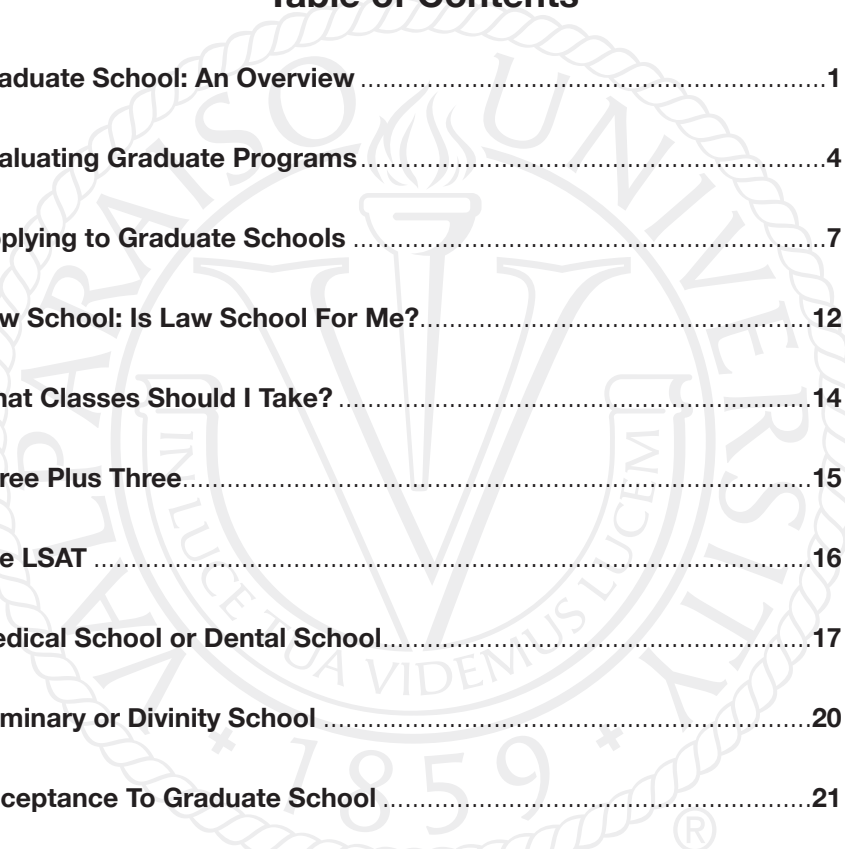


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The background of the page features a large, faint watermark of the Valparaiso University seal. The seal is circular with a rope-like border. Inside the border, the text "VALPARAISO UNIVERSITY" is written at the top and "1859" at the bottom. In the center of the seal is a shield with a cross, a book, and a lamp. The shield is flanked by two figures. The Latin motto "SCIENTIA FIDES AMICITIA" is written across the shield, and "IN LUCE ET VIA VIDEMUS LUCEM" is written on a banner below the shield.

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Graduate School An Overview

Attending graduate school is a wonderful opportunity for many Valpo graduates. Achieving an elevated degree of learning in a particular field, immersing yourself in cutting-edge research, enriching your employment options, fulfilling your passion for learning, gaining professional credentials—these are all excellent reasons to pursue graduate study.

Deciding to Attend Graduate School

But before you decide to go to graduate school, be sure to think carefully about the reasons behind your decision. While there are no straightforward reasons to go to graduate school, ask yourself the questions below and take the time to make a thoughtful, informed decision.

- Does your chosen career field require a graduate degree or degrees?
Have you investigated options in this field for undergraduate degree holders?
- Will a graduate degree make you a more marketable candidate for employment?
Will the degree allow you to command a higher salary?
- Are you interested in deepening or expanding your competence in an academic discipline or professional field? Do you have a strong desire to continue your education and learn for the sake of learning?

Also consider whether you really want to be a graduate student. Even though many people with advanced degrees remember their grad school years very fondly, the graduate school experience can also have plenty of negative features, including financial and personal hardship. Consider the following questions as you contemplate your decision:

- Are you prepared to invest the time, energy, and money necessary for graduate school? Have you determined, as closely as possible, what these costs are?
- Will workplace experience help you get into graduate school or make you a more successful graduate student?
- Would you benefit from a break from school before pursuing graduate study?
Most graduate programs last two to seven years, depending on the degree.

Simply put, spending time now to contemplate and identify both your immediate and long-term career goals will undoubtedly save you time, not to mention money and frustration, later. Graduate school, especially doctoral programs, can carry tremendous academic, financial, and emotional strains. So be certain you carefully consider your values, your abilities, and your needs and desires. Exhaust the resources available to you both on and off campus to help you with your decision. In the end, you'll be better able to make a confident, motivated, well-informed decision.

When to Go to Graduate School

No set of rules determines the best time to attend graduate school, but a number of factors may help you answer this complicated question. For example, attending graduate school immediately after college is fairly common, but it's a good idea to first be certain why you want to attend graduate school and how it will impact your career choices. Remember: advanced degrees may not improve your chances on the job market. In some occupations, just the opposite is true: graduate degrees might actually place you out of desirable positions, while practical workplace experience might help you land the job you want.

Moreover, you might be able to go to grad school and work at the same time. In fact, employers in many fields compensate or reimburse their employees for tuition and other costs associated with graduate school. Typically, employers will expect you to take courses on a part-time basis, although there are exceptions to this rule.

Another important reality to consider: some graduate schools—such as many MBA programs—require professional work experience before considering a student for admission. Be sure to investigate these prerequisites before submitting an application.

Part-Time vs. Full-Time

Academic burnout is a very good reason for taking some time off when you finish undergraduate school. After sixteen or more years of schooling, many students are simply tired of coursework and benefit greatly from doing something else, at least for a while. If you find yourself in this frame of mind, consider taking some time off from academic pursuits.

Part-Time		Full-Time	
Advantages	Disadvantages	Advantages	Disadvantages
Work full time	Takes much longer	Takes less time, degree will be in hand at younger age	Burnout is common with no time off between undergrad and graduate school
Sharpen your focus and clarify your goals	May be difficult to maintain motivation	Immersion in coursework in your selected field	Prolongs a career decision
Spreads out the financial burden		More financial aid options	Significant academic pressures
Less intense academic pressures			

Delayed Entry

If you're admitted into a graduate program and decide to postpone your graduate work, be certain your decision is well-informed and appropriate. Some reasons for deferring admittance to graduate school make good sense. Receiving a national or international fellowship or scholarship, or being presented with an unusual work opportunity, are two such reasons. Graduate programs may appreciate such opportunities and consider deferring or delaying your entry. However, because graduate programs seek to admit the best class possible each year, they may hesitate to grant delayed entry and instead ask you to re-apply the following year.

Inappropriate reasons for requesting delayed entry include marriage, travel plans, or "shopping around" for the best financial aid package for graduate work. Graduate schools view the admissions process seriously and will likely have little tolerance for students who aren't wholeheartedly committed to pursuing graduate work in a timely manner.

Evaluating Graduate Programs

Once you've made the decision to go to graduate school and determined when you plan to begin, you need to decide where to apply. Your choice should reflect your needs and values, along with your career goals. Seeking out information specific to your field of study is essential, so actively consult graduate school literature and discuss your options with faculty members at both your current school and in graduate programs you're considering, and also with professionals in your chosen field, career counselors, graduate school personnel, and current graduate students.

Issues such as accreditation, licensing, and certification can be critical factors in your decision. In some professions, where you receive your degree can make a difference in your marketability; in others, the degree itself is more important.

Other factors such as location, faculty you'd like to work with, and financial aid options are more open to your personal circumstances; it's up to you to determine how important or unimportant these factors are.

The following is a list of criteria for you to consider. Keep in mind that this list is far from comprehensive.

Reputation of the School or Program

If you're studying in a highly competitive field, where you earn your degree can have a major impact on your future marketability and earning potential. By the time you submit applications, you should have consulted with faculty members or professionals in the field to learn how important a school's reputation is.

Don't confuse the reputation of a school with the reputation of a program—each can have its own merits. In most cases, you'll probably need to be more concerned with the reputation of the program. In any case, always confirm that the school you choose is accredited by a reputable organization.

Quality of Faculty

The quality of a graduate program largely depends upon the quality of the faculty. As you undertake the application process, carefully research faculty members you might like to work with. Investigate the following questions: What are their academic degrees and research specialties? What are their publications? How might their scholarship benefit your planned course of study? What is the student/faculty ratio? (The opportunity to work with senior faculty is important to many graduate students.) If you have read and appreciated the work of a particular scholar, find out where that person teaches, then research his or her program to see if it might suit you.

Program Emphasis

Determine whether the focus of the program suits your career goals. Is the program's emphasis too broad or too narrow for your preferences? Do you agree with the theoretical or political focus of the program? Some graduate programs are heavily research-oriented, others may emphasize practical skills, while still others may focus on teaching. Make sure the program is a good match for you.

Facilities

Determine whether the facilities you'll need to do your work and complete your program are available at the institutions you're considering. Labs, classrooms, libraries, computer facilities, and up-to-date equipment are all important considerations.

Employment Potential

Where are graduates of the program working, and how much are they earning? Were they able to secure their positions immediately after graduate school?

Size of University

What size university is ideal for you? And what size program do you prefer? Be careful not to confuse the two. Many large universities have small graduate programs, and vice versa.

Location

Do you prefer an urban, suburban, or rural setting? Will your decision be limited by family, work, or other constraints? Do you prefer a residential or a commuter setting? Unless other factors dictate where you need to be, think about your personal needs—graduate school doesn't have to be all work, and quality of life issues can be very important.

Terminal Degrees

At what point do you intend to complete your degree? Will you stop with a master's degree or continue straight through a Ph.D. or other doctoral degree? Some programs award both master's and doctoral degrees in sequence; others award only doctoral degrees. Some institutions require that students reapply between the master's and doctoral levels.

Keep in mind that the differences between master's and doctoral degrees are significant, not just in the amount of time required to complete the degree. Compared to doctoral programs, master's programs tend to be far less selective and often admit students with lower GPAs and less competitive results on entrance exams. Similarly, master's degrees often result in fewer career possibilities. By contrast, doctoral programs usually require superior test scores and high GPAs; some also require related workplace experience.

Financial Aid

Financial aid for graduate-level work is much more available than for undergraduate studies. Many graduate students, and most Ph.D. students, are able to finance their educations—at least partially—through teaching assistantships, research assistantships, fellowships, or traineeships. These positions are sometimes difficult to obtain in the first year of training, as they often depend on seniority and academic merit.

A good alternative for many students is residential life positions. Universities often waive tuition and fees, as well as pay room, board, and a stipend, for students who work as Residence Assistants or Residence Directors.

Concentrate on Research and Publications

Gathering information on the types and amount of research and publications that emerge from a particular program can give you valuable insight into faculty members. It can also inform you about the topics a particular department considers important or worthwhile. Your goal should be to match your interests and needs with the focus of a given program as much as possible.

Competitiveness

The issue of competitiveness can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, being accepted into and graduating from a highly competitive program can be extremely beneficial to your future employability. On the other hand, the competitive nature of the admissions process and curriculum can often undermine self-confidence, camaraderie, and motivation. Weigh your self-confidence versus the potential value of the program and try to determine how much the risk is worth the reward.

Other Sources of Financial Aid

While financial aid packages from the university of your choice can be highly beneficial in financing your graduate work, don't overlook other sources of financial aid includ-

ing national fellowship programs, fellowships or grants through local organizations in your hometown, or financial assistance through your academic department. For more information, visit the Career Center website at www.valpo.edu/career.

Intuitive reactions

Gathering rational information will be the most important part of your decision. But don't neglect your instincts. If at all possible, conduct on-site visits to the programs you're considering. Nothing will give you a better sense of each school than being there and experiencing it first-hand. In lieu of a personal visit, extensive phone calls and emails with current students, faculty, and staff members can give you an idea of how you'll fit into a program. Consider questions such as, "How am I treated as a prospective student?" and "How does it feel to be in this place, surrounded by these people?"

Chances are you'll add other criteria to this list as you research graduate programs and complete the application process. Once you've identified all the criteria you'll consider, rank each item in terms of importance. No school or program will be able to meet all your needs, so it's up to you to decide which needs you're prepared to compromise or sacrifice.

Applying to Graduate Schools

Timetable

As you get closer to the actual process of applying to graduate schools, pay very close attention to timetables. Application deadlines vary from institution to institution and range from a year to a few months prior to enrollment. Most universities have an application deadline; a few allow year-round applications but may require a waiting period before enrollment. In addition, application deadlines at some universities vary by department, with acceptance into the department preceding acceptance into the graduate school division of the university.

As a general rule, most applicants begin preparations for the process the summer prior to their senior year.

Don't forget to determine deadlines for financial aid applications, which are often different from department application deadlines. Most graduate schools require applicants to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine aid eligibility. Some schools may require additional information; therefore, be sure to check with each school you're considering for specifics.

Entrance Exams

Entrance exams are another reality of the application process. The most common exam is the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). Other specialized tests include the Graduate Management Admission Test (GMAT), the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), the Law

School Admission Test (LSAT), the Medical College Admission Test (MCAT), and the Dental Aptitude Test (DAT). Certain graduate programs also require the GRE Subject Test.

Find information about all tests online at the following locations:

GRE: www.ets.org

MAT: www.milleranalogies.com

LSAT: <http://www.lsac.org/>

MCAT: <http://www.aamc.org/students/mcat/>

DAT: <http://www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/index.asp>

When to Take the Entrance Exams

Students frequently ask two questions about entrance exams: “Should I take the exam now even though I may not attend graduate school for a few years?” and “How important are my scores to my admission?”

In answer to the first question, most institutions accept scores within five years of the testing date. So even if you’re uncertain about your plans to attend graduate school right away, consider taking the entrance exams now, while you’re at the top of your academic game and in test-taking mode. This is particularly good advice if you’re fairly certain you’ll apply to grad school in the next two to three years.

If you have very little idea when you plan to attend graduate school, consider delaying the time, cost, and pressures involved in taking entrance exams until you’re more certain of your plans. Since various schools require different exams, it might be a good idea to wait until you’ve narrowed your field of potential programs before you decide which entrance exams to take.

How Important are the Scores?

Most graduate schools use standardized test scores as an initial screening device. Some institutions even set a cutoff score, and any applicants whose scores fall below the cutoff are omitted from the pool. Some graduate school directories provide information concerning ranges or averages of scores for their previously accepted classes; if you’re able to gather this sort of information, you’ll have a good idea what score to shoot for, and how you’ll compare to other applicants.

Many schools consider standardized test scores in combination with your GPA and academic record. Most universities are aware of undergraduate programs that offer quality education and view students’ academic records accordingly. As a Valparaiso University student, you will likely benefit from Valpo’s strong reputation.

When registering and preparing for an entrance exam, carefully compare testing dates and application deadlines, and make sure you’ll have time to get the scores to the school or schools of your choice.

Preparing for the Exams

Spending time (and money, in some cases) to prepare for entrance exams is always worthwhile. The amount of time you spend, and the prep methods you use, should depend on the amount of time you have before the exam. The best place to start is on the website specific to the test you'll be taking—for example, www.gre.org for the GRE. The sites offer an abundance of information, including sample tests. A variety of other options are available: online prep guides available on test websites, commercially-produced study guides, and preparatory courses such as Kaplan and Princeton Review.

The following are essential prep activities:

- Familiarize yourself with types of questions you'll encounter on the exam. Look for patterns that may help you be a more efficient test taker.
- Estimate your performance. (Generally speaking, you can expect your score to be close to your SAT score).
- Learn everything you can about the nature and format of the exam. Being unfamiliar with the format can cost you valuable time when actually taking the test.
- Work through several sample tests. These are widely available through the testing websites and through commercially-prepared prep manuals. Always be sure to time yourself to see how you'd perform under actual testing conditions.

Evaluating Your Test Results

If your final test results fall short of your goals, and if you believe you could improve your performance, you may want to consider re-taking the test. Even though retest scores appear on the score report, many programs consider only the most recent score. Moreover, a repeated or improved score probably won't harm your standing in the applicant pool.

Don't make the mistake, however, of going into one of these exams unprepared. Simply retaking a test without significant preparation is very unlikely to have a positive impact on your scores.

The Essay

Another time-consuming and demanding part of the application process is writing an essay or personal statement. The essay is opportunity for you to distinguish yourself from your peers in the applicant pool, and to share information about yourself with the admissions committee. For this reason, essays should be clearly written, concise (a 500-word limit is common) and distinctive. Most committees review hundreds of applications, so be sure to include your own voice, and try to include something memorable in your essay.

The good news is that most applications ask a broad, open-ended question pertaining to your desire to complete a graduate degree. As a result, you'll most likely be able to use the same essay (with minor adjustments, of course) for most applications. Visit

the Career Center website for guidelines for writing your personal essay: www.valpo.edu/career.

Of course, grammar and punctuation must be flawless. Always proofread vigilantly, and give yourself plenty of time to work through several drafts. Ask a friend or family to read your essay to see if it makes sense. Consulting with the staff at the Writing Center in the Christopher Center is also a very good idea. Finally, ask your professors to read and suggest ways to strengthen your essays. Remember: they have first-hand experience writing admissions essays, and they may have also served on admissions committees.

Letters of Recommendation

Your final task in the application process is gathering letters of recommendation. A requirement of three to five recommendations is typical. Your best resources are individuals most familiar with and supportive of your academic training. Depending on the competitive nature of the program or programs you are applying to, you might ask for recommendations from individuals who are well-known, frequently published, or well-connected in your field. If possible, select an individual who graduated from the program you're applying to. (Faculty degrees and the granting institutions are listed in the Valparaiso General Catalog.)

Identify as many individuals as necessary and personally contact them to ask for a recommendation. Be considerate of their hectic schedules, and always allow plenty of time for them to compose and send a letter. This means several weeks or a month, not just a few days.

If you have any doubts about the recommendation an individual may give you, negotiate this potentially awkward situation by being direct. Politely ask the person if s/he feels comfortable writing a positive letter of recommendation for you. Look for an immediate and enthusiastic response, but don't misinterpret a thoughtful response as hesitation.

Once you have a list of recommenders, make their jobs as easy as possible. Be sure to provide all the necessary information for delivering their recommendation forms promptly, including stamped, addressed envelopes and a complete list of deadlines. You might also want to include a list of deadlines, as well as a resume, especially for those people who might benefit from having more detailed information about you.

An important note: As a general rule, always waive your right to review a letter. Most institutions put more trust in a letter they know you have not seen.

These items—the essay, letters of recommendation, test scores, and the school's standard graduate school application form—are the fundamental ingredients in your admission file. Most institutions require that your file be complete by the application deadline in order to be considered for the following enrollment period. While some schools keep you informed of the status of your file by sending postcards, don't depend on this

courtesy. Instead, take personal responsibility for staying on top of your application materials and confirming that the schools have received all the necessary information. Don't hesitate to contact the appropriate office periodically to check on the status of your application.

Initial Application Submissions

Another question students commonly ask is how many schools they should apply to. Financial resources are probably the most important factor when making this decision. With application fees averaging between \$50 and \$75, applying to graduate schools is a very expensive proposition.

In addition, writing essays and applications, as well as making your final decision, is a very time-consuming process. For this reason, submitting twenty or thirty applications at one time is simply not feasible for most students, not to mention the decision-making process you'll encounter if you're accepted at many of the schools.

Instead, use careful and thorough research to narrow your choices to ten or fewer programs. See the "Rule of Thumb" that follows for some guidelines.

Rule of Thumb

Identify two or three institutions that you would love to attend, but that may be somewhat beyond your qualifications. Then select four or five quality institutions that are well within your range of qualifications. Finally, choose one or two "safety schools"—i.e. institutions where you feel sure you'll be accepted, but that would also meet your standards. This process will result in a list of seven to ten programs for your initial application process—enough to create some degree of choice and still be financially feasible.

The Interview

An on-site interview for graduate school is similar to an on-site interview for permanent employment. So that you can effectively discuss what you are able to contribute to and hope to gain from a graduate program, use tools of self assessment.

For example, spend time in advance of the interview preparing yourself to discuss your abilities, career interests, weaknesses, and short- and long-term goals. Also be ready to talk about your academic qualifications, your sense of purpose, your commitment to goals, and how you think these things will make you a successful graduate student.

Though there are no set guidelines for graduate school interviews, if you've spent time considering why you want a graduate degree, your goals, and your abilities, you should be ready for most interview situations. As with any interview, always try to be yourself.

For more information about interviewing, stop by the Career Center and pick up a copy of our Interviewing Guide.

Law School¹

Nobody seems to like lawyers these days—and it seems like they never have. Lawyers catch the blame for all kinds of problems and become the butt of lots of jokes. But none of this stops students from wanting to become lawyers. Undergraduate institutions across the country are filled with young men and women who want to go to law school. People decide to go to law school for lots of reasons, and you're the only person who can decide if law school is right for you. Others can give you advice and talk about their own experiences, but you have to make up your own mind. Try to gather as much information as you can before you make this important decision. **Visit www.valpo.edu/prelaw for more information.**

What are the best reasons for going to law school?

There is only one reason to go to law school: to become a lawyer. That sounds obvious, but many students focus on law school, rather than careers in the law. Law school can be a rewarding and intellectually challenging endeavor. It can also help you please your parents and postpone your career decision-making process for a few more years. But ultimately, law school is just that—three years of schooling that prepares you for a career in the law.

You need to ask yourself why you want to be a lawyer and what you see yourself doing as a lawyer. Learn as much as you can about the practice of law. Consult appropriate reference guides in the Christopher Center and the Law School Library. Spend time talking to lawyers. Ask them if they like their jobs, and why. Find out what they do, and what they like or dislike about their daily activities. Are they happy or stressed, challenged or bored? Read legal journals and newspapers to find out about the advantages and disadvantages of the legal profession, current trends in hiring, and current salary scales. Even better, take a legal job of some sort. Spend a summer working as a paralegal or legal intern in a law office, volunteer for a district attorney's or public defender's office, or assume some other legal undertaking. Once you learn first hand what the practice of law is like, you'll be much better prepared to decide whether or not the law is for you.

What are the worst reasons for going to law school?

Students give lots of reasons for going to law school, but some of these reasons don't make much sense if you think about them.

- ***I want to make a lot of money.*** Some lawyers make a lot of money—particularly those who graduate from the top law schools and take jobs with top firms in big cities. In exchange, they work long hours, often seven days a week, out of hopes that they might make partner in 7 to 10 years. For the rest of lawyers, salaries are similar to those in many other professions. If making money is your goal, think about investment banking or invent the next killer software application.

¹ Adapted from www.valpo.edu/prelaw, a website written and maintained by James Old.

- ***I'm a liberal arts major and I don't know what to do with my degree.*** Law school should not be a dumping ground for wayward liberal arts majors. Sometimes it is, but many of these people end up unhappy with their career choices. Don't make that mistake. Law is not the only career suitable for a liberal arts major. And do you really want to spend three years of your life accumulating thousands of dollars of debt without being sure that you want to be a lawyer?
- ***I like to argue and debate, and I'm good at it.*** Some lawyers are engaged in an adversarial process that involves argument and debate, but most lawyers spend much of their time doing less glamorous work, such as research and writing. A talent for argument and debate might make you a good litigator, but it won't necessarily make you a good lawyer.
- ***Everyone else in my family is a lawyer.*** Having family members who practice law will help you learn about the profession, but it should not be the reason you decide to go to law school. Just because your father or mother or uncle or aunt enjoys practicing law doesn't mean that you will. Sometimes, pressure from parents causes students to choose law school. Parents often see law school as their children's ticket to financial security and prestige. But a legal degree guarantees neither success nor happiness.
- ***I want to change the world.*** That's great. At Valpo, we like it when our graduates try to change the world. Sometimes, a legal degree can help you do that, but not many lawyers change the world all that much. A few lawyers get to argue famous cases and make a big impact, but lightning doesn't strike often. Some lawyers advocate on behalf of the poor and powerless. This is important work, but remember that law schools are often very expensive, and many graduates end up with six figures in debt to pay off. On the other hand, some law schools offer assistance with debt repayment for graduates who take service or government jobs. Other law schools offer very attractive scholarship packages for highly qualified students. Be sure to investigate all your options.
- ***Law school is so versatile that I can use it as a stepping stone to something else.*** If you want a business degree, go into business. Law schools train lawyers. Their placement offices focus on placing students in legal jobs. If you want to spin a law degree into some other kind of career, you'll be on your own.
- ***I just always have wanted to be a lawyer.*** Why have you always wanted to be a lawyer? Can you name things about the practice of law that you would like? If you can't, then you need to do some homework. Don't go to law school until you know what you're getting into.

What Classes Should I Take?

There are no hard, fast guidelines for suggested undergraduate coursework. What really matters is simply to take challenging classes that develop critical thinking and research skills. The American Bar Association, as well as the vast majority of law schools, encourages undergraduates to seek out breadth as well as depth in their education. These abilities, measured through your GPA and LSAT score, will carry infinitely more weight with law school admissions staff than merely having law-related courses on your transcript. As narrowly focused and intense as law school is, take the opportunity to explore now!

What major should a pre-law student at Valpo choose?

Valpo does not have a specific pre-law major, nor do many other colleges and universities across the country. In fact, law schools usually prefer students who have completed traditional majors over students with tailor-made pre-law majors. The three most common majors for students attending law school are Political Science, History, and English, but these three combined make up less than a third of pre-law students nationwide. The point is that you can go to law school with any major.

When choosing a major, keep in mind a few things:

- Some legal careers require expertise beyond the law, and this might determine your major. For example, if you are certain that you want to practice environmental law, you probably should major in Environmental Science or Biology. Students interested in practicing corporate law should choose a major in the College of Business Administration.
- A rigorous course of study is better than an easy course of study. If law schools think you have chosen an “easy” major, they might count this against you. A “rigorous course of study” does not necessarily mean a double major with multiple minors. Quality, not quantity, is what counts.
- You should choose a major that you are interested in, because you will be more likely to do well in courses that you enjoy. Obviously, GPA is very important in the law school admissions process.

After I choose my major, what other classes should I take?

Again, choose classes that fit your own interests and career plans and that will help you develop critical thinking and research skills. And if you are interested in the law, then courses about areas of the law might be a good idea.

Students who choose a political science major can complete the Political Science Department’s concentration in Legal Studies. And all Valpo students can choose from many other courses offered at Valpo that emphasize critical thinking skills or focus on specific areas of the law.

But remember, you can earn acceptance at a law school and do well without taking any pre-law courses.

What else should I take as an undergraduate?

You should contact your advisor and a pre-law advisor and explain your interest in law. Try to seek out a few mentors on campus—faculty or staff who can provide you with advice, contacts, and letters of recommendation. These steps will help you make a well-informed decision about a legal education before committing the necessary time and money to law school. Research both specific law schools and the overall application process.

Upperclassmen should prepare for the LSAT. Large study books are available from several companies, and many students find preparatory classes helpful as well.

Three Plus Three

Can a Valpo undergraduate get a head start on a law degree from Valparaiso University Law School?

Yes. Valparaiso University students in the College of Arts and Sciences can complete a bachelor's and a juris doctor (law) degree from Valparaiso University in a total of six years. This program can save you both time and money by freeing you from one year in school and one year of tuition.

Students who enter the **Combined Liberal Arts - Law Program** will spend their first three years in normal undergraduate course work and will begin law school courses in their fourth year. To enter this program, students must meet the following requirements during their first three years at Valparaiso:

1. Satisfactorily complete all General Education Requirements for the Bachelor's degree and an academic major.
2. Satisfactorily complete at least 94 credit hours.
3. Take at least one half of the credit hours for the major at Valpo.
4. Take at least 75 credit hours, including the last 30 credit hours, at Valpo.
5. Have a grade point average of 3.0 in all undergraduate work at Valpo.
6. Be admitted to the Valparaiso University School of Law through the normal admissions process.
7. Complete the first 30 credits in the Valparaiso University School of Law with a grade point average of at least 2.0.
8. Apply for the bachelor's degree graduation by the deadline date as noted in the University Catalog.

Furthermore, students must receive approval to enter the program from the Office of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences.

Students who take this route will have to apply for law school earlier than their classmates. Be ready to take the LSAT and complete your applications in the fall of your third (junior) year.

For further information, contact a pre-law advisor in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The LSAT

The Law School Admissions Test, or LSAT, is designed to assess skills considered necessary for success in law school. It does not measure your familiarity with certain subject material, but rather your ability to understand and analyze new information, organize your findings, and draw logical inferences from them.

For more information about the LSAT, including when you should take it, the test format, and tips for preparation, visit www.valpo.edu/prelaw. For LSAT dates, testing information, prep materials, and to register online, visit the LSAT website at www.lsac.org.

For more information about attending law school, including a list of popular law schools for Valpo grads, suggestions for selecting a school that suits your priorities, tips for financing law school, and a comprehensive list of resources, please visit www.valpo.edu/prelaw.

Medical School or Dental School

If you're contemplating medical school or dental school, you need to make this decision early in your undergraduate training and begin taking the recommended pre-medical curriculum at Valparaiso University. These courses will prepare you for the rigorous coursework that you'll face in medical or dental school, and may help you meet admissions standards.

When considering a medical profession, carefully consider your goals and aspirations. Conducting informational interviews with professionals in the field, with friends currently in medical training, with recent graduates, or with pre-med advisors will all help you gain an accurate perspective on your desired profession. Asking for advice and doing some serious research before applying will also help you clarify your purposes and motivations in students who are uncertain or confused about their career goals.

The application process for medical school and dental school is similar in many ways to the process for graduate school. One major difference, however, is that a single set of documents—the application form, transcripts, MCAT or DAT scores, and letters of recommendation—allows you to apply to as many schools as you wish.

Medical schools use the American Medical College Application Service (AMCAS) and dental schools use the Associated American Dental Schools Application Service (AADSAS). Note that you'll have to pay the application fee for each school. A Valparaiso pre-medical arts committee member can help guide you through this process.

For more information on application services, visit the following websites:

AMCAS: <http://www.aamc.org/students/amcas/>

AADSAS: <http://www.adea.org/AADSAS/>

When preparing for the application process, familiarize yourself with the most recent edition of the Medical School Admission Requirements published by the Association of American Medical Colleges. You can purchase this book from the AAMC's website at <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/msar.htm> or peruse it at the Christopher Center or your advisor's office. The AAMC website at www.aamc.org/students also offers a wealth of information for prospective medical students, including a comprehensive timeline for all four years of college.

When contemplating or applying to dental school, realize that dental schools in the United States require a wide variety of courses. As a result, Valparaiso University does not have a specific pre-dental curriculum. In order to determine admissions requirements for schools you're interested in, contact the schools directly or visit their websites. The pre-dental advisor at Valparaiso University can also help you navigate through the preparation and admissions process. The American Dental Education Association's

website also offers a tremendous amount of information for students interested in dental school: www.adea.org.

Like dental school, medical school admissions criteria vary from one institution to another. However, the general guidelines that follow will apply to most medical school applicants.

1. A GPA lower than 3.4 on a 4.0 scale will most likely disqualify you from consideration, though GPA criteria will vary between in-state and out-of-state applicants for state-supported schools.
2. Most schools require MCAT scores that are no more than five years old. A single MCAT score below the national average will likely disqualify you as an applicant.
3. Your GPA, MCAT scores, and letters of recommendation are the most important factors in determining an initial interview.
4. AMCAS suggests that applications be submitted no later than June 15th prior to the senior year; applications to any particular school can be submitted until the specified cutoff date. The cutoff date indicates the last day a completed file can be submitted for consideration. This date varies and usually falls between October and December.
5. Conditional acceptance into medical school is usually announced by the following March or April, with final acceptance following receipt of your final transcripts.
6. Generally, US medical schools require 90 credit hours of college-level work, in addition to the following courses:
 - a. General Biology (2 semesters)
 - b. General Chemistry (2 semesters)
 - c. Organic Chemistry (2 semesters)
 - d. General Physics (2 semesters)
 - e. College-level Mathematics (1 semester)

Prospective applicants typically take the MCAT or DAT in the spring of their junior year.

You can obtain informational bulletins for the MCAT from the pre-medical advisor of the junior class, from the Chair of the Pre-medical Arts Committee, or from the MCAT website: www.aamc.org/students/mcat/.

For information on taking the Dental Admissions Test (DAT), visit the American Dental Association's website at www.ada.org/prof/ed/testing/dat/index.as

If you're dissatisfied with the results of your first testing, you may opt to retest. However, realize that simply taking either of these tests again will typically have little effect on your scores. Improving a score requires serious and concentrated preparation, but this may prove worthwhile, as an improved score may improve your chances as an applicant.

Some med schools participate in an Early Decision Program, which allows you to apply to and possibly be accepted to medical school by the fall of your senior year. This option has both advantages and disadvantages. Learn more about the specifics of this program by reading Medical School Admission Requirements, consulting with your advisor, or visiting www.aamc.org/students/applying/programs/earlydecision.htm.

In recent years, many students have begun considering alternatives to highly competitive allopathic and osteopathic medical schools. In particular, some students choose to attend medical school outside the U.S. or Canada, and others pursue chiropractic training. When considering any of these alternative programs, be certain to carefully evaluate your career goals and determine whether these programs will allow you to reach these goals. Regardless of the path you choose to pursue, talk to your pre-med advisor about your decision in advance.

Pre-med advisors are an essential part of undergraduate training for pre-med and pre-dent students. Be sure to take advantage of their expertise and years of experience working with the medical education system.

Seminary or Divinity School

Some Valparaiso students decide to pursue careers as ordained clergy or other full-time church workers, and many will, therefore, need to complete their undergraduate training in preparation for professional study at a seminary or divinity school. Be certain that you understand the difference between these two types of training.

A seminary provides training specific to the purpose of readying individuals to serve as clergy within a particular denomination and is almost always operated by the same denomination.

A divinity school, on the other hand, may be associated with a particular denomination, but its purpose is not to serve any particular church body. Students from a variety of religious traditions attend divinity schools and then may, in turn, seek permission or certification from the denomination of their choice to become pastors in that church body. The process required to obtain such certification varies widely from denomination to denomination, so before deciding on your program direction, consult with clergy in your chosen denomination.

Seminaries and divinity schools do not require entering students to have specific undergraduate degrees. On the contrary, almost any bachelor's degree earned at an accredited university will meet the requirements of virtually all seminaries and divinity schools. Typically, liberal arts degrees provide the best background since they most clearly approximate graduate-level coursework. Some schools recommend that undergraduates complete certain types of courses before entering, and their admissions bulletins and catalogs will identify the specifics of these recommendations. For example, most seminaries and divinity schools suggest that undergraduates study at least some philosophy and gain a good working knowledge of the Bible. Many seminaries also require that students demonstrate competence in the Bible's original languages (Hebrew and Greek). Schools that require language proficiencies also offer language courses, but students who have already studied at least one of the languages will have a distinct advantage.

Seminaries and divinity schools offer several types of degrees. Professional degrees, such as a Master of Divinity or Doctor of Ministry, qualify graduates for pastoral ministry. Students who intend to teach or enter a profession other than pastoral ministry often seek academic degrees, such as Master of Theology, Doctor of Theology, or Doctor of Philosophy. Progressing from Master of Divinity studies to a Doctor of Theology (or Ph.D.) program is possible, as is pastoral ministry or other professional work. Discussing your career goals with a pastor or academic advisor is an essential step in determining the degree program best suited to your vocation.

When contemplating graduate school in a seminary or theology program, consider **gender** and **denomination**. Some church bodies, for example, do not allow women to become pastors or professional church workers. However, graduate studies in the field of religion often offer women many opportunities in those same church bodies. Also

note that many denominations require that prospective clergy complete training at schools officially recognized by their specific denomination.

Acceptance to Graduate School

Once you've been admitted to a graduate program, take some time to consider the ethical decisions involved in your acceptance. Accepting a graduate school's offer means that you are committed to that program and will, therefore, no longer pursue other options. If you're waiting for other acceptances, delay your decision until you hear from those other schools. You may find that the school you've been accepted to needs a decision quickly, and in this case, honesty is the best policy. It's always appropriate to share your predicament with the person in charge of admissions, and to request an extension for making your decision if necessary. Because such matters are highly individualized, though, there's no one way of doing things. Consulting with faculty members in your field, advisors, or a career counselor may help you through this process.

Once you've determined your graduate school options and made a final decision, always take the time to personally thank everyone who assisted you by writing recommendations or providing guidance. Allow others to share your accomplishments.

Prestigious National Fellowships or Scholarships

In addition to financial aid packages, you may want to consider competing for one of the many fellowships or scholarships available to finance graduate study either domestically or internationally. The competition for these awards, including the Rhodes, Marshall, and Truman, is always very keen. But an application can be well worth the effort if you are selected, as some Valparaiso students have been.

One essential requirement for fellowship applications is a comprehensive and concrete proposal of study. In most cases, a GPA of 3.6 or 3.7 on a 4.0 scale is necessary in order to be competitive; however, sometimes an exceptional proposal and excellent letters of recommendation may overcome a lower GPA. Selection is typically based on three criteria, with the greatest emphasis on the proposal, followed by heavy emphasis on letters of recommendation, and finally clear evidence of academic seriousness, for example, GPA, honors, independent study, or participation in overseas or urban studies programs.

Applications are usually due in the fall semester of your senior year, with October being the most common month for deadlines. Always be sure to give yourself plenty of time to write, edit, and re-edit your applications, because it's basically impossible to pull together a competitive proposal in a matter of days, or even a few weeks. Having several months to prepare fellowship applications is ideal, so if possible begin the process during the spring semester of your junior year.

For a list of fellowships, visit the Career Center website at www.valpo.edu/career. For more information about the fellowships and for some expert guidance in becoming a competitive applicant, contact the university's fellowship advisor. Finally, peruse the Christopher Center's copy of The Foundation Directory for information on other sources of fellowships, scholarships, and grants.

Preparing for Major Scholarships

- Start early! Sophomore year is not too soon.
- Maintain an excellent GPA. A 3.7 or higher is typical for scholarship recipients.
- Read the news and keep up with current events.
- Read and engage inside and outside of your major. Understand how your work relates to the larger world.
- Seek out leadership opportunities through campus organizations, jobs, internships in your field, off-campus volunteer positions, etc.
- Sign up for CC 300, The Scholar in Society.

The Scholar in Society

- Open to juniors and seniors with GPAs of at least 3.75 or higher who are committed to applying for at least one prestigious fellowship or scholarship.
- Enrollment must be approved by the course director.
- Involves some work over the summer before the course begins.
- Course objectives: improve the student's ability to evaluate complex international and domestic issues and reach reasoned positions on them; develop a clearer picture of the student's role following graduation; assist and guide the student through the scholarship application process.

