

LAW, SJD

Penn Law's Doctor of the Science of Law (SJD) program advances legal scholarship by producing graduates who have made significant contributions to their chosen area of study and who are prepared to become leaders in the international academic community.

The SJD is the highest law degree offered by the University of Pennsylvania. All applicants must have already earned an LLM, JD, or equivalent degree from Penn Law or another comparable institution.

For more information: <https://www.law.upenn.edu/admissions/grad/sjd.php>

Curriculum

The SJD is an advanced law degree requiring the written submission and oral defense of a major piece of independent research that makes an original and substantive contribution to legal scholarship ("the dissertation"). An LLM thesis may be incorporated into the doctoral dissertation, if appropriate.

Completion of the SJD ordinarily will be within three years following admission to the program, although the SJD candidate may petition for an extension. The Graduate Programs Committee, with the approval of a student's dissertation committee, may grant extensions to students in good standing.

First Year Requirements

All SJD students are required to spend the first full academic year of their SJD program in residence at the Law School. During the first year, students are expected to:

- Secure the consent of a faculty member from among Penn Law's standing faculty to serve as an advisor. The advisor will also serve as the chair of the student's dissertation committee;
- Complete and submit to their advisor a revised research proposal and a bibliography that substantially builds on the initial proposal submitted with the student's application;
- Complete a specially designated course or seminar offered annually for SJD students; and
- Complete a one-semester course in their area of specialization chosen from among those offered to upper level JD students.
- In addition, first year SJD students may apply to serve as legal writing fellows who assist LLM students. SJD students who are accepted to be legal writing fellows typically receive a small stipend.

Second Year Requirements

If the faculty advisor approves the proposal, during the second year the student is expected to:

- Submit a dissertation outline to their advisor;
- Assemble their full dissertation committee, which must consist of three members, two of whom (including the chair) must be members of Penn Law's standing faculty. The third dissertation committee member may, in appropriate cases, be selected from outside the Law School. Determinations regarding the inclusion of a committee member from outside the Law School shall be made by the student's advisor in consultation with the Deputy Dean for International Affairs.

Third Year Requirements

If the faculty advisor approves the outline, during the third year the student is expected to:

- Submit a draft dissertation to their committee (target deadline – October 1);
- Submit a completed dissertation to their committee (target deadline – February 15);
- Orally defend their dissertation before the dissertation committee.

Dissertation Requirements

Dissertations must make an original and substantial contribution to legal scholarship. This requirement is ordinarily satisfied by work equivalent in scale and quality to a book, extended monograph, or series of scholarly articles reflecting intensive and creative research with respect to a specific topic, problem, or area of law. The work, both in content and form, must be of publishable quality.

The oral defense of the dissertation occurs after the members of the dissertation committee determine that the dissertation substantially satisfies the requirements of the program.

Following a successful dissertation defense, an SJD candidate must submit three copies of their dissertation to the Executive Director for Graduate Programs for placement in Biddle Law Library.

The degree and major requirements displayed are intended as a guide for students entering in the Fall of 2025 and later. Students should consult with their academic program regarding final certifications and requirements for graduation.
