American Bar Association  
Standing Committee on Paralegals  
321 North Clark Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60654-7598

APPROVAL PROCESS PROCEDURES, REPORTING INSTRUCTIONS AND 
GENERAL INFORMATION®

SUBMISSION OF REPORT AND FEES

The following are the procedures to apply for approval or reapproval of a paralegal education program:

1. The ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals (“Standing Committee”) has implemented the ABA Paralegal Education Program Approval Process Reporting System (the “electronic reporting system”). All approval, reapproval and interim reports must be submitted through the electronic reporting system.

2. A program seeking initial ABA approval must complete a Request for Access to the ABA Electronic Reporting System form, which can be found on the Standing Committee’s website at: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/paralegals/ls_prlgS_ers_initial_ap plication_access_request_form.authcheckdam.pdf Once the form is received, an invoice for the initial application fee is sent to the program. After the ABA receives the application fee, access to the system is granted and the program director receives specific log-in information.

3. Approved programs will receive user information from the ABA. Once an approved program receives its user information, the program director or other authorized user will be able to access the electronic reporting system and begin preparation of the reapproval report. Programs submitting reapproval applications will be invoiced for the reapproval application fee, to be submitted when the reapproval report is due.

4. Prepare your report using the electronic reporting system. Additional information on using the electronic reporting system can be found on the Standing Committee website at: http://www.americanbar.org/groups/paralegals/resources/approval_process_resources.html

5. If you have any questions concerning the procedure for submitting your materials, please contact Jessica Watson, Approval Process Manager, at Jessica.Watson@americanbar.org or (312) 988-5757.
PREPARING SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS

Please adhere to these procedures in preparing your report:

1. Prepare the report in exact conformity with the electronic report forms and instructions.

2. Submit the electronic report with full and complete responses and all the required documents uploaded properly in the electronic reporting system.

3. After all data has been entered, the program director electronically signs the report. The Dean/President of the institution then reviews the report and electronically signs the report. The report is then electronically submitted to the ABA by the program director.

REVIEW OF REPORT BY ABA

The self-evaluation report is reviewed by the staff and by the Standing Committee’s educational consultant.

If the review of the report reveals that the program does not meet one or more guidelines or if additional information or revisions are required to complete the report or to assess compliance, the staff informs the program director, specifying in detail the necessary changes.

The program must revise the electronic report by the date designated by the ABA staff, the revised report is then reviewed by the staff and the educational consultant.

A site visit is scheduled when the application is found to be substantially complete and the program appears to be operating in compliance with the Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs (“the Guidelines”).

SELECTION OF SITE VISIT TEAM AND SCHEDULING OF SITE VISIT

When the staff and the educational consultant have determined that the self-evaluation report is substantially complete, the staff contacts the program director to determine dates for a site visit. The site visit and site visit report are key parts of the approval process.

The Approval Commission of the Standing Committee on Paralegals (“Approval Commission”) has concluded that site teams for initial approval and reapproval visits will have two members, composed of representatives of the ABA Standing Committee or Approval Commission, program directors or paralegal educators from another institution offering an ABA-approved program, and experienced paralegals or paralegal managers. The team chair coordinates the work of the team. Follow-up or special visits may be conducted by a two-person team or a single visitor.
All members of site visit teams are bound to adhere to the Statement of Conduct for Evaluators, Commissioners, and Standing Committee Members in the Approval Process of Paralegal Education Programs. This Statement affirms the obligations of site visit team members to be impartial and fair, to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety, to preserve confidentiality, and to avoid conflicts of interest. If a program being visited believes that a site visit team member has a conflict of interest that should prevent service on the team, the program director should so inform the staff at the time the team is selected.

Once members of the site visit team have been selected, staff informs the program director of the names and affiliations of the team members and the dates of the visit. Arrangements for site visits are made as soon as possible after a report is ready, but at least three weeks prior to the visit.

Once the visit is scheduled, the program director must immediately:

1. Prepare a draft agenda for the site visit per the instructions below and send it to the team chair.
2. Arrange with site visit team members for travel and accommodations and for direct payment or reimbursement of expenses.

Site visit team members review the report before the visit and may request additional information through the chair of the site team.

If you have any questions concerning the site visit process, please contact Noemi Aguirre, Report Review Coordinator, at Noemi.Aguirre@americanbar.org or (312) 988-5617.

EXPENSES OF THE VISIT

The applicant institution is required to bear the cost of travel, meals, and lodging for the site visit team. Arrangements MUST be made by the institution for direct payment of transportation and lodging expenses or for reimbursement of expenses to site visit team members. (G-104.J) Programs failing to pay directly or reimburse expenses are subject to sanctions, including withdrawal of approval.

SITE VISIT

The purpose of the site visit is for the team to verify and supplement the information contained in the self-evaluation report so that the Approval Commission can assess compliance with the Guidelines. The site team chair may ask the program director to provide additional information to address any questions that arise regarding the information provided in the self-evaluation report.

The site visit usually lasts one and one-half days and consists of the following activities:

1. Meetings with the program director.
2. Meeting with the president of the institution, or his/her designee.
3. Meeting with representative group of students.
4. Meeting with graduates of the program.
5. Meeting with the faculty.
6. Meeting with the advisory committee.
7. Observation of legal specialty classes in session.
8. Review of legal specialty courses offered in alternative delivery formats.
9. A tour of the physical facilities, including library and classrooms.
10. Meetings with key administrators and staff, such as placement director, admissions counselor, academic dean, and director of student services.
11. Review of records, such as faculty evaluations, student files, and samples of student work. (See more below.)
12. An exit meeting at which the evaluation team advises program officials of tentative findings and recommendations.

A draft agenda for the site visit must be prepared by the program director and sent to the chair of the evaluation team as soon as possible after the visit has been scheduled. The chair reviews the agenda and requests any necessary changes to the schedule. The final agenda will be determined by the chair of the site visit team.

During the visit, the site team meets in executive session several times. Adequate time should be provided in the schedule of activities for these meetings. A private meeting room should be provided for use of the team for the duration of the visit. Clerical assistance and/or secure access to computers should be available at the team’s request.

Please see the Instructions for Hosting a Site Visit for more detailed information on site visits.

SITE VISIT TEAM REPORTS AND ACTION BY THE ABA

The Approval Commission and Standing Committee rely on the site visit report to learn about the paralegal education program. The primary purpose of the report is to provide the Approval Commission and Standing Committee with the foundation they need to review the program’s compliance with the Guidelines. The report of the site evaluation should be written to give as much information as possible to the Approval Commission and Standing Committee so that they may take appropriate action, based on the team’s report and the documents submitted by the program.

When the site visit team has agreed upon the report, it should be transmitted only to ABA Staff. The chairperson of the site team shall not distribute the report to the program. Members of the team shall consider the report to be a confidential document and shall not share it with others.

In accordance with procedures established by the Standing Committee, the report will be reviewed by staff and the Educational Consultant. The chair may be asked to amplify or modify certain portions so that the report will provide the Approval Commission and Standing Committee the information needed to determine the program’s compliance with the Guidelines. Following this review, the ABA staff will make the report available to the program. The program director will review the report and may correct factual mistakes. In the event the program director wishes to respond to the report or include new information occurring after the site visit that may be relevant to one or more of the site team’s
observations, the program director may send any such response to the ABA staff who will distribute it to members of the site team. Comments from the program and any additional comments from the team will be attached to and made a part of the site evaluation report that will be submitted to the Approval Commission.

The report should be completed as soon as possible after the site evaluation visit. We ask the team to submit the completed report to the ABA no later than three weeks after the conclusion of the site visit. The report is submitted electronically. ABA staff use Microsoft© Word processing software. The site visit chair should submit the site visit report in Microsoft© Word format.

The Approval Commission is charged with the day-to-day administration of the approval process in accordance with rules and procedures established by the Standing Committee. The Approval Commission, consisting of 13 volunteers, meets twice a year for consideration of paralegal education programs seeking ABA approval or reapproval. Meetings are usually held in the fall and spring (late October/early November and late April/early May). Dates of the Approval Commission meetings are posted on the Standing Committee website. The Approval Commission makes recommendations concerning the status of programs to the Standing Committee.

Members of the Approval Commission include paralegal educators, practicing lawyers, and paralegals. All members read each site evaluation report, but one Commission member, the Chair of the site evaluation team, presents the report at the meeting. After consideration of the site evaluation report and other relevant materials, the Approval Commission may:

- recommend approval or reapproval, if it concludes that the program is operating in compliance with the Guidelines;
- conclude that a program is not in compliance with one or more guidelines or that compliance cannot be assessed, in which case it will defer action and notify the program of the specific information or action needed prior to making a recommendation to the Standing Committee. In such cases, the program is required to submit a progress report and may be required to host a follow-up site visit.

Other actions that may be taken with regard to a program’s status include granting or denying approval or reapproval, issuing warnings to approved programs, placing an approved program on probation, issuing an order to an approved program to show cause why its approval should not be withdrawn, and withdrawing approval. Warnings may be issued by the Approval Commission Chair or the Commission as a whole; probation or an order to show cause why approval should not be withdrawn may be imposed by the Standing Committee. All other actions are taken by the House of Delegates at the recommendation of the Standing Committee. Dates of the Standing Committee and House of Delegates meetings are posted on the Standing Committee’s website.

APPEALS

Recommendations of the Standing Committee to the House of Delegates may be appealed in
accordance with the ABA Constitution and Bylaws, and related policies.

INTERIM REPORTS AND ANNUAL FEES

The period of approval is seven years. Approved programs are required to furnish the Standing Committee with an interim report during the third year of a program’s approval period, on a date to be determined by the Standing Committee. (G-104.I) Each program will receive notice of the date on which the interim report is due at the time of its approval and reapproval. The interim report is submitted through the electronic reporting system.

The effective date of a program’s reapproval is the date the program was scheduled to have been reapproved, i.e., seven years from the month and year of its last approval by the House of Delegates. The date of the visit or the action by the House of Delegates is NOT the effective date of approval or reapproval.

Each approved program pays an annual fee. Approved programs are invoiced for the annual fee in February of each year. The fee is due on or before May 1 of each year. Approved programs do not pay annual fees in the calendar year in which a reapproval application is submitted.

Failure to submit interim reports or annual fees on time may subject the program to monetary penalties and possible sanctions including withdrawal of approval.

If you have any questions concerning the procedure for submitting the interim reports, please contact Noemi Aguirre, Report Review Coordinator, Noemi.Aguirre@americanbar.org or (312) 988-5617.

SUBSTANTIVE/MAJOR CHANGES

Each approved program also has an affirmative responsibility, whether a report is due or not, to notify the Standing Committee in writing of any major change which affects its program at the time the change is made or should have been discovered.

Programs are required to use the Substantive Change and Reporting Forms in the electronic reporting system. The forms can be found under the Application Tab, Select “Create,” Select “Substantive.” Effective September 1, 2013, approved programs are assessed a fee when reporting certain Substantive/Major Changes as identified in the Fee Schedule posted at: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/paralegals/ls_prlgs_fee_schedule.authcheckdam.pdf

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