

Trinity Western University Pre-Law Handbook

(Rev 2011), edited by Dr. John Dyck (DPhil. Oxford)

Pre-Law Advising Web page: <http://www.twu.ca/academics/fhss/politics/prelaw.html>

Law School Admission Council: <http://www.LSAC.org>

This Pre-Law handbook assists and prepares Trinity Western University students who are thinking seriously about law school. The answers to most basic questions about the legal profession, about law school and about how TWU prepares students to enter law school are found in the frequently asked questions section.

Assistant Professor in Political Studies Dr. John H. A. Dyck, (TWU Pre-Law Coordinator & Advisor), holds a general information meeting early each fall semester for students interested in the Pre-Law advising program and again in the Spring Semester. Printed program information from Law Schools, general pre-law study guides, including LSAT materials, are also available in the Department Reading Room (RNT 225), and from Professor Dyck's office, 204(RNT).

Fast Facts About: Trinity Western University Pre-Law Advising Program

- Pre-Law Coordinator/Advisor: Assistant Professor John Dyck (Political Studies) D.Phil. (Oxford) teaches:
 - Canadian Politics: POLS 234--Canadian Government and Politics in Comparative Perspective;
 - POLS 330—Law and Canadian Politics;
 - HIST/POLS 334—Issues in Canadian Government and Politics;
 - HIST/POLS 335 Development of the Canadian Constitution;
 - POLS 434—Canadian Political Thought.

See also Dr. Dyck's Research Website: <http://www.twu.ca/rcc>

- Pre-Law Advising Web page: <http://www.twu.ca/academics/fhss/politics/prelaw.html>
- Size of TWU's Pre-Law Yearly cohort: Approximately 20 students participate
- **Activities of the Pre-Law Advising Program:**
 - Introductory fall and spring meetings
 - Join the TWU Pre-law Society
 - Law School Forum
 - Individual advising
 - Individual and Group tutoring
 - Occasional speakers: hear from law school graduates
 - Your pre-law advisor can help you find courses that will best prepare you to get into and thrive in law school.

- For a comprehensive list of courses, go to the Frequently Asked Questions page.

- **Some Important Facts about our students**
 - ■Number of TWU law school applicants last year: 12
 - ■Average LSAT score of applicants: 164. (90th percentile)
 - ■Average GPA of applicants: 3.40
 - ■Number of TWU applicants accepted to one or more law schools: 8
 - ■Some of the law schools at which students were accepted in the past 3 years: University of Manitoba, University of British Columbia, University of Victoria, University of Toronto, University of Alberta, University of Western Ontario, Dalhousie University Law School, University of Ottawa Law School, all of which are recognized as being in the top tier of law schools in Canada.
 - ■Students have also been recently accepted to, among others: Gonzaga University School of Law in Washington, Graduate Degree Program in Law and Society at New School in New York and Baylor University Law School in Texas.

■ **Is there a Pre-Law major?** There is **no** Pre-Law major at Trinity Western University. The Canadian Bar Association and law school admissions professionals discourage college and university students from majoring in “Pre-Law.” Instead, these professionals advise students to follow their intellectual interests in choosing a major and to seek out demanding courses and professors as the best way to prepare for law school.

Trinity Western University’s strong liberal arts core and challenging majors provide excellent preparation for pursuing a profession in law.

Consider thoroughly the nature of law and the costs/benefits of a law degree before putting yourself through the law application process and the financial burden and stress of a law school education. A law school education will certainly help you build skills necessary to succeed in law, but no amount of education will help you enjoy things you hate.

Check out the following list of basic skills necessary:

- 1) Reading (including critical reading)
- 2) Research
- 3) Critical Thinking
- 4) Problem solving
- 5) Writing
- 6) Speaking
- 7) Listening
- 8) Prioritizing
- 9) Time Management
- 10) Creativity

- 11) Ability to Work with Others
- 12) Analytical Skills
- 13) Conflict Management

Ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you like to think of ways to solve other people's problems?
2. Do you enjoy working on research papers?
3. Do you like writing papers?
4. Do you enjoy speaking in front of people?
5. Do you like thinking on your feet?
6. Do you find history and current events interesting?
7. Do you thrive in conflict situations?
8. Do you work well under the pressure of deadlines?
9. Do you juggle multiple tasks well?

While not all legal occupations require all these skills, the majority do.

Don't make the mistake of entering law school simply because you don't know what else to do. Law school is too expensive to pursue as a trial run. In 2005, the average debt for law school graduates was about \$80,000. That debt load amounts to almost \$1000/month on a ten-year repayment. Investigate the career possibilities before you choose to pursue it.

Legal Profession

What do lawyers do?

Lawyers are advocates -- for individuals, groups, and organizations who need assistance in interpreting the law or who are in conflict with other individuals or groups. **Lawyers are also interpreters of laws and regulations.** They assist businesses, for example, in dealing with laws on labor relations or environmental usage. It is said that we are a nation of laws. Laws need to be understood and applied in a fair and reasonable fashion. Lawyers assist us in doing so.

About 73% of lawyers work in “private practice,” most in small, one-person office, but others in firms. A firm is a group of lawyers who work together. Each lawyer may develop a special expertise in some area of the law, and this grouping of experts is often advantageous to the firm and appealing to the public. Legal specializations include corporate and securities, criminal, environment and natural resources, family and juvenile, health, intellectual property, international, tax, and civil rights. Associates in a firm are paid a salary, do much of the “grunt” work, have less job security, and are typically not a part of the management of the firm. Partners typically share the profits of a firm, have more job security, are responsible for generating clients, and participate in the management of the firm. Associates on the “partnership track” typically work for a firm for between 5-9 years before they are considered for partnership.

Most lawyers do not work in large law firms. Many still set out their own individual shingles and work on a wide variety of cases. Some individual lawyers choose to join together in one

building and share secretarial help and a library while maintaining their own clients and hours. In these cases, salaries may be modest, but hard working solo practitioners can still make a good salary. Lawyers outside of private practice in Canada work in a variety of settings, including government agencies (about 10% of lawyers) or business (about 13%). Others work for public interest groups such as legal aid or public defender organizations (about 4%) or in legal education (about 1%).

Not all law school graduates practice law. For the graduating class of 2005, only 74% of the jobs obtained required passing the bar. Lewis Klar, QC, Professor of Law and Dean of Law, (1997-2002), University of Alberta, writes: “Whether you end up as a lawyer, serving clients involved in legal disputes, or in another profession or career entirely, knowing how the system works, and how it can best be utilized to avoid and resolve conflict, will be invaluable.”¹

Is Law Practice Changing?²

While there have been changes in the traditional law practice areas (due to ongoing marketplace conditions, new technologies, legislative amendments and client preferences), new industries, globalization, and scientific breakthrough, terrorism, and climate change have led to an “explosion of new niches and still-developing practice areas.”

Should I become a lawyer?

That's a tough question. Clearly the legal profession does not enjoy the respect it once did, and some people claim that we have far more lawyers in our country than we need. Lawyers are often accused of manipulating the law, gouging clients, and chasing after the almighty dollar rather than practicing the high ideals of the legal calling. It is also the case that many lawyers become discouraged after a time and seek other careers. Students sometimes overlook the fact that lawyers deal with conflicts and that personal fulfillment is not always the result of working hard with disputing parties.

Nevertheless, a student who truly wants to become a lawyer should seriously consider applying to law school. Legal training is invaluable for developing your ability to identify problems, analyze issues and offer solutions. Lawyers still provide a valuable service as counselors to individuals and businesses. And lawyers can still play a vital role in seeking to do justice and to show mercy as part of their Christian calling.

The best way to decide whether the law is for you is to talk with practicing lawyers from a variety of backgrounds. Seek out family friends or members of your church who practice law. See if they would be willing to let you "shadow" them to see what they actually do during the week. Try an internship or externship in a legal setting. In addition, talk to people who know you

¹ “Comments and Reflections About a Canadian Legal Education,” *Official Guide to Canadian Law Schools* 2008 <http://www.lsat.org/CanadianReview/template2.asp?url=CommentsandReflection.htm>

² Adapted from the 2007 *National Law Student* <http://www.cbanational.student.rogers.dgtlpub.com/data/issuePDF/LAW-E/9000000582-LAW-E.pdf>

and your skills and see if they match well with the task of being a lawyer. Become informed and leave your options open.

If you still have questions, then work through this excellent resource:

Should You Really be a Lawyer?: The Guide to Smart Career Choices Before, During & After Law School, by Deborah Schneider and Gary Belsky, Decision Books (2004).

Questions & Answers regarding Trinity Western University's Pre-Law Advising Program

Can I major in Pre-Law at TWU?

The simple answer is **NO**. Law schools do not require that undergraduates complete any particular course of study. Thus, students who complete degrees in engineering, science, medicine, human kinetics or business may wish to consider careers in law. Undergraduates interested in attending law school are encouraged to choose from among the many courses offered which explore legal topics. The majority of law schools tell potential students that the **best preparation for law school is a solid liberal arts education**. The liberal arts expose students to many academic disciplines and train students to think and write clearly, to organize and manage time wisely, and to learn how to adapt to a changing world. **Completing a strong undergraduate degree at TWU should help you acquire the necessary skills such that you can succeed at a law school.**

The pre-law advising program office in the Political Studies Department maintains information on careers in law, law schools, and the law school admission test (LSAT), which is universally required. Students may examine this material independently or make an appointment with Dr. John Dyck. Students with an interest in law are also encouraged to join the TWU Pre-Law Society. To do so, contact Professor John Dyck at john.dyck@twu.ca

What majors are good for preparing me for law school?

The American Bar Association and the Canadian Bar Association, the national organizations that oversee legal education, offer the best advice about choosing a major to prepare for law school:

“Students who are successful in law school and, who become accomplished attorneys, or use their legal education successfully in other areas of professional life, come to their legal education from widely differing educational and experiential backgrounds. As undergraduate students, some have majored in subjects that are traditionally considered paths to law school such as history, English, philosophy, political science, economics, or business. Other successful law students, however, have focused their undergraduate studies in areas as diverse as art, music theory, computer science, engineering, nursing, or education. Many law students enter law school directly from their undergraduate studies and without having had any substantial work experience. Others begin their legal education significantly later in life, and they bring to their law school education the insights and perspectives gained from those life experiences.”

“... the ABA and CBA do not recommend any particular group of undergraduate majors or courses that should be taken by those wishing to prepare for legal education; the law is too multifaceted, and the human mind too adaptable, to permit such a linear approach to preparing for law school or the practice of law.”

“Taking difficult courses from demanding instructors is the best generic preparation for a legal education.”

- **Are there any courses that would help me see whether I would like to attend law school or be a lawyer?**
- **I recommend the following courses** in order to determine your interest in the subject matter of law. Each of the following courses addresses either some aspect of legal theory, business and law, the political dimension of law, the historical context of legal systems, the relationship between law and specific court cases or speaks to the normative and factual content of court rulings:
 - *BUSI 345 Business Law I*
 - *BUSI 346 Business Law II*
 - *HIST 309 Early Modern Europe*
 - *HIST/POLS 334 Issues in Canadian Politics and Government*
 - *HIST/POLS 335 Development of the Canadian Constitution*
 - *HIST/POLS 340 Issues in Canadian-First Nations Relations*
 - *HIST/POLS 406 War, Peace and Society*
 - *HIST/POLS 352 Government and Politics of the United States*
 - *PHIL 108 Philosophy of Law and Society*
 - *PHIL/POLS 310 Issues in Social Justice*
 - *POLS/SOCI 234 Canadian Government and Politics in a Comparative Perspective*
 - *POLS 312 Globalization and Global Governance*
 - *POLS 330 Law and Canadian Politics*
 - *POLS 391 Canadian Government Leadership*
 - *POLS 392 Ethics and Public Affairs*
 - *POLS 393 Law, Public Policy & Cultural Change*
 - *PSYC416 Psychology and the Law*

Notes

For further information contact:

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