

An Undergraduate's Guide to Law School Preparation

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

By

Tori Whitman

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Elizabeth Dalton

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

April 2020

Expected Date of Graduation

May 2020

Abstract

Applying to law school can be one of the most stressful experiences a student endures. There is an abundance of information pre-law students need to know to navigate this process, and without assistance it can be overwhelming. Many undergraduate universities offer various preparation and support programs to help pre-law students in their efforts, but many offer little to no abetment. In some universities' case, the issue is not so much a lack of assistance, but rather a lack of communication between pre-law students and the university. In order to mitigate this communication issue, I have compiled what I believe is all the necessary information pre-law students need to know. From picking a major to taking the LSAT, pre-law students who may not be completely informed about the law school application process can find the answers to many of their law school questions within these pages. Students can discover who to reach out to for help, what undergraduate majors law school admissions office prefer, and what factors can influence a student's performance in law school. This information has been accumulated from my own experiences as a pre-law student and my own research into the legal studies world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my amazing advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Dalton, for her unwavering support throughout this process. Her honesty and constant encouragement are one of the biggest reasons this paper has blossomed into what it is today. I would not have been able to do it without her, and for that I am forever grateful.

I would also like to thank my writing partner, Elianor Priebe, for going on this journey with me and helping me make this paper the best it could absolutely be. Her knack for creative writing helped bring some elegance into my very serious thesis.

I would also like to thank my three amazing roommates, Gabby, Dana, and Megan, for supporting me through countless cry fests and never letting me take myself too seriously.

I would like to send a big thank you to the outstanding gals of Delta Zeta Gamma Chi, for always cheering me on and being my biggest support system. Your endless love and support, countless good luck texts, and hilarious *Legally Blonde* quotes while writing this paper (and over the course of my own application process) were my saving grace in some of my worst moments. Thank you for being the best sisters I could have ever asked for. DZLAM forever.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Dennis and Amy Whitman, for always pushing me to be my best self, no matter the obstacles I may face. Thank you for always believing in me and my dreams.

Table of Contents

Process Analysis	1
Introduction	4
Conclusion	25
Works Cited	27
Appendix	30

Process Analysis

When I began writing my thesis, I began with a desire to prove that students who were pre-law majors during their undergraduate years performed better in law school than those who were other various undergraduate majors. Professor Dalton and I figured out pretty quickly that this topic was extremely broad, and that the audience needed to be narrowed down. So, after some careful adjustment, we shifted the focus of my paper to specifically recommending that Ball State should develop a true pre-law program in order to fully prepare their students. This topic was still chosen while holding the belief that pre-law students outperform non-prelaw students in law school.

At almost every turn in my research, I discovered that I was wrong about my beliefs about pre-law majors. In fact, the exact opposite was true: most students who were not pre-law majors in their undergraduate careers generally do better in law school and most law school admissions offices prefer that their applicants are not pre-law majors during their undergraduate careers. Once again, Professor Dalton and I found ourselves reconfiguring my paper with a new topic, while trying to prevent my having to start from scratch. We decided that writing a “How To” paper would be the best choice, considering my own experiences and what I had learned through the research I had already done. And so, the new purpose of my paper emerged: informing other students, who are interested in law school, about what they need to know in order to prepare themselves for actual law school.

During this entire process, I had to change what I was researching and how I was planning to integrate said research into my new paper. I started by using the databases the

librarians in Bracken Library recommended to me, along with recommended keywords. Most of my academic sources came from *Academic Search Premier* and *ERIC(EBSCOHost)*. I struggled to find a lot of sources relevant to my topic(s) as the time progressed. It felt like I was still waiting for that one good source that was going to be so good, the clouds would part and angels would start singing. And as my topic kept shifting and changing, it felt like I was never going to find enough sources to write a fully developed 25-to-35-page paper. I then began searching on Google for anything relevant to my thesis, and that is where I found a lot of my sources from newspaper articles, official websites, etc. I also reached out to my own academic advisors, the president of the Pre-Law Interest Group on BSU's campus, and someone in the Pre-law Department, to see if anyone would be able to answer some of my Ball State-specific questions. I was able to get in contact with my academic advisor and the president of the PLIG. After several unanswered emails, I was unable to contact anyone in the Pre-Law Department, which is really a shame because I think I could have gotten a lot of my questions answered. My academic advisor said she was unable to personally help me, but she pointed me in the right direction for other people I could reach out to. The president of PLIG, Cameron DeBlasio, was very helpful and answered all my questions more than completely.

I made sure I was keeping careful notes about how I was going to use each of these sources, what I wanted to use from each source, and where I found the source originally. I knew it would save me time at the end of this process when the time came to cite everything. This also saved me a lot of time when it came time to outline, and eventually start drafting, because I had already had a mini-game plan in my head. Actually, starting drafting was a bit of a challenge because I essentially psyched myself out by stressing about whether my thesis was going to be

good, if it was going to be horrible, etc. But eventually I told myself, “If you do not start now, it’s just going to stress you out more.” I took Professor Dalton’s advice, and tried my best to turn off the editor in my brain and just start writing. Obviously, what I wrote was not amazing at first, but with enough tweaking I think it turned out to be a pretty good paper, one that I am actually proud of and want people to read.

I learned a lot while writing this paper, most of which I know would have been helpful information three years ago. I learned that pre-law majors are not preferred by law school admissions offices, and that it is better for students to excel in a challenging degree that interests them. I learned that I cannot listen to music with lyrics while I write because all I want to do is sing and jam out, rather than be productive. I learned that intelligence, personality, and learning styles can, and most of the time do, impact how well someone performs on the LSAT as well as in law school. I learned that I write the way I talk (with far too many contractions and “filler words”), and I am so grateful to Professor Dalton and Elianor Priebe for helping me make my paper more formal and overall, better. I learned what skills are deemed necessary to success in law school, as well as what undergraduate classes develop those skills. I learned that the LSAT is not a predictor of how good of an attorney someone will be, but it does predict first-year performance in law school.

Finally, I discovered that although the responsibility falls mostly on students to be informed about their career path, universities that do not actively reach out to their students to offer assistance are doing a great disservice to not only those students, but the university as well.

Introduction

I always knew I wanted to be a lawyer. It was something that was always deeply ingrained into who I am as a person, almost as though it were a character trait; it was something that made me, me. I loved learning about history and politics, as well as debate tactics. I enjoyed listening to arguments and debates and trying to see the reasoning on both sides or find any holes in said arguments. Above all, I love to help people and I wanted to feel as though I had actually made a positive difference in the world. But when the time came to go to college, I struggled choosing an undergraduate major. I knew, no matter what, I would be going to law school after I got my bachelor's degree. What I did not know is which major I should choose in order to best prepare myself for actual law school. Neither of my parents had gone to law school, so they helped as much as they could, but none of us knew what I should pick. A few years later, law school application deadlines were looming on the horizon, and I did not even know where to begin with compiling those or with taking the LSAT. It felt as though I had no one to help me or answer any of my questions. It felt as though no one had prepared me for what I needed to know or do in order to achieve my goals.

After my experiences as an undergraduate pre-law major, I have realized most of that responsibility falls on me for not informing myself about the law school preparation/application process. For students who attend universities, such as Ball State, with no pre-law program, it is important for them to inform themselves about what being pre-law means at any university and learn what resources are available to them in order to prepare for law school. My purpose in

writing this paper is to inform young undergraduate students about the logistics of being a pre-law major and how to best prepare themselves for actual law school.

I also hope to provide some insight about the pre-law student experience to undergraduate universities so that they can make their programs better. There are so many factors I did not know to consider and so many tips that I wish someone had told me early on. There was a severe lack of communication between Ball State and me. It left me feeling underprepared and uninformed about my own academic career. Questions I had then, and even some I have now, were very rarely answered by university pre-law faculty who are typically quite difficult to contact. Some of these questions are: Why does BSU not have a pre-law program? What classes do I need to be taking now to prepare myself for law school? What skills will I need for law school? What steps do I need to take to apply to law school? How does all this work? Even as I started writing this paper, I found that there were so many aspects of this topic that I was uninformed about.

The big question now is, where is the line between student and university responsibility regarding communication? How much effort should an undergraduate university put into informing its students and at what point is it the student's responsibility to inform themselves? Despite how much I have had to teach myself about pre-law programs, this paper is in no way meant to be an attack on Ball State, or universities like it, whose students have struggled through this process. It is, however, meant to point out potential areas of improvement on both the universities' and students' parts. I do not want other students to go through the same feelings of confusion and helplessness that I did if I can help it. In an effort to spare others the stress I felt

while preparing myself for graduate school, I intend to prepare as much relevant information as I can to those who are in a situation similar to mine.

Before I begin with my findings, there is some legal terminology I will be using, phrases which readers should understand so that the rest of the content makes sense. When I use the term “undergraduate” or “pre-law/prelaw,” I am referring to the first four years of college where students work towards their bachelor’s degree. If I use the term “law school,” I am talking about the graduate law programs students can enroll in only after they have received their bachelor’s degrees. Law school typically lasts three years unless the university offers an accelerated program of some kind where students can obtain their JD in less time. The phrase “1L” means a first-year law school student or the first year of law school, followed by “2L,” second year, and “3L,” third year (Parekh). A student’s LGPA is their GPA in law school, not specific to any year or semester. The Law School Admission Test, or the LSAT, is a test administered by the Law School Admission Council, or the LSAC, that supposedly tests a person’s mental capabilities within specific skill sets used daily in the legal field. And the result of the test is believed to be indicative of a person’s potential for success within the legal field. The test assesses students on their reading comprehension, logical reasoning, and analytical reasoning. A Juris Doctor degree, or JD, is the degree students get when they graduate from law school, making them a “Doctor of Law.” The American Bar Association, or the ABA, is an association for lawyers and law students who set rules and regulations for all those in the legal field.

The Socratic method is a discussion-based style of learning, similar to a debate or a cross examination in a court, which is used in law school. The Socratic method is very intense and is characterized by cold calling students in a classroom setting, requiring them to recall facts of a

case or defend their arguments. Externships are learning opportunities, like internships, where students are trained while actually working for an employer. Moot Court is a mock court where students can practice arguing cases. *Pro bono* work mean “for the public good” and essentially is work that is undertaken on a volunteer (unpaid) basis. Tort law is a type of civil law dealing with liability, negligence, financial losses, etc. Finally, the Pre-Law Interest Group, or the PLIG, is an organization on Ball State’s campus that assists students with their application/decision process.

Currently, at Ball State there is very little substance to the pre-law program. It could almost be described as a list of students who intend to go to law school. As a member, I can tell you, it only involves an email once or twice a month, along with organized trips with other pre-law students. There is no suggested course list detailing what classes pre-law students should take to build up the skills they will need in law school. In my experience, no one reaches out to advise a student on what steps to take to learn those necessary skills. It is the student’s responsibility to access any of the pre-law resources BSU has. The student must go find them; this information will not be offered right away. I am a senior at Ball State, and I could not tell you what faculty I would approach to get my law school-related questions answered. Even now, with it being my last year at Ball State, I do not know everything about the pre-law program. As it happens, it was extremely difficult getting answers from BSU pre-law faculty while writing this paper.

The lack of information sharing can be detrimental to advancing students’ preparation for law school. Students could be choosing majors that will not adequately prepare them or they could be taking inappropriate classes, simply because they do not know any better. Furthermore, university-funded resources are not being utilized to their fullest potential because students may

not know about them. Prospective students might mistakenly look elsewhere for a true pre-law major, and skip over BSU, because they do not know what majors law schools prefer. They also may look to other universities if they believe that Ball State does not do enough for their pre-law students.

This lack of information sharing between universities and pre-law students can also lead to a lack of confidence, on the student's part, in their personal academic abilities. I know in my own case I have regularly felt nervous that because I did not study a specific law-related major I will not be able to compete with other law school applicants. This lack of confidence and preparation is exactly the issue I aim to mitigate with this paper. It is my hope that by reading this paper, other young legal aspirants will be better informed and will know what majors to choose, what classes to take, and what factors can impact law school performance.

I wanted to begin by researching the undergraduate majors that are the most beneficial for students intending to go to law school, as well as how law school admissions offices view specific majors. I started by researching, overall, how students who were pre-law in their undergraduate careers measured up to students who were not, while in law school. I originally believed that pre-law majors offered students more extensive preparation that would benefit them when the time came to apply to law school. However, through my research I found that many pre-law programs are neither extensive nor challenging enough. That being said, because of the legal preparation students receive in their pre-law courses, they are likely to feel more confident about their skills while attending law school. More confidence usually leads to better performance, especially when the field these students are in relies heavily on the attorney's

confidence in their knowledge and expertise. According to an article by *OpenColleges.edu.au*, a student's level of confidence can impact academic performance by up to 12% (Briggs).

Aside from confidence building, there are some other benefits from pre-law majors, as well. According to a blog sponsored by the ABA, called *ABAforlawstudents.com*, well-developed pre-law programs can “[help] [students] gain important skill sets such as logic, writing and reasoning.” The author quotes Ray Panneton, a current attorney who was a pre-law major at Baylor University, who says that Baylor's pre-law program encouraged students to enroll in diverse courses outside of their major and department. Panneton also says that because of this policy, he was able to take several logic and writing classes that developed skills that have helped him throughout his legal career (Graves). A site sponsored by Florida Tech also claims that “majoring in prelaw gives the prospective law student an advantage” because of the courses offered and the skills these courses emphasize (“What Can You Do”).

However, being a pre-law major may not be the best option, despite the legal-specific preparation it offers. According to my research, undergraduate students may need to look at other majors if they wish to set themselves apart, impress admissions offices at their desired law school, and succeed academically. An article titled “Future Law Students Should Avoid Prelaw Majors, Some Say,” published in *U.S. News World & Report*, a publication known for its rankings of colleges for various levels of degrees, quotes several universities that prefer that students are not pre-law majors while at undergraduate universities. The same article discusses a study by the Law School Admissions Council, the organization that administers the LSAT, which found that students who were pre-law majors in their undergraduate years were “less likely to be admitted to the law school than those who chose other majors” (Wecker). Students

who majored in philosophy, economics, and journalism fared much better with the admissions offices.

Similarly, on the ABA's website entitled "Pre-Law," the organization suggests choosing a major that interests the specific student but also develops the skills they consider to be essential to being prepared for and succeeding in law school. These skills are as follows: "problem solving, critical reading, writing and editing, oral communication and listening, research, organization and management, public service and promotion of justice, relationship-building and collaboration, background knowledge, and exposure to the law." According to the American Bar Association, progressing in these areas prior to law school will help ensure the proper level of preparation while obtaining a JD and afterwards. The ABA suggests that students "should seek educational, extra-curricular, and life experiences that will assist (them) in developing those attributes" ("Pre-Law"). The website then goes into detail about how each skill will be utilized in the legal classroom.

Despite being a quite lengthy post, the ABA never favors one major over another; rather, the authors express that as long as the student gains a foundation of the skills they deem to be necessary and excels in their field of study, he or she will be just fine in law school. The American Bar Associations' website content only further supports that if undergraduate students truly wish to earn a seat at a well-known law school, they need to enroll in some sort of preparation that helps them flourish within these skill sets ("Pre-Law"). Considering the ABA is not only the organization that first began setting standards for what steps must be taken to

become a lawyer, but it is also the licensure board for American lawyers, their opinion is not to be taken lightly.

Even majors such as criminal justice do not sit well with many law schools, according to both the *US News World & Report* article and an article by Patrick Kinkade, Angel Ilarraza Fuentes, and Mathew Leone, titled “Criminal Justice Education in Relation to Law School Expectation: A Failure of Confidence.” In 2009, the authors asked 119 admissions officers at law schools whether they believe that an undergraduate criminal justice degree is recommended for those wishing to attend law school. Authors asked the deans to rank twelve academic disciplines on how well they prepared students for law school, how important specific portions of law school applications are, and it asked them to rank eight specific skills they considered to be necessary for success in law school. The deans were also asked whether they agree or disagree (according to a Likert scale) with various statements pertaining to the preparation a criminal justice degree offers to future law students (Kinkade, et al., 33). Criminal Justice was ranked as the ninth best major for preparedness, after English, philosophy, political science, history, biological/physical sciences, pre-med, and sociology. The undergraduate major as a whole was ranked as the fourth most important part of an application, after LSAT score, GPA, and university attended. In the skills section, knowledge about criminal justice systems was ranked last out of the eight options, with critical thinking coming in at number one. Finally, within the “agree/disagree” section, the study found that most admissions officers perceived a criminal justice degree as inadequate preparation in the areas deemed most important, such as written and oral communication skills (Kinkade, et al., 42). The study proves that it is important for an

undergraduate major to prepare students for law school, not in the legal system specifically, but in the skills and areas of understanding that are deemed important.

Choosing what is deemed a challenging major has proven to be important in the application process, specifically with the perception of how adequately the courses within the major develop students' skills in the necessary areas. *PrepScholar*, a successful SAT/ACT preparation site, also does not recommend being a pre-law major, according to the article "Ultimate Guide to Pre-Law: 13 Tips to Prepare for Law School," by Justin Berkman. The author states that during the admissions process, the students who performed well in particularly difficult courses/subjects are preferred over students who were pre-law in undergraduate. Berkman says this is because pre-law is not perceived as a challenging major, but more as a way for students to "delay joining the 'real world.'" However, according to *PrepScholar*, there are multiple benefits of being a pre-law major, namely that students who major in this area become familiar with the Socratic method, which can help them feel more confident going into law school. Pre-law courses can also help students learn more about the legal field as a whole, as stated in a preceding paragraph, and many programs claim they help students get better LSAT scores (Berkman).

LawyerEdu.org, a site that lists the state by state requirements to becoming a lawyer, does not outright recommend one major over another, but it does quote the ABA recommendation, which specifies that history, English, philosophy, political science, and economics/business "lend themselves more readily to law school readiness." The site then goes on to specifically list the pros and cons of choosing each major. For example, history teaches students about "the history behind the law" and how each law can impact society. English majors

will help expand students' reading, writing, and critical thinking skills, all of which are used every day in law school as well as after graduation. Philosophy can help develop students' ability to see both sides of an argument and formulate a complete case, whereas political science gives students a deeper understanding of the ins and outs of our legal system. An economics major can give students a better grasp of how money and legality go hand-in-hand, and how one can positively or negatively impact the other. Finally, pursuing a business degree will expose students to the corporate structure, as well as the procedures for negotiations and contract formation ("Best Pre-Law"). No one major or another is required by the ABA in order to attend law school, and the major a student has in undergraduate does not necessarily matter to a law school admissions office. But one thing everybody in the conversation does agree on is that undergraduate majors and courses need to fully develop and challenge the students' skills.

The skills mentioned in the previous paragraphs are necessary for success in law school for a reason. These skills directly translate into the performance of a student in actual law school courses and are required to fully comprehend and analyze law school course material. For example, in Amy Jarmon's article from the ABA's Law Student publication, "How to Choose Your Courses Wisely," the author, an assistant dean for Academic Success Programs at Texas Tech's law school, offers her expertise in order to assist law school students with class selection. This specific source gives insight into what the real course content may look like while attending actual law school, something that could assist students when choosing courses list for their pre-law preparation. Overall, Jarmon emphasizes choosing courses that will allow students to reach their fullest potential both during and after their legal education. The author also states that although many law school students are very left-brained and can handle juggling multiple

difficult classes, the author suggests finding a balance between overworking and underestimating yourself (Jarmon 19). What is most applicable to our current conversation, however, is the issue of prerequisites for actual law school courses. Typical prerequisites can include anything from skills development to participation in *pro bono* work.

Once again, we see an opportunity for students to give themselves an extra push, which they will need to get ahead in law school. Finding internships, attending on workshops, enrolling in courses that develop pertinent skills, or talking to real lawyers in order to figure out what type of law they want to practice would be exceptionally advantageous to students once they get to law school and start to select their first-semester classes (Jarmon19-20). Jarmon says, “Students who plan their academic selections carefully have the opportunity to increase their motivation, optimize their interests, explore new areas of the law, work toward future employment goals, and prepare to be practice ready. By being fully engaged in their academic planning, students can increase their chances for academic success now and for career success later” (Jarmon 20).

Jarmon also says something about graduate programs that I believe can be applied to undergraduate students as well: “Additional courses during law school can improve skills in a less-threatening environment than later legal employment,” (Jarmon 20). Learning these skills in undergraduate or law school, where it is still acceptable to make mistakes without fear of devastating consequences, is a lot less painful and time-consuming than it is to learn them the hard way in the real world. If undergraduate students can employ resources that will give them the opportunity to develop these skills earlier on, they will improve their chances of being fully prepared for law school.

Also from the ABA's Law Student publication, the ABA endorses three courses that will boost students' legal skills. Similar to what other sources claim, here, the American Bar association advocates enrollment in formal logic, US history, and microeconomics classes because of the overlap between the competencies in these courses and law courses. Formal logic classes focus on analyzing arguments and argument structure, both of which are imperative to academic prosperity. US history courses can give students a deeper understanding of the context within which laws were enacted and gives students latitude to enhance their research skills. Finally, microeconomics offers students an opportunity to grasp contracts and torts concepts ("3 Courses"). Once again, we see opportunity for students' growth in skill levels. Pre-law students should consider taking similar classes to those listed above, in order to develop these skills early on.

Undergraduate majors and level of skill development are not the only factors influencing student performance in law school; how students process information can impact success as well. In Eric DeGroff and Kathleen McKee's article, "Learning Like Lawyers: Addressing the Differences in Law Student Learning Styles," the authors present a study that looked into the relationship between a student's learning style and their "aptitude for legal study" (501). Their study found that learning styles can impact not only a student's LSAT score, but their grades in the first year of law school as well. DeGroff and McKee's study is specifically tailored to professors wishing to help their students with low LSAT scores develop their analytical reasoning skills or those who simply have not grasped the concept as fully as they need to (DeGroff and McKee 504). The authors begin by discussing specific skills requisite to law school success. According to the authors, all graduate school (like law school) class structures

vary greatly from that of undergraduate classes. Memorization skills that work greatly to the undergraduate student's advantage no longer serve in law school; rather, students must actively participate in the "questioning, sorting, relating, prioritizing, culling, and synthesizing facts and theories in the development of analytical constructs," (DeGroff and McKee 506). Typical undergraduate students are unfamiliar with the Socratic method of learning predominantly utilized in law school, due to the more passive style of learning used throughout most of a person's academic career, according to the authors (DeGroff and McKee 505). If students were exposed to the Socratic seminar style of teaching before law school, they would be giving themselves a leg up in the extremely competitive law school realm. Enrolling in courses specializing in debate, discussion, and analysis would be an extremely effective way to give students more confidence and make them feel more prepared going into law school. As I said earlier, early exposure to the Socratic method, and the resulting higher confidence, is one of the main benefits of pre-law majors. Offering these types of courses to students, regardless of their true major, is one of the best ways universities can guide their students.

The authors then move to discuss what the core purpose of legal education is, and we once again see a very similar list of skills students should have a grasp of on entering law school: problem solving, legal analysis and reasoning, legal research, factual investigations, communication, counseling, negotiation, litigation and alternative dispute resolution procedures, organization and management of legal work, and recognizing and solving ethical dilemmas (DeGroff and McKee 507-8). The authors recommend that students "should also have a basic understanding of how the different areas of substantive law relate to each other and impact each other within the seamless web of law as a whole" (508). As we know from the ABA's

recommendations, many of these acquired skills overlap with some undergraduate courses in other majors, such as philosophy or political science, but students acquiring any experience with these subjects earlier on is one of the best ways students can prepare themselves for law school courses.

As if being taught extremely complex material in an entirely new format is not stressful enough, DeGroff and McKee quote studies explaining how different types of students may fail to retain content, specifically because of how they process new information. The authors found that visual learners tend to not do as well in law school, as so much of the subject requires the skills mentioned before, specifically, logical thinking and the ability to comprehend long written texts, something that right brained, visual learners have a hard time grasping (DeGroff and McKee 506, 512). Not only this, but factors like intelligence, and personality, along with how individuals prefer to learn can impact academic success in any professional environment. The authors reference a study from Professor M.H. Sam Jacobson, “Primer on Learning,” that says even though educators cannot tailor classroom methodology to intelligence or personality, because of how fixed and generally unchangeable the two are, legal professors can tailor the classroom experience distinctly to a student’s information processing preference or learning style (DeGroff and McKee 510-12). This means that if a teacher were to address any discrepancy in student learning preference earlier on, the student whose learning style did not previously match up with the legal educators’ teaching style, could customize material to better align with the student’s learning style. Adapting material in this way can assist students in comprehending coursework and allow them to gradually orient themselves with the way law school material is taught.

Jacobson's study also suggests that learning style is the only factor of the three mentioned (intelligence, personality, and learning style) that is "an area in which adult learners may be capable of positive change," (DeGroff and McKee 512), Jacobson says that there are two phases of the learning process, that can potentially be impacted or changed by educators' strategy. The first phase, information absorption, is where students absorb the information presented to them via their senses. For example, verbal learners absorb through reading written text, oral learners absorb by talking through the information, tactile learners absorb by touching or practically applying information, and visual learners absorb information "in its entirety, rather than in parts" (qtd. in DeGroff and McKee 512). DeGroff and McKee point out verbal learners typically fair the best in law school because law school coursework and information is generally provided in a written text format (512). The authors then go on to say they have found no evidence that information absorption can be altered or changed in adults. Rather, it is the second phase of the learning process, "information processing," that can sometimes be customized, the extent to which is unknown. Jacobson and the authors define "information processing" as the internalization and contextualization of absorbed information. This could also be referred to as left-brained, controlling reading, writing, and analysis, versus right-brained, controlling creativity and spatial construction. Left-brain learners typically have an easier time processing the information presented in law school, not only because of how the information is presented to them but also because "legal analysis typically calls for logical and sequential, or left-brain, function (DeGroff and McKee 513).

As stacked as the odds may seem against right-brained or visual-learners, there are some solutions that give students a better chance of success in graduate programs. DeGroff and McKee

state that while “it is not entirely clear to what extent adult learners can replace previously acquired learning preferences, evidence suggests that students can achieve some balance in learning modes and acclimate to new learning environments at least to a degree” (517). DeGross and McKee declare that this study and its findings are not intended to make the law school education process easier, *per se*, but that they aim to assist students who have the competence to succeed in law school but who learn differently than the typical law student (537). However, the authors conclude that law school professors should not tailor their presentation of class material in a way that only benefits one type of student (a.k.a. visual learners or left-brained people), in order to mitigate this problem of excluding students with a variety of learning styles (536). Students should know how they learn best, so that they can reach out to their professors, at any level of education, when they are struggling to comprehend or retain material.

A study by Robert Detwiler states that factors such as student-student interaction, faculty-student interaction, as well as academic and non-academic involvement can impact students’ academic performance over the course of the three years of law schools (60). The study aims to inform faculty, so they can promote student involvement, and inform professional education students about what can affect their scholastic performance (Detwiler iii). Detwiler found that there are twenty-one of what he calls “significant predictors,” that can impact a law school student’s cumulative (third year) GPA (69). LSAT score and undergraduate GPA were both top predictors, along with race, where “white students were more likely to have higher law school grades than minority students” (Detwiler 70). That being said, the author states that there were far more white students than minority students who participated in the study; 74 percent were white, and 20 percent were minorities, with 6 percent declining to answer (Detwiler 62).

Detwiler also found that “if a student transferred from one [graduate] law school to another, they were more likely to have a higher law school GPA than students who only attended one law school” (70-1). Students typically enroll in smaller, less competitive law schools during 1L in order to get their grades up so they can transfer to a larger law school for 2L and 3L. This also can be an option for students who wish to have less debt or student loans post-graduation, or students who wish to attend law school part-time. The study also determined that students who attended larger graduate law schools performed better, along with those who “spent more time resting, having fun, and getting involved in activities sponsored by the law school” (71). The author found that students who were more active in class, contributed to classroom discussions, participated in law journals, participated in moot court, and frequently prepared two or more drafts of a paper before submitting it had higher LGPAs. Similarly, Detwiler found that students who regularly came to class without completing the necessary reading/preparation were more likely to have lower GPA’s at the end of their law school careers (72).

One of the biggest stressors for me, during my pre-law experience, was that I had no idea what to expect from law school. I did not know what the class structure would be like, what types of classes I would be taking, how big law school classes would be, or how much choice I had in my own schedule. Many law schools offer some guidance to potential students by sending “example schedules” to their applicants, along with full course catalogs. New England Law Boston provides their admitted students with leaflets featuring a full list of their available electives, along with a list of their concentrations. These electives range from Criminal Defense Ethics and National Security Law, to American Indian Law and Copyright Law. NELB also informs their admitted students about all of the potential study abroad programs, externships,

internships, and fellowship programs. The University of Illinois Chicago provides applicants with similar information, but “Chicago’s Only Public Law School” also creates a printed sample schedule, spanning three years. This sample schedule is complete with the number of credit hours attributed to each course listed but does not include a description of the course beyond the course title. Regardless of how informative these sample schedules are, many pre-law students may have questions about what exactly to expect from their law school classes, specifically how law classes will be formatted.

According to *U.S. News & World Report*, introductory law classes are taught using the Socratic method, “which involves cold-calling on students and interrogating them about the facts and decisions in various court cases” (Kowarski). This format is obviously very different from what most college students are used to and is quite a bit more intense than a typical undergraduate lecture. The same *U.S. News & World Report* article quotes Lance J. Robinson, a lawyer from New Orleans, who states that law schools continue to use this method because of its similarity to cross-examination. “By asking a series of questions meant to expose contradictions in students’ ideas, they can be guided toward more solid conclusions while also learning how to find the flaws in someone else’s thinking,” according to Robinson. Joe Bogdan, an associate professor at Columbia College Chicago and partner at the Culhane Meadows law firm, argues that the Socratic method “shows students what the most compelling arguments are on both sides of important legal questions so that, once they become attorneys, they can win legal debates and effectively represent their clients.” The method has a reputation for being intense and nerve-wracking, but students can prepare themselves by developing their public speaking skills and actively participating in their undergraduate classes, according to Bogdan. The overall aim

with this method is to prepare law students for the real legal world, not to “embarrass or humiliate students.” It is important for law students, and pre-law students preparing for this experience, to understand that professors do not dislike a particular student because they cold called them. Rather, law professors use this method in order to “force [students] to defend what [they] say [they] believe or what [they] say [they] think and to do it in a public setting,” says business-lawyer, Mark Tyson. Tyson also says that “the longer that a law student believes that [their professors have it out for them specifically], the worse they’ll do in handling the Socratic method” (Kowarski).

Despite how taxing preparing for law school can be, and despite how many factors there are to consider, students can still take some steps to put themselves in a better position when it comes time to apply. One option for students, especially those who have a little free time in their class schedule, is to take up a law-related minor. This way, students can still enroll in a major that interests them while also enhancing their skills specific to law school. Advisors can be extremely informative in the process of choosing a minor. The ABA’s website is also helpful. Again, according to the ABA’s website, students should be developing their skills regarding “problem solving, critical reading, writing and editing, oral communication and listening, research, organization and management, public service and promotion of justice, relationship-building and collaboration, background knowledge, and exposure to the law,” while in undergraduate classes (“Pre-Law”). Finding classes that can do this can be a tricky thing for students, so once again reaching out to advisors for help is a viable option. If a student knows what type of law he or she would like to practice, minoring in that field could be extremely advantageous as well. As I previously stated, the ABA also recommends enrolling in formal

logic, US history, and microeconomics majors/classes, because of the shared skill requirements, as well as economics/business, English, history, political science, and philosophy majors/classes (“Pre-Law”). Taking on a minor, instead of a full major, would offer students a few preparatory courses without consuming all of their undergraduate career. Minor in a legal field, versus majoring in one, mitigates the problem of how a pre-law degree is perceived; by taking this path, students prove they can succeed in what is considered a respected degree while also educating themselves on legal material. If students do not wish to have a minor and believe they can handle double majoring in pre-law as well as another program, that is another option. That being said, taking on an additional major or minor can be costly for students because of the increased course load. The financial responsibility and mental health implications of taking too many classes also needs to be considered but taking a pre-law minor can be a reasonable option for those planning to attend law school.

Before officially enrolling at a university, students should check to see what pre-law programs and classes they have (or do not have) and figure out what the best option might be. Most major universities have various classes and programs that develop skills which overlap with the skills needed to understand law school course material. Many schools offer recommended course lists for all their majors and minors, so students should be utilizing those to decide what the best course of action is for them personally. Offering a pre-law recommended course list, with a year-by-year breakdown, is a step an undergraduate university needs to take to give students some structure for their law school preparation experience. If a university does not offer any pre-law programs, major or minor, and if they do not have a recommended course list, students should look to other pre-law students for advice, as well as any law-related

extracurricular groups. However, reaching out to academic advisors for assistance is likely the best option.

Students should be reaching out to their advisors as soon as they figure out that they want to go to law school. Scheduling a meeting with their academic advisor is going to be a student's best bet when it comes to choosing the right classes and meeting degree requirements. Most advisors are going to be more in the know about on-campus events, internships, clubs, etc., than most students are. As we have seen throughout this paper, and from my own experience, no one is going to throw resources at students because they feel like it; students will have to seek advisors and faculty out to find how their university can help them.

Finally, joining pre-law clubs and organizations is one of the best ways to successfully traverse applying to law school. At Ball State, there is a Pre-Law Interest Group whose goal, according to their current President Cameron DeBlasio, “is to help students become acclimated with the idea of applying to and attending law school.” In an email dated 2/28/2020, DeBlasio said that the Pre-Law Interest Group gives members tips on almost every aspect of the law school application process, from the taking LSAT to putting them in contact with admissions advisors. The group also brings in alumni who give testimonies on their experiences in law school in order to inform students about what to expect, and the group regularly takes trips to actual law schools. The interest group is not overseen by any one academic department, so all are invited so long as they are interested in attending law school. DeBlasio says that one of the major benefits of this group is how it was able to help students feel less overwhelmed and stressed about the whole process. On-campus organizations such as the PLIG can help outline the steps

students need to take while applying to law school and point out further resources that students can utilize.

Conclusion

I started this paper with the intention of proving that Ball State did not have the means to adequately prepare students for law school. I had an entire plan set out to do the research and make recommendations to BSU detailing how exactly they could make their program better. I quickly found out that I was the one who was misinformed; Ball State does have the correct programs and majors they need to prepare their students. But what they are not doing is providing students with all the information they will need to succeed in law school.

Through my research, I have learned that success in law school does not come from memorizing the content; rather, it comes from having a well-developed grasp of specific skills. I have learned that what major students take does not really matter, as long as it is perceived as challenging by law school admissions offices. I learned that what learning style students prefer can impact their ability to make it through law school successfully. I have learned that even though the LSAT is not perceived as a good indicator of what kind of lawyer a person will be, students still have to take it and score well to compete with the thousands of others vying for a seat at a prestigious law school. None of this information was provided to me by Ball State, even after I declared as a pre-law major. All this information was what I discovered by myself, after four years of heavy course loads and an obscene amount of coffee.

Assuming that undergraduate universities want to help their students, they need to be making vigorous efforts to inform students about the venture they are undertaking. If universities, like Ball State, could simply reach out to their pre-law students a few times a year or through a pre-law newsletter outlining the application process, they would be relieving some of their students' stress. Universities could mandate regular meetings with pre-law students, to answer any questions or assist with LSAT prep, or they could designate a go-to person for these pre-law students. Many universities have the resources and information pre-law students need so the problem seems to be a matter of communication. Either way, despite how much of the academic responsibility falls on students, some of that responsibility lies with universities as well.

If students are to take anything away from this paper, listen to this: no one is going to tell them how to succeed or what steps they need to take to get there. These future lawyers are going to have to go out and find the information for themselves, if they wish to get to the places they want to go. Students need to use the advice given in this paper to their advantage and give themselves a leg up in what is one of the most cutthroat, competitive environments I have ever encountered. If potential law school students are willing to be responsible for their future and can take charge of their academic paths, with the help of universities and their faculty, they may be able to succeed at whatever law school they choose. I have provided pre-law students with the information I guarantee they will need during their entirety of their legal education, because I know how difficult it is to find this information. If I can, I want to prevent other students from feeling the way I did. So, students: be assertive about getting the information you need and do not be afraid or embarrassed to ask the university for help.

Works Cited

Berkman, Justin. "Ultimate Guide to Pre-Law: 13 Tips to Prepare for Law School." *Ultimate Guide to Pre-Law: 13 Tips to Prepare for Law School*, 19 June 2019, blog.prepscholar.com/pre-law-majors-schools-programs.

Briggs, Saga. "Why Self-Esteem Hurts Learning but Self-Confidence Does the Opposite." *InformED*, <https://www.opencolleges.edu.au/informed/features/self-efficacy-and-learning/>. Accessed 20 April 2020.

DeBlasio, Cameron. "Re: Honors College thesis." Received by Tori Whitman, 28 Feb. 2020.

DeGroff, Eric A., and Kathleen A. McKee. "Learning Like Lawyers: Addressing the Differences in Law Student Learning Styles," *B.Y.U. Education and Law Journal*, vol. 2006, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 499–549. ERIC(EBSCOhost),

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24691600&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Detwiler, Robert R. *Assessing Factors Influencing Student Academic Success in Law School*.

ProQuest LLC, ProQuest LLC, 1 Jan. 2011. ERIC(EBSCOhost),

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED539780&site=ehost-live
&scope=site.

Graves, Franklin. "Is A Pre-Law Program Right for You?" *ABA For Law Students*,

<https://abaforlawstudents.com/2017/01/25/is-pre-law-right-for-you/>. Accessed 20 April
2020.

Jarmon, Amy L. "How to Choose Your Courses Wisely." *Student Lawyer*, vol. 43, no. 3,

November 2014, p. 19-22. *HeinOnline*,

<https://abaforlawstudents.com/2014/11/01/choose-courses-wisely/>

Kinkade, Patrick, et al. "Criminal Justice Education in Relation to Law School Expectation: A

Failure of Confidence." *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp.

33–44. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1080/10511250400085901.

Kowarski, Ilana. "What Is the Socratic Method That Law Schools Use?" *U.S. News & World*

Report, 4 April 2019,

[https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2019-
04-04/what-is-the-socratic-method-and-why-do-law-schools-use-it](https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2019-04-04/what-is-the-socratic-method-and-why-do-law-schools-use-it). Accessed 20 April

2020.

Parekh, Neetal. "PreLaw 101: What Does "L" Mean Anyway?" *FindLaw*, 14 July 2010.

https://blogs.findlaw.com/greedy_associates/2010/07/prelaw-101-what-does-l-mean-anyway.html. Accessed 20 April 2020.

"Best Pre-Law Schools and Majors." *Best Pre Law Schools and Majors | Degrees and Programs*, 2014, www.lawyeredu.org/best-pre-law-schools.html.

"Pre-Law." *American Bar Association*,

www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law/.

Wecker, Menachem. "Future Law Students Should Avoid Prelaw Majors, Some Say." *U.S. News & World Report*, U.S. News & World Report, 29 Oct. 2012,

www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2012/10/29/future-law-students-should-avoid-prelaw-majors-some-say.

"What Can You Do With a Prelaw Degree?" *Ad Astra, Florida Tech Marketing and Communications*, 24 June 2014,

<https://adastra.fit.edu/blog/floridatechbound/pre-law-degree/>. Accessed 20 April 2020.

"3 Courses That Strengthen Legal Skills." *ABA.com*, American Bar Association, Jan. 2016.

New England Law Boston, *Admitted Students Pamphlet*, Boston, Spring 2020

University of Illinois Chicago John Marshall Law School, *Admitted Students Pamphlet*, Chicago, Spring 2020.

Appendix – Annotated Bibliography

Berkman, Justin. “Ultimate Guide to Pre-Law: 13 Tips to Prepare for Law School.” *Ultimate Guide to Pre-Law: 13 Tips to Prepare for Law School*, 19 June 2019, blog.prepscholar.com/pre-law-majors-schools-programs.

This source comes from one of the leading test preparation companies specifically for the SAT and ACT. They do, however, offer 13 tips to prepare for law school and in doing so, define what pre-law means, why/why not to be a pre-law major, what other majors are helpful, and other tips about the application process. This is one of the first sources I have found that actually talks about why being a pre-law major is useful, so I think that will be helpful when comparing and contrasting university preferences. As I am reading these sources, I am finding that pre-law students may not have an advantage because of how pre-law is perceived, so I want to find as many sources as possible discussing the subject.

DeGroff, Eric A., and Kathleen A. McKee. “Learning Like Lawyers: Addressing the Differences in Law Student Learning Styles,” *B.Y.U. Education and Law Journal*, vol. 2006, no. 2, June 2006, pp. 499–549. EBSCOhost,

search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=aph&AN=24691600&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

This article discusses law student learning styles and how those learning styles impact performance on the LSAT and in law school. I think this resource will help me establish what factors can lead to success in law school. I will then be able to use that information to recommend courses that build up the skills the author believes are necessary to succeed in law school. In the section where I recommend that BSU establish a pre-law program, I can use the information in this article to suggest specific aspects of the new major that would be helpful to future law school students.

Detwiler, Robert R. *Assessing Factors Influencing Student Academic Success in Law School*.

ProQuest LLC, ProQuest LLC, 1 Jan. 2011. EBSCOhost,
search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=ED539780&site=ehost-live
&scope=site.

This source is a dissertation from a graduate student working towards his Doctor of Philosophy Degree. It discusses how undergraduate GPA's and LSAT scores can predict/impact performance in law school. The paper also discusses other factors that can impact how a student performs in law school. I think this dissertation will be helpful to me because it can give me some insight into what *actually* affects a student's academic performance. Also, I believe this paper will help me with my recommendations on how to improve BSU's pre-law preparation; meaning what factors schools need to be mitigating to optimize performance.

Frantz, Paul L., and Alex H. Wilson. "Student Performance in the Legal Environment Course: Determinants and Comparisons." *Journal of Legal Studies Education*, vol. 21, no. 2, Dec. 2004, pp. 225–240. ERIC (*EBSCOhost*), search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ904998&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

This journal article discusses student performance, specifically with legal studies from business students. The article talks about what factors/characteristics can influence how students perform in law-related classes, while studying business primarily. I believe this source can give me some more insight as to what impacts performance in legal studies classes, as well as how non-legal majors perform in these types of classes. I think this will strengthen my recommendations as well.

Jarmon, Amy L. "How to Choose Your Courses Wisely." *Student Lawyer*, vol. 43, no. 3, November 2014, p. 19-22. *HeinOnline*, <https://abaforlawstudents.com/2014/11/01/choose-courses-wisely/>

This source comes straight from the ABA, but specifically it comes from their "Student Lawyer" publication that has various advice columns on subjects pertaining to law school. This specific article talks about how to pick the best courses in law school in order to get "maximum impact." This article will be extremely helpful to me because it will show me what courses are being taken in law school, which will allow me to recommend the creation of new courses to universities that do not currently have a pre-law program. Essentially, it will be beneficial for me

to see what classes are actually offered in law school so that I can better recommend preparation courses during an undergraduate career.

Kinkade, Patrick, et al. "Criminal Justice Education in Relation to Law School Expectation: A Failure of Confidence." *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2004, pp. 33–44. *Academic Search Premier*, doi:10.1080/10511250400085901.

This journal article specifically discusses how many law schools do not consider a bachelor's degree in criminal justice a sufficiently challenging degree for someone applying to law school. Specially, the authors interviewed deans of various law schools, asking them about how criminal justice degrees are perceived regarding preparation. Although this is especially about criminal justice degrees, this article will allow me to further discover what degrees provide adequate preparation for the law school experience and which ones do not.

"Best Pre-Law Schools and Majors." *Best Pre Law Schools and Majors | Degrees and Programs*, 2014, www.lawyeredu.org/best-pre-law-schools.html.

This website serves as a resource for potential lawyers and specifically lists all/any state requirements one would have to fulfill to become a lawyer in any state. Regarding undergraduate/pre-law majors, *lawyeredu.org* suggests one of the following degrees: history, English, philosophy, political science, economics, and business. The website then goes into detail about how each degree specifically can help prepare students for law school. The site mentions the ABA's recommendations and uses this as a basis for its explanations. I believe this source will be useful to me because it discusses what skills students need to be successful in law school, as well as what majors/courses one should take in their undergraduate years.

“Pre-Law.” *American Bar Association*,

www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/pre_law/.

This source comes straight from the American Bar Association and very clearly outlines their recommendations/relevant information. This lengthy post begins by addressing that there is no one path to law school and that any bachelor’s degree is acceptable. The ABA’s website also discusses, in depth, what skills will be needed to be successful in law school. I think this source will be useful to me because not only does it outright discuss skills/majors, but it also comes from the leading legal authority. The ABA’s statements are arguably the most important/relevant, so I think it is important to include their statements in my paper.

It also gives some other tips about selecting a law school and financial aid, but obviously these topics are not super relevant to my thesis.

Wecker, Menachem. “Future Law Students Should Avoid Prelaw Majors, Some Say.” *U.S. News*

& World Report, U.S. News & World Report, 29 Oct. 2012,

www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2012/10/29/future-law-students-should-avoid-prelaw-majors-some-say.

US News & World Report is active in almost all things law school, but they are one of the primary (reliable) law school ranking websites. In this article, Wecker talks about why some universities are recommending majors other than pre-law, and what majors would be better. The author references the ABA, the University of California-Berkeley, University of Mississippi, the LSAC, and many other relevant sources. The article specifically states that other majors (philosophy, economics, and journalism) have higher law school acceptance rates than pre-law

majors. I think this is relevant because, again, it speaks to the pros and cons of pre-law and how different majors measure up in the admission process. Also, it gives a lot of cold, hard facts/statistics which I could reference/use in my paper.

“3 Courses That Strengthen Legal Skills.” *ABA.com*, American Bar Association, Jan. 2016.

This article also comes from the ABA’s website, though it is much shorter. This article specifically recommends 3 courses to take in undergraduate, that will help prepare students for law school. The courses are Formal Logic, US History, and Microeconomics. This website article will help me make better course recommendations for universities that do not have pre-law programs and will give more information that supports my recommendations.