

Berkeley

PRE-LAW & LAW



What should I major in at Berkeley, if I want to attend law school?

There is no preferred undergraduate major for students who intend to go to law school. To be a lawyer, you will need the ability to read and write well, and to think critically and analytically.

Law school admissions officers often say they look for success in solid academic courses taken as part of a rigorous undergraduate program. To prepare for law school, you should choose courses which develop your writing skills and which stress the ability to reason logically, systematically and analytically. The ability to speak effectively is important for both the law student and lawyer. In addition, courses that provide a general understanding of business, economics, politics and social institutions will give you a valuable context for the study of law. Most importantly, choose a major that you will enjoy. In all probability, the more you enjoy your major, the better you will perform academically.

The most popular undergraduate majors of students admitted to law schools are political science, economics, business administration, history, English, and rhetoric. Most law schools give equal admission consideration to all academic disciplines because lawyers are needed in a wide variety of areas. This goal requires students with diverse academic backgrounds, but no matter what the field, all law students will need the skills mentioned above.

What if I'm uncertain about becoming a lawyer?

Your undergraduate years, particularly the first two, are a time of discovery and personal growth. If you are considering going to law school, you may wish to use some of this time to explore and research the many facets of law, to investigate the positive and negative aspects of being an attorney, and to give considerable thought to why you wish to obtain a legal education. You may also want to volunteer in a law office during your undergraduate years. It is important to follow your own interests and to be aware of the ever-changing job market. Since admission to many law schools is highly competitive, it is important for you to keep alternative career opportunities in mind when selecting a major. This is another reason for you to select a major in a field in which you are interested.

Berkeley offers an excellent undergraduate education in a wide variety of majors that prepare you for entry into law school. Like most universities and colleges in the United States, Berkeley does not offer a major specifically called “pre-law” because law schools do not require any specific major for admission. Most law schools require a bachelor’s degree, the Law School Admission Test (LSAT), strong letters of recommendation, and a compelling personal statement for admission.

Does UC Berkeley have a law school?

Yes. Berkeley’s School of Law, Boalt Hall, is generally considered one of the top ten law schools in the United States. Admission to Boalt is highly competitive. For further information, visit its website at law.berkeley.edu.

Does Boalt Hall give special preference to graduates of UC Berkeley?

While no special admission preference is given to graduates of UC Berkeley, the percentage of Berkeley applicants admitted to Boalt Hall is quite high. Over the last four years, Boalt has been the second most popular destination for Cal graduates. (Hastings College of the Law is number one.)

Do other University of California campuses have law schools?

Yes, both the Davis and Los Angeles campuses have law schools. In addition, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco is affiliated with the University of California.

How successful are graduates of Berkeley in being accepted to law schools nationwide?

Berkeley graduates do very well compared to graduates of other colleges and universities. Over the last five years, nearly 80 percent of Berkeley graduates applying to law school were accepted. Additional statistics are available on the Career Center’s website, career.berkeley.edu.

How do law schools decide which students they will admit?

Law schools look closely at five factors:

1. College GPA. The higher your grades, the better. Grades can account for 30-40 percent (or even 50 percent) of the admission decision. The college you attended and the major in which you earned your degree often are taken

into consideration, so attending Berkeley is an advantage. An excessive number of courses taken passed/not passed could work against you because law schools cannot interpret your accomplishments accurately. Many law school admissions officers assume that a GPA would be lower if all courses had been taken for a grade.

2. Law School Admission Test (LSAT). The higher your score, the better. The current LSAT consists of three types of questions: reading comprehension to measure the ability to read with understanding and insight; analytical reasoning to measure the ability to understand a structure of relationships and to draw conclusions about that structure; and logical reasoning to evaluate the ability to understand, analyze, criticize, and complete a variety of arguments. The LSAT is given considerable weight, up to 50 percent (or even more) of the decision in the law school selection process.
3. Personal statement. This is an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other applicants and to explain your qualifications beyond what is revealed by your transcript and test score.
4. Letters of recommendation. Usually two or three are requested. It is your responsibility to develop relationships with two or three professors during your first three years in college so they can write strong, informative letters about you.
5. Activities/work experience. Activities in which you have taken on responsibilities and demonstrated leadership are the most useful for admission purposes. It is better to concentrate on a few activities rather than spreading yourself too thin just so you can list many organizations on your resume. Responsibility is a plus in work experience, particularly paid or volunteer community or legal work experience.

Where can I get more information and advice?

You may obtain more information from Berkeley's Career Center
2111 Bancroft Way # 4350
Berkeley, CA 94720-4350
510-642-1716
or at career.berkeley.edu.

The Career Center employs pre-law counselors and maintains a variety of reference materials and features a comprehensive web section on all facets of applying to law school (career.berkeley.edu/Law/Law.stm). In addition, the Center provides a letter-of-recommendation service, holds workshops on applying and writing the personal statement, and sponsors an annual Law School Fair which provides the opportunity for law school representatives to meet with students. The fair is held on the Berkeley campus in late fall.

Berkeley students may visit Boalt Hall and take advantage of applicant counseling in the Boalt Admissions Office as well as attend a series of six applicant information sessions during the fall semester.

A useful book about law schools which is usually available in college bookstores and libraries is: *The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools*, published by the Law School Admission Council.

You may order publications and find links to many law schools by accessing the Law School Admission Council's website at: lsac.org.

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