

PRE-LAW AT UVM

PREPARED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Recommended Senior Year Timetable

SENIOR YEAR, FALL SEMESTER

I. **Apply by late August (perhaps before classes start) for the late September/early October LSAT exam if you did not take the exam in June.** Although you can register in late October to take the exam in early December, you should strongly consider taking the exam during the June or late September/early October test dates. The December date not only coincides with your hectic end-of-the-semester schedule, but does not allow you any room for flexibility if you miss the exam, become sick, or do not perform to your abilities. Taking the exam earlier will take some of the pressure off by allowing you the opportunity to reschedule if something unexpected occurs.

NOTE: **Should you take the LSAT more than once?** Yes, but only if you believe you were not at your best when you took the exam for the first time. If you take the exam twice, law schools generally average the two scores, but certain law schools *might* be willing to accept a second higher score if you explain your poor first LSAT. In general, students who take the exam twice do not significantly improve the second time, and some actually do worse.

BOTTOM LINE: For best results, plan to take the LSAT only once. Be VERY prepared the first time you take the exam.

Feel free to check out the website for the Law School Admission Council, which administers the LSAT: www.lsac.org.

II. Early in the semester (August/September) obtain admissions material including catalogs and admissions forms from the law schools where you wish to apply. Your choices will be based on specific research into specific law schools and their admissions standards. Be realistic in assessing your grade point average and LSAT score compared to published admission criteria of the various law schools. Understand, however, that admission competitiveness may change on a year-to-year basis. Recent accounts have indicated, for example, that law schools are currently seeing a substantial increase in the number of applicants compared to only a few years ago due to changing economic circumstances across the country.

NOTE: Where should you apply? It is often recommended to take what advisors call the “three-tier” approach. Do not focus on costs, though you may have to pay \$50 or more to each school. Your objective is to be accepted to a law school of your choice. Application fees are an unavoidable expenditure. Adding some geographic diversity can help as well.

- a) **Top tier.** Apply to two (?) schools which seem long shots, but would be your choice if admitted.
- b) **Middle tier.** Apply to four (?) schools where your credentials appear to give you a better than even chance of acceptance.
- c) **Third tier.** Apply to two (?) schools which seem likely to accept you. These choices should be made carefully since these may be the only choices you will have. Basically, these are “back up” schools. They may not be ideal; but you see them as acceptable.

III. As you receive catalogs and application forms, write down the dates of the application deadlines. Most law schools set a deadline between December and February, and you should note these dates on a schedule you post to remind yourself of the due dates.

NOTE: Often there is a real advantage in filing your application early. If a law school uses the rolling admission system (they notify you as soon as they have acted on your application), early applicants may increase chances of acceptance. Later applicants compete for a declining number of places in the entering class. This is another reason why you are urged to be prepared for and take the LSAT in June or, at the latest, in late September/early October.

IV. Continue to narrow or expand the list of schools where you intend to apply. You may want to confer with your prelaw advisor and do more investigating of more schools as the realities of the application process become apparent.

V. **Begin working on admission forms early – by mid-October, at the latest.** You should plan to write and rewrite the essay or expository parts of the application forms. These essays should be polished statements.

NOTE: The Personal Statement can be a key part of the application. How well this is prepared may make a difference in how your application is viewed. This is your only opportunity to tell an admissions committee about how you perceive yourself. The portrait you draw should explain your values and your priorities in life. It should not be a resume (biographical information is provided elsewhere in the application). Do not be afraid to explain your academic career, any hardships or obstacles encountered (for example, you need to work to support yourself). Strike a positive note; avoid being defensive. As you prepare to write the statement, ask yourself the following question: *what is it about me that a law school admissions committee would view in a positive light that is not already apparent from looking at my LSAT scores and my academic record?* Also, be very careful about inserting humor or being too innovative. An unusual, off-the-wall essay is high risk – it may win you a place, but it may turn off your readers.

In writing a Personal Statement, follow directions carefully. Confine your essay to the prescribed length. Edit your copy. Avoid spelling and grammatical errors. Have a friend or professor read the essay for reactions to the prose and to check for errors. **Why is the Personal Statement so important? Admissions committees often do not interview, so the personal statement is your only opportunity to showcase yourself.** If your personal statement is incomprehensible or prepared sloppily, you might be eliminated early in the review process. You are applying to a professional program: take a professional attitude toward the application process.

VI. **Carefully choose those who will recommend you.** The strongest recommendations will probably come from professors who know you more than casually and have had ample opportunity to judge your academic work. In general, you should first consider professors who can provide insight into your abilities and your character. The letters of recommendation are important, and if you have been an active student and have a strong academic record, you should be able to choose among several professors who can evaluate your abilities. When seeking letters of recommendation, do not ask the professor: “will you write a letter of recommendation for me?” Rather, ask him or her: “can you write me a *strong* letter of recommendation?”

NOTE: Do not ask a prominent person (such as a politician) to recommend you unless that person knows you personally, knows something about your abilities, and will be able to write a letter that is not merely platitudes. All recommendations have to have content which will aid the admissions committee in judging your qualifications. A family friend or acquaintance may be more than happy to write a letter describing “what a nice young man/woman” you are, but will unlikely be able to provide an objective, substantive analysis of your abilities and character.

VII. Ask professors for letters of recommendation EARLY in the application process, as much as a month or two ahead of the due dates. In addition to common courtesy, remember that it takes time to write a good letter of recommendation. Professors generally have busy schedules, and may be asked to write letters of recommendation for several students. A professor may not be able to produce a letter with just one or two week's notice, and certainly will not be able to write the strongest possible recommendation. It is in your interest to give professors plenty of time.

VIII. Set a deadline to have all applications completed. Some advisors think that you should have the forms completed and ready to mail by Thanksgiving. Of course, you do not need to mail all applications at one time, but early applications seem to have more advantages than disadvantages in a very competitive process.

SENIOR YEAR, SPRING SEMESTER

I. When you receive acceptance to a law school, note any deadlines for reply. Some schools want a fairly quick reply. All, or nearly all, request a deposit to hold your place. After being accepted, you do not want to put your admission at risk by failing to honor the requests and requirements of the law school.

II. If you receive multiple acceptances, consult a prelaw advisor and your family and friends about which choice is better for you. If this happens to you, you have a wonderful problem! Perhaps trips to law schools accepting you would be in order. You may need to see the schools to choose the best one for you.

III. Arrange your financial plan. Now that you are admitted, you should turn your attention to financing the three years of education. Learn about the options available to you. If you will have to borrow money, talk to the financial aid office of the law school you will be attending. You will want to make these arrangements before you begin classes at the start of the Fall Semester.

This information and advice should help you set your own agenda for your last two years as an undergraduate. The outline is only a starting point as you make plans which fit your schedule and objectives. You have many options, and you will ultimately have to decide how to proceed. Your choices will affect whether you are accepted by a law school. Use the extensive university support system. Good luck!