Preparing You for a Future of Meaningful Work

This tool is intended to assist you in effectively managing your career exploration, planning, and decision making. In order to prepare for success after graduation, it is essential to take initiative, be intentional, and have goals in mind. Through exploration and “testing out” ideas of interest, your plan may shift or change – that’s completely natural! Stay flexible, and take advantage of the rich resources and support persons who are ready to walk alongside you on your path to purposeful work.

**PRE-LAW**

Your Career & Professional Development Plan

Messiah College

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Assess

Assess, articulate and develop your strengths, interests and values. Begin to explore options that are congruent with your awareness of self.

Engage

Purposefully engage in opportunities and with resources that will set you on the path to personal and professional development. Target opportunities where you can apply and further develop your skill sets, grow your experience base, and explore areas of interest.

Experience

Enhance critical professional competencies in order to successfully connect your professional goals with real world opportunities. Take your experience to the next level by participating in meaningful opportunities that will differentiate you from the rest.

Transition

Synthesize your collective experiences from your academics, internships and other experiential learning, service, leadership, and co-curricular involvement. Begin to articulate a plan and take action to translate your skills and experiences into meaningful post-graduate opportunities.
Greetings from the Pre-Law Adviser!

This Career and Professional Development Plan has been tailored to students who are thinking about pursuing a future career in the law. But I guarantee that it will prove useful to even those of you who may ultimately decide that the law is NOT for you.

First of all, I want to stress that the field of law is quite diverse. Law school graduates do myriad things with their degrees. This is part of what makes law so exciting. At the same time, this realization can be overwhelming for many students. This is why it is important for you to gather as much information as possible about the countless ways in which you can put a law degree to use. For example, talk with faculty members and alumni, and engage in informational interviews and shadowing opportunities with real lawyers.

In addition, please be advised that it is NOT necessary to minor in Pre-Law in order to prepare well for law school. In fact, many law school admissions officers are skeptical about Pre-Law majors. Some of the most successful law school students majored as undergraduates in English, Philosophy, and Engineering. The key is to take classes that involve lots of reading, writing, critical thinking, and problem-solving. If you do not like to read and write, you might want to reconsider your decision to attend law school. Other reasons not to go to law school include: doing so because a close friend or family member has gone or is pressuring you to go; doing so because you believe that lawyers make a lot of money; and doing so because you simply like to argue. (Note: lawyers rarely spend time giving stirring speeches in the court room; most legal work is solitary and involves a great deal of researching, reading, and writing.)

The decision to attend law school is an extremely important one, as law school involves a great deal of time, hard work, and expense. For those of you who attend law school full-time, the education will consume three years of your life and will involve an extraordinary number of study hours. Following law school, preparation for the bar exam generally takes 6 solid weeks of full-time study. In addition, most law students pay for their legal education by taking out loans. Many students graduate law school with as much as $100,000 of debt, and this reality leads many to take jobs primarily because of the salary involved (as opposed to other worthwhile considerations like a passion for a particular area of law or the desire to help underprivileged people). Finally, the unfortunate reality is that many of today’s law school graduates are having a difficult time finding jobs.

None of this is intended to discourage you from applying to law school, but it is meant to underscore that law school is a major commitment and deserves years of careful reflection. And here is where this Career and Professional Development Plan comes into play. This is NOT a law school application timeline. (That information is available on Messiah’s Pre-Law Advising webpage.) Rather, this pamphlet provides students with specific advice about how to engage in thoughtful exploration, planning, and decision making, not only for a possible legal education and career, but for any post-undergraduate education and employment. If following this guide steels your determination to attend law school, then it will have served its purpose. On the other hand, if the kind of self-reflection that it promotes leads you away from the field of law, then it will have done its job as well. As long as your ultimate decision is made thoughtfully, you should rest assured that it is the right one for you.
Assess

Who am I & where am I going?

There are several options available to assist you in the process of assessing and developing your strengths, interests and values related to your field of interest. Identify resources from the list below to begin building this important foundation to decision making.

What tools are available?

- **Self-assessment inventories** are available through the Career Center to help you begin narrowing down your interests, strengths, and values.
- Begin to construct an **electronic portfolio** where you can begin to store artifacts, including papers, projects, research, and other accomplishments from your classroom work and out-of-class activities.
- Become familiar with the **Pre-Law Advising Website**: [www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/law/index.html](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/law/index.html)

How can I find relevant opportunities?

- Check out the “**What Can I Do with a Major in Law**” resource on the Career Center’s website ([http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/jobsearch/pdf/law.pdf](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/jobsearch/pdf/law.pdf)).
- Research career paths within law, as well as education and training needed for particular jobs in the [Department of Labor’s Occupational Outlook Handbook](http://www.bls.gov/oco).
- Learn what **alumni** and other professionals are doing with law degrees by reading the alumni profiles from various academic departments, or by checking out [FalconNet](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/networkingOpps.htm), the alumni directory.
- Be sure to attend the Pre-Law program’s career panels offered throughout the year.
- Explore options for **involvement outside of the classroom** through offices such as Student Involvement & Leadership Programs, the Agapé Center for Service & Learning, the EpiCenter for Off-Campus Study & International Programs, College Ministries, Residence Life and much more.

What resources should I be accessing?

- Visit the Career Center early, and start constructing a customized career and professional development plan.
- **Get to know Professor Rego, the pre-law advisor**, as well as the professors within your department beyond the classroom. Take advantage of office hours and department activities. Become familiar with the Pre-Law Advising website - [http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/law/index.html](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/law/index.html). Create a first draft of your **résumé**; what gaps exist? Use this as a guide to start constructing an action plan that includes relevant, sought-after experience.
- Become familiar with the “**transferable skills**” you are learning ([www.messiah.edu/offices/career/liberalArts.html](http://www.messiah.edu/offices/career/liberalArts.html)). These skills are very marketable to employers and graduate schools, so be intentional about developing them.

Reflection Q’s

- How would I describe my skills, interests, and values?
- Considering past and present experiences, what energizes me most? Be specific!
- How are these aspects of myself shaping my decisions about a major and potential career path?
- What options for involvement outside the classroom might allow me to gain experience while further developing my transferable skill sets?
Explore & Engage

How do I choose?

Don’t just become involved. **Intentionally** choose activities that will allow you to grow personally and professionally. Target opportunities and experiences where you can apply and develop transferable skill sets while exploring potential areas of interest. Consider the following options to stay on track.

Who can help?

- Meet with Dr. Paul Rego, the Pre-Law Advisor as well as a Career Center professional to discuss where you’re at and any adjustments that should be made to your customized career and professional development plan. Brainstorm ideas for complementing your classroom learning with relevant experience to start filling the gaps in your résumé.

- Take the initiative to **build relationships** with your academic advisor, faculty members, and RD. Discuss and gain ideas about potential career interests and plans to gain experience. Invest in faculty members with whom you share specific interests/passions. Consider seeking a mentor.

How do I choose from so many options?

- Strategically choose courses and co-curricular activities that will allow you to develop the following skills: research, writing, critical thinking, listening, oral communication, and problem solving. **Law schools value quality over quantity**, so invest in meaningful opportunities.

- Begin talking with the Pre-Law advisor, the Career Center and/or the Internship Center about **experiential learning opportunities** (visits to law schools and law firms, internships, professional development experiences (PDE), job shadowing, mentor relationships, film nights, etc.). Note that for some majors, internships or clinicals are a requirement. **Data shows that graduate programs and employers highly value relevant experience!**

Reflection Q’s

- What experiences might be valued to a prospective employer or grad school?
- How can I apply what I’m learning in the classroom while developing meaningful experience?
- Am I focusing on quality rather than quantity?

What can I do to test out my career interests?

- Conduct an **information interview** or initiate a **job shadowing** experience with lawyers to learn more about the different ways in which a law degree can be put to use.

- Research law careers of interest to you. The **Occupational Outlook Handbook** (www.bls.gov/oco/) and the **American Bar Association** (www.americanbar.org) are particularly helpful. What is the nature of the work and work environment? What skills and experiences are highly desirable? What are some of the behind-the-scenes tasks?

- Attend **Pre-Law career panels** to learn more about the diverse field of law and to begin building your professional network.

- Consider connecting with Messiah alum through the online alumni directory, FalconNet. Consult with the Career Center about how to do this.

- Begin thinking of **how you will spend your summer**. What experiences, paid or volunteer, will help you build on your experience and continue to develop marketable skill sets?

- **Other options for involvement may include**: potential internships, fellowships, research opportunities, work study options, study abroad programs, student clubs and organizations, volunteering or service learning, a work study position, and summer or part-time work.

- Practice articulating the **transferable skills** you are developing (refer to links in “Assess”).
Experience

How can I differentiate myself?
It’s time to take your experience to the next level! Increase your marketability and uniqueness through investing in your experience base. Consider the options below as you develop and enhance your “brand.” If you’re not thinking of pursuing a career specifically in a field related to your major, research the field(s) you’re considering. Think about how your academic background will prepare you for making unique contributions to your field of interest.

What constitutes “relevant experience?”
- Every professional field is unique. Do research and talk with professionals who share your interests to know what is valued in your targeted field.
- Virtually all employers are looking for candidates with relevant experience. This may be gained through research experience, an internship (visit the Internship Center) or practicum, international experience, or volunteer positions. Talk with your advisor about how this fits into your schedule.
- Think creatively about how your experiences, major, and the skills you’re demonstrating might be transferable to your targeted field. How are you conveying this on your résumé?

What professional competencies are important?
- Learn how to effectively market your qualifications through your résumé and cover letter. Stop by the Career Center during drop-in hours or schedule an appointment to receive personalized feedback.
- Strengthen your interviewing skills by scheduling a mock interview in the Career Center.
- Practice your networking skills with faculty, alumni, and at Career Center events.
- Build a professional web presence through vehicles such as social networking sites (ex. LinkedIn) and e-portfolios. Document your experiences in your electronic portfolio as a way of showcasing your skills and accomplishments.

What tools and resources will help me to get connected professionally?
- Attend job and graduate school fairs and other career-related events (Pre-Law career panels, visits to law schools and law firms, guest speakers, etc.) throughout the year. Start early; remember, you don’t have to be in the job-seeking phase to attend!
- Connect with professional associations (such as the American Bar Association) and conferences in your field.
- Utilize the Pre-Law Advising Website: www.messiah.edu/offices/career/grad/law/index.html
- Become familiar with the Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) – www.lsac.org
- Develop “networking cards” with basic contact info and a summary of your goals and qualifications. Have these available as you meet new contacts who may serve as critical resources in the future.
- Stay on top of current events, trends, and hot topics in your field through journals, magazines, and the news.

Reflection Q’s
- What specific experiences are highly desirable in my targeted field?
- Have I “tested out” my area of interest to know it’s a good fit?
- How am I practicing the skills that will be marketable to my target?
- What will set me apart from the average candidate in my chosen field?
- Have I considered stepping into a leadership position?
Transition

Am I ready?

Transitioning to post-graduate life, whether that is law school, employment, a gap year, or full-time service, includes many aspects. Keep in mind that career development is a lifetime process. That said, consider it your “first destination.” As a steward of your strengths, consider carefully what you have to contribute to your next step.

What are my transition goals related to law?

- Research and clarify your top occupational or law school choices which are congruent with your skills and interests. If possible, visit schools and contact alumni who have attended these schools.
- Discuss your goals and ideas and receive feedback from your faculty, the Pre-Law Advisor, professional networks, and the Career Center (stop by to schedule an appointment).
- Stay active in the process by engaging your network of personal and professional contacts. Reach out to additional contacts through the alumni directory, FalconNet, and your social networks such as LinkedIn.
- If planning to attend law school immediately after graduation, you should begin preparing for the fall LSAT during the summer before your senior year. If taking the June LSAT, begin preparing during the spring semester of your junior year.
- Stay on track for accomplishing your goals by devising strategies and timelines for making them happen.

What do I have to offer to law schools?

- Reflect on the totality of your experiences both inside and outside of the classroom. What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you have to offer a prospective employer or law school? In what practical ways have you demonstrated these strengths? Write them down! This will be the basis of your personal marketing campaign.
- Refine and tailor your application and admissions materials, including your résumé, cover letter, and essays. When writing personal statements, carefully follow the directions provided by each school; review your drafts with the Pre-Law advisor, Writing Center, and other faculty members who know you well. Don’t put this off until the last minute! Consider attending the “Writing Personal Statements Workshop” provided in the fall by the Career Center.
- Secure employment or graduate school references from those who can speak to your proven strengths and potential. Allow for 3-4 weeks for your references to respond. Provide them with copies of your resume, personal statement, and papers you have written.
- If you haven’t already, consider building a professional portfolio (i.e., yola.com). This should incorporate a bit about you, your résumé, transferable skills and experiences, and anything else that might be important to your specific field of interest.

Where can I find opportunities?

- Use an eclectic mix of resources. View job opportunities posted exclusively to Messiah students through FalconJobs (messiah.edu/offices/career). Participate in career events related to important transitional topics.
- Attend job and graduate school fairs locally and in your geographic area of interest.
- Consult career and graduate school resources on the Career Center website noted above.
- Identify Young Professionals Groups in your targeted geographic destination.
- Connect with job boards through professional association websites.
- Remember to follow up, say “thank you,” and track progress.

Reflection Q’s

- What are my top strengths I have to offer an employer or graduate school?
- Does my résumé accurately reflect my transferable skills and experiences?
- How have I demonstrated the skills that will be marketable to my target?