

## Law deans oppose proposal to accredit online law schools

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April 2 (Reuters) - Deans from 26 law schools have asked the **American Bar Association** to pull back on a proposal to extend its seal of **approval to fully online law schools**, saying more employment and bar pass data for graduates of online and hybrid programs is needed before making the change.

In a public comment on the proposal, deans including those from the University of California, Berkeley School of Law; the University of Houston Law Center; and Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law wrote that the arm of the ABA that oversees law schools hasn't made clear why it should modify its longstanding policy of accrediting only law schools with a brick-and-mortar location.

The ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar in November began the process of modifying its accreditation standards to allow for fully online law schools, with proponents saying **that change would expand access to a law degree and reduce the cost of becoming a lawyer.**

The ABA has accredited a handful of fully online juris doctor programs, but only those offered by accredited law schools that also have brick-and-mortar campuses. The proposed change would allow **graduates of fully online law schools that are ABA-accredited to sit for the bar exam** in any state. The council could make a decision when it next meets in May.

The ABA received 21 letters during the latest round of public comments, **16 of which were in support of accrediting fully online law schools.** Many of the supporters are students, graduates or faculty of Purdue Global Law School, which is the oldest online law school in the U.S. It was founded in 1998 as the Concord Law School before its acquisition by Purdue in 2017.

Other supporters include the **State Bar of Montana** and the **Indiana Supreme Court**, which in February amended its attorney admissions rules **to enable graduates of non-ABA law schools to request a waiver to sit for its bar exam**—a change Purdue pursued.

The Indiana justices wrote that accrediting online law schools will help states **address attorney shortages**, which is a growing problem in their state.

In a public comment opposing ABA accreditation for online law schools, the Illinois Board of Bar Admissions wrote that there are "significant" differences between in-person and online teaching. **Face-to-face interaction is a "critical aspect of the law school learning experience,"** the board's comment said.

Accrediting **online law schools would threaten existing in-person law schools**, wrote Alberto Gonzales, dean of Belmont University College of Law and former U.S Attorney General under President George W. Bush.

"Despite offering a **lesser educational experience**, online schools would be able to out-compete traditional law schools on cost, convenience, and scale," he wrote.

## **SUMMARY**

In bold print are the key elements for a short summary

### **Suggested outline**

#### **1. ABA's decision**

- American Bar Association = approval to fully online law schools
- graduates of fully online law schools that are ABA-accredited to sit for the bar exam
- State Bar of Montana and the Indiana Supreme Court = enable graduates of non-ABA law schools to request a waiver to sit for its bar exam
- 16 of which were in support of accrediting fully online law schools

#### **2. Reasons for such a proposal**

- that change would expand access to a law degree
- and reduce the cost of becoming a lawyer.
- address attorney shortages

#### **3. Reasons for rejection of the proposal**

- Face-to-face interaction is a "critical aspect of the law school learning experience
- Accrediting online law schools would threaten existing in-person law schools
- lesser educational experience

## **Commentary**

### **1. Pros of in-person teaching**

a) on the social side:

More social interaction => sororities + fraternities + clubs + sport is part and parcel of students' lives (campus experience) =close family-like community (even a small town) = to develop social skills + mental health services available

b) on the educational side

- students are more engaged + motivated and stimulated and higher class attendance = meeting with academic advisors + informal meeting and encounters

- healthy competition

- can visit campus library in person

c) on the professional side

- legal clinics = free legal services provided by 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students under the supervision of a professor = legal experience

- networking

- Moots

## **2. Why law deans oppose fully online law schools**

- less money = fees will go down as some facilities and services might disappear +

- loss of prestige and reputation

- serious IP and hacking issues