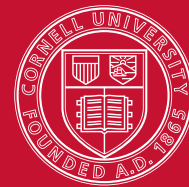


Undergraduate Admissions Office

Admissions Bulletin

Preparing for Law School



Choosing Your Undergraduate Major

Honest: There's no such thing as a prelaw major. At Cornell we agree completely on that point with the Association of American Law Schools and the American Bar Association—both of which state, as policy, that there's no ideal prelaw curriculum. Of course, if you have your sights set on law school, attending Cornell as an undergraduate is a great way to get there. You're even welcome to call yourself a prelaw student. But if you look for a description of a prelaw major in our course catalog, you won't find one.

Law schools don't look for some magic combination of courses and extracurricular activities. They look for people with good minds. To be a strong candidate for law school, you'll need to sharpen certain skills while you're an undergraduate. We recommend that you choose a major in which you're genuinely interested. A major that helps you develop your intellectual skills—particularly your skills in writing, research, problem solving, and analysis—will be the most useful.

That doesn't mean law school admission committees don't look at objective criteria. Your grade point average is important, and so is your Law School Admission Test (LSAT) score. Choose an undergraduate major that interests you, and do the best work you can.

Cornell's seven undergraduate colleges offer you almost unlimited opportunities to explore different areas of the curriculum as you consider the direction of your future legal career. Courses in international studies or a language might eventually lead to a career in international law. Your work in natural resources or biology and society could grow into an interest in environmental law. Undergraduate study in industrial and labor relations might help you decide to specialize in labor law. Taking classes in human development might lead you to concentrate on family law or advocacy law. Or studying engineering might be your first step toward becoming a patent lawyer.

What You Should Work On

Writing Skills: Writing well will be vital to your success in law school. Most of the work you'll submit for grading will be written, and your mark for an entire course may depend on how clearly you express yourself on a single exam.

Whatever your current writing ability, it's sure to improve if you consistently make your best effort in your undergraduate writing assignments. If you're a first-year student at Cornell, you'll probably take two First-Year Writing Seminars through the university's John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines. With more than 150 courses offered each semester across some 30 departments in the humanities, social sciences, expressive arts, and sciences, these seminars will give you a chance to study writing in a small-group setting and in the context of a subject you enjoy.

In addition to the First-Year Writing Seminars, the Knight Institute sponsors a wide range of upper-division courses through Writing in the Majors, in which students learn writing as integral to their major field. The English Department offers Expository Writing, a course with multiple sections in special topics. The Knight Institute also operates the Writing Workshop, which offers tutorials and a walk-in service to provide students with feedback and assistance

on a broad range of writing activities, including application essays for law school.

Speaking Skills: You'll be entering a profession that's built on language and communication, and you'll need to develop advocacy skills. Like your writing ability, your speaking skills will improve with practice. And one of the best places you can get that practice is in the classroom. Make an effort to participate fully in class discussions. Spend as much time as your schedule allows in seminars, where you can express your ideas, have them challenged, and defend them. Ask questions.

Other excellent proving grounds for your oral communication skills include campus clubs, political organizations, social events, and even your residence hall. Challenge yourself to listen, think, and speak up in group meetings.

Broadening Your Perspective: Law schools look for people who have shown they're willing to go beyond the obvious. Your outstanding achievement in a very narrow concentration may not, in itself, satisfy them. Take courses in a variety of subjects that demand analysis, creativity, critical thinking, good research skills, and reasoning.

We recommend that you use your electives to move far afield from your major once in a while. If an unfamiliar subject looks interesting to you, explore it. Many law school admission committees factor in the "challenge" aspect of your undergraduate work, and you should be ready to demonstrate that you've sought out a few unexpected (and tough) intellectual adventures.

Prelaw Advising Resources—How We Can Help

Cornell's Prelaw Advisory Network (PLAN), composed of prelaw advisors in the undergraduate colleges and in Cornell Career Services, will help you get the facts about careers in law and the law school application process. Prelaw advisors help students plan academic programs that meet the requirements of their major and college, and develop skills important in law school and in legal careers. Seniors applying to law school receive advice and guidance in the application process from advisors in the Prelaw Network.

Cornell Career Services in Barnes Hall is the central location for reference materials about legal careers and applying to law school. The office has materials from virtually every law school in the country and maintains surveys of Cornell alumni that provide information about their experiences at a number of schools. Full-time advisors are available for individual counseling sessions. They also conduct seminars on various prelaw issues; for example, each semester they offer a program called "Guidelines for Applying to Law School." Seminars also cover other topics such as "Writing Personal Statements for Law School Applications" and "What to Do When You Are Wait-Listed by Law Schools."

Student Groups: Undergraduate law societies provide information about prelaw issues, hold mock trials, and sponsor campus lectures. For example, the Minority Undergraduate Law Society organizes career forums and the Society for Women and Law invites law school admission officers to discuss the application process. Each year, the Black Law Students Association at Cornell Law School sponsors the William E. McKnight Moot Court competition for undergraduates.

And then there's **Law School Day**. Representatives from more than eighty law schools across the country come to Cornell each fall to talk with students who are considering attending law school and to distribute application materials and catalogs.

Special Academic Programs

Several special academic programs at Cornell will foster your research and writing skills and contribute to your intellectual growth, with the additional benefit of letting you work closely with a faculty member outside the more formal classroom and lecture hall environment. The Undergraduate Research Program, for example, lets you experience the pleasures and frustrations of research by participating, for academic credit, in a faculty member's research project. The independent study option lets you explore special topics in an intense way. Working from a proposal you've submitted to the faculty member who has agreed to be your instructor, you determine the direction of your studies and decide what you will consider a successful outcome. The Law and Society Program, an interdisciplinary concentration in the College of Arts and Sciences, offers some remarkable opportunities. It examines law from a variety of perspectives, including anthropology, history, and technology. As a student in any of Cornell's undergraduate colleges, you can take Law and Society courses as electives.

Undergraduate Internships

Can you imagine better places than Washington, D.C., and Albany, N.Y., for a future lawyer to intern? The Cornell in Washington program makes it possible for qualified Cornell juniors and seniors to live and work in Washington for an entire semester and receive full academic credit.

Human Ecology's Capital Semester in Albany, N.Y., combines a full semester of Cornell credit with a paid internship with a New York State legislator. Students complete research projects, meet with lobbyists and constituents, write reports for legislation and publication, and work on legislative hearings.

Urban Semester

If you'd like to learn about the application of law in a slightly different way, you might want to consider participating in the Urban Semester Program in New York City. This program focuses on multicultural issues and is sponsored by the College of Human Ecology. It is both academic and experiential, and lets you learn directly about how the enforcement of law affects society. For example, a recent prelaw experience involved working with the Legal Aid Society on housing cases, government benefits, and family law problems for indigent people.

Before We Adjourn

Even if there's no such thing as a prelaw major, we hope your four years as a prelaw student at Cornell will help you discover whether your interest in law as a profession is going to last. Many people are interested, or vaguely curious, but only a few have the requisite combination of natural talents and personal inclination. If you're one of those people, we look forward to helping you get your legal career off to the best possible start.



United States Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg graduated from Cornell University in 1954.

For Further Information

Undergraduate Admissions Office
Cornell University
410 Thurston Avenue
Ithaca, NY 14850-2488
Telephone: 607 255-5241
Web: admissions.cornell.edu