ADVICE ON COURSE SELECTION FOR J.D. STUDENTS

Introduction

We recognize that selecting courses as an upperclass J.D. student may feel overwhelming at first, especially since the J.D. degree requirements allow so much freedom. Do not worry! You have plenty of time to make these decisions, and you have already taken an important first step by downloading this short document of advice. The thing to keep in mind throughout this process is that Georgetown Law’s course offerings are both broad and deep. You are likely to have a rewarding and stimulating upperclass experience with any variety of classes.

To help you make the best course choices possible, we have collected our thoughts in response to some frequently asked questions on course selection. The responses are relevant to both full-time and part-time J.D. students. As a starting point, here are a few basic tips, followed by a list of resources:

- Think about taking courses in the substantive area of the law that interests you ("area of study") and courses that will help you acquire the skills you need to succeed as a particular type of lawyer ("practice type"). See FAQ 1 for a description of “area of study” and “practice type.”

- Consider taking some foundational courses, such as Corporations, Federal Income Taxation (formerly Tax I), Evidence, Administrative Law, International Law I, and Con Law II. In addition to being prerequisites or recommended courses for a number of advanced offerings, they address fundamental legal concepts that most lawyers should understand. However, be careful not to fill up your schedule with only foundational courses in any given semester. See FAQ 5, FAQ 9, and FAQ 10.

- Take full advantage of our varied and unique experiential learning offerings, including clinics, practicum courses, D.C. Advantage programs, and externships. Our experiential learning curriculum gives you the opportunity to “learn by doing” while testing a hunch about the career you may want to pursue. See FAQ 6.

- Mix and match lecture, seminar, and experiential learning courses for a more varied curricular experience. See FAQ 10.

- Think about sequencing. If you identify a capstone or advanced course you are interested in, look at the courses that are recommended and required before you can take it, and when those are offered. If you know you want to focus your coursework in a particular area of study, our cluster descriptions can provide guidance on a logical sequence of courses within that area of study. See FAQ 11.

- Consider your extracurricular and personal interests and how they may affect your schedule. See FAQ 2, FAQ 3, and FAQ 4.

- Make an appointment to talk to an academic advisor and career counselor to see how your course selection fits with your overall law school and career goals.
Resources

In addition to our FAQs, the following are useful resources in selecting courses:

1) Curriculum Guide, which lets you search for courses, faculty profiles, and descriptions of the areas of study covered in the Law Center’s curriculum.
2) Course evaluations from the last three academic years of courses.
3) Upperclass course grids (for Fall and Spring) of all 2017-2018 courses, organized by day and time.
4) How Courses Close, which will provide historical data to help you in your preregistration selection process.
5) Pass/Fail policy and procedures.
6) Meeting with an academic advisor.
7) The Registrar’s Pre-Registration Handbook for J.D. Students, which includes deadlines, instructions, and strategies for using the Pre-Registration System.

Frequently Asked Questions

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Getting Started

**FAQ 1. How do I get started with course selection?**

Before diving into the Curriculum Guide and meeting with one of our academic advisors, we urge you to think about two important dimensions of your legal education and career: area of study and practice type. Even if you have no idea what direction you want to take in your coursework or, ultimately, what you want to do when you graduate (see FAQ 2 below), thinking about these aspects of legal study and practice will provide a helpful framework for your course selection process.

- **Area of Study** – An area of study is a subject matter area (or “cluster”) of our curriculum. For example, criminal law and environmental law are both areas of study. Our course offerings cover 27 areas of legal study. For more information on each of these areas, read our cluster descriptions. If you are interested in a particular area of study, or think you may be interested, consider taking courses offered in that cluster. Think about how best to sequence these courses – i.e., starting with core and foundational courses and working toward more advanced seminars, capstone courses, and experiential learning opportunities. Finally, remember that there is substantial overlap among the clusters as areas of law are increasingly interdisciplinary. Think about courses that may be interrelated or may help you develop your interests even if they do not fit squarely within a curricular area of study.

- **Practice Type** – A practice type describes the substantive practice of the lawyer – i.e., what they do on a day-to-day basis. Practice types cut across all areas of study. For example, attorneys interested in environmental law (an area of study) could have very different practices, say as a regulatory attorney working for the Environmental Protection Agency, a litigation associate at a law firm representing clients facing environmental lawsuits, a lobbyist for an environmental nonprofit, or a law professor teaching property and writing scholarly papers on green energy and historic preservation law. Because different practice types need different skills and expertise to succeed in their job, think about the skills-based classes, practicum courses, clinics, and externships opportunities that will help you acquire these lawyering skills. Here is a brief explanation of five broad practice types:
  
  o **Litigation and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR)** – Litigators represent their clients in criminal or civil legal proceedings, through both verbal and written advocacy that sets forth their client’s legal arguments and requested legal remedies. While many think of litigators as presenting their client’s cases in front of an adjudicative body like a state or federal court, these practitioners increasingly find themselves in arbitration or mediation hearings, or more informal negotiation sessions. Litigators and ADR practitioners need skills in the areas of factual analysis, legal research, written and oral argument, effective communication, legal writing and case planning, creative problem solving, and negotiation and mediation technique. They also need an excellent command of litigation and ADR procedures.
  
  o **Transactional** – Transactional lawyers hardly, if ever, see the inside of a courtroom. Their work involves evaluating and structuring business deals and arrangements for their clients with an eye toward issue-spotting and addressing possible future events that may affect the client’s legal interests. They advise clients on key strategic aspects of the deal,
conduct fact-finding by reviewing and interpreting relevant legal documents, and draft and negotiate term sheets and agreements. A good transactional lawyer must have excellent written and oral communication skills, experience with interpreting and drafting legal documents, and the ability to think practically and creatively about their clients’ business interests. Transactional attorneys often find it useful to focus on a particular industry so they can “speak the same language” as and understand the business considerations of their clients. Basic understanding of financial accounting can help transactional attorneys quantify business risks and structure around contingencies. Familiarity with general corporate guidance principles, the regulatory environment relevant to the client, and basic negotiation techniques, is also useful.

- **Regulatory and Public Policy** – Regulatory and public policy lawyers in the public sector advocate and draft legislation and regulations to meet particular policy positions, often as lobbyists or government affairs attorneys. In the private sector, they advise their clients on the restrictions placed on their clients’ business undertakings under the applicable regulatory framework. A key part of a regulatory lawyer’s job is interpretation of relevant statutes, regulations, and other forms of administrative rulemaking. Regulatory and public policy lawyers typically focus on a specific regulatory environment – e.g., healthcare, education, or communications. Regulatory and public policy lawyers must have experience researching and interpreting statutory text and legislative history, demonstrate oral and written advocacy skills, and have a sound understanding of administrative agencies, government relations, and political and legislative processes. Georgetown Law has unparalleled access to Congress, the Supreme Court, and numerous agencies, administrative boards, and commissions of the federal government and the District of Columbia. Students can obtain many of the skills critical to a regulatory practice through a clinic, practicum, D.C. Advantage program, or externship in one of these offices.

- **Academia** – The work of a legal academic is focused on scholarship and education. Students who want to work in academia should not only be comfortable with the legal curriculum as a whole, but must also identify specific areas of study and develop rich legal questions within them to address in their scholarship. Legal academics should have superior legal research and writing skills and—since many teach, provide expert testimony, or speak at academic conferences—be able to effectively convey this information. This practice area has become increasingly competitive, and the emphasis on publishing scholarly articles has grown. Students should seek out as many opportunities as possible to work on their writing and develop their research ideas into publishable scholarly work. Georgetown Law’s esteemed faculty can help students further develop their scholarly interests and craft a targeted program of study.

- **Public Interest** – While public interest lawyers work as litigators, regulatory attorneys, transactional lawyers, and academics, given the discrete legal setting in which public interest lawyers practice and Georgetown Law’s position as a leader in providing academic offerings in public interest law, it is helpful to identify public interest lawyering as its own practice type. Public interest lawyers represent people or interests that have been underrepresented in legal institutions and processes. Some work for non-profit organizations (such as legal aid agencies or public defender offices), national or local
governments, or international organizations. Others work in law firms but devote a portion of each year’s work to uncompensated pro bono activities. A successful public interest lawyer must demonstrate conviction and commitment to social or legal issues, as well as strong legal writing, oral advocacy, negotiation and creative problem solving skills (and other skills necessary for a litigator, regulatory or transactional lawyer, as the case may be).

FAQ 2. But what if I don’t know what I want to study or do when I graduate?

Many students start law school not knowing what they want to study or what type of lawyer they want to become. While keeping in mind the concepts of “area of study” and “practice type” described in FAQ 1 you may also need to take a step back and identify what you can about your interests, values, and goals. Try to take courses that draw from and build on the answers to the following questions:

- What classes have you particularly enjoyed in your first year of law school or in other educational settings, and why? Did you enjoy the professor’s teaching style, the substance of the course, and/or the class size and format (i.e., was the class lecture-based or interactive)?

- What work, internship, and volunteer experiences have you found most rewarding and why? What were some of the attributes of the setting or environment? What role did you play? What were some of your least satisfying experiences and why?

- What are your goals for the next two or three years of law school, and how would you prioritize them? For example, how important is it to you to develop specific legal skills, such as drafting legal documents, public speaking, or managing client relationships? To produce a publishable academic paper? To have significant time for personal commitments or pursuits outside the law? To maximize your GPA? To assume leadership roles in student organizations, moot court, or journals? To take a few courses just for fun? To develop deep expertise in a specific field of law? To develop mentoring relationships with faculty? To test your interest in particular career paths?

- Are you considering experiences that will occupy all or substantially all of one of your remaining semesters (e.g., an externship, a semester abroad, a D.C. Advantage program, or a clinic)?

- What additional information do you need to gather in order to refine your academic and career goals? Are you considering additional specialized training, such as a J.D./LL.M.?

Consider the entire universe of your experiences here at Georgetown Law and try to create a balanced schedule for yourself, taking into consideration all of the various activities and courses in which you will be engaging. A great reference tool is our Guide to the Second Year and Beyond (requires login) which gives a birds-eye view of the various curricular and extracurricular opportunities available at Georgetown Law as well as the relevant deadlines for each.

FAQ 3. There are a number of courses I want to take. How do I choose the right courses for me?

Let’s say you have already worked through the questions and considerations discussed in FAQ 1 and FAQ 2 and have started to develop a long list of potential courses. How do you choose from among
these great options? It is important to make thoughtful and deliberate decisions about your courses, even if it is to simply test a hunch. With each course you are seriously considering, ask yourself the following questions:

- Which personal and professional goals will the class further?
- Do I need the class? To ensure future opportunities (e.g., as a prerequisite for other courses)? To be an effective lawyer?
- What exactly will I be doing on a day-to-day and week-to-week basis?
- What are the trade-offs? What will I be giving up?
- How will the class enhance my education and/or build professional skills?

The next step is to discuss your narrowing list of courses with faculty members and upperclass students whom you respect, as well as with an academic advisor. See if your assumptions about a course square with others’ experiences and whether there is anything more you can learn about the class.

Finally, remember to use the add/drop period to test your assumptions and further refine your list. Just remember to drop the courses you decide not to take no later than 3:00 pm on the last day of add/drop each semester! (Please click here to check the academic calendar for applicable deadlines).

**FAQ 4. How do my career goals impact my course selection?**

Consider whether there are particular skills that you want to develop or substantive knowledge that would be useful for a particular career that you may be considering. Generally speaking, employers do not require you to take specific courses. Employers whose work focuses on a particular subject matter (i.e., area of study) or type of legal work (i.e., practice type), however, often do expect that applicants will have taken at least a basic course in the related area. For example, many tax employers will consider only applicants who have taken at least one tax law course. In addition, employers increasingly expect their new hires to have acquired practical skills training while in law school, which are typically provided in a clinic, externship, practicum course, D.C. Advantage program, or skills-based class.

For more individualized advice about course selection and your career path, please consult with our career counselors and academic advisors.

**Advice on Particular Classes**

**FAQ 5. Are there courses every law student must or should take?**

Yes, there are certain courses required to graduate:
- 85 credits (at least 54 of which must be at the Law Center)
- A course or supervised research project that meets the upperclass legal writing requirement (WR)
- A course that meets the Professional Responsibility requirement
- For students who matriculated in Fall 2016 or later, at least 6 credits of experiential courses

As you can see, the required curriculum leaves lots of room to explore. We often encourage (but do not require) students to take a course(s) in the following categories because they may help you identify an area of study in which you may want to specialize, explore or develop the skills you need to work as a
particular type of lawyer or in a particular practice setting (see FAQ 1), or simply help you develop a solid grounding in the law:

- Certain “foundational” courses, including:
  - Administrative Law
  - Constitutional Law II
  - Corporations
  - Evidence
  - Federal Income Taxation (formerly Tax I)
- An introductory course in international or comparative law (e.g., International Law I)
- A course in legislation and statutory interpretation
- A course on negotiations, mediation or other form of ADR (alternative dispute resolution)
- An advanced course in legal research and writing
- At least one experiential learning course (practicum course, externship, D.C. Advantage program, or clinic). Note: students who matriculated in Fall 2016 or later must complete at least 6 credits in experiential courses.

Be open-minded and adventurous in your course selection, taking into consideration your goals, interests, and values.

**FAQ 6. Should I take a clinic or practicum course or explore a D.C. Advantage program or externship opportunity? What is “experiential learning” and how do I integrate it into my coursework?**

Definitely! Students who matriculated in Fall 2016 or later must complete at least 6 credits of experiential courses.

Even if you are not required to, we strongly encourage you to investigate our experiential offerings. Experiential learning at Georgetown Law includes several types of courses that give students an opportunity to “learn by doing.” If you participate in one of our 17 clinics, you may have the opportunity to take the lead on a case or project. If you enroll in a practicum course, you will participate in a weekly seminar and either work on a project under the professor’s supervision or conduct fieldwork at an outside organization. If you enroll in one of our D.C. Advantage Programs, you will work for 30 hours/week in a designated field, and take related courses back on campus. They might also do an externship, through which they will work either 10 or 15 hours/week at an outside placement and participate in a series of externship classes. Or if you take a simulation course, you will simulate being a lawyer in situations developed by the faculty. Each type of experiential course will provide students with slightly different experiences, skills, and other benefits (career connections, etc.). For more on all of these offerings, please see [http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/academic-programs/clinical-programs/](http://www.law.georgetown.edu/academics/academic-programs/clinical-programs/).

**FAQ 7. Should I take courses because they are on the bar exam?**

You should not take a course merely because it is a topic that will be tested on the bar exam. The multistate bar exam covers Civil Procedure, Constitutional Law, Contracts, Criminal Law and Procedure, Evidence, Real Property, and Torts. Most state exams also include essay questions that focus
on jurisdiction-specific topics, such as rules of inheritance. Although familiarity with such topics gained through course work is helpful, students should expect that most of their preparation for the bar will occur in bar review courses.

**FAQ 8.  Should I choose a course because I hear that the faculty member is great?**

Yes, by all means. But remember that each year nearly two thirds of the faculty members are nominated by at least one student as the teacher of the year! Teachers have different styles and different strengths. To learn more about the faculty:

- Ask for course recommendations from a range of upperclass students whom you respect.
- Ask your professors which colleagues they would recommend.
- Read course evaluations available online.
- Take a course with an interesting visiting faculty member, including international visiting faculty.
- Consider courses taught by our outstanding adjunct faculty (who include current and former judges and distinguished lawyers from private practice and private industry, government, and the non-profit and public interest sectors).
- Get advice from an academic advisor and/or career counselor.

**Course Load and Sequencing**

**FAQ 9.  Should I take all of the 3 or 4 credit foundational courses in my second year?**

Probably not. If you want to take a number of these courses (see FAQ 5), spread them out over two (or three) years so you can also fit in courses with different formats (smaller classes, seminars, clinics, or other experiential learning formats) and topics of greater interest to you. See FAQ 10 and FAQ 11 for more tips on how to create a balanced course load.

**FAQ 10.  Is it preferable to take a heavier load in the fall or spring semester of second year?**

This is a highly individual decision. On average, full-time students take about 28 credits in their second year, while part-time students typically take about 20 credits per year. **Full-time students** must take 12 to 16 credits in a semester (or 17 with the permission of an academic advisor), while **part-time students** must take 8 to 12 credits. With permission of an academic advisor, full-time students may take 10 or 11 credits and part-time students 6 or 7 credits in one semester only (we call this “underloading”).

Graduating part-time students are also permitted, in their final semester, to take the minimum number of credits needed to graduate and meet their residency requirement. See page 8 of the [Student Handbook](#).

You should consider your own commitments and goals for each semester in devising a course and credit load. Considerations may include:

- Do you expect to participate in Early Interview Week (EIW) (some students choose to take a heavier load in the spring because the fall may be busy with interviews and callbacks)?
- Are you taking an intensive clinic in one or both semesters?
- Will you have significant journal, Barristers’ Council, student organization, or other
extracurricular commitment in the fall or spring (e.g., a student note, competition or symposium)?

- Will you be working part-time? If you are a part-time student, will your job be more demanding in the fall or spring?
- Are you doing an externship? If so, that can involve as much as 15-20 hours per week on site.
- When are you planning to complete your upperclass writing requirement (the “WR”)? See FAQ 12 for advice on how and when to complete your WR.
- Do you have significant outside family or personal commitments that will be heavier in one semester?

The timing and nature of the workload is much more important than the number of credits. Indeed, not all credits are created equal. Most students find that two 2-credit courses are more work than a single 4-credit class, especially where papers are required, so take this into account as you plan your schedule. A course load of four exam classes will demand intense focus at the end of the semester when you need to do outlines and study for exams, but may leave more room earlier in the semester for other commitments. By contrast, the deadlines and “deliverables” tend to spread out more evenly in a schedule that includes an experiential learning course (e.g., a negotiations seminar or an externship), a few exam classes, and one or two paper seminars.

**FAQ 11. What should I consider when sequencing my course selections?**

In building your course schedule for your second year, think about the clinics, courses and seminars you hope to take in your third and, if applicable, fourth years (including advanced seminars or other capstone courses), and pay attention to their prerequisite and recommended courses. And, note the difference between a course that must be taken as a prerequisite and a course that can be taken concurrently, during the same semester (a “co-requisite”).

The following courses frequently are prerequisites or recommended courses for other courses:

- Corporations
- Evidence
- International Law I
- Federal Income Taxation (formerly Tax I)
- Constitutional Law II

You may also find advice about sequencing within each [cluster description](#) in the Curriculum Guide.

**FAQ 12. When should I complete the upperclass legal writing requirement (“WR”)?**

The best answer is: when you are able to devote enough time during the semester to write a serious paper that you can be proud of—and perhaps publish. Note that you can either satisfy the WR through a 3-credit seminar designated as meeting the writing requirement (you will see a “WR” in the course description), or through a 2-credit Supervised Research project (see the Registrar’s website for more information). Some considerations:

- If the fall of your second year will be too busy a time to write a serious paper, consider the spring
of your second year or the fall of your third year.

- Since papers written in WR or non-WR seminars can serve as writing samples in your job/clerkship search, consider whether you want/need to write such a paper in your second year.
- Because of the significance of the paper, it’s rarely a good idea to wait until the final semester before you intend to graduate.
- Consider choosing a seminar that will allow you to write in an area that interests and motivates you. The amount of work required to meet the requirement will seem less daunting if you are legitimately interested in what you are researching and writing about throughout the semester – and your final paper will likely be stronger as a result.

**FAQ 13. Should I consider studying abroad?**

Studying abroad can provide an opportunity to expand your knowledge of other cultures and legal systems. Georgetown Law offers semester abroad opportunities at a number of schools around the world, including at the Center for Transnational Legal Studies (CTLS) in London. Of course, like all your curricular choices, there are trade-offs. A semester abroad means one less semester to take advantage of the full range of courses, clinics, and extracurricular activities at Georgetown. In addition, the grades earned in a study abroad program (except for CTLS and Georgetown’s London Summer Program) will not be included in your Law Center cumulative GPA. Please see pp. 23 to 30 of the Student Handbook for more information regarding study abroad opportunities.

If you think you may be interested in studying abroad, you should carefully consider the timing of your study abroad experience. Some of the factors you should consider are: (1) whether and when you would like to take a clinic; (2) whether there are some semesters when you would want to be in the country for clerkship or job interviews; and (3) how your semester abroad will impact the sequencing of other courses in which you are interested.

**Next Steps**

To discuss any of the above topics in greater detail and/or to receive personalized advice, please contact an academic advisor listed at https://www.law.georgetown.edu/campus-life/advising-counseling/jd-advising.cfm to schedule a one-on-one academic advising appointment.