

## **Advising Guide for Pre-Law Students**

Unlike medical or engineering programs, law schools do not require admitted students to have a specific disciplinary background. Instead, admissions officers are looking for evidence of specific skills, especially the ability to read, comprehend, and communicate difficult texts and strong logical reasoning. A student may thus major in any discipline as preparation for law school.

### **LSAT**

A student's Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score is the most important factor in determining whether students will be admitted to a top-tier law school.

Advisees should be encouraged to begin LSAT preparation early in their undergraduate academic career with the goal of taking the exam no later than the fall of their senior year. (Many students take the LSAT at least twice, so the spring of their junior year is often the best time to schedule an initial test.)

- LSAT experts suggest that students begin prepping for the test at least one year before they plan to sit for the exam.
- Students should be encouraged to take graded practice exams to increase their exposure to the test format and lower test anxiety. There is a plethora of free or inexpensive online preparation materials through Khan Academy or Blueprintprep; more intensive (and expensive) courses are available through Blueprint or Kaplan, Inc., Princeton Review, or Test Masters.

Students who are active members of Hampden-Sydney's Pre-Law Society (PLS) receive \$300 to offset the costs of prep materials or exam registration. Encourage your advisees to join PLS in their first year at HSC to take advantage of this and other opportunities offered by the club (see below).

### **GPA**

Regardless of major, students need a strong GPA to be admitted into nationally recognized law programs in Virginia and elsewhere. Consequently, students should be reminded that *all classes matter* from the standpoint of being accepted into their school of choice and receiving financial aid. Students must dedicate themselves to excelling in coursework, even in core curriculum courses that may not be of immediate interest.

### **Personal Statement**

Personal statements are extremely important; in a group of applicants with similar LSAT scores and GPAs, the personal statement may be the tie-breaker that determines acceptance.

Students should be advised to build an extracurricular resume that demonstrates either a unique perspective about the law or dedication to a legal career that goes beyond "My mom is a lawyer" or "I've always been interested in law." For example, students should consider:

- Internship and/or professional shadowing opportunities with law firms.
- Volunteering at the Virginia Legal Aid Society (vlas.org) or a similar organization in their home area. (VLAS has a Farmville office and welcomes part-time assistance during the school year.)
- Focusing on legal issues in their capstone, independent study, or honors research. (This work can then be submitted as a writing sample on the law school application.)

A good personal statement usually takes several drafts to hone; students should be directed to the Rhetoric Studio for assistance.

### **Legal Studies (LS) Minor (18 credits)**

The legal studies minor is an interdisciplinary minor that pulls courses that have either substantive focus on the law or build up the skillset required to excel on LSAT. Several of these courses can be used to fulfill core requirements as well as the LS minor

#### **(6 credits) Case Law**

- GVFA 430 Constitutional Law

plus one of the following courses:

- GVFA 431 American Constitutional Law: Liberties and Rights
- GVFA 440 International Law

#### **(6 credits) Critical Thinking/ Logic & Ethics**

Two of the following courses:

- PHIL 201 Logic (Strongly recommended as part of LSAT prep)
- PHIL 215 Professional Ethics
- PHIL 314 Ethics

#### **(6 credits) Law in Disciplinary Context**

Two of the following courses, in different departments:

- ECON 213 Economics of the Law
- ENGL 193 Literature and Law
- GVFA 331 American Courts and Judicial Process
- GVFA 437 Regulatory Policymaking and the Administrative State
- PHIL 216 Philosophy of Political Economy
- PSYC 319 The Psychology of Law

Note: Unlike in the previous Law and Public Policy minor, LS minors *may* major in Government but may count *no more than two GVFA courses* toward the minor.

Additional special topics courses may also qualify for this LS minor; you will receive a notice from GVFA chair before registration flagging all LS courses for the following semester.

### **Student Groups**

Advisors should encourage students to engage with campus groups and organizations.

#### **Pre-Law Society (PLS)**

An HSC student run organization, PLS membership provides many benefits to its members. For example, active membership in PLS allows students to:

- Attend lectures and meet with legal professionals throughout the year.
- Participate in the annual HSC Bar Association Continuing Legal Education (CLE) conference. CLE sessions provide advanced seminars on different legal issues and are an excellent networking opportunity.
- Join student trips to Law Schools throughout Virginia and the mid-Atlantic area.
- Receive a \$300 stipend toward LSAT prep or registration costs.

#### **Phi Alpha Delta**

A national legal fraternity, PAD membership (\$150 for undergraduates) provides networking opportunities, ability to participate in national expos and mock trial tournaments, and admission to the PAD Society of Scholars honor society (for seniors with a 3.5 GPA). As importantly, PAD members receive discounts on LSAT prep material, casebooks, and other expenses related to applying to law school.

Other campus opportunities relevant to students pursuing law school include Ethics Bowl, UPLS, and honor societies within their respective departments.