

Contact: Diana Gonzalez

COLLEGE OF LAW
ACCREDITATION REPORT AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

Action Requested: Receive the accreditation report for the College of Law at the University of Iowa.

Executive Summary: The College of Law (1) underwent a self-study that addressed the standards and criteria defined by the accrediting body; and (2) had an on-site visit by peer evaluators.¹ Approval of a law school by the American Bar Association is not for a fixed period of time, but is continuing approval. Site visits usually occur every seven years. This accreditation report addresses the Board of Regents Strategic Plan priority to provide “educational excellence and impact.”

Background:

◇ **Description of Programs.**

- ☑ The *Doctorate of Jurisprudence (J.D.) Program* enrolls 210-250 students per year and provides the fundamental skills and appreciation of law needed to enter into professional practice. Students must complete 90 academic credits to be awarded the degree.
- ☑ The *LL.M. Program in International and Comparative Law* is designed for graduates of J.D. programs in the United States who wish to deepen their understanding of international and comparative law, including the law pertaining to international business transactions; and foreign-trained jurists who wish to receive either advanced training in the same areas or a more general orientation to and specific training in United States law and legal institutions.

◇ **Purpose of Accreditation.** An accredited educational program is recognized by its peers as having met state and national standards for its development and evaluation.

◇ **Accrediting Agency.** The accrediting body is the American Bar Association.

◇ **Review Process.** The self-study prepared by the College of Law contained the responses to the standards and interpretations required by the accrediting body: general purposes and practices; organization and administration; program of legal education; faculty; admissions and student services; library and information resources; facilities; and Council authority, variances, and amendments.

◇ **On-Site Team Report.** In February 2007, based on the report of the visiting team, the College of Law was asked to provide the following additional information: (1) number of Law School graduates from 2003-2007; (2) data on three or more of the five most recently completed calendar years on the annual first time bar passage rate in the jurisdictions reported by the School and that those 1st time completion rates were no more than 15 points below the average 1st time bar passage rates for graduates of ABA-approved law schools taking the bar exam in the same jurisdictions; and (3) data that 75% or more who sat for the bar exam passed the exam or in at least three of those calendar years, 75% of the students graduating and sitting for the bar passed.

¹ Weather conditions prevented the participation of two team members during the February 25-28, 2007 site visit. The two team members visited the campus at a later date.

◇ Statements Identified by the Visiting Team.

- ☑ “The College of Law is consistently ranked in the top ten most distinguished public law schools in the United States and the 2006 Strategic Plan adopts the goal of maintaining and improving that position, despite state funding.”
- ☑ “The College also is proud of its outstanding law library, which is ranked 1st among public law schools, and 2nd among all law schools in terms of the number of volumes and volume equivalents and separately catalogued different titles in its collection.”
- ☑ “The College has a fully staffed Writing Resource Center and all members of that staff are available to work with students on their writing assignments.”
- ☑ “The resources at Iowa meet the research and educational needs of the students as well as the scholarly needs of the faculty.”

◇ Accreditation Committee Timelines.

- ☑ Site visit occurred in February 2007.
- ☑ In October 2008, the Accreditation Committee notified the College that the Committee had insufficient information available to make a determination regarding the College’s compliance with the following standards and requested that the University submit a report by February 1, 2009:
 - Standard regarding the requirement that the College shall maintain an educational program that prepares its students for admission to the bar, and effective and responsible participation in the legal profession.
 - Standards regarding the requirements that each student receive substantial instruction in writing in a legal context, and other professional skills generally regarded as necessary for effective and responsible participation in the legal profession.
- ☑ On February 24, 2009, the College submitted the requested information.
- ☑ In April 2009, the Accreditation Committee informed the College that, based on the information provided, the Committee concluded that the College had demonstrated compliance with the standards regarding the requirement that “the College shall maintain an educational program that prepares its students for admission to the bar and effective and responsible participation in the legal profession.” However, the Committee also concluded that it currently had insufficient information to make a determination as to the College’s compliance with the following standards and requested that the College submit a report by November 15, 2009:
 - Standard regarding whether the work performed in externships and clinical programs meets the rigorous writing requirement and that work in these programs would not be counted toward both the writing and the professional skills requirement.
 - Standard regarding a requirement for substantial instruction in professional skills beyond that offered in the first-year Legal Analysis and Writing Research course.

- ☑ On November 13, 2009, the College informed the Accreditation Committee that construction was proceeding on the renovated clinical suite with a projected completion of December 31, 2009 and that the renovation would include more faculty and conference space and adequate student and file space as well as a reception area for clients. The College also indicated that it had submitted the bar passage information requested. The College informed the Committee that “with regard to substantial instruction in skills courses, the faculty is proceeding to design a skills requirement that will be both innovative and consistent with the spirit of the standard. To that effect, the faculty passed a resolution requiring additional skills training as a graduation requirement. The faculty also committed itself to subsequent consideration and approval of appropriate further specification of the contents of the professional skills requirement no later than May 2010.”
- ☑ In January 2010, the Accreditation Committee notified the College that the Committee had reason to believe that the College had not provided information to enable the Committee to conclude that the College had demonstrated compliance regarding the following standards and requested a report by May 15, 2010. The Committee also informed the College that if the written report did not establish compliance to the standards, the University President and the College Dean would need to appear at a hearing before the Committee at its November 2010 meeting to show cause why the College should not be required to take remedial action, have sanctions imposed on it, be placed on probation, or be removed from the list of law schools approved by the American Bar Association.
 - Standard regarding rigorous writing instruction required in the externship and clinical courses that would meet the Standard.
 - Standard regarding the lack of a policy that would prevent a student from meeting both the writing requirement and the professional skills requirement by taking one externship or clinical course.
 - Standard regarding the requirement that the College provided for substantial instruction in professional skills, in that although the faculty passed a resolution to require the instruction, it had not determined or implemented the criteria for such a requirement.
- ☑ On May 5, 2010, the College responded to the Commission’s request:
 - *With regard to rigorous writing in the College of Law, all upper division writing requirements are governed by the College’s policy on writing requirements. Students must complete four writing credits, two of which must be completed under “direct and on-going faculty supervision.” The policy makes clear that this faculty-supervised experience is available in both clinical and non-clinical courses, independent research, and seminars. The policy establishes length requirements for papers. One writing credit can be obtained for original drafting of documents that are 4-10 pages in length accompanied by one or more explanatory documents that are 4-10 pages in length. Standards in the policy prescribe length, feedback and criteria for assessment. The rigorous writing policy covers clinical and externship work throughout the College.*

- ❁ *With regard to the implementation of the clinical programs, the Clinic Policy on the Awarding of Writing Credits provides that clinic students may earn one writing credit by completing at least 20 pages of double-spaced text, exclusive of footnotes or at least two 10 page double-spaced pages of original drafting accompanied by one or more explanatory documents of 4-10 double spaced pages, exclusive of footnotes. All of this is consistent with the collegiate writing policy. Students in the clinic request writing credits on the Request for Writing Credits form. The procedure for approval of those credits by the clinic faculty is described in paragraphs two and three of the policy. The College believes that this procedure ensures that those students enrolled in the clinic will have “a rigorous writing experience after the first year.” The clinic procedures clearly meet the requirements of the standard. They conform to the general collegiate writing requirements for graduation in their nature and number. The policy also provides that “the student should also discuss the written work with the clinic faculty member(s) supervising that work.” The clinic faculty meet, discuss and award writing credits at their grading session at the close of each semester. Writing in the clinical programs provides one of the most intensive writing experiences students can have at the College.*
- ❁ *With regard to implementation in externship programs, a non-clinical externship that qualifies for writing credits must be treated as an independent research paper under the rules in the Student Handbook. The collegiate writing credit policy provides detailed length and revision requirements for independent research. These externship writing credits are covered by the collegiate standards for writing quantity, feedback, and criteria for assessment in the Standards section of the policy. The collegiate writing policy covers clinical externships with respect to length, feedback, and assessment criteria.*
- ❁ *Clinical and externship projects cannot be counted for both rigorous writing and professional skills requirements. In April 2010, the faculty adopted a new “Professional Skills Instruction Course Requirement” which includes anti-double-counting language which overlaps to any potential double-counting with any type of course, seminar, or other setting.*
- ➔ *With respect to the requirement that the College provide for substantial instruction in professional skills, the College faculty adopted a “Professional Skills Instruction Course Requirement” in April 2010 that requires each student to complete a professional skills instruction course with approximately 14 hours of instruction in qualifying professional skills listed in the policy and using required instructional methods.*
- ☑ Only July 7, 2010, the Accreditation Committee notified the College that the information provided by the College in May 2010 demonstrated that the College was in compliance with the standards and that the proceedings previously initiated with respect to those matters were terminated.
- ➔ “The standard regarding the requirement that there is rigorous writing instruction required in the externship and clinical courses was met.”

- “The standard requiring the College to have a policy that prohibits a student from meeting both the writing requirement and the professional skills requirement by taking one externship or clinical course was met.”
 - “The standard with respect to the requirement that the College must provide for substantial instruction in professional skills was met.”
 - The proceeding initiated with respect to this matter was terminated and the hearing scheduled for the November 2010 meeting of the Committee was cancelled.
 - The College of Law remains on the list of law schools approved by the American Bar Association.
- ◇ Accreditation Status. In July 2010, the American Bar Association awarded continued accreditation to the College of Law and its Programs at the University of Iowa. While approval is not for a fixed period of time, site visits typically occur every seven years. However, no date was given for the next scheduled visit.