Minor in Law and Technology

Law schools do not recommend that undergraduate students complete any particular major and undergraduate institutions do not offer majors in law. On the other hand, we would not suggest that you apply to law school without giving it any attention as an undergraduate.

There are lots of reasons to study some law as an undergraduate. First, you get an exposure to the kinds of issues that law students study. In Law, Courts and Politics (SS 1310), students learn about the nature and function of law in society. Our courses in Constitutional Law help students understand the role of courts, the legislative power of the Congress, the powers of the Executive Branch to enforce the law, and the rights and liberties of individuals. Other courses cover cyberlaw and policy, legal regulation of the environment and intellectual property law, and illustrate how legal institutions regulate technology and resolve conflicts that arise from the use of technology. For more, see Course Descriptions.

Second, by studying law as an undergraduate, you get an exposure to the way that lawyers and judges think. Law, like engineering, is mostly problem solving. But, what, exactly, is a "solution" to a legal problem? When a client has a problem, the lawyer must determine how the law (or a legal institution) is likely to move toward a solution of that problem. For example, can a client use a proposed technology without infringing on a prior patent? Can a license solve that problem? Or, what do I have to do to avoid a legal problem arising from an underground oil tank? Using legal sources and logical reasoning skills, lawyers construct solutions to problems like these for clients.

Third, legal study introduces students to the materials with which lawyers work. To find the solutions to legal problems, lawyers consult statutes, regulations and prior court cases. These materials are often not as clear as one may wish and arguments over the meaning and impact of a Supreme Court decision are common. Students in the law and technology program learn how to read and engage these materials.

And, of course, though engineers and scientists work with numbers, lawyers work with words. In the Law and Technology Minor, students get more exposure to reading, writing and oral communication - all skills that law students and lawyers need.

Finally, applicants to law schools prepare a personal statement. They must explain why their professional goals included legal study. For the student who has been actively involved in legal study as an undergraduate, the reasons are likely to be more clear. In addition, by completing the Minor in Law and Technology, WPI students can show law schools that they are truly committed to legal study and the legal profession.

For more information, please contact Prof. Rissmiller.