

CAREER SERVICES *at Whitworth*

Making the Decision to Attend Law School

Pre-Law Questions

1. What's the best pre-law concentration?

There is no "best" concentration for law school. The most common pre-law concentrations: Political Science, History, Philosophy and English are excellent preparations, but **only** if you enjoy those areas of study. Your personal interests and desire to grow intellectually in a particular discipline should drive your choice of a concentration.

Try to think about how the perspective of your concentration will enhance your long-term interest in the law. Your advisor should be able to help you with this process

2. What courses are required for Law School?

There are no specific course requirements for law school. The most important thing is to take courses that are intellectually challenging for you and that broaden your understanding of the world. Training in the use of the English language is very important to success in law. You should *honestly* assess yourself on this, and while an undergraduate work to develop your written and verbal skills to their fullest potential.

Try to use your distribution requirements to take courses in a broad variety of disciplines, both to explore the subjects themselves and to improve your skills in particular areas, i.e. logical reasoning, reading complex texts. Quantitative courses will help you to analyze and synthesize data necessary for making a case. Verbal skills will help you to present arguments effectively. Sensitivity and aware of social issue may help you to listen better to clients.

3. I only want to go to a "top" law school. What GPA do I need in order to get admitted?

First, you should further evaluate your interest in a legal education and why you wish to pursue it. Striving to be the "best" is an admirable quality, but studying and practicing law is something that you should desire for its own sake. Your legal education will involve a huge sacrifice of time, energy and money. Before making that choice, make sure it is going to be right for you.

There are no general GPA cutoffs, but of course the higher your GPA and LSAT scores, the more competitive you are. Many law schools desire Whitworth graduates but recognize you

are competing with your classmates for a position in the law school class. Subjectively, Whitworth is well respected but in the application process, you need to make yourself interesting so that the law school will see you as an asset to their class. The personal statement is your opportunity to do this.

Parallel Plan

1. My GPA is low but I really want to study law. What are my options?

If you are truly interested in studying law, there are several law schools nationally where competition for admission is not as great. This does not mean that the programs at these schools are easier, simply that they have different admissions philosophies that allow more subjective evaluations of your ability to be successful. The pre-law advisor can help you to identify schools to optimize your chances of admission.

Remember that how you use your legal education after law school will be determined by the contacts and experiences you develop during your legal education. Each law school has a Career Services Office that will share the opportunities available to you at graduation after you have been admitted. Your personality, your debt level, your ability to take risk, and your personal desire for balance in life will set your standards of "success" more than the law school that you attend.

2. What are some common parallel plans in case I do not get accepted at one of the law schools of my choice?

It is best to take some time off from school and work. Law school can remain an option in another three to five years, after you gain some experience in business. Sort out your personal strengths and interests and investigate professional opportunities for yourself. The Career Center, 2nd Floor HUB will assist you doing this as an undergraduate. Work experience will make you far more competitive in the lawyer job market once you graduate from law school as well. Some students further investigate law by becoming a paralegal. There are paralegal educational programs, but there are also law firms which hire bachelor degree candidates for a one-two year period and train them as paralegals. Ultimately, whatever you chose to do will add perspective to who you are and if you can articulate it well in writing, strengthen you as a candidate for admission.

You also may want to reevaluate the law schools to which you applied. You may have set your original expectations far too high and in reapplying you may need to set more realistic admission goals. If you are truly interested in studying the law, there is a law school for you and it will give you the skills necessary to pass the state bar exam. Earning a successful living as a lawyer requires many attributes not taught in law school.

Some students consider graduate programs to improve their competitiveness for admission to law school. Graduate school grades are not used in the admission process. Rather the degree is another characteristic about you to be weighed in the admission process. One last option is to attend a less competitive law school your first year and look to transfer for the second and third year. This plan is generally only a good one for students who truly excel in their first year of law school and who can pinpoint specific reasons why they were unable to be as successful in their undergraduate years.

Article by Don Rebstock
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Northwestern seeks to attract a different kind of law student. We believe that to succeed in law school and in their careers, our students should have more than the highest intellectual capacity. We want them to have strong interpersonal skills, ambition, and maturity to meet the challenge of change and excel in their chosen fields. In order to make this assessment about applicants, Northwestern became the only major law school that attempts to interview all applicants and pushes work experience as a preferred admission requisite.

The importance of work experience became clear during our strategic planning process in 1998, in which we spoke to recruiters at many firms to find out what they expected of new associates. We learned that firms value associates who had significant work experience before going to law school because they often are better prepared to succeed in the changing legal profession, where law and business are increasingly intertwined and where being a mature, motivated, team player has become extremely important.

We, therefore, encourage our applicants to work for a while in non-legal business or governmental positions rather than coming to law school right from college. Our long-term goal is to admit only students who have had at least two years of work experience. We want to enroll student who understand how the world of their future clients functions, who are mature and have an excellent sense of judgment, who are experienced in working in teams often with people very different from them, and who are leaders with well-developed organizational skills. We also want students who are giving up more – a decent salary and comfortable lifestyle – to come back to law school. We believe that such students are more focused to succeed in our community and enliven the overall learning environment by sharing their past experiences.

When interviewing applicants, we have noticed that typically college seniors are much more general in terms of goals, whereas those who have worked tend to be interested in a specific area of law that relates to their experience. This also relates, we feel, to curbing turnover and dissatisfaction within the profession due to those entering it for less well-defined reasons. Our unique admissions interviewing program, however, does allow us to look for, in applicants without work experience, the skills we value – strong interpersonal and relational skills, sense of passion and enthusiasm for the law and particular areas within it, maturity and

demonstrated tendency to be responsible and dependable. All college seniors must have an interview as part of the admission process.

We initially thought that by establishing the work experience criteria and the interviewing program, our LSAT scores would drop. That was a calculated risk we took, expecting that in the long run we would be more attractive. In fact the reverse has happened. Our median LSAT score rose in each of the first three years that we have conducted the program, and today, our scores are the highest they have ever been. An internal study performed in 2000, which included five years of Northwestern Law students, also found that the average first year grades and average graduating grades were higher among those with work experience vs. those who came directly from college. In fact, the GPA of students who had worked for two years was higher than those who worked only one and the GPA of those who had worked for at least three years was higher than those who work for two.

In the end we find that prior work experience also helps with job placement and career strategizing. As we have increased the number of students with work experience, we have also seen an increase in their placement success upon graduation. Our long term goal is to empower our graduates to make wise choices and to manage the multi-job careers that await them. We believe that legal education should be a springboard to a wide variety of career opportunities, which may be more accurately analyzed if our students have already spent some time working in the professional world.

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