

# Why study Law at University if you don't want to become a lawyer?

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A lot of people who study Law at University do so because they want to become practising lawyers, whether barristers or solicitors. But it is not necessary to read Law at University to become a practising lawyer. Equally, studying Law at University is a legitimate subject for academic study even if you definitely do not want to become a lawyer or think that you may not become a practising lawyer. This is because the study of Law at University is not a vocational subject; it is an academic subject and an intellectual discipline. Even those students who study Law at University intending to become practising lawyers are required to do additional vocational training to prepare them for working as a barrister or a solicitor; the study of Law at University by itself is not sufficient to train them to become lawyers. So why do such students study law at University and why do others study Law even if they don't want to become a lawyer? The answer is fairly similar in both cases, namely that studying Law at University trains the student to think and write logically and clearly; enables the student to engage in the critical analysis of the law; enables the student to engage in a wide variety of different academic disciplines; and is interesting and intellectually stimulating.

Students who study law at Cambridge end up doing a wide variety of jobs, other than being a practising lawyer or a teacher or researcher of law. The study of Law enables students to acquire and develop skills and knowledge which will be of relevance to business, politics, the civil service, charitable organisations, international non-governmental organisations, banking, finance, journalism and much, much more.

So what are the advantages of studying Law at University generally and studying Law at Cambridge specifically?

## *1. Breadth and depth of knowledge*

At Cambridge most Law students study 14 papers over three years. Seven of these are the foundation papers which must be taken if a student wishes to practice law, but, even if not, they are papers in subjects which are fundamental to English law, such as crime, contract and constitutional law, and which ought to be studied to get a good idea of what the law is about.

All students also study Roman Law in the first year which is an excellent introduction to legal principles and legal thinking.

Law students then have a choice of 6 other subjects from a very long list. This enables them to specialise or to study subjects which may relate to other academic disciplines, such as history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, government and politics, international relations and economics.

Students with an expertise and interest in modern languages can also apply to go to one of four European countries between the second and third year of their legal studies and study law in that foreign country, either in France, Germany, Spain or Holland.

## 2. *Learning to think like a lawyer*

Law is an academic discipline which enables students to think like lawyers. This means that they need to develop skills in thinking logically; in identifying issues in practical problems; in assessing evidence and in reaching judgments. These are all skills which are of significance to a wide variety of different jobs and professions. The advantage of the small group teaching system at Cambridge means that students get a great deal of support from their teachers in being able to think and analyse the law. You also get a great deal of support in developing legal writing skills, which emphasises clarity of expression, conciseness and precision in the use of language; again, skills which are of real benefit to many careers.

## 3. *Encouraging critical engagement*

One of the real benefits of studying Law at university is that the law is not taken at face value as something which is unchanging, but rather is something which can moulded and developed. This may be through careful interpretation of the rules or through careful assessment of old precedents to see how they can be applied to new problems. But Law students also engage in discussions and thinking about more radical reform of the law. Law students are encouraged to reflect on the law, to think critically about the law, to consider whether the law is satisfactory, to identify the policies which underpin particular rules and to suggest alternatives. Law is consequently a very important and useful subject for students to study if they are interested in questions of justice, rights, social policy and law reform.

## 4. *Intellectual engagement*

Finally, students who study Law at University engage in an academic discipline with a very long pedigree. They discuss the work of ancient philosophers and modern theorists; they examine the meaning of justice; they consider the operation of financial markets, corporations and commerce; they engage with the operation of law in a European and global arena; they analyse social policy and change. Aristotle said that the '*Law is reason free from passion.*' He was half right. The law is reason, but it is full of passion.

More information about alternative careers for Law Graduates is available at

<http://www.careers.cam.ac.uk/sectors/law/cmslawalts.asp>