Educational Preparation

Necessary Skills

Language skills are of primary importance in preparation for the law.

A lawyer must convey meaning clearly and effectively and communicate ideas convincingly and concisely. Writing is the most critical skill for success in law school and the legal profession. Much of a lawyer's time is spent drafting precise legal documents such as briefs and contracts. Many law schools use essay tests exclusively and have only a single test per course each term. To develop strong writing skills, select undergraduate coursework that teaches writing skills directly and courses that require essay exams and term papers taught by professors who are known for their rigorous attention to written work.

Reading and oral comprehension are also important language skills in preparation for a legal career.

Law students must digest and recall quantities of detailed written material, and they must assimilate new information into their expanding framework of legal knowledge. Lawyers must grasp the exact meaning of factual statements, legal reasoning and argument, both written and oral, and the continuously changing body of legal codes and decisions.

Oral communication skills are significant as well.

Both lawyers and law students must state their positions effectively using concrete and correct language. Public speaking will be especially important for courtroom-heavy careers such as district attorney, public defender, or litigator. Some legal careers require little time in the courtroom, but attorneys often address community groups and professional organizations. Speech classes and courses that require presentations in addition to paperwork provide natural opportunities to refine public speaking skill and comfort level.

Critical thinking skills are another key to success in law school and the legal profession.

Using formal methods of reasoning to prepare a logical argument or to evaluate the soundness of a position presented are important as lawyers problem-solve through the unique facts of each case they encounter. These skills are particularly important in the law school preparation process since three fourths of the graded sections of the Law School Admission Test cover logical and analytical reasoning problems. Courses that directly addresses these skills include Logic and Critical Thinking (PHIL 1313) and Symbolic Logic (PHIL 3003). Courses in mathematics, economics, foreign languages and English develop quantitative and verbal reasoning skills.
Understanding cultural and institutional history and human behavior is also critical as lawyers assist individuals with the difficulties they face.

Often lawyers work with people experiencing extreme emotional distress. They must know human behavior and the systems through which they must work to determine how best to help. The study of psychology and sociology provide a background in behavioral issues as do economics, cultural geography, history, literature, philosophy, and political science in cultural history of societal institutions.

Computer skills are a necessity in the legal profession as research is done via computer, and word processing, spreadsheet and database programs provide the most efficient ways to produce documents and manage data on cases.

Law-related courses from political science, legal studies in business, and other legal overviews from varying disciplines provide background in the area and help students test their interest in and aptitude for legal study. Economics and accounting familiarize students with terms and principles relating to government and business.