

How do I get there from here?

College is a training ground. It is a place for students to prepare for the professions they choose. While the goal for many is to graduate in four years and begin their careers, some choose a different path.

Many of Oklahoma State University's College of Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources students choose to further their education by going to law school. While some students began college with this goal in mind, others made the decision later in their college careers.

Amy Pierce, juris doctorate and 1996 OSU agricultural communications graduate, had the goal of being a lawyer since she was a young girl.

"I have known it was what I wanted to do since I was in the fourth grade," said Pierce. "I realized in high school and college that I had a talent for oral argument and for writing. I intended all through college to attend law school."

On the other hand, Jason Rogers, juris doctorate and 1996 OSU agricultural education graduate, said one class made him decide on law school.

"I took an agricultural law class and became very interested in law," Rogers said. "After that, I just did it [went to law school], and it has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done."

Even though all departments in CASNR can successfully prepare a student for law school, a student's choice of an academic major is still an important decision.

"The term prelaw refers to a student's intentions to pursue law school following their undergraduate degree," said Keely James, prelaw adviser at OSU. "No one major best prepares all students for the study of law."

Although no one major is preferred, a degree in agriculture can effectively prepare a student.

"Many classes offered in CASNR require you to give oral presentations and write reports," said Rogers. "By taking these classes, you are honing the skills that will best assist you in law school."

In addition to class work, Pierce said the faculty also play a big role in preparing students as well.

"The professors, deans and advisers in CASNR expect nothing less than the best from the students," Pierce said.

"They expected us to work hard and pushed us to perform at a top-notch level. Law school professors expect the same type of excellence and commitment."

Not only can an agricultural degree prepare a student for law school, it also can prove beneficial later. Since Oklahoma is primarily an agricultural state, lawyers have dealings with agricultural issues on a regular basis.

"I am a general practice lawyer," said Rogers. "However, I deal with people in agriculture every day. As a result, my knowledge and background in this field gives me an advantage that many lawyers don't have when dealing with these issues."

With this information in mind, students need to ask themselves a few questions that can help them determine a major. What subjects do I enjoy studying? Are these subjects academically challenging? Will they allow me to demonstrate high levels of academic success?

In addition, students should have a backup plan.

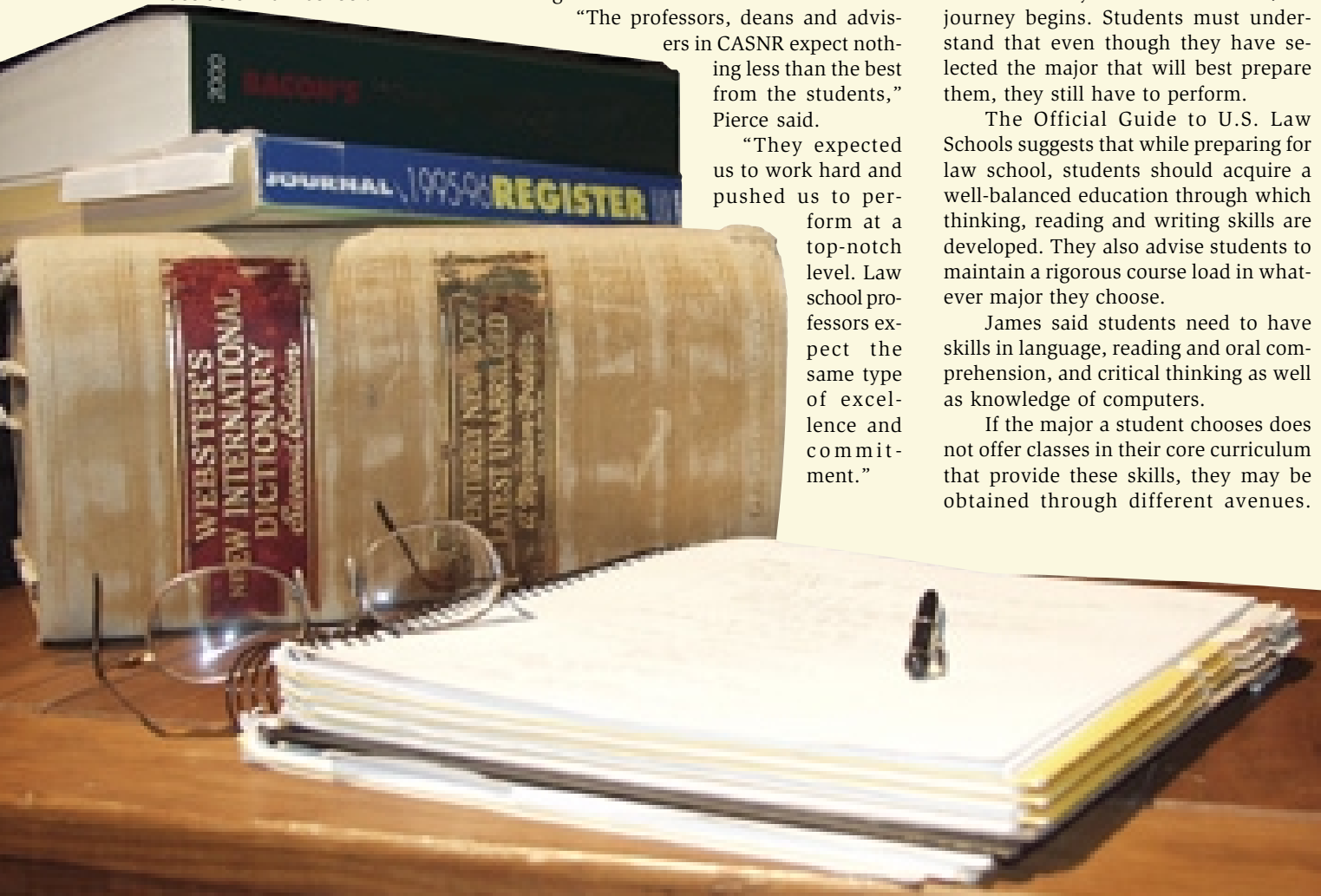
"You need to ask yourself 'What would I do if I did not attend law school?' and pick a major that best suits both options," James said.

Once a major has been selected, the journey begins. Students must understand that even though they have selected the major that will best prepare them, they still have to perform.

The Official Guide to U.S. Law Schools suggests that while preparing for law school, students should acquire a well-balanced education through which thinking, reading and writing skills are developed. They also advise students to maintain a rigorous course load in whatever major they choose.

James said students need to have skills in language, reading and oral comprehension, and critical thinking as well as knowledge of computers.

If the major a student chooses does not offer classes in their core curriculum that provide these skills, they may be obtained through different avenues.



When I find out a student is going to law school, I try to use their controlled electives to better prepare them,” said Shelly Sitton, agricultural communications adviser at OSU. “I usually try to enroll them in critical thinking, writing and other courses that will provide them with the skills they need to be prepared.”

Undergraduate grade point average is important when applying to law school but is not the only factor taken into consideration. Law schools also look at a student’s other activities.

“Through my internships I learned how to handle responsibility and to work under pressure,” Pierce said. “I also learned how to deal with others in a professional manner. Through my activities I was able to hone my communication skills which gave me a distinct advantage over other law students.”

Law schools want students who are well rounded. They look for individuals who have a reason to study law, who have overcome in the face of adversity, who have extracurricular activities and who have work experience, James said.

Once students have done their best to prepare themselves for law school, the next step in the process is applying.

“Admission requirements for law school include completion of a bachelor’s degree and a competitive undergraduate grade point average,” said James. “A competitive score on the Law School Admissions Test is also required.”

When a student has completed the undergraduate work and been accepted into a law school, the journey to becoming a lawyer is only about half over.

“Law school is nothing like college,” said Pierce. “It requires levels of concentration and commitment that will rarely have to be displayed in college.”

Rising to the occasion is not just suggested, it is expected from students.

“Law schools expect nothing less than 100 percent from their students,” said Owen Anderson, professor at the University of Oklahoma’s law school.

James said for most students who go to school full time, law school is a three-year program. Upon finishing, a student receives a juris doctorate, which is a general law degree.

If a student chooses to specialize in one particular area, they may further their legal education by pursuing a master of legal studies.

The first year of law school typically includes a set of required courses. Second-year students usually have choices among a predetermined list of courses. Most students focus on courses needed to prepare them for the bar exam.

During the third year, most students complete preparatory courses for the bar exam and have several free choices. They may choose to develop an area of emphasis or take courses that meet their interests and diversify their knowledge or practical experience.

James said one factor that potential law students need to be prepared for is teaching style.

“Many law schools use a Socratic method of teaching,” James said.

Under this method, lecturers utilize an exchange of questions and answers from readings and assignments.

“Students need to be prepared to do lots of reading,” said Anderson. “In addition, they need to be able to discuss what they have read.”

Discussions are not a mere portion of the classes students will have to take, they are the main emphasis.

“In law school you will be called on by your professor, and you will be expected to participate in a meaningful and intelligent discussion regarding the legal cases you reviewed the night before,” said Pierce.

In addition, many law school classes take only one test per course per semester. This test is typically a three- to four-hour essay exam.

“If you are a procrastinator, I recommend you save your money and find another profession,” said Pierce. “You cannot put off opening a book until a few weeks before an exam.”

If a student survives these three years, their options are endless. Having a juris doctorate does not mean that a student has to be a lawyer.

“Students with an agricultural background might be interested in working for governmental agencies such as the Department of Environmental Quality or the Department of Agriculture,” said Pierce. “In addition, an agricultural law student could seek employment with many of the numerous agricultural-related corporations and provide legal counseling.”

Although these careers may be attractive to some students, other options exist for those who dream of returning to a small town.

“The agricultural law student could consider practicing in a small community,” said Pierce. “In this position, they could assist the small farmer with numerous issues he may encounter.”

Whether it involves court cases or simply giving advice to a farmer, being a lawyer is a fulfilling career.

Pierce said on the first day of class a professor told students that having a

Thinking about law school?

- Register for the Law School Admission Test and the Law School Data Assembly Service.
- Prepare for the LSAT.
- Receive an LSAT Admission Ticket.
- Receive an LSDAS Subscription Confirmation.
- Request an official transcript be sent to the LSDAS from the registrar’s office.
- Request letters of recommendation be written and sent to LSDAS or directly to law schools as appropriate.
- Take the LSAT.
- Receive your LSAT score.
- Receive a Master Law School Report once all undergraduate transcripts have been summarized.
- Apply to law schools.
- Schools will then request reports from LSDAS.
- Receive an activity update that indicates reports have been sent to law schools.

This checklist presents one of many approaches to the process of applying for law school. It is important to prepare your own timetable based on application deadlines for the law schools to which you apply.

Information from the Law School Admission Council, copyright 2001

law degree was like having a tiger on a leash. It gives you the power and the ability to do anything you want to do. It gives you specific knowledge and skills that few people have, and for that reason, it is a powerful animal at your beck and call.

Though the road is long and difficult, students who have the desire and determination to succeed, can achieve the dream of “possessing a tiger.” *Eg*

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