“Otago has a well-resourced Law Faculty with an international academic reputation. It has academics who are leaders in their field and active in the profession, and courses designed to prepare students for their future professional life.”

Jo Murdoch
Associate and senior Crown Lawyer, Meredith Connell, Auckland

Law is part of all social activity. It defines relationships, protects rights, imposes obligations and gives structure to governmental and commercial enterprise. Law graduates are well equipped to analyse complex issues, find solutions to a wide variety of problems and contribute to decision making at all levels. They are skilled in the precise use of language, both oral and written. They understand the limits of law and its relationship with other social forces. Many graduates find careers as lawyers in private practice, but others prefer to work in business, government, the public sector or welfare agencies.
Why study Law?
The LLB degree provides an excellent grounding in such skills as analysing, decision making, negotiation and forming legal and other arguments. Law graduates are skilled in the precise use of oral and written language and these skills are used in a variety of occupations. Among the students enrolling in the First Year Law paper are many who want to gain an understanding of how the law works in New Zealand as part of their degree course. These include students enrolled in Commerce, Science, Physical Education, Health Science, Arts, Consumer and Applied Science and other degrees.

Background required
There are no specific requirements regarding subjects taken at school, for entry into the Legal System paper. In general, students are advised to take those subjects at school which interest them and they do well in. The sorts of skills which are useful for law are good language skills (English is therefore very useful) and skills of analysis (maths is useful here). Another relevant subject, normally first encountered at University, is philosophy. You could develop your language and analysis skills by taking part in activities such as drama and debating at school and at University.

Law at Otago
Law is a four year professional degree. The Legal System Course LAWS 101 is the foundation for the law degree but can be taken to count toward another degree. Admission to Second Year Law is restricted to 200 students and is based on the strength of the student’s academic record at University with a particular emphasis on the mark achieved for The Legal System.

The second-year course consists of papers in Criminal Law, Law of Contract, Property Law, and Public Law as well as a programme of research and writing. These papers are fundamental to the understanding of law, and provide a foundation for advanced papers in subsequent years.

In the third and fourth years, students have three compulsory papers: the Law of Torts, Jurisprudence, and Legal Ethics. The Faculty also offers a wide range of optional Law papers from which to choose. Students will also continue with a programme of research and writing, and a short programme to develop skills of oral advocacy.

More able students studying for an LLB are given opportunities to enrol for the LLB (Hons) degree which involves supervised research work in addition to the work required for the ordinary LLB degree.

Double major/degree options
You can combine your LLB work with study for a degree in Commerce, Arts, Science, Health Science, Physical Education and other degrees. By cross-crediting papers between the two courses, two degrees can usually be gained after five years of study. Your employment opportunities are widened with a double degree and more than two thirds of LLB students at Otago are enrolled in this way.

Teaching style
LAWS 101 is an open-entry full-year course consisting of three lectures and one tutorial a week. Students will learn how to read, interpret and apply Case Law and Statutory Law. Students learn how to reason and justify arguments, how to write clearly, effectively and persuasively. In tutorials students work in small groups and focus on developing the basic skills of analysing a legal problem.

Student exchange
The University of Otago has exchange agreements with more than 70 institutions in over 30 countries. If your marks average B or better you may qualify to attend one of these institutions for one semester or for a year. You pay only your New Zealand fees and complete your qualification within the same timeframe as if you’d never been away. Law students are able to take Law papers at the Law Faculty of specifically approved overseas Universities.

Why study Law?

After attending Havelock North High School, Louis Chambers came to Otago to study a double degree in Law (with Honours) and Arts majoring in Economics, with a Minor in Environmental Management.

“Adjusting to life in Otago was not always easy: having grown up in a small town in Hawke’s Bay, it was my first time away from home. I was lucky to have a brilliant and kind first year law tutor, and I found the Otago Law staff very approachable and supportive.”

From early on, Louis was particularly interested in issues of climate change and sustainability. As a university student, Louis joined a group of young New Zealanders whose experience attending global climate change summits led them to found Generation Zero, a youth climate advocacy organisation that campaigns for responsible policy changes to reduce New Zealand’s emissions.

Alongside his legal studies and advocating for climate change, Louis and a fellow law student entered and won the 2011 Australian Law Students’ Association Meeting Competition. As well as competing in debating, Louis served as President of the University of Otago Debating Society for two years. In his final year at Otago, Louis worked with a fellow Otago alumnus and another debater, to launch Law for Change, a nationwide network to inspire students and young professionals to pursue public interest legal careers.

Louis gained further hands-on experience through a Summer Clerkship with Russell McVeagh and an internship in Washington, DC working for the Environmental Defense Fund, a non-governmental environmental advocacy organisation known for its science-based, non-partisan approach.

In 2012, Louis was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship to study at the University of Oxford. After studying a Master of Public Policy and a Master of Economics for Development, Louis is now working in London at McKinsey & Company, a multinational management consulting firm which works with many of the world’s most influential businesses and institutions.

“Now practising in Sydney, I use the legal skills and knowledge gained from my LLB at the University of Otago all the time. In addition to those, the friendships formed with your peers as you navigate the degree last a lifetime. As an Otago law grad, you become part of a wide community spread all over the world.”

Alexander Latu
Solicitor, Addisons, Sydney

For questions about Law
otago.ac.nz/law

Careers in Law
Law graduates work as legal advisers and company secretaries in the commercial world, they work in management and executive positions in business and private enterprise. Two thirds of Law students at Otago complete double degrees because Otago’s flexible cross-credit system opens up job opportunities in areas like the media, public relations, entertainment industry, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Information Technology consultancies. Private practice has a variety of fields of law to choose from e.g. commercial, property, public, environmental, banking, wills and trusts, family, criminal, sports, media, civil, tax, maritime, intellectual property and medical law. All government departments and local bodies employ lawyers for specialist legal advice. Otago law graduates work in law firms all over the world and also in organisations like the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and Amnesty International. A Law degree is training for life.

Professional options
Law at Otago is a professional degree. On completion of the LLB, graduates who wish to be admitted to the Bar have the option of undertaking the Professional Legal Studies Course. This course ensures that lawyers entering all areas of practice are equipped with the skills required to represent clients competently and ethically.

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PROFILE

Louis Chambers

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“The skills I learnt at Otago – in logic, in thorough research, and in concise communication – continue to serve me today, whether I am helping to design a strategy for a new not-for-profit or interrogating differences in political systems with peers from Oxford.”

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