



## What Should I Be Doing as a First-Year?

1. **Pick a Major You Love and Rock It!** The First Rule of ~~Fight Club~~ Pre-Law is: There is no official "Pre-Law Major." This is because law schools do not have any prerequisite undergraduate courses for admission – just a college degree. GPA, however, does matter and you're more likely to do well in a major that you enjoy. All of this said, there are skills that you want to make sure you develop through your academics, such as: (1) strong analytical and problem-solving abilities; (2) critical reading and thinking abilities; (3) **clear, organized, grammatical writing**; (4) oral communication and listening abilities; (5) general knowledge about the world and yourself.

Fortunately, any major you choose at UP, if you take it seriously, will afford you the opportunity to develop these skills in spades. UP also has an extensive liberal arts Core Curriculum that you all must take, which will expose you to many different subjects and ways of thinking. A bit of advice: try to approach every course not only with an open mind but with passion. You may be pretty sure that Philosophy, for instance, is not your cup of tea (which is wrong; it should be everyone's, and will be yours at some point in your life). But you must remember that a lot of really smart and interesting people throughout history have dedicated their lives to studying and writing about Philosophy. There just might be something to it. And this is true of all college majors.

Finally, you might want to check out the ***Constitutional Studies minor*** that includes courses in Political Science (including US Constitutional law courses), History, and Philosophy. You don't need to have this minor to have a competitive application, but it may help you determine whether you really want to go to law school. In fact, I teach the Constitutional law courses similar to a first-year law school class: we read and discuss seminal Supreme Court cases interpreting the Constitution. If you find that you like reading these cases, then law school might be for you. If you find that you hate it, maybe think about something else.

2. **Get Off Your Bu\*\* and Get Involved!** Law school admissions offices are basically looking for the same thing as undergraduate admissions offices. If an applicant has shown through grades and test scores that they can handle the academics, admissions offices next ask the following question: What experiences, background, skills, interests, etc., does this person bring to our campus to enhance the experience of those studying law with them?

Since this is the case, the more interesting your résumé, the more interesting you are to admissions. This is not an exhortation to "pad," because you run the risk that they will notice. I advise exploring things – **extracurricular activities, internships, community service, study abroad** and so forth – and committing yourself to them wholeheartedly. Quality is better than

sheer quantity, and a warning to the overachievers out there: don't over commit, especially at the cost of your GPA.

While we're on the topic of extracurriculars, you may want to look into **Mock Trial**. Law school admissions officers have indicated that, while it's not necessary, Mock Trial experience is an attractive extracurricular from their point of view. Moreover, you will learn the basics of evidentiary law, verbal advocacy, and the rules of courtroom procedure, which you will learn in law school anyway – this gives you a head start. Also, check out UP's **Pre-Law Society** to meet other law-interested students and participate in pre-law activities.

3. **Your Profs. (Mostly) Don't Bite!** But they do write law school recommendation letters. You'll want at least one but probably two of your professors to write your letters. Because they are the best situated to evaluate your academic talents, law schools want to hear from them; law schools do not want to admit people who cannot handle law school. Beyond recommendation letter concerns, getting to know your professors will simply make your college experience better. Studies show that students who meet with their professors are happier in college (yes, there is a causation/correlation problem here, but still). They also, unsurprisingly, tend to learn more and get better grades. So go to office hours every once in a while!

4. **Back to the Future.** Take some time to learn more about your future career path: about law school and legal practice. There are, of course, *tons* of resources online, including on our UP pre-law page (come ask me if you have any questions about them). You might want to start with LSAC.org, which is the company that produces the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT) and also serves as a clearinghouse for law school applications. The LSAC website has lots of basic info. about law and law school. Check out some law school websites, as well. We mentioned internships above. You might want to look into doing a law-related internship. This is more for you, to help you figure out if you really do want to be a lawyer, than it is an application enhancer. Unless your legal internship is something relatively exotic that also ideally gives you some real responsibility, say, like assisting lawyers prosecute war criminals at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, admissions offices don't weigh legal internships that heavily. The reason for this is that every other applicant has spent a summer filling coffee mugs and stapling papers at Uncle Joe's law firm. Still, it does signal to admissions officers that you have dipped your toe in the legal world and have been reflective about applying to law school. Shadowing a lawyer at work or just talking to lawyers and law students can also help you make your decision about your career. At UP, we have had students intern, sometimes for academic credit, with prosecutors, public defenders, judges, and various law firms and other legal organizations.

5. **Your Humble Pre-Law Advisor.** Prof. Bill Curtis, Political Science, BC 447, [curtisw@up.edu](mailto:curtisw@up.edu). Shoot me an email if you'd like to meet, and watch for Pre-Law activities.