

Law School Accreditation

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Accreditation and what it means to you. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary the definition of accreditation is "to recognize (an educational institution) as maintaining standards that qualify the graduates for admission to higher or more specialized institutions or for professional practice." Law schools generally fall into three categories of accreditation, American Bar Association (ABA) accredited, state accredited or unaccredited.

ABA accreditation - According to the American Bar Association, "Law schools approved by the American Bar Association (ABA) provide a legal education which meets a minimum set of standards as promulgated by the ABA. Every jurisdiction in the United States has determined that graduates of ABA-approved law schools are able to sit for the bar in their respective jurisdictions. The role that the ABA plays as the national accrediting body has enabled accreditation to become unified and national in scope rather than fragmented, with the potential for inconsistency, among the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico,

and other territories. The Council of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is the United States Department of Education recognized accrediting agency for programs that lead to the first professional degree in law. The law school approval process established by the Council is designed to provide a careful and comprehensive evaluation of a law school and its compliance with the Standards for Approval of Law Schools."

State accreditation - Most states have their own accreditation process and in most cases give accreditation status to ABA accredited schools. However, there are many law schools that for one reason or another do not meet all of the ABA accreditation requirements. Some of these schools, however, do meet the states requirements. Note: State requirements can vary by state. If a school meets state requirements it can apply to that state for state accreditation.

Unaccredited - According to the California Bar Association "An unaccredited law school is one operating as a law school in the State of California that is neither accredited nor approved by the Committee, but must be registered with the Committee and comply with the requirements contained in Rules XIX and XX of the Admission Rules, applicable provisions of the California Rules of Court and relevant sections of the California Business and Professions Code. A law school operating wholly outside of California is unaccredited unless it has applied for and received accreditation from the Committee or is provisionally or fully approved by the American Bar Association."

Rules in many other states are the same.

Most states require that you meet certain requirements prior to being eligible to take their bar examination. The California Bar states "To be eligible to take the California Bar Examination, one must have completed at least two years of college before beginning the study of law or must have passed certain specified College Level Equivalency Program examinations before beginning law study and must have graduated from a law school approved by the American Bar Association or accredited by the Committee of Bar Examiners of The State Bar of California or have completed four years of law study at an unaccredited or correspondence law school registered with the Committee or studied law in a law office or judge's chambers in accordance with

the Rules Regulating Admission to Practice Law in California." Most states have similar requirements.

The foregoing suggests that many states will not allow, non ABA accredited out of state law school graduates to take their bar examination, unless they attended school in that state or a school that is certified by that state. Therefore students graduating from non ABA accredited law schools may not be allowed to practice in any state other than the state they attended school. Note: Some states have reciprocal agreements with other states allowing attorneys registered in one state to become a member of the bar in another state without taking a bar examination in the new state.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, there are many fine law schools in this country that are not ABA accredited. Additionally, many ABA accredited schools do not offer night time or part time classes. Finally, there are many more applicants than spaces available in ABA accredited schools, forcing many good students to attend other schools. Therefore, accreditation should not be your only criteria in choosing a law school or in deciding whether or not to hire a particular law school graduate.

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