Nature of Work:

Lawyers, also called attorneys, act as both advocates and advisors in our society. As advocates, they represent one of the parties in criminal and civil trials by presenting evidence and arguing in court to support their client. As advisors, lawyers counsel their clients about their legal rights and obligations and suggest particular courses of action in business and personal matters. Whether acting as an advocate or an advisor, all attorneys research the intent of laws and judicial decisions and apply the law to the specific circumstances faced by their clients.

The more detailed aspects of a lawyer’s job depend upon his or her field of specialization and position. Although all lawyers are licensed to represent parties in court, some appear in court more frequently than others. Trial lawyers spend the majority of their time outside the courtroom, conducting research, interviewing clients and witnesses, and handling other details in preparation for a trial.

Lawyers may specialize in a number of areas, such as bankruptcy, probate, international, elder, or environmental law. Those specializing in, for example, environmental law may represent interest groups, waste disposal companies, or construction firms in their dealings with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and other Federal and State agencies. These lawyers help clients prepare and file for licenses and applications for approval before certain activities are permitted to occur. Some lawyers specialize in the growing field of intellectual property, helping to protect clients’ claims to copyrights, artwork under contract, product designs, and computer programs. Other lawyers advise insurance companies about the legality of insurance transactions, guiding the company in writing insurance policies to conform to the law and to protect the companies from unwarranted claims. When claims are filed against insurance companies, these attorneys review the claims and represent the companies in court.

Most lawyers are in private practice, concentrating on criminal or civil law. In criminal law, lawyers represent individuals who have been charged with crimes and argue their cases in courts of law. Attorneys dealing with civil law assist clients with litigation, wills, trusts, contracts, mortgages, titles, and leases. Other lawyers handle only public-interest cases—civil or criminal—concentrating on particular causes and choosing cases that might have an impact on the way law is applied. Lawyers sometimes are employed full time by a single client. If the client is a corporation, the lawyer is known as “house counsel” and usually advises the company concerning legal issues related to its business activities. These issues might involve patents, government regulations, contracts with other companies, property interests, or collective-bargaining agreements with unions.

A significant number of attorneys are employed at the various levels of government. Some work for State attorneys general, prosecutors, and public defenders in criminal courts. At the Federal level, attorneys investigate cases for the U.S. Department of Justice and other agencies. Government lawyers also help develop programs, draft and interpret laws and legislation, establish enforcement procedures, and argue civil and criminal cases on behalf of the government.

Other lawyers work for legal aid societies—private, nonprofit organizations established to serve disadvantaged people. These lawyers generally handle civil, rather than criminal, cases.
**Preparation:**
Although there is no recommended “prelaw” undergraduate major, prospective lawyers should develop proficiency in writing and speaking, reading, researching, analyzing, and thinking logically—skills needed to succeed both in law school and in the law. Regardless of major, a multidisciplinary background is recommended. Courses in English, foreign languages, public speaking, government, philosophy, history, economics, mathematics, and computer science, among others, are useful. Students interested in a particular aspect of law may find related courses helpful. For example, prospective patent lawyers need a strong background in engineering or science, and future tax lawyers must have extensive knowledge of accounting.

Acceptance by most law schools depends on the applicant’s ability to demonstrate an aptitude for the study of law, usually through undergraduate grades, the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), recommendations from professors, the quality of the applicant’s undergraduate school, any prior work experience, and sometimes, a personal interview. However, law schools vary in the weight they place on each of these and other factors.

**Admission Requirements**

Admissions Requirements are GENERAL and may differ from school to school. Please contact the schools you’re considering to discuss specific admissions requirements.

- Bachelor’s degree
- Competitive GPA
- Competitive LSAT score
- Letters of recommendation
- Completed application to law school

**UW-Eau Claire courses STRONGLY ENCOURAGED**

- ANTH 422 – Anthropology of Law
- CJ 414 – Mass Media Law
- ECON 103 - Principles of Microeconomics
- ECON 104 – Principles of Macroeconomics
- ENGL 150 – Introduction to Literature
- ENGL 201 – Advanced College Writing
- HIST 114 – U.S. History to 1877
- HIST 115 – U.S. History since 1877
- MATH 111 – Short Course in Calculus
  - AND/OR-
- MATH 246 – Elementary Statistics
- PHIL 120 – Ethical Reasoning
- PHIL 150 – Logic I
- PHIL 305 – Ethics and Business
- PHIL 310 – Philosophy of Law
- POLS 110 – American National Politics
- POLS 338 – Judicial Politics
- POLS 403 – U.S. Constitutional Principles-Powers of Government
- POLS 405 – U.S. Constitutional Principles-Due Process
- PSYC 100 – General Psychology
  - OR-
- SOC 101 – General Sociology
Professional Programs

During the first year or year and a half of law school, students usually study core courses, such as constitutional law, contracts, property law, torts, civil procedure, and legal writing. In the remaining time, they may choose specialized courses in fields such as tax, labor, or corporate law. Law students often gain practical experience by participating in school-sponsored legal clinics; in the school’s moot court competitions, in which students conduct appellate arguments; in practice trials under the supervision of experienced lawyers and judges; and through research and writing on legal issues for the school’s law journals.

A number of law schools have clinical programs in which students gain legal experience through practice trials and projects under the supervision of lawyers and law school faculty. Law school clinical programs might include work in, for example, legal-aid offices or on legislative committees. Part-time or summer clerkships in law firms, government agencies, and corporate legal departments also provide valuable experience. Such training can lead directly to a job after graduation and can help students decide what kind of practice best suits them. Law school graduates receive the degree of juris doctor (J.D.), a first professional degree.

REGIONAL PROGRAMS:
University of Minnesota Law School http://www.law.umn.edu/
University of Wisconsin Law School http://law.wisc.edu/
Marquette University Law School http://law.marquette.edu/
William Mitchell College of Law http://www.wmitchell.edu/
Hamline University School of Law http://law.hamline.edu/
University of St. Thomas School of Law http://www.stthomas.edu/law/
For a list of all schools: http://www.lsac.org/JD/choose/law-school-links.asp

Pre - Law Advising

Dr. Geoff Peterson, Chair
Political Science Department
Hibbard Hall 433
PETERSGD@uwec.edu
(715) 836-3641

Resources

Law School Admissions Council http://www.lsac.org/default.asp

The Association for Legal Career Professionals http://www.nalp.org/lawstudentsgraduates

American Bar Association http://www.americanbar.org/aba.html

Helpful Tips

- Majors and minors should be chosen principally in terms of what you’d be interested in doing if you do NOT go to law school (your alternative career plans). We have had people go to law school who have had majors in Biology and Music, for example. Choose a major/minor that will provide you with options. As an example, if you are interested in science and the environment, you might major in biology and/chemistry with the idea of either going into environmental law or continuing in graduate school in the sciences.
- The pre-law designation is NOT a major or a minor. Students that elect to add the pre-law designation MUST also choose a major in an academic department.
- Students who plan to take the LSAT (Law School Admission Test) regardless of major, should take GE courses that improve upon their writing and analytical skills.
- Meet with a pre-law advisor
- Join the Future Lawyers of America (FLA) organization http://uwec.orgsync.com/org/fla