Undergraduate Preparation

Should I focus on a pre-law track as an undergraduate?

The notion that there is some set “pre-law” major as an undergraduate is a myth. Law schools are looking for applicants who are academically well-rounded and who have distinguished themselves in many different fields of study. Generally, you should pay close attention to the development of skills and abilities related to reading, oral and written communication, and reasoning. Your courses should emphasize comprehension and analysis, including the critical understanding of institutions and ideas, while cultivating studious thought. You'll maximize the value of your undergraduate studies by engaging with important issues while investigating your beliefs in the course of practicing close readings of complicated texts. Also, be cautious about focusing too much energy on law-related classes as an undergraduate. Law schools want to know if you can think and write well, not whether you know the rules of evidence and procedure — that’s what law school is for! An understanding of the principles of law is very helpful whereas the undergraduate study of legal minutia can be counterproductive. Possessing the above mentioned skills will provide a leg up for any law student dealing with the rigorous workload demands. The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools points out seven basic areas of knowledge crucial to both a sound legal education and development into a competent attorney (in no particular order):

1. A broad understanding of history, particularly American history, and the various factors (social, political, economic, and cultural) that have influenced the development of the pluralistic society that presently exists in the United States
2. A fundamental understanding of political thought and theory and of the contemporary American political system
3. A basic understanding of ethical theory and theories of justice
4. A grounding in economics, particularly elementary microeconomic theory, and an understanding of the interaction between economic theory and public policy
5. Some basic mathematical and financial skills, such as an understanding of basic precalculus mathematics and an ability to analyze financial data
6. A basic understanding of human behavior and social interaction
7. An understanding of diverse cultures within and beyond the United States, or international institutions and issues, and of the increasing interdependence of the nations and communities within our world

How important is the study of a foreign language in college?

The old adage runs as follows: “you never fully understand your native language until you have studied a foreign language” — and it’s just as valid today as it ever was. Since law is a written form of communication, the critical understanding of language is very
important in both law school and legal practice. Foreign language study teaches students to recognize how the meaning of words, their grammatical function, and their arrangement in sentences all work together to support an interpretation of a text. Such an ability to closely study the interrelationships of a document’s language is a serious competitive advantage in law school. An understanding of cultures and customs other than your own will also help provide you in future dealings with a wide variety of clients.

**What majors are the most popular for students accepted into law schools?**

At the top of the list are political science, English, and history. Just remember that the most important thing is that you feel interested and challenged in your course of study. A high GPA and a broad course of studies are much more important than which major you have completed. So if you are more comfortable focusing on physics, Spanish, or biology it’s no problem so long as you make sure to satisfy the aforementioned seven areas of knowledge.

**How important are extracurriculars as an undergraduate?**

Law schools seek to fill their first year classes with applicants who bring significant life experiences with them to the study of law. Whether you founded a campus organization, volunteered for non-profits, or served in the military, law schools value students who have learned about themselves and the society in which they live by engaging with life. So, too, law schools want to know how your work experience has shaped who you are today. Your undergraduate years are an opportunity to cultivate breadth and depth of experience to draw upon in your study and application of the law.

**What about studying abroad? How important is it?**

Take advantage of the opportunities you have at Purdue Fort Wayne to travel and study the languages and literatures of different peoples. Such experiences challenge us to think critically about why the world is the way it is, and this is a very helpful exercise of the faculties sought in a law student. Studying different cultures and languages also helps students to recognize different ways of viewing and interpreting events and ideas from different perspectives.