So you want to be a lawyer?

Preparing for a legal career with the VMI English major

Lawyers and law students must be able to

handle a high volume of writing and reading
read closely for detail
read deeply for comprehension
analyze situations and texts
reason with logic and accuracy
argue effectively
write with precision
write with power

As a VMI English major, you’ll develop these skills throughout your degree.

The VMI Pre-Law Society

Want to learn more about law school? Join the VMI Pre-Law Society. Contact adviser MAJ Mary Stewart Atwell at atwellms@vmi.edu.

“...researching legal issues, reading agreements, writing, and editing.”

Lawton Way ’05

MAJ Mary Stewart Atwell and members of the VMI Pre-Law Society visit the Supreme Court.
Russell McGuire ’96
Lt. Col. McGuire is a former infantry officer and the commonwealth attorney in Louisa County, VA. “I chose the English major to prepare me for law school. I knew English involved reading, writing, and critical thinking, which are the foundations of law school. I credit my success in the academic rigors of law school to the solid foundation I got in my VMI English major.”

“If you are a trial lawyer, your powers of persuasion and your ability to connect with a judge and jury are extremely important. My coursework in the English department developed that skill set. Understanding Blanche DuBois’ struggle in A Streetcar Named Desire and analyzing Iago’s motives in Shakespeare’s Othello are examples of how I became proficient in empathizing with clients, understanding the grey areas in life, and arguing a position.”

Matthew Mikula ’05
Mikula is partner at Gilliam and Mikula, PLLC. He specializes in criminal law, personal injury, and civil litigation, among other areas. “On the research side, I need to comprehend and break down complex legal issues and then summarize those issues into concise explanations for my clients. When drafting or editing agreements, I must accurately reflect the views and agreements of the different parties in a transaction. These things are usually complicated and multifaceted. Where possible, I craft an agreement so that the language benefits my clients—their perspectives and interests.”

Aaron Campbell ’03
Campbell is a former defense attorney and veteran prosecutor. He is lead enforcement counsel and oversees litigation for the Utilities Section at the Virginia State Corporation Commission. “The English faculty at VMI demanded good writing, which prepared me well for law school and life as an attorney. As an English major, I sculpted my writing and learned to distill large amounts of information in concise language, a skill I use every day. The techniques I exercised in interpreting literature transfer well when I have to decipher legal opinions and other complicated texts.”

Lawton Way ’05
Way is a partner at Hunton Andrews Kurth LLP in Richmond, VA, where he specializes in securities law and corporate finance.

What does a lawyer do?
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