
CONSIDERATIONS IN CHOOSING SUBJECT MATTER

Advice from the Associate Dean, Academic Affairs

Probably the best general approach to choosing your upper year courses is to try for a balanced program in terms of subject matter, intellectual approach, and degree of specialization.

As far as your choice of subject matter is concerned, you will obviously have your eventual career options in mind, but some caveats are in order. One is not to think of your career options too narrowly. Private practice, or Crown counsel, or government service, or some other legal career may be your current aim, but there are many other possible careers for law graduates. Another caveat is not to assume that your interests will never change. And a third is to remember how unpredictable the turns in a career path can be. Graduates have often ended up practising or employed in areas of law that, when they were in law school, they never expected to become involved with. Or they have expected to spend careers in private practice but, after articling or some time in practice, turned instead to public service practice, government, education, mediation, house counsel work, business management, or other career paths. For all these reasons, gearing your program too much to one career plan may be something of a disadvantage if you later want to move in another direction.

Courses vary in their intellectual approach to law. For instance, there are doctrinal courses, theoretical examinations of particular areas of law, clinical or practice skills courses, and courses examining the philosophical foundations of law itself. Many courses are a combination of approaches. Each approach can contribute to your insight into law, the legal system, and the relationship between law and other aspects of knowledge and of life. It is wise not to assume that any particular approach is the most interesting, the most "practical", or whatever. The best program is usually one that exposes you to the full range of ways in which law can be studied and understood. Choose courses - and instructors - on the basis of what, for you, looks as if it will be the most stimulating and fully rounded academic experience.

Some degree of specialization in your courses usually adds depth and interest to your package, but it is generally advisable to have a good range of the broader courses as well. There are practical advantages to this, as just discussed. And, usually, the person with a broad exposure to different aspects of law has a better sense of the intellectual framework of law as a whole.