

Concern for improving the competence of those entering the legal profession was a major reason for creating the American Bar Association in 1878. The Standards for Approval of Law Schools are promulgated to serve that objective.

### **Accrediting Agency for Law**

Since 1952, the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar (“the Council”) of the American Bar Association (“the ABA”) has been approved by the United States Department of Education as the recognized national agency for the accreditation of programs leading to the first professional degree in law. It is the Council and not the ABA that is so recognized.

The majority of the highest courts of the states rely upon ABA approval of a law school to determine whether the jurisdiction’s legal education requirement for admission to the bar is satisfied. Whether a jurisdiction requires education at an ABA-approved law school is a decision made by a jurisdiction’s bar admission authority and not by the Council or the ABA. The Council and the ABA believe that every candidate for admission to the bar should have graduated from a law school approved by the ABA, that graduation from a law school alone should not confer the right of admission to the bar, and that every candidate for admission should be examined by public authority to determine fitness for admission.

### **History**

The ABA in 1879 established the Standing Committee on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar as one of the ABA’s first committees. In 1893, the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar was established as the Association’s first section. Recognizing the need to take further steps to improve legal education, the Section leadership played the major role in creating the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) in 1900. The AALS has a regulatory role in that member law schools must meet its requirements for membership, but the AALS is not recognized by the Department of Education as an accrediting agency, and no jurisdiction requires that one have graduated from an AALS member law school in order to be eligible for admission to the bar.

## PREAMBLE

The Standards for Approval of Law Schools of the American Bar Association are founded primarily on the fact that law schools are the gateway to the legal profession. They are minimum requirements designed, developed, and implemented for the purpose of advancing the basic goal of providing a sound program of legal education. Consistent with their aspirations, mission and resources, law schools should continuously seek to exceed these minimum requirements in order to improve the quality of legal education and to promote high standards of professional competence, responsibility and conduct.

The graduates of approved law schools can become members of the bar in all United States jurisdictions, representing all members of the public in important interests. Therefore, an approved law school must provide an opportunity for its students to study in a diverse educational environment, and in order to protect the interests of the public, law students, and the profession, it must provide an educational program that ensures that its graduates:

- (1) understand their ethical responsibilities as representatives of clients, officers of the courts, and public citizens responsible for the quality and availability of justice;
- (2) receive basic education through a curriculum that develops:
  - (i) understanding of the theory, philosophy, role, and ramifications of the law and its institutions;
  - (ii) skills of legal analysis, reasoning, and problem solving; oral and written communication; legal research; and other fundamental skills necessary to participate effectively in the legal profession;
  - (iii) understanding of the basic principles of public and private law; and
- (3) understand the law as a public profession calling for performance of pro bono legal services.

**ABA Standard 302. CURRICULUM**

(a) A law school shall require that each student receive substantial instruction in:

... (5) the history, goals, structure, values, rules and responsibilities of the legal profession and its members.