

Academic Planning Guide (Course Selection Information)

[Updated: 3/23/2018]

GRADUATION & OTHER COURSE-RELATED REQUIREMENTS

) **Graduation Requirements.** Even though upper level students have a wide variety of electives from which to choose, there are some specific course and credit hour requirements that every J.D. student must meet in order to graduate. The requirements are as follows:

- All first year required courses;
- One course selected from the ethics curriculum (courses with the attribute “(Law) ETH-S” or “(Law) ETH-NS” in Course Listings);
- One seminar - to satisfy the upper-level research and writing requirement (courses with the attribute “(Law) – SEM” in Course Listings);
- 6 units of experiential credits (courses with the attribute “(Law) – EXP ” in Course Listings);
- At least 86 credit hours; and
- At least six fall & spring semesters as a full time law student (taking at least 12 credit hours/semester).

) **Limit on Non-Law and Non-Classroom Credits.** J.D. students (who graduate with exactly 86 units) must take at least 67 law classroom units (LCUs) or no more 19 non-law/non-classroom units (NLCUs). Non-law/non-classroom units are non-law courses or courses that do not provide attendance in regularly scheduled class sessions at the law school (courses with the attribute “(Law) NLCU” in Course Listings). Examples of NLCUs include competitions, supervised research, practicum or moot court, Moot Court Teams, Trial Advocacy Competition, Judicial Clerkship Externship, Lawyering Practice Externship, Congressional/Administrative Law Externship, Corporate Judicial Field Placement, International Justice Conflict Resolution Field Placement, Patent Law Field Placement, New York Regulatory and Business Externship, student publications, and non-law graduate level courses. (Not included in this list are courses taken in our Study Abroad Programs.)

) **Order of the Coif Credit/No Credit Course Limitation.** The Order of the Coif is an honorary scholastic society (www.orderofthecoif.org) that encourages excellence in legal education by fostering a spirit of careful study, recognizing those who as law students attained a high grade of scholarship, and honoring those who as lawyers, judges and teachers attained high distinction for their scholarly or professional accomplishments. Members are selected by the faculty from the graduating J.D. students who rank in the top 10% of their class. Based on Order of the Coif rules, in order to be eligible a student must have taken 75% of his/her credits "graded." If a student plans to graduate with the 86 minimum credits required for the J.D, this means s/he must take at least 64 graded credits graded, and no more than 22 ungraded. WUSL's modified pass/fail courses (HP3.94, P, LP2.98, F2.50) such as Pretrial and Trial count as graded courses, per this definition. Courses not graded under either our usual numerical system or the modified pass/fail system, such as student publications, moot court, supervised research, Judicial Clerkship Externship, Congressional/Administrative Law Externship, other Externships/Field Placements, and non-law courses do not count as graded courses. This is information that students who are vying for the top 10% may wish to keep in mind - especially if considering applying for a semester abroad (which would likely involve at least 12 non-graded credits) or taking one of the semester-long Clinics/Externships/Field Placements that are graded credit/no credit. A student who has a questionable disciplinary/behavioral record, may be disqualified from making Order of the Coif, even if s/he is in the top 10%.

) **Competition Credit Limits.** Students may not receive credit toward more than one competition activity (including receiving credit for serving on the board overseeing a competition activity) or Supervised Moot Court during any one semester. Additionally, students may not receive more than a total of 4 competition or competition related units toward their J.D.

) **Student Practicum Limits.** A student may earn one to three units of academic credit in a Supervised Practicum by working on a clinical project under the supervision of a member of the faculty and a field supervisor, who may also be a faculty member. A student may enroll in only one Supervised Practicum during her/his law school career. A student may not be enrolled in a clinic and a Supervised Practicum in the same semester. Students must work a minimum of

four hours per week at the site for each hour of academic credit, e.g., a three-hour course generally means twelve site hours per week for 13 weeks. Supervised Practicum is graded on a Credit/No Credit basis.

) **Student Practice Requirements.** Many states, including both Missouri and Illinois, permit law students to appear in court on certain matters provided that they work for a not-for-profit entity, for the government or in the public service sector and under the supervision of a licensed attorney. To become certified to appear in court this way, students often have to meet certain course and credit hour-related requirements. The requirements for Missouri and Illinois are set forth below:

- In **Missouri** the student practice rule is Rule 13. To be eligible for Rule 13 certification, you must have completed one-half of your required hours for graduation, or 43 hours. Please note that in certain law school clinics, Rule 13 certification is strongly preferred.
- The **Illinois** student practice rule is Rule 711. To qualify to practice under Rule 711, you must have received credit for at least 50% of the total credit hours required for graduation, which is 43 credits.

) **Pre-Requisites, Co-Requisites, Etc.** Certain classes have requirements that must be taken concurrently or that must be met before a student can enroll in them. Other classes have course-related recommendations and/or give preference to students who have taken certain other courses. Students should thoroughly read the course descriptions in the [Course Listings](#) for the most up-to-date and comprehensive information, and should communicate directly with the professor if there are any questions regarding the pre/co-requisites or recommendations. *Students are responsible for making sure they've fulfilled any pre/co-requisites and recommended courses. Students who have not taken a pre/co-requisite must receive professor permission to take the course and are responsible for contacting the professor. The professor has the authority to direct the Registrar's Office to drop students who have not fulfilled a pre/co-requisite.*

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

There are various approaches that a student may follow when selecting courses. No one approach is right for everyone. Set forth below are just a few considerations that you may wish to take into account.

- **Balance.** Law students often are advised to take a “balanced” program. Balance can exist (or not) in a variety of different ways- e.g., between public and private law courses; between code and common law courses; between “mainstream,” “perspective,” and specialized courses; between substantive and practical skills courses; between different kinds of practical skills courses; between paper and exam courses; etc. Balance need not be your main objective, but it is definitely worth thinking about.

- **Skills.** Consider the skills that particular courses develop. Some courses (e.g., tax and UCC courses) focus heavily on statutory interpretation and the interpretation of administrative regulations. Other courses (e.g., seminars) emphasize writing skills and provide an opportunity to write a substantial paper, receive feedback from the instructor, and then submit a revised version that incorporates the instructor’s comments. Still other courses emphasize planning and drafting skills (e.g., Business Planning and Drafting, Nonprofit Organizations Planning & Drafting), litigation skills (e.g., Trial Practice and Deposing the Expert Witness), or negotiation and mediation skills (e.g., Mediation Theory & Practice, Arbitration). Consider not only the substantive focus of the courses you select, but also the skills you will develop and refine.

- **Gaining a Broader Perspective.** Consider taking not only courses that are directly relevant to the type of legal work you expect to do, but also courses that will give you a broader perspective. You are studying at a research university, not a trade school. Take advantage of the opportunities offered here to stretch your horizons. There are many kinds of courses that provide such opportunities. These include: theory courses (e.g., Jurisprudence and Feminist Legal Theory), courses involving other disciplines (e.g., Law & Economics and American Legal History), and comparative law courses - both the basic Comparative Law course and the more specialized courses (e.g., Socialist Law in Transition and Introduction to U.S. and Comparative ADR Processes). Consider also courses that focus on some of the pressing issues facing our legal system and our society, such as Adoption & Assisted Reproduction, Corporate & White Collar Crime, Immigration Law, or Education Law & Policy: K-12.

• **Bar Exam.** Students sometimes ask whether they should select courses to help them with passing the bar. It is important to understand that law school courses are not designed for that purpose. Nearly all law graduates take a commercial bar review course to prepare for the bar exam, and that is generally sufficient to introduce you to the subjects tested. Still, there is a school of thought that encourages students to pick at least a few courses with a view toward the bar exam. Some people find that they have an easier time cramming information about a subject into their heads (a *sine qua non* of bar exam preparation) if they have had some exposure to the material during law school. This is especially true with UCC courses. For information on what subjects are tested on a particular state's bar exam, go to that state's bar examiners website or www.ncbex.org.

• **Your Other Time Constraints.** Keep in mind what else you will be doing in a given semester aside from school work and adjust your schedule accordingly. For example, students seeking law firm jobs outside of St. Louis for the summer after their second year may need to do a lot of traveling during the preceding fall semester and should consider taking a lighter load at that time. On the other hand, students seeking public interest or government positions are likely to be more caught up in the job-seeking process in the spring.

• **Faculty Mentoring & Recommendations.** Ask yourself whether you have developed a relationship with a member of the faculty (especially a small section and/or Legal Practice professor) who has gotten to know you and your work well enough to be able to serve as a mentor and/or recommender. If you have not done so, consider selecting courses in a way that will permit you to develop such relationships. Faculty references are extremely important in the judicial clerkship selection process and can be very helpful in other contexts too. They are most helpful if you can build these relationships early - if not as a 1L, then in the fall of your second year. To do this, you will need to refrain from taking only big "building block" classes (e.g. Evidence, Corporations, Federal Income Tax, Lawyer Ethics) in the fall of your second year. You can get to know faculty in a variety of ways – by enrolling in smaller more specialized courses (including, but not limited to, seminars); doing supervised research; working as a research assistant; or being an unusually active participant in class discussions. Also try to spend some time with the professor outside of class asking questions and discussing issues pertaining to the course and related areas.

• **Plan Ahead.** Always consider the "big picture" - i.e., the entire remainder of your time in law school - when planning your schedule. Most courses are offered just once each year. Some courses are offered only every other year. If you think you may want to study abroad for a semester, or participate in the Congressional and Administrative Law Externship in the spring of your third year, be sure to arrange your other semesters so that you have met all requirements for graduation at the time when you plan to graduate.

• **ASK, ASK, ASK.** Remember that the best way to get help is to ask for it! Solicit advice from the resources that are offered at this Law School. That means consulting individual faculty or staff members, upper level students, and the Associate Dean for Student Services. Additionally, consult the [curriculum planning guides](#) which were created by faculty to assist students in course selection.

PERCEPTIONS AND PERSPECTIVES (Advice from Others)

As with many other questions one encounters in law school, the question of what courses to take is one to which there is no single, "correct" answer. What has worked for others won't necessarily work for you. Still, it never hurts to ask - and in fact, we have done just that, on your behalf. Here's what a few alums have said:

Lisa Pickard Baron, Class of 1987; Executive Director, Memory Care Home Solutions: I chose classes that would benefit me in my long-term objectives and short-term objectives. Thinking long term I chose classes that would benefit my career. I chose classes that I would need and use in my chosen field of practice. Thinking short term, I tried to balance my schedule. I partnered classes that I knew would be time-consuming and challenging with classes that were slightly less time-consuming. The one class I regret never taking was Federal Income Tax. I believe it is a basic core class that every student, no matter what their field, needs to know and understand.

Beverly Beimdiek, Federal Public Defender's Office: When choosing courses to take, avoid taking only the classes you think you are interested in. Take a class in something you fear, or something you think you will have no interest in. As a Trial Practice Adjunct Professor, I am always impressed by the students who tell me on the first day of class that they took Trial Practice because they never want to be a litigator and never want to see the inside of a courtroom.

Sometimes, by the end of the semester, their feelings have been confirmed. But other times, students who have said they never want to litigate are now considering an entirely different career path in litigation. I never took a tax class because I was afraid of it. While I probably would never have become a great tax attorney, I still regret not taking at least one tax class. This is not to say you shouldn't sign up for the things you are interested in. My very favorite class, when I was in law school, was the criminal clinic I took during the first semester of my third year. I always thought I wanted to be a public defender and working in the clinic confirmed it. The opportunity to actually learn about and observe the practice of law outside of a classroom can't be beat. Clinics, whether civil or criminal, will allow you to meet lawyers. Even if you don't stay and practice in St. Louis, those lawyers can be valuable references for you when you begin your job search. I still hear from former law students who have worked in the public defender's office even after they have moved away from St. Louis. My only regret was taking the criminal clinic during the first semester of my third year instead of my second semester of third year. Staying focused on my classes during that final semester was a challenge once I had seen the "real world."

Suzanne Brown, Class of 1996; Law Offices of Suzanne Brown; Founder, The Immigration Project: Several students have called me recently to ask what they should take if they are interested in Immigration Law. I tell them to take what sounds good; that they will learn the "practice" of Immigration Law (or anything else) at work, and that the best plan of action for those interested in immigration is to go to work or volunteer at an agency serving the needs of immigrants in any capacity-get to know their lives, their needs, etc.

The Honorable Michael Burton, Class of 1985; Circuit Judge of the 21st Circuit: Without a doubt, my most valuable law school experiences came from my trial advocacy and clinical courses. Dealing with real lawyers and real world experiences gave me my first real glimpse at life after law school. By having the opportunity to actually "practice" law, I ultimately determined the field of law that was best for me. Without these experiences, I would have sought a career solely on the basis of my interest in a particular subject (that was taught in one of the traditional classes that I had taken). This course of action would have proven to be disastrous. If I were selecting classes for my second year of law school, I would make every effort to get into as many trial advocacy courses, judicial clerkships, and clinical programs as I could. Most of these courses will not be available until the third year, but there may be an occasional opportunity before then. During the second year, I would take most of the necessary traditional core courses (including Evidence), so that I could have as much flexibility and as many opportunities as possible during my third year.

Christopher Goddard, Class of 2005; Associate General Counsel, Washington University:-TREAT A FEW COURSES AS "REQUIRED." While Washington University does not have any "required" upper-level courses, consider taking Evidence, Corporations, Federal Income Tax, and Con Law II because they complete the "core" legal knowledge provided during your first year. I submit the fact that other schools require these courses as evidence that these courses provide important substantive knowledge which all attorneys should possess.

-TAKE PROFESSORS, NOT TOPICS. Beyond these "core" courses, I recommend that students select courses based primarily on professor and only secondarily on content. This suggestion derives from my more general advice to make concerted efforts to develop meaningful relationships with a few professors during your three years of law school. The lessons you learn from an effective teacher will outlast and outweigh the substantive information covered in a given course.

-COURSES FOR CLERKSHIPS. If you are considering a judicial clerkship, consider taking classes such as Federal Courts, Criminal Procedure, Conflict of Laws, and a Fourteenth Amendment course.

Greg Hewett, Class of 1994; Managing Director, Blackstone Group: Enroll in courses that you want to take for your own reasons and do not get too caught up in what courses you "ought" to take for the bar exam, prospective employers or anyone else. The bar review class will teach you what you need to know for the bar exam (which is as much about test taking skills as your knowledge of substantive law.) Similarly, your employer will give you the opportunity to learn, although often under fire, what you need to know in practice. Consequently, I have no regrets for having made my class schedules based on whether I enjoyed classes with the particular professor, whether the class was scheduled at a time that would interfere with work or extracurricular activities, and whether the subject matter interested me. I am, however, most grateful for the courses that exposed me to new experiences and ways of thinking. First-year courses and certain survey courses such as Administrative Law and Labor Law taught basic legal analysis and provided a useful grounding in the subject matter. Other courses such as criminal procedure taught the invaluable skill of reconciling and applying leading cases to fact patterns in gray areas. Courses in tax and environmental law taught the skills crucial to integrating statutes, regulations and administrative pronouncements to reach a conclusion. Other courses such as pre-trial, trial and reorganization seminar provided valuable insights in to the practical application of the law. Practicum courses such as the judicial internship also provided a fantastic opportunity for learning from practicing lawyers. Take advantage of the variety of classes offered and do not hesitate to take a class that, for whatever reason, appeals to you.

Tomea Mersmann, Class of 1991; Assistant Dean of Graduate Placement and Recruiting: Law school teaches you how to learn; don't expect to graduate with all of the substantive knowledge you need for your career. I think it is important to choose classes which give you a broad base of knowledge and plenty of training in analyzing complex factual and

statutory problems. For example, Immigration Law is the best class I ever took for truly complex statutory and regulatory interpretation; the skill is applicable to many substantive areas. Having said that, I also believe that every law student should take Evidence and Tax; people expect you to know those things. Finally, don't worry about taking classes just for the bar exam; bar review will teach you all you need to know about a topic to pass the bar; think about what you want to know for after the bar.

Mary Perry, Class of 1991; Lecturer in Law; Director of Externships: When thinking about life after law school, litigation may be the first practice area that comes to mind, but there are many other practice areas. This is your time to explore those areas. Think about what practice areas might hold potential interest for you and take some courses that would provide you an opportunity to learn more about those areas. You might be surprised to find that you have a passion or knack for a subject that you hadn't expected.