New Online Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools

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Announcing the New Online Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools

The Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools is now available online at http://ambar.org/official guide. The online Official Guide replaces the ABA-LSAC Official Guide to ABA-Approved Law Schools publication and the ABA data charts previously posted on the Law School Admission Council website.

Standard 509 (Required Disclosures) of the ABA Standards and Rules for Approval of Law Schools sets out the consumer information that each ABA-approved law school must publish. Included in the required disclosures are admissions data; tuition and fees, living costs, and financial aid; conditional scholarships; enrollment data, including academic, transfer, and other attrition; numbers of full-time and part-time faculty, professional librarians, and administrators; class sizes for first-year and upper-class courses, and number of seminar, clinical, and co-curricular offerings; employment outcomes; and bar passage data.

On the new Official Guide page, data charts can be generated for each ABA-approved law school through the Standard 509 Information Reports and Employment Summary Reports drop-down menus. Links to all of the ABA-approved law schools allows users to access the ABA Required Disclosures posted by schools as required by Standard 509.

The Official Guide page also includes links to other ABA information previously included in the Official Guide:

• Legal Education Statistics
• Bar Admissions
• Post-JD and Non-JD Programs
• Pre-Law Information
• Pro Bono Legal Services
• Student Loan Repayment
• The ABA Accreditation Process
We expect that the resources provided by this online Guide will expand and become more useful over time. We hope that you will find the online Official Guide to be a valuable resource and share it with your colleagues and students.
From the Chair
Council Actions on the Comprehensive Review of the Standards

The Honorable Solomon Oliver, Jr.
Chief Judge
U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Ohio

The Section’s Council is nearing completion of a comprehensive review of the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools commenced in 2008 and led by the Standards Review Committee. During the review process, the Committee sent recommendations to the Council, which then circulated the recommendations for notice and comment from interested constituencies, including legal educators, lawyers, judges, bar admission authorities, and university presidents.

At its meeting in San Diego on March 14-15, 2014, the Council approved the vast majority of the recommendations that had been circulated for notice and comment. Importantly, the proposed changes to the Standards are designed to incorporate student learning outcomes into the Standards.

The issue discussed by the Council that generated the most public comment was the effort to allow law schools the possibility of providing for academic freedom and security of position without requiring tenure, with tenure only serving as a safe harbor. A majority of the Council expressed dissatisfaction with current Standard 405. However, neither of the alternative proposals that the Council had circulated for notice and comment were acceptable to a majority of the Council. Therefore, current Standard 405 remains in place.

The Council had circulated for notice and comment alternative proposals for a requirement of experiential instruction. One alternative proposed a requirement of one or more courses totaling at least six credit hours; the other required at least 15 credit hours. The Council determined that six credit hours was the appropriate requirement at this time. The Council also added language to an interpretation encouraging law schools to promote opportunities for law students to provide at least 50 hours of pro bono service during law school.

The Council approved several additional matters for notice and comment: a new Interpretation 503-3 that provides a “safe harbor” for admitting certain students without an LSAT score; and the deletion of a
current prohibition on students (in Interpretation 305-3) from receiving academic credit for paid internships. The Council also decided to send out for comment for a second time proposed Standard 505, which limits the total number of transfer credits that a transferring student can receive toward the J.D. degree from foreign law schools and L.L.M. programs to a third of the total credits needed for graduation. Under the current rule, a transfer student could transfer up to a third of the credits needed for graduation from a foreign law program and an additional third of the credits needed from an L.L.M. program.

The matters sent out for comment will be finalized by the Council at its June meeting in Cleveland. The complete set of revisions is expected to be reviewed by the ABA House of Delegates in Boston at its August 2014 meeting, in accordance with House Rule 45.9.
As the comprehensive review of the ABA Standards and Rules for Approval of Law Schools draws to a close this summer, a few observations about the role that the Standards play in evolution of legal education are in order.

Legal education observers cite the ABA Standards as “a,” “the” or “one of the primary,” reasons why law schools are in the shape that they are in, which for many in the popular press and blogosphere is not yet lean and healthy. The Standards, they say, are: too many, too detailed, too micro, too constraining on innovation, too much under the control of deans, too much under the influence of special interests within legal education, or not transparent enough – a partial list, no doubt.

However, legal education is not nearly as overweight and out of shape as the critics see it. The market is difficult. The legal profession is changing. Jobs are fewer and law graduates need to bring new skills and knowledge to the table if they want to be successful. Schools need to adapt in a shifting and changing environment, and many are. Further, the Standards over time have played a key role in supporting change and innovation in legal education. Finally, the set of Standards that will emerge from this comprehensive review makes important changes, removing some of the requirements that are overly micro and do not go to the core of what makes a “sound program of legal education,” and incorporating learning outcomes and skills training requirements that are more in sync with the contemporary legal profession and higher education environments in which law school operate.

Lastly, and to the main point of this piece, the Standards, at least from my experience as a dean, faculty member, and regulator, are seldom the roadblock to meaningful change, innovation, and adaptation to the environment by law schools. When one remembers that Standards are minimum levels of program, resources, and services required to support a sound program of legal education, this makes sense.
A few examples make the point:

- The new Standards will include a specific requirement for skills courses (law clinics, field placement, and simulations). The current Standards do not include such a requirement, but they do not preclude a law school from offering and, indeed, requiring of its students a substantial amount of practical experience. The quantity, quality, and scope of law schools’ skills offerings is impressive. Students flock to these courses because they see their value. Many schools require some skills coursework as a part of their degree requirements. That is, the Standards are not overly prescriptive on the curriculum that a law school must require, leaving space for the growth of skills programs. They have grown and now provide support for the Standards requiring a minimum amount of such coursework.

- Current Standard 502(a) prohibits a law school from accepting students into its JD program who have not completed three-fourths of the work needed for an undergraduate degree. That is, an undergraduate degree is not required by the Standards for admission to law school. In the conversation around the total cost to a person to get the education needed to become a lawyer, the timeline and expense can be reduced from a typical seven years to six years by law schools and undergraduate institutions creatively working out programs that are usually called 3+3 programs. Some might say that is still too long and too expensive. Perhaps, but the point here is that there is room to maneuver within the Standards, and now several dozen law schools are offering these options.

- The same is true for the length of time it takes to earn a law degree. A JD program is most often referred to as a three-year program, and that’s the way it generally is structured. But current Standard 304(c) requires a period of study of not less than 24 months, not 36 months (or three years). Schools are now exploring the space that the Standards offer to create “accelerated” programs that reduce the amount of time it takes to earn a law degree.

- Schools have considerable unused space to experiment with and incorporate distance learning and other educational technologies into their programs. Current Standard 306 allows a school to grant up to 12 credits toward the JD for true distance learning courses. Additionally, a course does not become a “distance learning” course that counts against that 12-unit limit so long as no more than 1/3 of the work for which credit is granted is done outside the classroom. So, blended learning, a “flipped” classroom pedagogy, and other innovations can be incorporated into the curriculum right now. The ABA does not collect data on how much of this increased use of technology in the context of a traditional residential program is happening, but my own observation would be that it is a tiny, tiny fraction of the space the Standards allow today for innovations in the curriculum based on what educational technology now allows.

Some will say, of course, why should the Standards require any particular amount of undergraduate education for admission to a JD program? Why should the Standards require any particular period of study? Why should the Standards care how much of a JD program is offered online? Sure the Standards provide for a little bit of flexibility and room to innovate, but our problems are huge and the Standards need to get out of the way.

I hear you. But almost no one believes that there should be no Standards. So, the question is really what should a good set of Standards require?
It is certainly fair to argue that the Standards should be quicker to change, should be simpler, and should focus more on the core of what makes a program sound. But “core” means different things to different people. That is what the ongoing conversation will be about. I look forward to being involved in those conversations.

Meanwhile, let’s acknowledge that the Standards leave ample room for law school to innovate, adapt, and change. As we continue to work on making the Standards better, let’s look for the space within them to do what we need to do for our students and the profession.
Remembering Henry Ramsey, Jr., former Howard Law Dean, Council Chair, and Civil Rights Activist

Henry Ramsey Jr., who served as an Alameda County (California) judge, dean of Howard University School of Law, and chair of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, died March 14 in Berkeley, California, five days after suffering a massive stroke. Mr. Ramsey was also active in the civil rights movement and participated in the third march on Selma, Alabama, in 1965 that succeeded in reaching the state capital of Montgomery.

Mr. Ramsey was born in Florence, South Carolina, and briefly attended Howard University before transferring to the University of California-Riverside, where he earned a bachelor’s degree in philosophy in 1960. He then earned a law degree from the University of California-Berkeley School of Law in 1963.

After graduation, Mr. Ramsey served as a Contra Costa County, California, prosecutor before he entered private practice in the late 1960s. He joined UC-Berkeley as a faculty member in 1971 and taught there until 1980. During that time, he also served as a Berkeley city council member from 1973 to 1977. In 1981, Governor Jerry Brown appointed Mr. Ramsey as an Alameda County Superior Court Judge, a position he held until 1990 when he became dean of Howard University School of Law. He served as dean until 1996.
In addition to serving as the Section’s Council Chair from 1991-1992, Mr. Ramsey served on the Accreditation Committee from 1978 to 1983, including a term as chair in 1980-1981. He chaired the Special Committee to Study the Law School Approval Process in 1989 that led to several key recommendations, including improving training for site evaluation teams, promoting less secrecy in the approval process, and creating an intermediate sanction for schools found to be in violation of the Standards. In the late 1990s, Mr. Ramsey chaired the Law School Admission Council’s Bar Passage Study Working Group, which for the first time collected bar examination outcome data by ethnicity and gender and explored factors that could explain differences in outcomes. The study was published in 1998 as the LSAC National Longitudinal Bar Passage Study.

His numerous awards include the Section’s 2000 Robert J. Kutak Award, and two awards from the University of California-Berkeley School of Law: the 2003 Citation Award and the 2006 Judge D. Lowell and Barbara Jensen Public Service Award. The ABA’s Law Student Division created the Henry Ramsey Jr. Diversity Award in his honor, given annually to law students, law schools, or student organizations whose activities advance women; ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; and gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender legal professionals and students. A law academy at De Anza High School in California is also named in his honor.

At its March 2014 meeting, the Council issued the following memorial resolution in honor of Henry Ramsey Jr:

MEMORIAL RESOLUTION
AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION
SECTION OF LEGAL EDUCATION AND ADMISSIONS TO THE BAR
HENRY RAMSEY, JR.

WHEREAS Henry Ramsey, Jr. had a long and distinguished career in legal education, the legal profession, public service, and the judiciary, including service as a prosecutor, as a judge of the Superior Court of California, as a professor of law at the University of California at Berkeley, as dean of the Howard University Law School, and as an elected public servant in California; and

WHEREAS Henry Ramsey, Jr. chaired the Council of the Section in 1991-1992, chaired the Ramsey Commission which studied the accreditation process and led to recommendations which substantially revised accreditation procedures, and served in countless roles in improvement of law schools and the legal profession; and
WHEREAS Henry Ramsey, Jr. was a tireless worker and proponent of justice for all throughout his life, who led in the achievement of civil rights, ethics reforms, rule of law in Africa, bar passage improvement, and trial court procedural improvements; and

WHEREAS Henry Ramsey, Jr. received many honors for his work throughout his career, including the Citation Award from the University of California-Berkeley and the Robert J. Kutak Award, the Section’s highest honor

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, in its meeting on March 15, 2014, that we mourn the passing of Henry Ramsey, Jr. on March 14, 2014, and remember his treasured friendship and his many contributions to public service, the Section, legal education, the judiciary, and the profession.
Standards Notice and Comment: Hearing Scheduled for April 25

At its meeting held on March 14-15, 2014, the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar approved for Notice and Comment the following proposed revisions to the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools:

- Interpretation 305-3 (Study Outside the Classroom)
- Interpretation 503-3 (Admission Test)
- Standard 505 (Granting of J.D. Degree Credit for Prior Law Study)
- Chapter 8 (Council Authority, Variances, and Amendments)
- Definitions
- Rules of Procedure

The proposed revisions and accompanying explanations are published on the Notice and Comment page of the Section’s website.

The Standards Review Committee of the Section has been conducting a comprehensive review of the Standards. As part of that review, the Committee considered multiple drafts and received informal comments from many interested persons and entities.

We solicit and encourage written comments on the proposed changes by letter or e-mail. Written comments should be submitted no later than Friday, April 18.

A hearing on these proposed changes is scheduled for Friday, April 25, 2014, from 9 to 10 a.m. in St. Louis, Missouri. The hearing will be held at The Ritz Carlton, 100 Carondelet Plaza.

Please address written comments on the proposals and requests to speak at the hearing to JR Clark, jr.clark@americanbar.org, by Friday, April 18, 2014.
Join us at the ABA Annual Meeting in Boston

ABA Annual Meeting
August 7-12, 2014

Section Headquarters Hotel
Hilton Back Bay
40 Dalton Street
Boston, Massachusetts
800.370.1233

Preliminary Section Schedule

Thursday, August 7
Council Meeting
Chair’s Dinner

Friday, August 8
Council Meeting
Kutak Award Reception

Saturday, August 9
Deans Breakfast
Annual Section Business Meeting

Details will be posted on the Section’s website as they become available.
Paulette Brown, a partner at Edwards Wildman Palmer and a member of the Section’s Council, is the candidate for ABA president-elect. The ABA nominating committee formally selected Paulette as president-elect at the ABA Midyear Meeting in February. She will be elected by the House of Delegates at the 2014 Annual Meeting in August in Boston, making her the first woman of color to serve as ABA president. Paulette’s one-year term as president will begin at the close of the 2015 Annual Meeting.

JoAnn Epps, dean and professor at Temple University Beasley School of Law, received the 2014 Justice Sonia Sotomayer Diversity Award sponsored by the Philadelphia Bar Association. The award honors an individual who has demonstrated a strong commitment and has made significant contributions to diversity and promotion full and equal participation and inclusion in the legal profession.
Third Party Comments Invited for Law Schools Undergoing Accreditation Site Visits in Fall 2014

Consistent with Internal Operating Procedure 4(a), written comments related to current compliance with the Standards for Approval of Law Schools may be submitted to the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Interested parties wishing to comment on current compliance with accreditation standards by law schools undergoing accreditation site visits during spring 2014 are encouraged to submit signed, written comments to the Section by August 31, 2014.

Law schools undergoing accreditation site visits in Fall 2014 are:

- University of California-Hastings College of the Law
- University of Dayton School of Law
- Duke University School of Law
- Indiana Tech Law School
- Loyola Law School-Los Angeles
- University of Maine School of Law
- University of New Mexico School of Law
- University of North Carolina School of Law
- Pace University School of Law
- St. Mary’s University School of Law
- Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law
- University of Tulsa College of Law

Written comments should be sent to:

Shirley Gonzalez
American Bar Association
Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar
321 N. Clark Street
Chicago, IL 60654-7598
shirley.gonzalez@americanbar.org

Note: Your comments must be signed. Comments, with the signatures redacted, may be provided to the law school and to members of the site team reviewing the law school. Only comments directly related to the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools will be considered.