March 19, 2018

Dean Maureen O’Rourke
Chair
Section on Legal Education and Admission to the Bar
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Dean O’Rourke and Members of Council:

American Association of Law Libraries Comments on Proposed Change to Standard 601 of the ABA Standards for the Approval of Law Schools

The American Association of Law Libraries (AALL) welcomes the opportunity to submit these comments on the proposed change to Standard 601 of the ABA Standards for the Approval of Law Schools. AALL is the only national association dedicated to the legal information profession. Founded in 1906, AALL has over 4,200 members from a wide range of institutions, including law schools, law firms, government agencies, and corporate law departments. Nearly 1,600 association members report that they serve in law school law libraries in the United States, and the association’s Academic Law Library Special Interest Section has over 1,250 members.

Comments on Standard 601 - Library Information and Resources, General Provisions

The recent proposed change to Standard 601(a)(3), calls for the removal of a written assessment of the effectiveness of the library in achieving its mission and realizing its established goals. The American Association of Law Libraries advocates for the requirement of rigorous planning and written assessment of the library to be effective in providing students and faculty appropriate resources and services tailored to meet the school’s program of legal education. While a law library and law school should be able to determine what method of assessment meets the needs of the institution, it is important that all final assessments and outcomes be documented and preserved in writing for the following reasons:

- A written assessment best captures the state of the library at any given period of time, including contributions to the curriculum, instruction, and scholarly services. A regular process that includes written assessment creates benchmarks, a standard or point of reference to measure success and failure over time. Such written assessments are invaluable tools for effective, knowledgeable, and responsive change.
• An unwritten assessment can become inaccurate, muddled, or irretrievable. Oral communications are fraught with the tendency to be easily forgotten, misinterpreted or misconstrued.

• A written assessment of the law library is most effective in documenting the not readily discernible but important work that the library performs to maintain appropriate cost-effective resources and services in the rapidly evolving environments of law, legal education, and information management. A written assessment also serves to ensure that the law school is informed about the value of the library to the program of legal education.

• Finally, a written assessment facilitates transparency and can be shared easily with all stakeholders, including faculty, students, alumni, the university community, accrediting bodies, and other interested parties.

For the reasons enumerated above, the American Association of Law Libraries urges that the Standards Review Committee and the Council retain the existing Standard, requiring that the law library working with the dean and faculty, engages in a regular planning and assessment process, including written assessment of the effectiveness of the library in achieving its mission and realizing its established goals.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Greg Lambert
President