They are less expensive than their A.B.A. counterparts. However, bar passage rates tend to be lower, and career options may be more limited. Correspondence law school graduates are not eligible to take the bar exam in any state except California, and then only under special conditions.

RANKED BY TIERS

Although the A.B.A. officially discounts ranking systems, other sources rank law schools into four Tiers. The First Tier is the most highly selective, the most competitive, and difficult to enter, while the Fourth Tier is the least selective. Hierarchy is based on reputation, job placement success, strength of faculty, and prestige of parent institution, if there is one.

ADMISSIONS FACTORS

UNDERGRADUATE GRADE POINT AVERAGE (GPA)

The more competitive law schools are looking for grade point averages in the range of 3.5 or higher. Improvement in grades and grade distribution is considered.

SCORE ON LAW SCHOOL ADMISSION TEST (LSAT)

Along with GPA, the most important factor in determining admission. The LSAT assesses reading comprehension, logical and analytical reasoning, and writing skills. Students are advised to take the test in the spring semester of their junior year of undergraduate study. It is administered about four times a year, at hundreds of locations around the world.

UNDERGRADUATE COURSE OF STUDY

Admissions officials look for solid academic courses taken as part of a rigorous program. College curricular and extracurricular activities, work experience Ethnic/racial background

PERSONAL STATEMENT

Evaluation of experiences and past accomplishments, obstacles successfully overcome.

SPECIALIZATION WITHIN LAW SCHOOLS

Law schools specialize in different types of law. Some schools are better at international law, others at environmental law, and others at trial law. It is very important that you know which law schools have the type of law that interests you. For example, while UC Berkeley is considered strong in Intellectual Property Law, the best schools for Environmental Law are Vermont Law School, Lewis and Clark College in Oregon, and Pace University in New York. (Source: *US News*)

RESOURCES

Law School Admission Counsel: <http://www.lsac.org> (includes online LSAT registration)

American Bar Association: <http://www.abanet.org>

US News Rankings: <http://www.usnews.com/education>

OTHER RESOURCES

Law School Forums, sponsored by the Law School Admission Counsel, provide an opportunity for prospective students to meet with law school officials from around the country. They are offered on a rotating basis throughout the U.S., and are usually held in Los Angeles once each year. Workshops include: The Application Process, Financing a Legal Education; Minority Information Panel; and What Do Lawyers Do? A current schedule for the Forums can be found at <http://www.lsac.org>.

Guides to U.S. law schools are readily available at most libraries and book stores.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (USC)**PRE-LAW**

Since fall 2009, USC College's School of Philosophy has offered the philosophy, politics and law (PPL) major. The program allows students to select from a range of courses in nine areas, including logic; moral and political philosophy; constitutional politics; history of philosophy; and politics, law and public policy. "Concepts in American Law," a course tailored specifically to philosophy, politics and law students, is being offered for the first time through the USC Gould School of Law this spring.

For more on this topic, click on: http://uscnews.usc.edu/university/usc_college_offers_new_pre-law_major.html