Preparing for Law School
Admissions committees look at a variety of factors and trends in your academic record in an attempt to predict how you will perform in law school. There is no "prelaw major," and unlike medical school, there are no specific educational requirements for entrance into law school. **Your curriculum should provide a diverse background; choose classes that challenge your ability to think and reason logically, that require you to research subjects thoroughly and write extensively, and that sharpen your ability to analyze material. Developing your research and organizational skills as an undergraduate will benefit you in law school.**

Developing Skills
The following disciplines can help develop skills that are necessary in law school and will serve a future lawyer well:

- Social sciences offer insight into human behavior, social processes, and institutions. Courses that give you a better understanding of diverse cultures will help prepare you for a legal career.
- English and communication courses are forums for improving written and oral expression.
- Mathematics and philosophy classes provide background in logic and reasoning, as well as problem-solving skills.
- Physical sciences require systematic analysis of evidence and inductive reasoning.

Law-related classes may allow you to get a feel for law as a general subject, but they neither cover the material in the same depth nor embody the intensity and rigor of law school. Therefore, they are not especially accurate indicators of your ability to succeed in the study of law or whether you will enjoy law school.

Selecting a Major
Choose a major that interests you and double major, if you like, but be aware that this is not necessarily a positive factor in the admissions process. Though most law students do not "major" in specific areas—typically specialization occurs in law firms or other legal environments following law school—there are areas of law you may want to prepare for as an undergraduate. For example, if you are considering a career in patent or intellectual property law, you may want to major in engineering or science. Environmental Sciences can provide a good background for environmental law. Learning one or more languages and taking courses in international studies will help lay the groundwork for a career in international law. Courses in economics, business, and accounting are useful in the areas of corporate and tax law.

Compiling an Impressive Record
A solid GPA, particularly within your major, is expected, but a willingness to go beyond requirements demonstrates an intellectual curiosity that would be advantageous in the study of law. Academic excellence reflects discipline and abilities, though admissions committees will also consider seriously the variety and depth of your coursework as evidence of your interests and motivation. The key to compiling an impressive transcript is to challenge yourself by taking classes at increasingly difficult levels and studying diverse subject areas. Taking courses on a pass/fail basis may encourage you to explore subjects or levels of instruction you might otherwise avoid for fear of a low grade; keep in mind, however, that taking a number of courses pass/fail may be perceived negatively. While grades earned during study abroad may not be calculated into your GPA for law school, admissions committees will see your study abroad transcript.

In general, lecture courses provide a good foundation for further instruction, while seminars allow you to present, discuss, critique, and defend more specific ideas. Seminars also give you the opportunity to interact with faculty. Get to know faculty whom you might later ask for recommendations or evaluations; make yourself stand out as an individual by attending office hours, asking questions in class, and conducting research with faculty.

Other Activities
Law schools will be interested in your extracurricular activities, leadership experience, summer jobs, internships, and public service since they seek well-rounded candidates for admission. Select activities that interest you, not those you think will impress admissions committees. However, do not devote so much time to your activities that you sacrifice your GPA, which is far more important in the admissions process than activities.
Pre-Law Advising
As you consider a legal career, you might find it helpful to talk with a pre-law advisor at SUNY Oneonta. Three faculty members with whom you can meet are:

- Bill Wilkerson, PhD; Associate Professor of Political Science; SUNY Oneonta Pre-Law Society Advisor (https://oneonta.collegiatelink.net/organization/prelawsociety); Schumacher 10A; 607/436-3272; Bill.Wilkerson@oneonta.edu
- Daniel Payne, PhD, JD; Professor of English; 319 Netzer Administration Building; 607/436-3442; Daniel.Payne@oneonta.edu
- Barbara Durkin, MBA, JD; Assistant Professor of Management; 221 Netzer Administration Building; 607/436-3531; Barbara.Durkin@oneonta.edu

Realities of a Legal Career
An important step in making your decision is to learn about the significant changes in the market for new lawyers in recent years. Employment statistics for the class of 2011 law graduates (www.nalp.org/salariescompensation), based on responses from 41,623 (93.5% of all graduates), reveal that the overall employment rate was 85.6%, the lowest since 1994. The percentage of graduates who reported taking a job for which bar passage was required was lower than ever—65.4% compared to 74.7% for the Class of 2008. And, the lowest percentage entering private practice since 1975 was reported, just under 50%. In short, the 2011 class encountered the worst job market since the mid-1990s. Here are additional statistics about the class:

- The median starting salary of those reporting was $60,000, down $12,000 from 2009.
- Approximately 52% of salaries reported were in the $40,000 to $65,000 range.
- About 14% of those reporting had salaries of $160,000.
- Nearly 29% of graduates took positions in public service, including judicial clerkships, government agencies, and public interest organizations.
- Graduates entering business accounted for about 18%.

Keep in mind that these statistics reflect the experience of graduates from all law schools; you should investigate employment outcomes at schools that interest you. If, after careful consideration of the realities of a law career, you continue to be committed to the prospect of a career that will require you to think logically, critically, and creatively; to address some of the major social issues that confront our times; and to play a part in shaping legal institutions and codes that influence the future, then becoming a lawyer may well prove to be a rewarding and fulfilling career choice for you.

Adapted from the 2012/2013 Legal Careers Guide, Cornell University, career.cornell.edu