

Faculty of Law

Degree Planning



This document provides some advice about planning how to complete your LLB: which papers to take, and when to take them. This document is intended to provide some guidance to help you make choices that make sense for you.

Workload and degree progression planning

LLB structure overview

There are three main components of the LLB degree:

- Six single-semester 18-point non-law papers (these are required even for students who are not doing a double degree);
- Seven full-year compulsory LAWS papers:
 - LAWS101 The Legal System (36 points);
 - The second year papers: LAWS201-204 Criminal, Contract, Property and Public Law (30 points each).
 - LAWS301 Torts, which is usually taken in your third year (30 points); and
 - LAWS302 Jurisprudence, taken after second year (30 points). Students are generally best-placed to engage with the material in Jurisprudence in their fourth or fifth years, but the paper can be taken in third year.
- Fourteen single-semester 15-point elective LAWS papers (Legal Ethics is an elective but is required to practice law, see below under General paper recommendations).

For up to two law electives, you can substitute an Otago non-law paper at 200-level or above, or an approved exchange paper.

The LLB also requires completing the following 0-point papers:

- LAWS298 Legal Writing (taken during second year), LAWS398 Legal Research Skills and LAWS499 Advocacy Skills (taken during third year); and
- LAWS498, which is satisfied by completing five pieces of research and writing in conjunction with your 300- and 400- level LAWS papers. You should enrol in LAWS498 in the semester in which you expect to complete the requirements.

Students who are doing a double degree also take ten more non-law papers:

- Three 200-level papers for their major;
- Four 300-level papers for their major; and

- Three other non-law papers, the requirements for which depend on the other degree.

This takes into account taking maximum advantage of cross-crediting (where some papers contribute points towards both degrees).

LLB degree progression

It usually takes four years to complete an LLB and five for an LLB double degree.

LLB double degree progression generally looks like this:

- First year: LAWS101 and five non-law papers;
- Second year: the second year law papers;
- Third year: LAWS301 and a mix of elective law papers and non-law papers.
- Fourth year and fifth year: a mix of elective law papers and non-law papers, and LAWS302 at some point.

LLB progression usually looks like this:

- First year: LAWS101 and five non-law papers;
- Second year: the second year law papers;
- Third year and fourth year: LAWS301 in third year, LAWS 302 in third year or fourth year, elective law papers, and one non-law paper in either third year or fourth year.

Workload

After second year, for a double degree you will usually have the equivalent of 18 single semester law papers (14 electives plus two full-year papers) to finish your law degree, and 11 non-law papers

This works out to the equivalent of ten single-semester papers per year from third year onwards, or 6 single-semester law papers and 3 or 4 single-semester non-law papers each year. That works out at around five papers per semester, but not necessarily five every semester.

If you are going on exchange, the exchange semester usually contributes fewer papers to your degree than a normal semester, so requires more careful planning. The LLB(Hons) requires an additional 60 points so also requires more careful planning.

You can also use summer school to manage the overall workload of your LLB. You should generally not do summer school until after your third year.

Workload of over 162 points in an academic year requires special approval. For example, you can do six law papers and four non-law papers without requiring approval. The Faculty generally considers that over five papers in a semester is too many. To assess whether there are exceptional circumstances that justify approving a high workload, we are generally looking for a specific reason that you need to be doing high workload in that semester (including that you have exhausted other ways of managing the workload such as summer school), and evidence that you can manage high workload.

Paper choices

General principles

Generally speaking, the most important thing you get out of your legal studies is not knowledge about a specific area of the law. Rather it is general knowledge of the legal system, and the legal reasoning skills that you develop throughout your law degree. Those skills should enable you to work in an area of law that you did not study, perhaps because that area of law did not even exist when you did your degree.

So, generally not possible to pick the “wrong” papers and make it impossible for you to work in a particular area. That’s not to say that there aren’t some papers that can be quite helpful for particular fields of work (see the discussion of general paper recommendations below). But the main point we want to make here is that paper choice is generally something you don’t need to worry too much about getting wrong.

We suggest that you take into account the following further points when choosing papers:

- If you do have a clear idea of the area in which you want to work, it does make sense to devote a significant proportion of your electives to related papers, but it is still a good idea to take a range of subjects;
- If you do not have a clear idea of where your career might be headed, trying out a diverse set of law electives in your third year can help you work out what might be right for you;
- You can attend lectures for several different papers in the first week of a semester to help you determine which ones work for you;
- Other than that you should be locking in your papers for a semester by the end of the first week of that semester, you do not have to make your elective paper choices in advance. There are some good reasons to revise your thinking about which papers you want to take as you progress your degree, including that the subjects that interest you might not be the ones you expect, and that we might add new papers that were not available when you first starting considering electives;
- Some electives are offered most years, and some less frequently. If there are electives that you are particularly interested in doing, you can ask the lecturer when they are likely to be offered during your time at law school, so you can try and factor that into your planning;
- University might be the last opportunity to look into an area of law because it interests you, so we encourage you to take some papers in areas that interest you, even if you do not think that there is a clear link to your expected area of work. You will still be developing your legal reasoning skills, and we find students tend to get better grades in subjects that they find interesting;
- Who is teaching a paper, how you will be assessed, and when the lectures are held are all legitimate factors to take into account when deciding which papers to take; and
- You are always welcome to contact us for course advice about paper choices and degree planning – you can email law.courseadvice@otago.ac.nz

General paper recommendations

There are several papers which we recommend most students consider taking, though they are not strictly compulsory:

- Legal Ethics (LAWS463) is required to practice law, so take it if you expect to practice law, or think you might want to do so;
- Company Law (LAWS407) because companies are involved in many aspects of legal practice (from corporate law to criminal law to family law to working with iwi and hapū);
- Evidence Law (LAWS414) if you think you are going to be a courtroom lawyer, or work with courtroom lawyers; and
- Treaty of Waitangi (LAWS459) because Treaty issues and Māori rights are relevant to many aspects of legal practice in Aotearoa.

The Ministry of Justice has indicated that Evidence and Company are preferred papers for students interested in applying for Judges Clerkships.

Notes about specific papers

A few law electives have pre-requisites or co-requisites, including:

- LAWS488 Accidents and the Law has LAWS301 Torts as a pre-requisite; and
- LAWS433 Advanced Family Property has LAWS462 Wills and Trusts as a pre-requisite.

If you are interested in taking papers with a pre-requisite then you need to factor in taking the pre-requisite in a previous year. In exceptional cases, we might wave the usual requirements.

LAWS464 Advocacy teaches practical courtroom advocacy skills. The class is limited to 12 students, and priority is given to finalists and students with B-range or better in Evidence. Places in evidence are allocated near the end of the year. So, if you are interested in taking Advocacy, you should take Evidence before your final year.

LAWS480 Research Paper involves completing a supervised research paper instead of a standard lecture-based elective. To undertake LAWS480, you need a supervisor who has agreed to supervise you on a specific topic, and you need to [complete an application form to confirm the supervisor and topic](#).