

BAD REASONS FOR GOING TO LAW SCHOOL

Students give a lot 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, seven days a week, out of hope that they might make partner in 7-10 years. For the rest of the 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 app.
- I'm a liberal arts major and I don't know what else 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 choice. Don't repeat their 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 in 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 not all of them. Much of legal practice is a tedious and repetitive process of 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. The fact that your father or mother or uncle or aunt enjoys practicing law does not 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 does not guarantee either success or happiness.
- I want to change the world. That's great. At VU, 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 when you finish law school you might have \$100,000 in debt to pay off. You will have to start your career by taking the highest paying job available, and work extraordinary long hours to pay off that debt. Social advocacy will have to wait until much later in your career.
- 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 will 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 three 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 are getting into.

Adapted from: Should I Go to Law School? (Part I) by Kathleen Uradnik, Assistant Prof. of Political Science and Coordinating Pre-Law Advisor, St. Cloud State University.

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