



University of
Nebraska
Lincoln

College of Law

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INFORMATION FOR THE PRE-LAW STUDENT: CAREERS IN LAW

Careers in Law

1. What are the careers in law?

Lawyers typically concentrate in either Criminal Law or Civil Law, although some lawyers in private practice handle both civil and criminal cases.

Criminal law involves violations of city ordinances or state or federal laws. Lawyers in the criminal area either prosecute cases for the federal, state or local government, or defend criminal cases, either in private practice or in a public defender's office. Civil law covers areas such as automobile accidents, contract disputes, landlord-tenant relations, wills, and the affairs of businesses.

Lawyers practice law in a variety of settings. The majority of lawyers practice either by themselves or in a firm with other lawyers. Firm size can range from two lawyers to several hundred. Most lawyers practice in firms of 2-10 lawyers. Many lawyers are employed in corporate legal departments, in the military, with public interest organizations, or with federal, state or local government agencies.

Some lawyers go to court frequently. Some lawyers never go to court.

2. How many areas of the law are there?

There are many areas of law. In addition to the areas of law that you may be familiar with such as Criminal Law, Family Law and Corporate Law, lawyers also practice in such areas as Environmental Law, Health Care Law, International Law, Wills and Estate Planning, Constitutional Law, Real Estate Law, Civil Rights Law, Poverty Law, Sports Law, Entertainment Law, Employment and Labor Law, Tax Law and Immigration Law.

Trial lawyers may handle a wide variety of cases in the above areas of the law or may specialize in a particular area, and only try cases in that area.

3. What do lawyers do?

No matter what area lawyers practice in, they use the same kinds of skills.

Lawyers:

counsel-give their clients legal advice

analyze and research-determine the elements of a problem; locate and apply the law and policy to specific factual situations

advocate-represent or present a client's point of view to the court, jury or adversary

write and speak-write letters; prepare briefs to the court which discuss and argue the applicable law; draft contracts, wills and other documents; make oral arguments and try cases in courts; discuss matters with clients; question witnesses; and communicate with adversaries

negotiate-present a client's position and reach a settlement of a dispute

4. Must I practice law if I receive a law degree?

No. Many people with law degrees never practice law. They may use their skills and training in law to work in other careers such as politics, business or education.

5. What are the requirements for the practice of law?

Most states require that you be a person of good moral character, that you have graduated from an accredited law school and that you have passed a state bar examination. In order to be accepted into a law school, you must earn a bachelor's degree at an accredited undergraduate institution, take the Law School Admission Test, and satisfy other admission requirements. It normally takes four years to earn an undergraduate degree and three years to earn a law degree.

6. How do I begin to prepare for a career in law?

First, you must complete your high school education and apply to college. You should study hard, get good grades and make certain that your high school academic performance is adequate for admission to most colleges. You should check with your high school counselor about general college preparatory requirements and check with the colleges you are interested in for their specific entrance requirements.

7. What course of study should I take in order to prepare for law school?

There are no prescribed majors which are required to enter law school. You can major in whatever you like, and you should choose a major based on what you are interested in so that you will study hard and do well. You should take courses which require a great amount of reading and writing and which develop your analytical skills. For further information, see our brochure: The Pre-Law Student: How to Prepare for Law School.

8. What is law school like?

Generally law school consists of three years of full-time study. The study of law is rigorous, challenging and very stimulating. Most schools have a required first year curriculum which consists of courses like Contracts, Property, Torts, Legal Research, Civil Procedure and Criminal Law. Beyond the first year, most classes are elective.

Program of Study at the University of Nebraska College of Law

The University of Nebraska College of Law has much to offer students seeking a career in law. Our basic program of study involves three years of full-time study which leads to the Juris Doctor (J.D.) degree and entitles the recipient to take the bar examination in all fifty states. Summer courses are offered permitting students to graduate in 2 ½ years of concentrated work.

The J.D. degree is the first professional degree in law. The program leading to the J.D. is designed to provide the student with a general understanding of the American legal system and the skills necessary to function within the system, principally as a lawyer, but also as a judge, legislator, arbitrator, executive, planner and responsible citizen.

The program consists of instruction in legal theory and practice as well as in the professional skills used by lawyers. The foundation of the legal education at the College involves interactive dialogue between students and their instructors. Professors also use problem-oriented approaches and computer-assisted instruction to supplement the case method.

The first year curriculum is required of all students and consists of Civil Procedure, Contracts, Criminal Law, Introduction to Law, Legal Process and Legislation, Legal Research and Writing, Property and Torts. A broad selection of elective courses and seminars is available in the second and third years of study. The upperclass curriculum affords study in such diverse areas as Administrative Law, Corporate and Commercial Law, Criminal Law, Employment and Labor law, Environmental and Natural Resource Law, Family Law, Intellectual Property Law, International Law, Tax Law, and Trial Advocacy.

In addition to the traditional methods of classroom instruction, the College offers professional skills courses which allow students to develop practical skills in simulated settings or in the handling of real cases for actual clients. These courses include Pretrial Litigation, Trial Advocacy, Advanced Trial Advocacy, Civil Clinic, Criminal Clinic, Client Interviewing and Counseling, Mediation, Negotiations and Business Planning.

In the Civil and Criminal Clinics, students represent clients in real cases and experience situations comparable to what a new attorney might face in the first few years of practice. Students in Civil Clinic represent clients in a wide range of civil

matters, including bankruptcy, tax audits, litigation, divorce and domestic relations, immigration, adoption, landlord-tenant and estate planning. Students in Criminal Clinic prosecute misdemeanor criminal cases through the Lancaster County Attorney's Office. The cases include marijuana and cocaine possession, child abuse, intimidation by telephone, physical and sexual assault, public indecency, trespass, theft, forgery, fraud, receiving stolen property, escape, arson and extortion.

The College also offers joint degree programs with other departments at the University. Students in these programs earn two degrees simultaneously in a shorter period of time than taking the degrees consecutively. The College offers joint degrees in law and Accounting, Law and Business Administration, Law and Community and Regional Planning, Law and Economics, Law and Educational Administration, Law and Political Science and Law and Psychology. The College offers a joint degree program in International Affairs with the University of Denver.

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