

MASTER OF LEGAL STUDIES (MLS)

The law pervades much of American life today. People in all walks of life, including administration, business, education, science, and public service often find themselves making decisions that have legal implications, and academics often find themselves researching interdisciplinary topics that have legal components. Yet, persons in these careers have not had the opportunity for any formal legal training – unless of course they attend law school and pursue the Juris Doctorate (“JD”) Degree.

Although the JD Degree is a prerequisite for practicing law, the University of Nebraska recognizes that not everyone who is interested in the law is interested in practicing law. That is why we developed the Master of Legal Studies (“MLS”) Degree Program. The MLS Degree Program is designed for individuals who are not interested in practicing law but who are interested in developing a better understanding of the law as it affects their non-legal careers or areas of interest. Anyone who has or will have an undergraduate degree by the time they would begin taking classes can apply for admission to the MLS Degree Program.

The MLS Degree will be conferred upon the successful completion of 33 credit hours of classes at the College of Law and a final oral examination. Students can either take classes on a full-time basis, which will enable them to complete the program in one calendar year, or on a part-time basis. Students who take classes on a part-time basis must take at least one class each semester and must complete the program within three calendar years. The requirement that a student complete all requirements for the MLS degree within three years may be waived by the Dean or his/her designee. All classes are offered during the day; there are no night classes.

An MLS Degree Program student who is also currently enrolled in another graduate degree program at the University of Nebraska will receive MLS credit for three hours of coursework in the student’s department of primary study as long as those credit hours are taken and completed during the time that the student is enrolled as an MLS student. Thus, a student concurrently enrolled in another graduate program at the University of Nebraska must only complete 30 credit hours at the College of Law to receive the MLS degree. The three hours must be in course work, not as a research or teaching assistant, and must be approved for MLS credit by Dean of the College of Law or his or her designee.

Note: The College of Law has specific requirements for MLS joint degree programs with the Department of Psychology at UNL and the Program in Gerontology at UNO. The requirements governing those joint degree programs remain in effect and should be consulted for students interested in those specific joint degree programs.

Students enrolled in the MLS Degree Program enjoy considerable freedom in structuring their course of study and can take most of the courses offered at the College of Law; there are six to eight hours of required courses, depending on the student’s focus area.

Course Requirements

Required courses

1. One of the common law courses in Contracts, Property or Torts. Contracts and Property are year-long courses, 3 credit hours each semester. Torts is a fall semester, 4-credit hour course.

2. Legal Analysis, Writing and Research (LAWR) – 2 credit hours in the fall semester.
3. The common law course and LAWR must be taken during the student’s first year in the program. If the demands of another academic program in which the student is enrolled make it impossible for the student to take any of the common law courses during the student’s first year in the program, the student may request permission from the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs of the College of Law to delay satisfaction of the common law course requirement until the student’s second year. The request must be in writing and must be submitted as soon as reasonably possible but no later than one week before the first day of regularly scheduled classes. If the request is granted, the student may be permitted to take a limited number of courses prior to the student’s second year in the program

Elective courses

1. A student who takes LAWR and Contracts or Property will be required to take an additional 25 credit hours of Law College courses, or 22 credit hours if the student is enrolled in another graduate program concurrently.
2. A student who takes LAWR and Torts will be required to take an additional 27 credit hours of Law College courses, or 24 credit hours if the student is enrolled in another graduate program concurrently.
3. A student cannot take courses in lawyering skills such as Advocacy in Mediation, Appellate Advocacy, Business Planning, Client Counseling, Mediation, Negotiations, Pretrial Litigation and Trial Advocacy.
4. A student cannot take more than two seminars or independent studies.
5. A student cannot take more than 12 hours of first year law courses (excluding LAWR) without prior approval. Those courses are Civil Procedure, Contracts, Criminal Law, International Perspectives in the U.S. Legal System: Practicing Law in a Global Legal Environment, Property, and Torts.
6. A student cannot take more than 12 hours of interdisciplinary Law/Psychology courses. Those courses are Law & Behavioral Science, Mental Health Law, Topics in Law & Psychology, and Psycholegal Research. Topics in Law & Psychology may be taken twice (maximum of six hours) if the substantive content is different each time.

All MLS Students are assigned a faculty advisor who works with the student to develop a course of study that best suits the student’s individual interests and needs. Subject to the above limitations, students are free to select their electives from the wide range of courses offered at the College of Law.

Academic Requirements

As previously mentioned, the MLS degree will be conferred upon the successful completion of 33 or 30 hours of course work at the College of Law and a final oral examination. Successful completion of course work means a grade of C or better (on the College of Law grading scale). For students completing 30 hours of course work at the College of Law, successful completion of the 3 credits of course work in another College at the University of Nebraska means a grade of C or better on that College and department’s grading scale. Although receiving a grade below C in a particular course will not render a student ineligible to continue, the course(s) in which the student receives a grade below C will not count toward the required 33 or 30 credit hours. A student who fails to receive a grade of C in Legal Research and Writing or in one of the required substantive courses (Contracts, Property or Torts) will be allowed to

repeat the course once. If the student fails to achieve a grade of C in the repeated course, the student will be dismissed from the MLS Program. In addition, a student will also be ineligible to continue in the MLS Program if the student

- a. fails 6 credit hours or
- b. has less than a C average at the end of the semester or summer session in which the total number of credit hours in which the student has received a grade first totals at least 33 credit hours.

The cumulative grade point average of an MLS student shall be computed at the conclusion of the semester or summer session in which the number of credit hours the student has taken and received a grade totals at least 18 hours. If the student's cumulative grade point average is less than 4.500, the student shall be placed on probation.

The MLS student must file a Memorandum of Courses with the Graduate College prior to completing one-half of the program.

The final oral examination is given near the end of the semester in which conferral of the MLS degree is expected. The student must arrange for three faculty members from the College of Law, who are also members of the Graduate Faculty, including at least one Graduate Faculty Fellow, to give the oral examination. The student must file the Final Examination Report for Masters Degree with the Graduate College at least four weeks before the final oral examination date.

Tuition and Fees

Since MLS classes are all law classes, MLS students are assessed the College of Law tuition rate. Tuition is set every year by the Board of Regents. MLS students are assessed a College of Law fee for two semesters, in addition to University fees and tuition.

Admissions Procedures

Students may begin taking classes only during a fall semester. If you are interested in applying for admission to the MLS Degree Program for the fall semester, you should begin the application process as soon as possible. The sooner the College receives all required information, forms, and letters, the sooner the College can inform you of whether you will be admitted into the program. The application deadline for the fall semester is April 15.

In order to apply for admission, you need to do the following.

1. Complete the MLS Degree Program Application online at <http://law.unl.edu/master-legal-studies/>.
2. Complete the Graduate College Application for Admission. Graduate College applications are only available on-line at <http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/>. On the Graduate College Application, Part III, under "Admission Objective", indicate "Legal Studies/MLS" in the Major/Degree box.
3. Submit a non-refundable application fee of \$50 to the Graduate College. You do not need to pay an additional application fee to the College of Law.
4. Have every undergraduate or graduate school you have attended or are now attending forward a copy of your transcript to the Graduate College.
5. Two letters of recommendation must be sent to the College of Law by individuals who know you personally and can comment on your analytical skills. Please have those individuals complete the "Letter

of Recommendation" form which is attached to the MLS Degree Program Application.

6. If you have taken the LSAT (Law School Admission Test), you must have your score forwarded to the College of Law. If you have not taken the LSAT but have taken either the GMAT (Graduate Management Admission Test) or GRE (Graduate Record Exam), you must have your scores on those tests forwarded to the College of Law. If you have taken any other standardized test for a graduate study program, you may but are not required to forward the scores to the College of Law.

Your application for admission will be reviewed by the Admissions Committee of the College of Law. If accepted, you will be asked to develop a proposed course of study in consultation with your faculty advisor. Although you will be taking classes at the College of Law, you will be enrolled in the Graduate College.

It should be emphasized that the MLS degree is not a substitute for the Juris Doctorate degree ("JD"). Individuals who are interested in practicing law or in applying for admission to the bar should seek a JD degree, not an MLS degree.

If you have any questions about the MLS Degree Program, please feel free to contact the Admissions Office of the College of Law.