March 5, 2018

Dean Maureen O’Rourke, Council Chairperson
Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar
321 N. Clark Street, 21st Floor
Chicago, IL 60654-7958

Via email to JR Clark, jr.clark@americanbar.org

Re: Omitting the requirement of a “written assessment” to Standard 601(a)(3)

Dear Dean O’Rourke and Members of the Council:

On behalf of the membership of the Society of Academic Law Library Directors ("SALLD"), we write to you regarding the proposed change to Standard 601(a)(3) of the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools ("the Standards") that omits the requirement for a written assessment of law school libraries. SALLD, founded in 2008, is an organization of 153 law library directors, drawn from over 75 percent of the 202 fully accredited law schools in the United States.

The proposal to drop the “written” component of a library assessment was apparently made because some law libraries were confused about what form a written assessment would consist of and its purpose. The requirement for a written assessment was inserted into the Standard because of a desire to include law libraries in law school strategic planning, but the requirement of a written assessment was dropped from Standard 203 (relating to library involvement in law school strategic planning), and the language relating to a written assessment was retained in Standard 601.

SALLD argues that the requirement for a written assessment be retained, regardless of the law school strategic planning process. The omission of questions relating to library collections, personnel and services in the Annual Questionnaire makes a regular and written assessment of library operations and functions crucial to establishing whether our libraries comply with the Standards, especially in the years between site visits by the ABA. These assessments have the ability to show whether and how our libraries are complying with the Standards and meeting the needs of our faculty and students. SALLD posits that “written” assessments can take any form that works for these purposes, whether through regular surveys, focus groups, annual reports or any other method that is appropriate to each law school library. Without the requirement of a written assessment, changes in personnel, both in the law libraries and in their law schools, budget and funding changes and trends, law school and library demographic changes may be lost, hidden or simply not available.

The ABA has put great value and emphasis on assessments, as evidenced in Chapter 3 of the Standards. Written library assessments would support ABA efforts to “measure and improve” (Standard 314) student learning. Standard 315 requires law schools to “conduct ongoing evaluation of the law school’s program of legal education”. Academic law libraries are an integral part that education. We provide resources for students to learn the law, teach legal
research and support the teaching, research and scholarship of faculty. Retaining the requirement of a “written” assessment simply furthers the goals of the ABA for an excellent education for every law student.

On behalf of SALLD, we respectfully urge the Council to retain the requirement for a ‘written” assessment of law libraries.

Sincerely,

Adeen Postar, Chair
Society of Academic Law Library Directors