

PRELAW AT UNCG

Information and Suggestions for

Freshmen, Sophomores, Transfers

A prelaw curriculum is a comprehensive undergraduate plan of study that you design to maximize your chances of obtaining admission to a law school when you are a senior. Contrary to what you may have heard, there is no specified or required prelaw curriculum or major. Law school admissions committees require only that you have an undergraduate degree in any major; they do not favor applicants with certain majors. Nevertheless, the UNCG Prewal Advisory Committee (a faculty group whose names, addresses, and phone numbers are listed below) does recommend courses which should help prepare you for admission, aid you in law school courses, and give you success as a practicing attorney. Whatever major you choose, and whatever other courses you take, **you must achieve an outstanding undergraduate academic record** – law school admissions are competitive.

Before you determine which courses to take, stop and ask yourself about your commitment to the law. You are not only thinking about law school, but a lifetime commitment to a profession that is very demanding. As a law student, you will devote three years of hard work to courses. Many law schools warn those who apply that they should expect to spend at least ten hours a day, at least six days a week, on their course work. After earning your J.D. (Doctor of Jurisprudence) degree, you will probably have to study intensively for several months to pass state bar exams to become a licensed attorney. Once you join a law firm, you may be expected to put in long days (and often long nights) at the office. It is not the glamorous life you see lawyers enjoying on your favorite TV shows. These realities should not frighten or discourage you, but you should understand the sustained effort demanded of you now and in the future. Are you prepared to see the challenge ahead as an opportunity? Do you see the rewards of the future career as worth the energy you will have to expend? If you can answer “yes” to these questions, you have the commitment.

As an undergraduate, the first step of several to getting into law school and becoming a lawyer is to formulate a plan of study with the advice and guidance of advisors. Approach the task systematically; you do not have to make any hasty decisions. Avoid being overwhelmed by the unfamiliar university curricula. Your first two years as an undergraduate give you some flexibility, and you and your friends can explore different offerings and think about various careers. As you determine in which direction you want to go with your career, you will determine whether the legal profession is for you. Again, build a superior academic record every semester since that is a prerequisite for advanced study in any field. **A strong academic record provides you with opportunities for the future.**

The following are some suggestions for planning your undergraduate years:

1. Start your “homework” by reading and studying the *UNCG Undergraduate Bulletin*. Learn about the required courses all students have to take to earn a degree. Read about majors which may potentially interest you and the additional courses required for those majors. If

you are early in your university career, bear in mind that you do not need to declare a major until the second semester of your sophomore year.

2. Once you are familiar with the UNCG curriculum options, you will be able to talk knowledgeably with your academic advisor. When you have questions pertaining to prelaw, make an appointment to talk to a member of the Prelaw Advisory Committee. **It is never too early to meet with a prelaw advisor.**
3. Student Academic Services in the Mossman Building or CASA in the McIver Building can give you information about curriculum requirements as well as general useful advice which will help you be a successful student. **Please, however, do not ask them to advise you about law school related questions; please see a prelaw advisor (listed below) to discuss these types of issues.**
4. Visit the UNCG Career Service Center, 207 Foust Building. Make an appointment to talk to a Career Counselor if you are struggling to decide among career options.
5. Familiarize yourself with the resources of Jackson Library, particularly the Reference Room on the first floor. Reference Librarians are trained to help students and scholars find information, including materials pertaining to careers. Librarians also have prepared bibliographies about many subjects, including the law. **Many materials that may be of use to you have been placed on reserve in the Reserves Room of the library. Please see a prelaw advisor for a list of these resources.**

The suggestions above should give you places to start your career explorations. If you decide to aim for law school, you ought to understand the credentials you will need:

I. **Grade Point Average** – you will need a high grade point average (3.5 or higher – and the higher the better) in a demanding major subject and other substantive courses.

II. **Skill Development** – regardless of major, the courses you take should develop your skills in three basic areas: A) comprehension and use of language, B) understanding American institutions and human values, and C) developing the ability to think logically and analytically. Without getting very specific (since a wide variety of courses address these objectives), a few general suggestions may help you make decisions about courses.

- A. Language development is essential for effective speaking and writing. You will benefit from courses which help you express yourself using an extensive vocabulary in correct grammar and syntax. Both oral and written presentations must be clearly organized. Courses in English composition and expository writing help you polish writing skills, and courses in English and American literature help your language development. Courses in public speaking and debating (offered by the Communications Department) give you confidence to speak and think on your feet, something all lawyers have to do.

- B. Lawyers need to understand American institutions, and they must have insight into the values people hold and how people think. You can learn about American institutions by taking courses in Anthropology, Economics, History, Political Science, Psychology, Religious Studies, and Sociology.
- C. Above all, lawyers must be able to think critically and make judgments. The lawyer regularly is confronted with problems; he or she must be a problem solver. Sound advice to clients is the way a lawyer builds a reputation. Many of the course options listed above – Political Science, English, History, Sociology, etc. – help to sharpen your critical thinking ability. Courses in the Philosophy Department in logic and ethics are especially relevant. Philosophy has a sequence of courses it recommends to those prelaw students who major in that department.

III. **LSAT Scores** – you will need a high score on the Law School Admissions Test, commonly called the LSAT. This means that your score must fall in the 85th percentile or higher (which means that you did better than 85 percent of those taking the exam). This national exam provides admissions committees with a yardstick for measuring all candidates on the same scale.

The LSAT is not an achievement test (examining you to find out what you know). It consists primarily of written passages which describe different scenarios which the test taker must read rapidly and then answer a series multiple choice questions. The exam is timed by sections and puts a premium upon rapid reading and a quick grasp of the reading. You may wish to look to old LSAT exams to familiarize yourself with the format. Practice exams are available in published books and on disk. Practice exams are available on a limited basis from the Jackson Library and the Chair of the Prelaw Advisory Committee; otherwise, copies of these publications are available for purchase through the LSAC (Law School Admission Council) or at any major bookstore, such as Barnes and Noble or Borders. The Prelaw Advisory Committee recommends that students study for the LSAT in advance, which includes taking several practice exams before taking the actual LSAT.

During your early years at UNCG, you do not need to be directly concerned with the LSAT, which most students take at the end of the Junior year (in June) or early in the Senior year (late September or early October). At this point, the best thing you can do to prepare to do well on the exam is to take courses that develop and sharpen your reading, comprehension, and analytic skills. The courses mentioned above should help in this endeavor. In fact, the Law School Admission Council, which prepares, administers, and grades the exam, claims that the best preparation, according to their studies, is a demanding course load which develops reading and analytic skills over your many years as a student.

IV. **Personal Record** – you will need to provide a personal record of accomplishments above and beyond your academic record. The law is an activist profession, and you must demonstrate that you have been connected to the real world while earning your degree.

Many kinds of experiences fit into this category. Many government agencies (federal, state, and local) offer internships or summer jobs. Another possibility is to find a job in a law firm,

which would allow you to see the law from the inside while adding to your resume. You may want to be a member of a community service project, or join university clubs (and especially the UNCG Legal Professions Association) and, if possible, be an officer in the club. In short, law schools want to see some meaningful experiences on your application forms.

A word of caution. Extracurricular activities will not make up for a mediocre academic record or a low LSAT score. While experiences add strength to an outstanding academic record, **the two most important factors that affect whether you will be accepted to a law school are your undergraduate record and LSAT score.**

V. **Recommendations** – when you begin the application process for law school during your junior and senior years, you will be asked to provide several recommendations from professionals who can speak to your qualifications and suitability for the study of law. Potential recommenders include your professors, employers, club advisors, well-respected administrators, or even family friends. You will want to choose professionals who can best speak to your qualifications for law school, i.e., your written and oral communication skills, your problem-solving ability, your analytic and logic skills, your work ethic, and your level of personal integrity. Obviously, you will need to ask individuals whom you know and who know you fairly well. A few tips in this regard:

- A. Since you know you will be required to do this, think ahead and try to develop closer relationships with faculty now. You obviously will not need (or want) to become more familiar with all of your professors; however, as you become more engrossed in the studies in your major (for example), you may want to make an effort to get to know two or three faculty members whom you respect and like on a more personal level. This simply requires a little extra effort on your part to speak up more in class, stay after class to ask questions, attend any extra-curricular opportunities mentioned in class, or discuss class-related materials with the professor during office hours. Remember that eventually you will be looking for someone who can speak to your skills, dedication, and work ethic. Start building those relationships now.
- B. Some people make the mistake of believing that it is better to have a short, non-specific letter from someone “important” (a family friend who is a lawyer, a senator who is an acquaintance, the political representative from your district) than a longer, more developed and specific letter that attests to your skills and abilities from someone else. In most cases, **this is a mistake. Make sure that you choose people to write your recommendations who can say something unique and individualized about your unique skills, talents, and/or situation.** Law school admissions personnel use recommendations to “put a face” on a set of abstract numbers (your GPA and LSAT scores). Choosing someone who does not know you or your work well just because you think they are important or influential generally is not the best course of action.

Since you will not have enough spaces in your program to take all of the courses that you may want to help in your preparation for law school, it is very important that you take adequate

time to determine your major and the supplemental courses best suited for you based on your strengths and weaknesses as a student. **As a general rule, take courses which appeal to you, since we all tend to do better if the subject matter is of interest. Do NOT major in something just because you think it will get you into law school: a poor GPA in any major will hurt your chances.**

Important: If you are not already, you should become computer literate. Within a few years, this may become a prerequisite for admission to law school. Some law schools already require evidence that you are comfortable with technology; a growing number require you to own a PC and/or laptop. One law school has altered its curriculum so that students buy no books, accessing all study materials through personal computers. You should take appropriate courses in Computer Science, whatever major you choose.

This information should help you begin your own prelaw curriculum. If you have read it carefully, you should realize that the requirements for law school can be met by being committed to a comprehensive plan of undergraduate study. You have options, and it ultimately is your responsibility to make the right choices for you. Don't hesitate to use the extensive university support system to guide you through your four years here. Please call on members of the Prelaw Advisory Committee to either answer your questions about prelaw or send you to other offices where you will find answers.

PRELAW ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Professor Susan Johnson, Chair (Political Science), 233 Graham Building, 256-0512 (on leave Spring 2007)

Professor Eloise Hassell (Business Administration), 373 Bryan Building, 334-4535

Professor Christopher T. Hodgkins (English), 116 McIver Building, 334-4691

Professor Sandra Westervelt (Sociology), 318 Graham Building, 334-3697

Professor Kimberlianne Podlas (Broadcasting and Cinema), 205 Music Building, 334-4196

Professor David Lefkowitz (Philosophy), 216 Foust Building, 336-334-4322

Professor Thomas Jackson (History), 200 McIver Building, 336-334-3514

Please visit the "Prelaw at UNCG" bulletin board on the 3rd Floor of the Graham Building.

** Feel free to visit the following websites:

Law School Admission Council website at www.lsac.org.

American Bar Association website at www.abanet.org

Kaplan Testing Services website at www.kaplan.com