



Yale College Council  
Pre-Law Resources

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	3
Peer Institutions.....	3
Data Analysis.....	7
Focus Group Input.....	10
Recommendations.....	11
Conclusion.....	11

## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this discussion is to situate Yale's existing pre-law resources in the context of peer institutions. Our intention is to illuminate how Yale can improve these resources given successful initiatives of other universities. In order to bolster these resources, going forward, we propose, overall, (1) a reform to Yale's Career Services website, (2) an exploration of new pre-law resources, and (3) an evaluation of the effectiveness of existing resources. We will elaborate on these proposals below.

### YALE'S CURRENT PRE-LAW RESOURCES

Yale's pre-law resources include: OCS advising, graduate affiliates and fellows within the residential colleges, and extracurricular activities directed towards students with an interest in law (Yale Undergraduate Legal Aid Association, Lawyers Without Borders, Yale Mock Trial Team, Yale Journal of Medicine and Law, Yale Moot Court Team). Yale also offers courses that could help prepare students for the legal reasoning and analytical skills they will need in law school (Constitutional Law; Thinking and Writing about the Law; Ethics and Law; Bioethics and Law; Law, Technology, and Culture). Finally, Yale has a dedicated pre-law adviser at the Office of Career Strategy (OCS).

## PEER INSTITUTIONS

### *Harvard*

After an analysis of pre-law resources offered at all peer institutions, we discovered that Yale's resources most closely paralleled Harvard's, but Yale fell short in a few key areas. Pre-law students at Harvard benefit from a streamlined Career Services [Website](#) that is user-friendly and easy to navigate. The page offers an introductory synopsis of the legal profession and explanations broken down into the "preparing," "selecting," and "applying" phases of the law school application process. Harvard's Office of Career Services Website also provides more information about a clearly-defined collection of four pre-law resources: (1) Law School 101 Sessions, (2) House Pre-Law Tutors, (3) House Pre-Law Websites, and (4) The Harvard Pre-Law Organizations. In comparison, Yale offers similar undergraduate law school advising sessions, moderated by OCS, as well as an opportunity for participation in pre-law oriented extracurriculars, such as the Yale Undergraduate Legal Aid Association. While Yale offers Residential College Fellow mentorship programs, Fellows Dinners,

and College Teas, which may provide students with exposure to law students, lawyers, or legal scholars, there is certainly a vast and troubling disparity of access to these resources among the different Residential Colleges.

We are especially interested in Harvard's House Pre-Law Tutors, a relatively unique program unlike Yale's graduate affiliates in which each undergraduate house has a team of current law students and recent graduates to assist students in preparing their law school applications and, more broadly, offering advice and mentoring throughout the process. Each tutor's contact information is provided in a directory for the current semester, published on the program's website. Because each of the 12 undergraduate house has such a team, Harvard students do not experience the same disparity in access to advising resources among undergraduate communities. Further, each House has its own Pre-Law website, which serves as a platform to target resources more specifically to student communities. The websites are supplemented by Pre-Law advisers (as opposed to tutors, who coach students through the application process) tied to each House, to whom interested students are encouraged to reach out. We find that the combined effect of these programs is a more personalized approach to the law school application process, which may be more conducive to demystifying an otherwise complex post-undergraduate path.

Finally, Harvard offers a downloadable PDF [guide](#) to "Applying to Law School" on its website as a part of its Career Services' Undergraduate Resource Series. This guide presents a compilation of information on the website and serves the purpose we have in mind for our proposed Law School Handbook.

### **Stanford**

We see similar beneficial programs offered at other peer institutions. We first investigate Stanford University. Stanford's pre-law [website](#) is very simple, to the point where it may be described as sparse. However, the website does contain a document titled: "Should I go to Law School?" which is host to many useful pointers for students potentially interested in law school and which, once again, is quite similar to what we have in mind with for the Law School Handbook. Stanford, furthermore, has set up a "UAR," or Undergraduate Advising and Research, advising program. One branch of this program includes pre-law advisors. Stanford, like Yale, has drop-in advising for shorter questions that take up to ten minutes; however, unlike Yale's [two-hour weekly sessions](#) (only held in the fall semester), Stanford's drop-in hours are 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. every day from Monday to Friday. Stanford also is home to BEAM: Bridging Education, Ambition & Meaningful Work, which

serves as its student career education hub. Career Educators at BEAM connect students with people and knowledge needed to help them explore career paths, identify and apply for opportunities, and cultivate personalized networks that shape their professional journeys. In the case of pre-law students, BEAM can be used to help obtain names of attorneys who have volunteered to allow students to shadow them. Stanford Alumni Mentoring (SAM) is also a resource where students can find law-related mentors. Our proposed conference would serve this role well.

### **Columbia**

Columbia University<sup>1</sup> hosts walk-in pre-law advising hours from Monday to Thursdays, 3:00pm to 4:30pm, offering a much more flexible schedule than Yale's. The university also offers a pre-law listserv, which provides updates on pre-law programs and events, as well as job and professional development opportunities. Their [website](#), while also sparse, also contains a very detailed Law School Application Process [Packet](#). This packet provides a general timeline, detailed and extensive FAQs, LSAT test dates, and Pre-Professional Law File components. It also offers suggestions for obtaining letters of reference, choosing a law school, writing a personal statement, understanding admissions criteria, factors to consider when reviewing a file, and a list of law schools requiring a dean's certification. Columbia also offers a very clear explanation on how to obtain a dean's certification on its website, as opposed to Yale's website, which offers no such guidance.

### **University of Pennsylvania**

The University of Pennsylvania (UPenn) similarly details the process on how to obtain a dean's certification via Interfolio, its career service website. UPenn has pre-law walk-in hours from 12:30-2:30pm daily, a schedule which is similar to that of Yale's OCS. It also, like Columbia, has a pre-law newsletter which can be accessed via "Handshake," a central career information website. Their website also contains audio answers to law school application FAQs (as opposed to typed out answers).

### **Dartmouth**

Dartmouth College, like the peer institutions mentioned above, also offers a Law School [Guide](#) with information including, but not limited to, pre-law advising contacts, information on the LSATs, components of a law school application, an

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<sup>1</sup> This pre-law advising may only be available to the School of Engineering and Applied Science.

application checklist, letters of recommendation, and financial aid. The authors also offer advice about applying to law school immediately versus taking time off, and there is a page at the end of the guide detailing pre-law resources with links to certain websites on different law school rankings, LSAT preparation, application resources, scholarships, and legal career information. Presently, Yale does not offer a document or guidebook like Dartmouth's where relevant information for pre-law students can be found, conveniently, all in one place.

### **Brown**

Brown University provides an entire website dedicated to Law Careers [Advising](#). Information regarding law school preparation, when to apply, frequently asked questions, admission statistics, events and programs, and student groups related to law is provided on the website. Some example of events advertised to pre-law students include law school fairs in which Brown students can speak directly to the Directors of Admissions of various schools, including Yale. Brown's Pre-Law Society is also a notable organization on campus that provides its members (students from diverse backgrounds considering law school after graduation) with opportunities to attend lectures, panel discussions, and other various activities related to law school.

### **Cornell**

Cornell University, like Harvard and Brown, also has an entire [website](#) dedicated to easy access of pre-law resources for its students. Accessible information on the website includes general materials like law career interest guiding points and law school preparation, but also specific Cornell resources offered to pre-law students. For example, the website contains a Legal Careers Guide with dates for law school information sessions and workshops. However, the most promising offering from Cornell is an Externship Program. Under this program, students have the opportunity to shadow Cornell alumni currently working in the field of law over winter break. There is even a similar externship program for first-year students called [FRESH](#), that takes place during spring break. Cornell also sets up internships over the summer for students interested in the legal profession with programs such as Cornell in Washington, Cornell University Pre-Law Program in NYC, and Urban Semester Program in NYC. Students can also intern with a law firm or law-related organization with the help of the Arts & Sciences Career Development staff. Yale currently does not have a program like Cornell's. All legal internships organized by Yale are listed on Simplicity but these internships are limited in quantity and do not

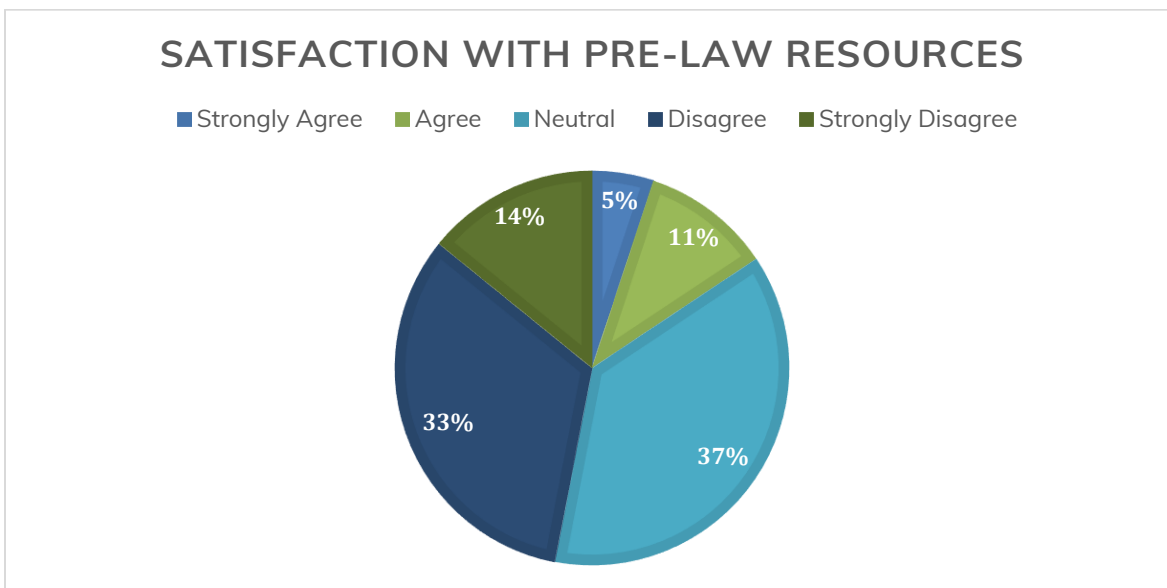
offer the same kind of support and guidance the externships and internship programs of Cornell provide for its students.

## DATA ANALYSIS

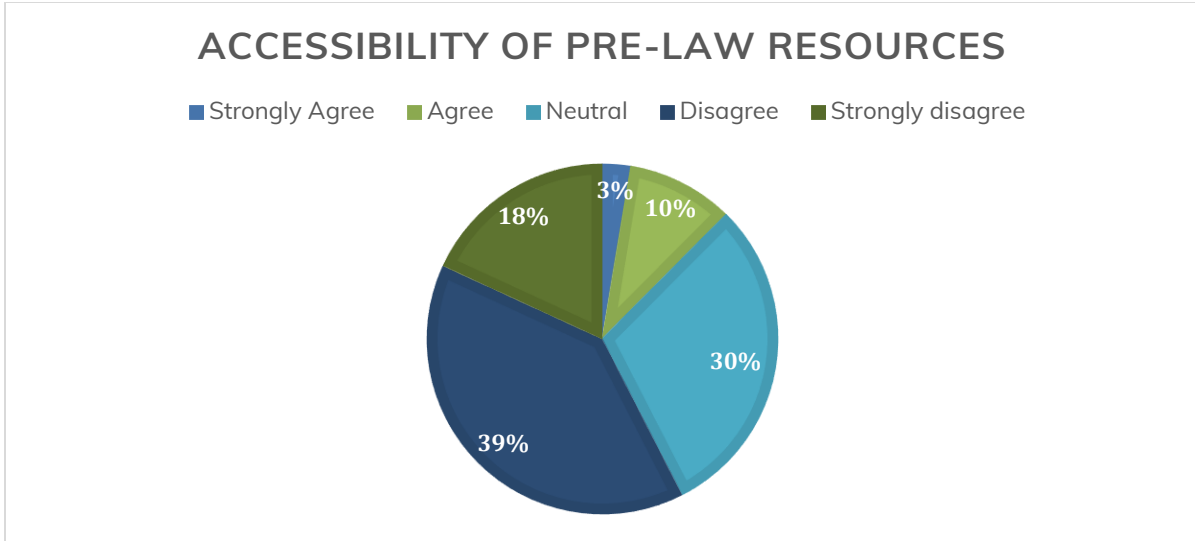
Out of a total 1163 Yale undergraduates who responded to the Fall 2017 YCC survey, 200 students indicated that they identify as pre-law, with a further 24 identifying as former pre-law students. In other words, 19.26% of surveyed students, almost one in five, had identified at some point as pre-law, showing a clear continued interest in law as a profession among Yale undergraduates.

The 224 students who indicated current or former interest in the legal profession were asked further questions about their Yale pre-law experience.

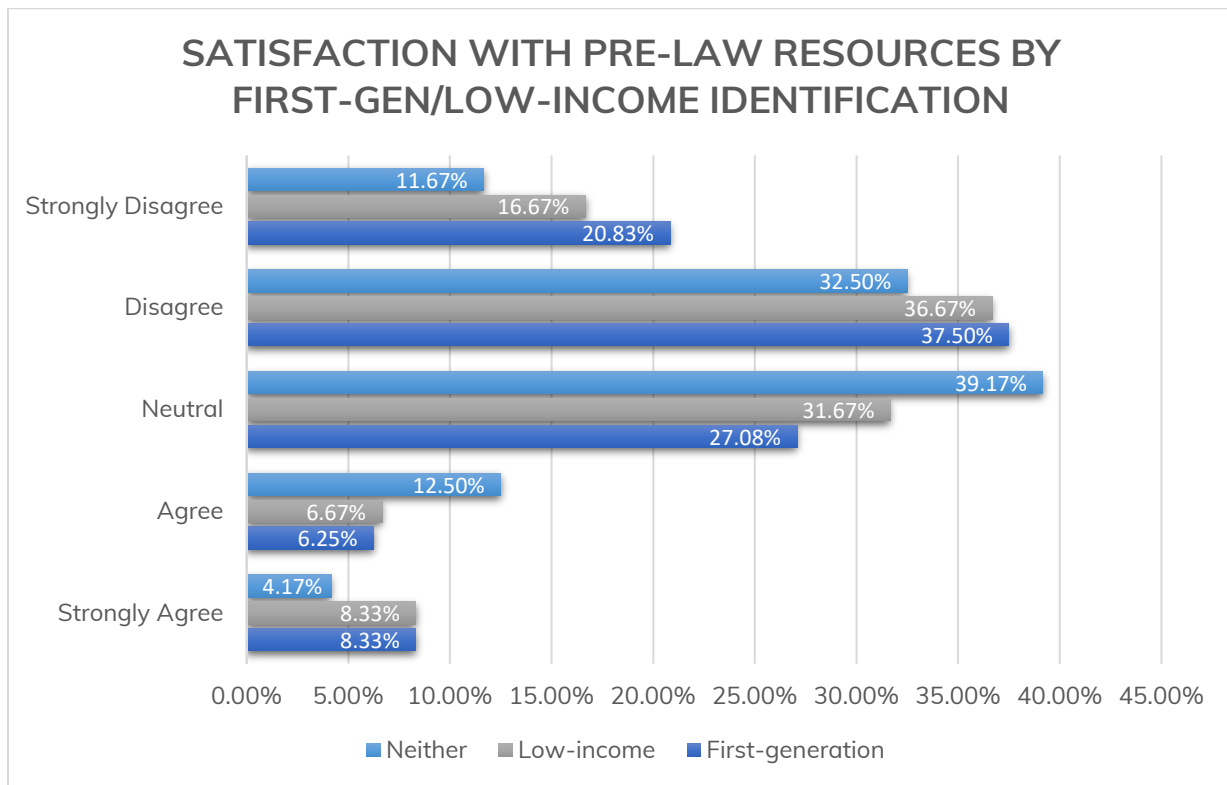
Students seem generally dissatisfied with the current state of Yale's pre-law resources. When asked if they believe Yale's pre-law resources are sufficiently *helpful* in planning for law school, most respondents (74 students, or 37.37% of respondents) selected "neutral," with the next most populous category being "disagree" with 65 students (32.83% of respondents), and then "strongly disagree" with 28 respondents (14.14% of respondents).



When asked if Yale's pre-law resources are sufficiently *accessible* in planning for law school, the results were slightly more negative. 76 respondents (39.38%) replied "disagree," 58 respondents (30.05%) replied "neutral," and 35 respondents (18.13%) replied "strongly disagree."



When data was stratified by socioeconomic conditions, we noted that students who identified as first-generation and/or low income were more likely to disagree that pre-law resources are sufficiently helpful than those who identified as neither; those on financial aid were also more likely to indicate “disagree” than those not on financial aid.





When asked if they would attend “a pre-law event that provided networking opportunities, LSAT advice, and law school application assistance if one was offered,” 175 of 197 respondents (88.83%) replied affirmatively, with a further 18 marking “unsure.”

When asked if they would “utilize a free undergraduate LSAT study group if it were provided,” 149 of 197 respondents (75.63%) responded affirmatively, with a further 41 (20.81%) responding “unsure.”

When asked if they would “utilize a pre-law handbook that provided access to resources, testimonials, and other information,” 179 of 196 respondents (91.33%) responded affirmatively, with a further 14 (7.14%) responding “unsure.”

We conclude from this data that there is a strong interest among Yale pre-law students in these resources.

**When asked about the pre-law resources here at Yale, several students commented:**

*“We have the best law school in the world across the street, why don’t we have good pre-law resources?”*

*“It would be really awesome if there was some form of LSAT prep help. Like, Yale Law is across the street. I’m sure half of them are tutoring for the LSAT to make money anyway! Let’s have them tutor undergrads.”*

*“In order to [improve] pre-law resources, it would be nice to just have general pre-professional information available as well. I feel like there are a plethora of resources for computer science, pre-med, and engineering students but not very many in the way of career development for political science and humanities majors. With regard to the pre-law program ideas, I think it would be really instrumental to have students interested in pre-law be a part of the construction of pre-law resources (perhaps you can send out an email for students to volunteer to be a part of a committee that works specifically on those things).”*

## FOCUS GROUP INPUT

By gathering a group of Yale undergraduate students interested in law school for a roundtable discussion, we gained insight into a variety of perspectives. Among the primary concerns raised were the lack of a dedicated pre-law adviser accessible through the Office of Career Strategy and the lack of practical, experiential exposure to law-related careers for undergraduates. Students feel they would benefit from such exposure to help them gauge whether law school is indeed a goal they wish to pursue. For these reasons, our student panel encouraged us to explore opportunities for a mentoring or shadowing program with practicing attorneys or current law students at Yale Law School. They also continued the conversation about developing new courses in Yale College, for example, ones in which the readings would draw heavily on case law. Another suggestion was to implement a dedicated stipend or grant to be administered by student organizations to supplement the offerings made available by the university to cover summer legal internships with public interest firms.

Furthermore, students expressed an interest in an LSAT study group, with an emphasis on making such a group free, so as to mitigate financial limitations students may face in attempting to prepare for the LSAT. A survey-type approach could be used to identify students' unique study goals and to help tailor preparation among groups to meet varying expectations, time constraints, and personal preferences. Perhaps current seniors who have already taken the LSAT could serve as mentors to undergraduates, providing coaching and personalized feedback to aid in their preparation.

Another point of concern for interested students is uncertainty about the legal profession. Students feel that they may not have the most comprehensive or candid picture in mind of what a J.D. or other law degrees offers. Moreover, many students are unsure whether they wish to commit to law school early into their time as undergraduates, which can make it challenging to present the most compelling law school application possible. Students say they would benefit from a pre-law handbook, similar to the career services resources disseminated by our peer institutions. Such a handbook would centralize information that is readily available but potentially difficult to parse through. It would present the challenging aspects of law school alongside the rewarding ones, and so contribute to a more accurate narrative about the process of preparing for, applying to, and ultimately attending law school.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish a mentoring/shadowing program with Yale Law School for undergraduates.
2. Develop, or support the YCC in hosting a pre-law conference to educate the general student body about pre-law affairs and initiate the program in recommendation one
3. Create, or support the YCC in creating, a pre-law handbook centralizing relevant information for interested students
4. Work with, or support the YCC in working with, the Association of Yale Alumni (AYA) to develop helpful alumni-student pre-law undergraduate resources and experiences
5. Streamline the OCS Website to promote ease of access to resources
6. Make pre-law walk-in advising hours more convenient, either by a change in location or times of advising sessions, or by providing supplemental walk-in hours with admissions officers from Yale Law School or Law School professors
7. Provide free LSAT study resources to Yale undergraduates, such as access to prep books, group classes, or individual tutoring
8. Create a system for student LSAT study groups, whereby students would be able to study with each other in organized groups for the LSAT and possibly receive mentoring or tutoring from the Yale Law School

## CONCLUSION

In this report, we have cited quantitative and qualitative evidence to substantiate our claim that Yale must improve undergraduates' access to pre-law resources. In light of our findings, we hope Yale's administrators will consider this report as the beginning of an ongoing conversation to reform our current pre-law advising and preparation materials. We look forward to the opportunity for continued collaboration between the Yale College Council and the Office of Career Strategy to provide our students with the best support possible for their postgraduate plans.