MEMORANDUM

To: Program Directors, ABA Approved Programs
From: Jessica Watson, Approval Process Manager
Re: COVID-19 Pandemic Matters
Date: June 12, 2020

The American Bar Association Standing Committee on Paralegals (Standing Committee) provides the following guidance to approved programs relating to site visits, compliance concerns and reporting requirements related to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

1. Virtual Site Visits: The Standing Committee has adopted a policy for the limited use of virtual visits to be conducted during the period September 1, 2020 through April 30, 2021. The full policy is included at the end of this Memorandum and can also be found on the Standing Committee’s website.

The Standing Committee authorized the Approval Commission to issue guidelines for conducting virtual site visits. The guidelines are included at the end of this Memorandum and can also be found on the Standing Committee’s website.

2. Compliance Concerns During the COVID-19 Pandemic: ABA approved programs are part of institutions accredited by an agency approved by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE). The DOE has provided guidance to institutions on how to accommodate students during college/university closures. Institutions are approved to use online technologies to accommodate students without having to seek approval for the use or expansion of distance learning. Further, institutions can request a reduction in the length of the academic year. The Standing Committee recognizes the difficulties for the continuing approval of paralegal programs absent some accommodation and adaption to the present situation. At the same time the Standing Committee needs to ensure the integrity of the ABA approval process for paralegal programs. Therefore, the following will apply to the terms/semesters as noted:

a. The delivery method for all legal specialty courses in which there was a change in delivery method during the Spring 2020 term/semester due to campus closures related to the COVID-19 pandemic will be the delivery method in place prior to any campus closures. The stated hours of instruction and the requirements of G-302.J will be deemed to be satisfied if the program followed its institution’s changes to the academic calendar.

b. The delivery method for all Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and Spring 2021 terms/semesters legal specialty courses will be the actual delivery adopted by the program at the beginning of the terms/semesters, assuming no adjustments needed to be made following the start of the
term/semester due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The stated hours of instruction must be met for the legal specialty courses offered during these terms/semesters.

c. In the event a change in delivery method for legal specialty courses offered in the Summer 2020, Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 semesters/terms is required subsequent to the start date of the semester/term due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, the delivery method in place prior to any changes. The stated hours of instruction and the requirements of G-302.J will be deemed to be satisfied if the program followed its institution’s changes to the academic calendar.

d. If a program is acting in good faith in accordance with its institution’s requirements for any changes in the method of delivering instruction and any changes to the academic calendar necessitated by the COVID-19 Pandemic during the Summer 2020, Fall 2020, and/or Spring 2021 semesters/terms, the requirements of G-302.J will be deemed to be satisfied so as not to result in non-compliance of the Guidelines.

3. Reporting Requirements: Programs will report in their reapproval and interim reports the method of delivery adopted by the programs at the start of the Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters/terms. Programs are required to report on the adjustments made to the delivery of their programs necessitated by the COVID-19 Pandemic. A template will be provided for ABA approved programs to meet the reporting requirements. The template will be submitted via email attachment to Jessica Watson, Approval Process Manager. The following is the timetable for reporting:

   a. Those programs hosting a site visit during Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 will submit the template no later than 30 days prior to the start of the visit.
   b. Those programs which have submitted a reapproval report but do not have a site visit scheduled and those programs which have a reapproval report due in Spring 2020, Summer 2020, Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 will submit the template as part of the revisions requested to their reapproval reports.
   c. Those programs which have an interim report due Summer 2020, Fall 2020 or Spring 2021 will submit the template as part of the revisions requested to their interim reports.
   d. All other programs will submit the template no later than April 15, 2021.

The ABA Staff will work with programs to ensure continued compliance with the Guidelines. Any questions relating to matters addressed in this memorandum should be directed to Jessica Watson, Approval Process Manager.