

ACADEMIC ADVICE

COURSE SELECTION ADVICE

Selecting Electives

The Colorado Law 2L and 3L curriculum is largely elective. Elective courses are intended to achieve a number of different objectives:

- Gain breadth of legal knowledge.
- Provide more detailed understanding of the substance of the law in a particular area.
- Allow for the development of specific intellectual or practical skills, such as effective written or oral communication, close reading of complex statutory materials, clinical proficiency, and so on.
- Provide a more sophisticated understanding of law by studying theoretical fields like jurisprudence, history, or policy studies.

The choice among elective courses will depend in part on the student's professional objectives. Those aiming at a general law practice might emphasize courses that provide wide substantive coverage and the development of a full array of basic skills. Students who want a specialized practice, such as tax or natural resources law, might choose a sequence of courses relevant to that area. All students should choose elective courses to assure that they are exposed to all of the major objectives during their legal education.

Professor Nestor Davidson

Individualize Your Curriculum

Selecting a law school curriculum, given the wonderful variety of courses and other opportunities available at Colorado Law School, can be a challenge, but I recommend approaching the task with the following in mind:



- Get individualized advice. No set of recommendations can fit all students, and you will find that most of your professors will take the time in office hours or otherwise to help you think about how to mold a course of study. It also helps to talk to several professors, as each will have particular insights you might find helpful.

- Take chances in what you seek to learn. Law school gives you a rare chance to roam through topics and areas of interest outside of what you think you might do in practice—if you're passionately committed one day to litigating for Earthjustice, think about taking the chance to get the basics on secured transactions, or if you know for sure that you're going to be in-house counsel to a Fortune 500 company in ten years, you might take the chance to learn something about family law. You will be surprised—no matter where you end up in practice—how often you will encounter topics that may now seem esoteric.
- Strive for balance in approaches. You may think that one type of class or one professor's demeanor suits you best, but you will get more out of law school if you at least sample the full range of approaches available—not just traditional classes, but seminars, clinics, externships, and research opportunities. You will have to apply a range of skills as a practicing lawyer—written and oral communication, research, interpersonal relations, and many others—and Colorado Law offers a variety of opportunities to work on all of those skills.
- Consider offerings beyond the law school! One of the many advantages to studying at Colorado Law is access to the larger University—again, whether your passion is American Indian law or the tax implications of corporate restructuring, there are great opportunities at CU to move beyond the law.

Professor Wayne Gazur

Core Courses

It has been my experience that many attorneys work in a general office practice that demands exposure to a broad body of law. Accordingly, unless a student has an identified area of interest, I generally recommend a package of “core” courses covering topics such as business associations, income tax, evidence, wills and trusts, family law, criminal procedure, employment law, survey of intellectual property law, real estate, and creditors' remedies/debtors' protections. Those courses represent roughly two semesters' work. In my



view, that leaves enough time (indeed, two additional semesters) for required coursework and exploration of other courses that strike some special chord with the student or reflect a newly discovered interest.

Professor Melissa Hart

A Generalist Approach

The best way to get advice is by finding someone—a faculty member or a 2L or 3L, whose judgment you trust and who will take some time to listen to your specific interests and concerns. There is no single way to plan a curriculum, and therefore no advice that will always work for every student. However, I believe that for most students, the following advice might be of use:



- Take classes in areas that interest you or that sound like they might be interesting to you. You will do better in the class, and have more positive memories of law school if you take classes you want to take.
- Try to choose classes from a variety of disciplines. You may discover an interest you never knew you had.
- Take classes from professors whose teaching approach you appreciate.
- Play to your strengths. If you prefer writing papers to taking in-class timed exams, look for classes with paper options.
- Take a class that exposes you to a complicated statutory/regulatory scheme. In the first year of law school, you will have focused almost entirely on reading cases. As a lawyer, you will have to work with statutes and regulations as well, and it is important to learn the skills associated with maneuvering through these often-convoluted texts. While a number of different classes may fill this gap, it has always seemed to me that Income Tax and Environmental Law are the most likely to expose you to both statutory and regulatory exploration.
- DON'T take classes because they are Bar subjects. You will still have to study for the Bar, and you will discover that much of what we teach in class is entirely different (in approach, more than substance) from what you have to know on the Bar.
- DON'T take classes just because someone tells you that “everyone” takes this class in law school.

- Work on your writing during law school. It is perhaps the most important skill a lawyer can have, and many do not.
- Do an externship or a clinic. The practical learning experience is incredibly valuable.
- If there is something you want to study that you don't see included in the curriculum, talk to a faculty member or administrator. We may have solutions – through independent study, cross-listed options or even the possibility of adding a new course. Indeed, if you have questions about any aspect of your legal education, find someone to talk to about them. We are here to make this experience work for you, but only you can tell us if there is something more we can be doing to meet that goal.

Professor Clare Huntington

Balance Core and Specialty Courses

If you are a disaffected first-year student, don't give up hope on law school yet. The second and third years of law school can be highly gratifying and engaging years, in large part because you can now choose your courses.



If you know now what you want to do after graduation, e.g., practice environmental law, become a criminal lawyer, work as a family law attorney, then develop your schedule accordingly. Be sure to take all the courses offered in your area, playing close attention to which courses are offered biannually, as you will have only one opportunity to take these courses. If you do not yet know the area of law in which you would like to practice—and many students do not, so do not succumb to any pressure to decide now—then choose a variety of courses in different areas of the law to see which area engages you the most. But also remember that choosing one field now does not preclude practicing in other areas of law later in your career. For example, many attorneys who practice family law started out as commercial litigators, doing no work with families.

In addition to taking courses in your field, or following the salad bar approach of trying several different areas, I recommend enrolling in “core” courses, such as Administrative Law and Corporations. You should also take courses that help you further develop your legal skills, regardless of the subject area of the course. For example, Immigration and Citizenship Law (to pick one of my courses!) will help a student learn to read statutes carefully, develop a better understanding of constitutional law, and put into

practice administrative law concepts. You need not have an interest in immigration law to benefit from this course.

Finally, seize every opportunity to gain practical experience in your field of interest or potential interest. Externships and summer jobs are often the key to finding full-time employment after graduation. Indeed, in some fields, such as guardian ad litem work (representing children in foster care proceedings), prior experience is essential to finding a full-time job.

Good luck—the second and third years of law school are a lot of work but also a lot of fun!

Vice Dean Dayna Matthew

Focus on Writing

I remember my time at law school as three of the most exhilarating, challenging, and satisfying years of my life. I believe this is because I *immersed* myself in the enterprise of being a law student I encourage you to do the same. Three years is a very short time and perhaps the last time that you will have time to study absolutely anything and everything that your heart desires. Do it. Here are my few words of advice:



- Take as many courses as you can reasonably fit into your schedule. Without ignoring the very real need to earn income, I strongly encourage you to STUDY as much law as you are able to during this three years, and trust that you will have a professional lifetime to PRACTICE law when you are done. The cases, the contracts, the deals will all be there for you to take on when you are done with law school. Now is an incredible opportunity—literally a gift—to just think about, talk about, learn about and *wonder* about the law. You will not likely ever have this opportunity again.
- Write, write, write and then write some more. Writing well is the most important skill that you will develop in law school. It is the skill that will most directly serve your clients, your constituents, your students and anyone you seek to influence, or on whose behalf you seek to advocate. Take first year legal writing *seriously* as this course will give you the most marketable skill you will own after your first year is over. Then, absolutely *immerse* yourself in at least one seminar, working closely with a faculty member to hone your ideas and your paper into the best it possibly can be.

Consider writing a note, a brief or taking on upper level writing course to complete a paper for publication or competition. Finally, get lots of help with your writing – ask faculty members to read your papers, your drafts, your sample exam answers – anything and everything you write improves when another edits it. The more you write, the better you will write. This is the time to make yourself the best writer you possibly can be.

Professor Michael Waggoner

Plan Ahead and Think Broad

Plan now for both second and third years. You don't want to discover as you are registering for your third year that a course you then want has a prerequisite that you did not take. You also want to make sure that you are going to have a sensible course selection over the three years.



Get a broad education, even if you already know what you want to do. A broad education will make you more effective and fulfilled in whatever specialization you choose. Moreover, it is common to change the focus of one's career, following the developments in the law and the growth in one's clients. The youngster you represent on a misdemeanor may later need help buying a house, starting a business, or dealing with family law matters, retirement plans, wills and trust, etc.

A legal education that is only the nuts and bolts will be much poorer than one that includes philosophy. But a legal education too heavy on philosophy and too light on nuts and bolts will leave one poorly prepared for the bar exam and for the practice of law. Take many courses in the areas in which lawyers are likely to be working, such as bankruptcy, business planning, corporations, criminal procedure, the environment, family law, intellectual property, international law, land use planning, natural resources, tax, wills & trusts, etc., as well as a few courses in the philosophy and the sociology of law.

Take courses for the professor as well as for the subject matter. The faculty here vary greatly in their approaches to the law and lawyering: sample as many as you can, particularly those you may not agree with, rather than sticking with favorites. You will work with employers, clients, judges, etc., some of whom you will like and find agreeable, and some not: get used to both.

Learn to read and listen carefully, to research and analyze creatively, to write and speak effectively.

Learn to use language as a poet and as an engineer, sometimes to clarify and sometimes as a smokescreen. A great way to hone these skills is to enroll in our clinics, be a member of our journals, and participate in our competitions (typically one of each). Working as a research assistant for a professor can also be a great way to improve and apply your skills.

Work with judges and practicing attorneys, whether as a paid clerk, an extern for credit, or a volunteer. On-the-job training is a vital part of a legal education, and such work is good way to make contacts and earn recommendations.

Expect to enjoy your legal education and your career.

Professor Ahmed White

Remember that this is a university program not simply a vocational school; take courses that interest you and that exercise your appetite for critical reflection, not just those that you imagine will be important to your career.



STUDENT ADVICE

- Seek advice from the 2L's and 3L's! The 2L's can be a great resource, as they've just finished going through their 1st year of law school and can provide you with their insight about what worked for them and what didn't.
- Legal Writing: While it may not top the list of your favorites, it is likely the most important class that you will ever take in law school. You will have to submit writing samples when you apply for jobs, and if you work hard on your legal briefs, your sample will only need a couple of tweaks here and there.
- The Law School has a tutorial program to help 1Ls through their first year. Tutors can provide a great overview of the course and it's also a way to get to know members of the other classes.
- Compromise when selecting courses: Take some subjects to see what will spark your interest (this is a good indicator of whether or not you will be good at it) or because you enjoy the professors (it will also make it easier to pay attention), and some subjects because they are on the bar exam.
- Take courses that provide you with practical experience and build a foundation in a variety of fields.