WASHINGTON AND LEE SCHOOL OF LAW
THE NEW THIRD YEAR

W&L LAW’s rigorous third year expands upon the lessons and law of the first- and second-year curriculum, moving students out of the classroom and into the real world of legal practice.

The third year consists of four components that blend the practical and the intellectual into a diverse range of simulated and real practice-oriented experiences:

- A two week long skills immersion at the beginning of each semester, one focusing on litigation and conflict resolution, the other on transactional practice
- Four elective courses, one real-client experience (either a clinic, an externship or a Transnational Human Rights program) and three additional electives taught in a problems-based, practicum style
- At least forty hours of law-related service
- Participation in a semester-long professionalism program, “The Legal Profession.”

The third year allows students to explore topics more deeply and engage in the most professionally relevant work of their law school careers. It affords them the unique opportunity to cultivate the skills essential for professional success while working closely with permanent faculty as well as practicing attorneys on a diverse range of legal topics, encountering the law as they will as practitioners: through their client’s problems. As a result, W&L graduates will have a more realistic sense of the day-to-day functioning of a lawyer, and a more focused notion of their own professional interests and ambitions. In short, they will be prepared to practice:

**STRATEGIC THINKING.** The third year’s focus is squarely upon the student. Students learn to move beyond simply solving a specific academic problem to embracing the multi-faceted nature of effective legal practice. Students exercise judgment, take initiative and determine what questions to ask, how to engage a client’s problems, and how best to proceed in light of the relevant law, the client’s goals and competing ethical considerations. In sum, they begin to think not simply as law students but as practicing lawyers.

**PROJECT MANAGEMENT.** Throughout their third year, students operate within the fluid deadline regime of the legal profession, juggling competing assignments just as they will in practice. With each class requiring at least twenty to twenty-five hours of work per week, students’ schedules take on a more professional cast, placing significant value on organization and planning.

**WRITING.** Throughout the year, students produce the kind of work product lawyers produce, drafting a wide variety of documents ranging from memoranda and motions to letters and contracts.

**INTERPERSONAL SKILLS.** The third year places a premium on a student’s ability to effectively communicate with lawyers and non-lawyers alike. In their elective courses, students regularly work in teams. They also routinely report to professors who, within the context of these classes, function as senior-level attorneys. Furthermore, in their real-client experience, students interact with clients, cultivating the emotional intelligence and interpersonal acumen essential for effective representation. Through their real-client experiences, they learn how to manage client expectations, address ethical complications, and deal with the messy and often unpredictable nature of legal practice.

**MATURITY.** As a result of the third year, students have already begun the transition from law student to lawyer. They have encountered many of the challenges and frustrations regularly experienced by new attorneys but within the context of law school, where faculty and practitioners serve as mentors, providing students with focused feedback and instruction intended to address missteps and promote introspection, development and improvement.

**VALUES.** The third year emphasizes that a lawyer’s role in society is to serve. Students perform at least sixty-five hours of law-related service and often work in the public interest in their clinical or externship experiences. In addition, through the professionalism program, students investigate and discuss a variety of current issues confronting the legal profession including the legal economic model, ethical challenges and client management. Building upon the core principles of the W&L educational experience, the third year promotes critical engagement with the central values of the legal profession, the nature of effective legal practice and the development of professional identity.

For more information on the New Third Year Curriculum, visit: [http://law.wlu.edu/thirdyear/](http://law.wlu.edu/thirdyear/)

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W&L Law Students: By the Numbers

With a median LSAT of 164 and entering GPA of 3.65, each student is worthy of consideration by any employer—regardless of his or her place in the class. Many students bring more than just book smarts to the classrooms in Lewis Hall: over half the students in the Class of 2014 spent one or more years working before coming to law school.

- Median LSAT: 164 (89.7th Percentile)
- Median Undergraduate GPA: 3.65
- Applications Received in 2011: 3,972
- Target 1L Class Size: 121
- Percentage of Students Self-Identifying as Minority: 17%
- Percentage of Men/Women: 45%/55%
- Total Number of Undergraduate Institutions: 89
- Total Number of States Represented: 30
- Percentage of Students that Spent Two or More Years in the Working World Before Coming to Law School: 40%

Academic Excellence

Curricular engagement is the expectation, not the exception at W&L Law. Learning in small classes and led by a teaching faculty consistently recognized for its instructional facility, students are active participants in their legal education. Consequently, our students are comfortable with the performance expectations inherent in successful legal practice, where lawyers are expected to be agile, dynamic thinkers who are quick on their feet.

- Student faculty ratio: 9.52:1
- Small upper-level classes (average class size of 22)
- Intensive first-year writing program taught by full-time, tenure-track faculty who regularly evaluate students’ work and meet with them to discuss edits and improvements
- Upper-level writing requirements require students to draft documents lawyers produce: from motions and memoranda, to requests for production of documents and interrogatories

Ethics & Professionalism

W&L’s Honor System has been in place for well over a century and is based on the fundamental principle that honor is the ideological cornerstone of our community. Consequently, our students have three years of practice living and working in an environment where one’s word is his bond and matters of reputation, character and integrity are central. They understand what it means to shape and mold one’s professional identity, and they carry these lessons with them as they enter the reputation-driven legal profession.

With Professional Responsibility a core component of the foundational first-year curriculum, our students begin grappling with and encountering the challenging ethical dilemmas confronting the profession at the earliest juncture in their legal development. And as part of their third year, students engage in a semester-long discussion of the legal profession in which students investigate contemporary economic, ethical and social issues affecting practicing attorneys.

For our law students, their obligations as lawyers do not end at the law school doors. At W&L Law, we take our responsibility to train lawyers for careers in public service seriously. Last year, our third-year students alone logged over 6,200 legal service hours.

Beyond the Classroom

At W&L Law, we believe a complete legal education takes place both in and out of the classroom. Our small-size combined with our unique location creates a distinct campus culture typified by collegiality and friendliness. Students interact with peers and professors alike, cultivating the emotional intelligence necessary for effective representation in the professional world.

All first-year students participate in the Hermann Brain Dominance Instrument diagnostic evaluation. This assessment provides students with a comprehensive, nuanced sense of how they work, learn and interact with others.

With over 40 student organizations and activities, students actively shape the life of the law school. They cultivate the habit of engagement and the requisite time-management and organizational skills essential for balancing law school and multiple extracurricular obligations throughout their time at W&L Law.

Many students participate in one of our clinics or externship programs, gaining the “on your feet” experience not taught in a classroom. From representing the local low-income population on matters ranging from domestic relations to elder law, students learn to establish a rapport with clients, make effective oral arguments, and write compelling briefs.

- Black Lung Benefits Clinic: representing West Virginia coal miners in claims for benefits
- Community Legal Practice Center: serving the community by representing victims of domestic violence and senior citizens
- Criminal Justice: representing low-income clients charged with criminal misdemeanor offenses
- Legal Aid: externships with local legal aid societies
- Public Prosecutors Program: externships with the U.S. Attorney’s Office and Offices of the Commonwealth’s Attorney
- Tax Clinic: assisting low-income clients with tax controversies
- Virginia Capital Case Clearinghouse: assisting in the defense of those charged with capital offenses
- General Externship Program: externships in the public interest
- Judicial Clerkship Program: state and federal placements
- Immigration Law Program

One of the most significant opportunities afforded by our third year curricular reform is that every third year student has a real-client experience as part of their core curriculum. These experiences, either one of our six clinics or an externship, allow students to develop interpersonal, drafting, client management and advocacy skills.