

THE TORERO BLUE BOOK

ACADEMIC ADVISING GUIDE
FOR STUDENTS ENTERING LAW SCHOOL IN FALL 2025

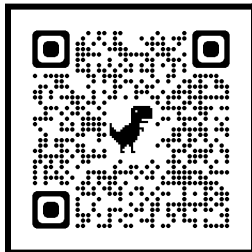


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This is intended to serve as a useful guide rather than a substitute for reading and understanding the Academic Rules and Student Handbook.

Students are responsible for ensuring that they meet all degree requirements.

Online version of this guide



www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/jd-program/graduation-requirements/

CONTACTS

The Office for Law Student Affairs

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(619) 260-4651

lawstudentaffairs@sandiego.edu

Academic Success and Bar Programs

Warren Hall 116-130

(619) 260-4651

lawacademicsuccess@sandiego.edu

Graduate and International Programs (LLM and Study Abroad)

Warren Hall 218

(619) 260-7584

lawgradprograms@sandiego.edu

Law School Registrar

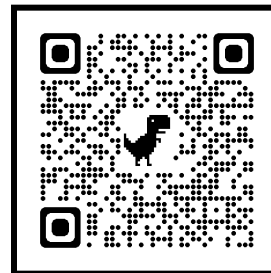
Warren Hall 206

(619) 260-4526

lawreg@sandiego.edu

Make an appointment

www.sandiego.edu/law/current/advising.php



GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Quick Checklist

1. 88 total credits minimum (at least 70 of which must be letter-graded)
2. Residency requirement
3. Required courses:
 - all first-year courses
 - Tax I
 - Professional Responsibility
 - Multistate Bar Exam Review¹
 - Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing²
4. Upper Division Writing Requirement
5. Experiential Course Requirement (6 credits)
6. Minimum GPA of 2.2

1. You need 88 credits to graduate.

Students must earn at least 70 letter-graded credits out of the 88 required. You may petition for a reduction in required letter-graded credits if you participate in an approved semester exchange or enroll in a Judicial Externship for credit. There is no cap on pass/fail credits, only a floor on graded credits.

You may take up to 6 credits of graduate coursework outside of the law school with pre-approval, e.g. at the Knauss School of Business, Kroc School of Peace Studies, School of Leadership and Education Sciences, the College of Arts and Sciences, Shiley Marcos School of Engineering, and School of Nursing at USD.

You have a 72 month (six years) time limit to complete your degree.

2. You must “reside” at USD School of Law for six full-time semesters or eight part-time semesters.

Full-time students must attempt and pay for six (6) full-time regular (fall or spring) semesters. A full-time regular semester is a minimum of 12 credits and a maximum of 16 credits.

Part-time students must attempt and pay for eight (8) part-time regular (fall or spring) semesters. A part-time regular semester is a minimum of eight credits and a maximum of 11 credits.

Transfer students who have entered USD after spending their first year at another law school must attempt and pay for at least four (4) full-time regular (fall or spring) semesters or six (6) part-time regular (fall or spring) semesters to meet their residency requirement.

Students who are approved to change divisions (full-time to part-time or vice versa) must comply with the applicable hybrid residency requirement. See Law Student Affairs for details.

¹ Due to potential changes in the California Bar Exam, the title of this course may change by the time students in this graduating class take the course.

² Due to potential changes in the California Bar Exam, the title of this course may change or the course may be eliminated by the time students in this graduating class take the course.

Summer school credits may be “banked” to take a lighter credit load. Full-time students may draw on their summer credits to take fewer than 12 credits in a fall or spring semester. Part-time students may draw on their summer credits to take fewer than 11 credits in a fall or spring semester. No full- or part-time student may ever go below eight credits in a regular semester. Students will still be charged the regular block tuition rate for their division.

Example: Irene takes and pays for three credits in the summer. Irene decides to apply those credits to the upcoming fall semester, and therefore only takes nine credits that fall. Irene still pays full-time tuition in the fall, but has lightened their course load to allow more time to work.

3. You must take and pass (receive a grade of 1.1 or above in letter-graded or a P or above in H/P/L/F and P/F courses) all required courses.

<u>Course</u>	<u>Credits</u>
Civil Procedure	4
Constitutional Law I	4
Contracts	4
Criminal Law	4
Property	4
Torts	4
Legal Writing and Research I and II	4
Experiential Advocacy Practicum I and II	2
Professional Responsibility	3
Tax I	3 (or 4)
Multistate Bar Exam Review (see note below)	4
<u>Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing (see note below)</u>	<u>2</u>
Total Required Credits	42 (or 43)

Students who enter the final year of law study with a GPA below 3.15 must take an in-person or hybrid version of the Multistate Bar Exam Review, if available. Students with a cumulative GPA above 3.4 may petition to waive the requirement to take the MBE course upon a showing of exceptional circumstances; for example, if the student has no intention of taking a bar exam.

Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing (FBEW) is required for all students who enter the final year of law study with a GPA below 3.4. Students who enter the final year of law study with a GPA at or above 3.4 may take FBEW but are not required to do so. Students with a cumulative GPA above 3.4 may waive the Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing course without petitioning.

4. You must satisfy the upper division writing requirement.

The upper division writing requirement may be satisfied in one of the following ways:

Successful completion of a graded writing course after the first year.

OR

Scholarly written work submitted to the school’s law journals, upon certification of the approving faculty member.

5. You must satisfy the experiential course requirement.

The experiential course requirement may be satisfied by successfully completing one or more experiential course(s) totaling at least six credits. The first year Experiential Advocacy Practicum courses count towards satisfying this requirement.

Certain courses may be designated as meeting either the upper division writing requirement or the experiential course requirement. A course cannot count for both requirements, so you will be asked to make an election at the beginning of the semester.

6. You must graduate with a minimum GPA of 2.2.

DEGREEWORKS DEGREE AUDITING TOOL

You have access to the Degree Audit tool in MySanDiego which will help you track the progress on your degree. **Students are still responsible for ensuring that they meet all degree requirements but Degree Audit can help you track your own progress.** Access at degreeworks.sandiego.edu.

CHOOSING YOUR SCHEDULE

After your first year, you have the opportunity to choose from a wide range of elective courses to fulfill the 88 total credits needed to graduate. Balancing your schedule is important for making sure you graduate and making the most of your law school experience. To do that, you should keep in mind the following targets:

	Average Total Credits Per Semester	Average Letter-Graded Credits Per Semester
Full-Time Students	14.5 credits per semester (two semesters of 14 credits and two semesters of 15 credits)	10.5 letter-graded credits (two semesters of 10 letter-graded credits, two semesters of 11 letter-graded credits)
Part-Time Students	11 credits each semester	8.75 letter-graded credits per semester (8 or 9 credits should be letter-graded every semester)

Recommendations:

- Take two (2) required and/or bar courses per semester.
- Do not take all letter graded credits, mix in some P/F credits.
- Check the final exam schedule in advance.
- Choose elective courses that look interesting and will keep you engaged!

Types of Courses/Credits

There are several ways to receive academic credit in your upper division years. Below are different types of credits that USD School of Law offers.

Bar Subject Courses in a Changing Landscape

To become licensed to practice law, you must pass the bar exam in the state you wish to practice. The courses you took in the first year of law school cover about half of what is on the bar exam. You are strongly encouraged to learn the remaining topics in electives courses.

The California Bar Exam (CBE) typically consists of three parts: (1) the Multistate Bar Exam (MBE), which covers seven broad topics tested via 200 multiple-choice questions; (2) five hour-long essays, using a larger list of topics; and (3) a Performance Test, or PT, which consists of one 90-minute skill-based legal writing assignment.

However, the company that writes the MBE (which is used in 50 out of 51 U.S. states and D.C.) will no longer be publishing the MBE beyond February 2028. For students who started at USD in Fall 2025, that means the MBE will no longer exist when they take the bar exam, so the CBE will be required to change by the July 2028 bar exam.

California is considering using the NextGen UBE (discussed below). Less likely are options like diploma privilege, a portfolio bar exam, the Nevada plan (which modifies licensing to look more like medical school).³ **For now, our recommendation remains to prepare for the CA Bar Exam using the current California topics.**

Students who plan to practice in a state other than California should review that state's bar exam topic list to ensure that they are signing up for the correct electives. While a small number of states still create their own bar exam (like California), more than forty states will be rolling out the NextGen UBE by the time of the July 2028 bar exam. The NextGen UBE plans to focus more on foundational lawyering skills than the bar exam traditionally has in the past.

Below are the USD upper-division electives which cover bar exam topics on the CBE. All other topics are covered in your first-year classes. Students should prioritize these electives so that they are not forced to learn these subjects from zero during the summer bar-study period.

³ Note: California is considering writing its own new exam, which might include topics like Administrative Law and Employment Law, might remove topics like Corporations and Community Property, and might change Trust & Estates to a topic based more on Estate Planning and Probate Law. It may also change the format of the entire test. However, these changes would not be anticipated for the July 2028 bar cycle, as the State Bar would require as much as five years to prepare the new test. Please don't worry too much about these potential new topics. We just included this information here in case you hear information about these topics through the grapevine, and we wanted to be sure you knew that you did not need to worry about these topics being on your bar exam. That might be a problem for future students.

Upper-Division Classes Covering CBE Multiple-Choice Topics	Upper-Division Classes Covering CBE Essay Topics
Constitutional Law II	California Civil Procedure
Criminal Procedure I	Community Property
Evidence	Corporations
	Professional Responsibility ⁴
	Remedies
	Trusts & Estates

USD does not have a course that covers California Evidence, however, most Evidence classes will cover the California distinctions from the Federal Rules of Evidence.

Upper-Division Classes Covering NextGen UBE Topics
Corporations
Family Law ⁵

For the NextGen UBE, all topics can show up on all sections of the bar exam (i.e., there is no distinction between multiple choice and other types of questions related to areas of law). Additionally, it is likely that one of the performance tests on the NextGen UBE will be in the field of Trusts & Estates, but all of the law will be provided on the exam.

We know it can be uneasy to register for classes without knowing what your bar exam will look like. We will continue to keep you in the loop as decisions are made regarding the future of the bar exam.

Concentrations

Many students come to law school with a particular practice area in mind for their future career or quickly develop a special interest. USD offers concentration options in ten key practice areas. These concentrations highlight curricular strengths, offering a rich selection of courses taught by leading scholars and expert practitioners.

⁴ Professional Responsibility is a graduation requirement. Students on the Academic Improvement Plan may *not* count Professional Responsibility as one of the four required upper-division bar classes.

⁵ You may hear that Family Law is not on the NextGen UBE. However, that is only the case for the NextGen UBE from July 2026 through February 2028. Starting with July 2028, Family Law will be re-added as a substantive law topic on the NextGen UBE.

Each concentration requires 18 credits and a 2.2 cumulative GPA in the concentration courses. Successful completion of a concentration is noted on your law school transcript.

- Business and Corporate Law
- Children's Rights
- Civil Litigation
- Criminal Litigation
- Employment and Labor Law
- Environmental and Energy Law
- Health Law
- Intellectual Property and Technology Law
- International Law
- Public Interest Law

Required courses are listed online www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/jd-program/concentrations.

Clinics

USD has over a dozen legal clinics which provide excellent practical legal training during your law school career. Clinical programs offer students the opportunity to train under experienced professors and attorneys, learn professional responsibility in the real world, and acquire interpersonal skills.

Legal Clinics: Clinic applications are available online. Prerequisites vary. All clinics require authorization to enroll, and you may be contacted for an interview by the professor. Enrollment is limited and some clinics fill quickly.

www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/clinics-externships

Consumer Protection Policy Center (CPPC): CPPC's mission is to harness the power of the law to institute positive social change by educating the next generation of leaders. CPPC offers a yearlong course, California Regulatory Law & the Public Interest.

www.sandiego.edu/cpil

Children's Advocacy Institute (CAI): CAI is one of the nation's premier academic, research, and advocacy organizations working to improve the lives of children and youth. CAI trains law students to be effective child advocates through its Child Advocacy Clinic offerings. Prerequisite: Child Rights and Remedies.

www.sandiego.edu/cai

Energy Policy Initiatives Center (EPIC): EPIC is a research center that studies energy policy issues affecting the San Diego region and California. EPIC sponsors the Energy Law and Policy Clinic, a unique opportunity for students to work in partnership with a related state agency to conduct legal and policy research on a topical issue. Students will present their research to the agency at the end of the semester. Prerequisite: Energy Law and Policy.

www.sandiego.edu/epic

Field Placement Program

Externships allow students to receive academic credit for part-time legal work performed under the supervision of an attorney at approved placement sites. Externship credit requires faculty approval, and students must enroll in a faculty-taught course designed to enhance the placement experience. Students work a minimum of 50 hours per credit.

Students must apply for externship approval following the procedures listed online.
www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/clinics-externships

Agency Externship: The Agency Externship Program allows students to earn academic credits for legal work with a government agency or non-profit organization.

Corporate Counsel Externship Program: This program allows students to earn academic credits for working in the legal department of a corporation, company or other business entity. Students may also potentially work in non-legal departments of a corporation as long as they are supervised by an on-site licensed attorney.

Judicial Externships: The Judicial Externship Program allows students to earn academic credits for their work with judges in state or federal trial or appellate courts.

Corporate Tech Externship: This program places students at local law firms and companies to provide legal assistance to technology companies in the areas of corporate formation, financing, contracting, employment, and related areas. The course begins in the fall semester, but the work component continues into the spring semester. Students apply during the spring for the subsequent year. Contact Professor Ted Sichelman for more information.

IP Externship: This program places students at local law firms and companies to provide legal assistance to individuals (inventors, artists, musicians, and others) and tech and media companies in the area of IP law. The course begins in the fall semester, but the work component continues into the spring semester. Students apply during the spring for the subsequent year. Contact Professor Ted Sichelman for more information.

Law Firm Externship: This program enables students to experience the world of legal practice through positions with private law firms. Under the guidance of supervising attorneys, students will handle real-world legal issues, gain invaluable practical experience, and build lasting professional connections.

Law Review and Journals

Membership on any of our student-run journals will help you gain significant experience with legal research, writing, and editing of articles. Through the write-on competition that takes place at the end of exams each spring, rising 2Ls have the opportunity to earn a spot on the *San Diego Law Review*, *San Diego International Law Journal*, or *San Diego Journal of Climate & Energy Law*. If you are a member of one of these journals, you can earn up to two credits for preparation of written work.

www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/journals/

Advocacy Competition Teams

USD offers competition teams which students can join and, in certain circumstances, earn academic credit for their participation. *If you are on one of these advocacy competition teams, you can earn up to one credit each semester with a cap of four credits over your law school career.*

Alternate Dispute Resolution Team (ADR): The ADR Team seeks to foster and encourage the development of client advocacy, negotiation, and dispute resolution skills among USD law students. Members of the team compete in various client advocacy competitions focused on alternative dispute resolution around the country. Competitions include negotiation competitions

(including the national ABA negotiation competition and sports and entertainment law negotiation competitions), client counseling competitions, and mediation competitions.

National Trial Team (Mock Trial): The USD National Trial Team is dedicated to teaching the art of trial advocacy and molding strong future litigators. The team competes in several major trial tournaments every year and is coached by seasoned attorneys with both mock trial and real-life litigation experience. Members of the team are selected through participation in a spring intramural competition.

Appellate Moot Court (Moot Court): The Appellate Moot Court Board is dedicated to fostering the development of appellate advocacy skills among our students. Members of Moot Court receive training from professors and attorneys experienced in legal writing and appellate argument. Moot Court hosts two intramural competitions each year which are open to all upper-division students. Each spring, the Appellate Moot Court Board selects rising 2Ls to serve on the associate board. Students in their last year have an opportunity to serve on the executive board and be a competing member of a national team.

Transactional Law Team (TLT): TLT provides a forum for students to hone their corporate and transactional law skills, to explore the mergers and acquisitions process, and to further develop their negotiation tactics. Members of TLT obtain an inside look into practical corporate transaction deals. The team competes in various regional competitions.

Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot (VICAM): VICAM competes in the Willem C. Vis International Commercial Arbitration Moot in Vienna and Hong Kong. The mission of the team is to foster the development of international legal writing, arbitration, and oral advocacy among its members. VICAM hosts a pre-moot competition here at USD which attracts teams from around the world. Team members are selected in the fall. As a requirement of this team, students must enroll in the companion course, International Asia-Pacific Commercial Arbitration.

Summer Study Abroad

USD's summer study abroad programs provide intensive coursework in international law while introducing USD students to the legal institutions of another country.

www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/study-abroad/.

Semester Exchange

For students interested in studying abroad for a full semester, USD offers exchange programs in various countries throughout the world. Students participating in a semester abroad pay tuition and fees to USD and are responsible to the host university for board, lodging, and any obligatory fees. The credit for coursework undertaken must be approved by USD. Upper division J.D. students may apply for a semester exchange program through the Office of Graduate and International Programs (lawabroad@sandiego.edu; Warren Hall 218).

What kind of classes can students take at the host school?

You can take letter graded classes taught in the law faculty at your host school. You may request to take up to 6 credits in a non-law graduate faculty at your host school, but additional justification is required to explain how the class advances your legal education. You will also be required to write a short summary of how the graduate course integrated with your legal education at the end of the semester.

All classes you take abroad must be pre-approved by the Assistant Dean for Law Student Affairs in order for the credit to transfer to your J.D.

Can I go on semester exchange my 2L fall if I am subject to the Academic Improvement Plan?

No, you may not go on semester exchange in 2L fall if you are subject to the Academic Improvement Plan. There is a required course taught in your 2L fall and the rules state that you must take that course at the earliest opportunity. You may seek approval to go on semester exchange in your third year.

How will your credits taken abroad transfer over to your J.D. degree?

They will transfer over P/F to your J.D. For law classes, you must earn the equivalent of a “C” or better for the credit to transfer back. If you take a graduate level course, you must earn the equivalent of a “B” or better for the credit to transfer back.

If the USD equivalent credit is a half credit, the Registrar’s Office will round down. For example, if you sign up for 29 ECTS credits in Madrid, this is equivalent to 14.5 USD law credits. We will transfer over 14 total credits.

How can you complete your letter graded credit requirement if your abroad classes transfer back P/F?

We will lower your letter graded credit requirement based upon the number of credits you enrolled in on semester exchange. The first 8 credits you take abroad will be treated like “true P/F” credits you signed up for here at USD. The balance of credits will be used to lower your letter graded requirement.

Total credits taken abroad	LG credit reduction amount	New LG credit requirement	How many LG credits remain for 2L and 3L year?
15	7	63	35
14	6	64	36
12	4	66	38

Based on the above, it is a good idea to enroll in 15 credits abroad if possible. J.D. students complete the first year of law school with 28 letter graded credits. If your requirement is reduced from 70 down to 63, this means that you have 35 letter graded credits to complete over the remaining 3 semesters on campus at USD ($63 - 28 = 35$ total credits). This means you will need to do 12 letter graded credits over those 3 semesters on campus here ($35/3 = 11.66$, round up to 12).

If you do 12 credits abroad, you should aim for 13 letter graded credits a semester, which is a significant workload ($66 - 28 = 38$ letter graded credits to complete over 3 semesters; $38/3 = 12.66$, round up to 13). Students on exchange to South Korea’s program have historically struggled to enroll in more than 12 credits. If you’re planning on going on exchange to Seoul, it is therefore prudent to enroll in 13 letter graded credits a semester, or to enroll in a summer letter graded class to make the workload manageable.

Supervised Independent Research

After your first year of law school, you may earn up to two P/F credits during any regular semester or summer for supervised independent research and writing. Contact Law Student Affairs for information.

Non-USD Law Courses

Upon application and approval, you may earn up to six credits of coursework outside of the law school. The courses must be graduate-level or offered at another ABA-accredited law school. Courses must be pre-approved by the Assistant Dean for Law Student Affairs on a case-by-case basis.

USD Graduate Courses: You may take a letter-graded course offered at a graduate school here at USD, and you must earn a B or better. The credits transfer over as P/F.

Other ABA Law Schools: You may take a letter-graded course and must earn a C or better. The credits transfer over as P/F.

Electives and Elective Limitations

In addition to satisfying required courses and incorporating a healthy mix of bar subjects, select electives that allow you to explore areas of intellectual interest and broaden your legal horizons. However, keep the following limitations in mind.

Elective Limitations	Maximum Credits
Independent Supervised Research	2
Independent Supervised Research, Journals, and Advocacy Competition Team Combined	6
Advocacy Competition Teams	4
Non-USD or Non-Law Transfer Credit	6

REGISTRATION INSTRUCTIONS

The Registrar will send you instructions on how to enroll every semester, and they are also online. www.sandiego.edu/law/registrar/registration/how-to-register.php

Registration Schedule

Please be sure to read all emails from the Registrar's Office. They will inform you of your registration schedule for the Fall 2026 semester. This information will also be posted on their website.

www.sandiego.edu/law/registrar/registration/when-to-register.php

Registration begins promptly at 7:00 a.m. Set your alarm and log in by 6:45am!

If you experience technical difficulties during registration, please contact the Help Desk at help@sandiego.edu or (619) 260-7900.

Waitlists

Waitlists are automatically managed. Professors and administrators are NOT able to bypass the waitlists.

You will be notified by email if a spot opens up to you and have 24 hours to take action.

You have 24 hours from the time of email notification to register for the course. If you do not register in that time period, you are dropped from the waitlist and the next person on the waitlist is offered the open seat. **THERE ARE NO EXCEPTIONS TO THE 24-HOUR RULE.**

GRADES

- A minimum GPA of 2.4 at the end of each regular semester maintains good academic standing.
- A GPA below 3.0 at the end of any academic year results in placement on the Academic Improvement Plan.

Grading Policy

The School of Law uses the following grading system:

Grade	Value
A+	4.2 – 4.3
A	3.9 – 4.1
A-	3.5 – 3.8
B+	3.2 – 3.4
B	2.9 – 3.1
B-	2.5 – 2.8
C+	2.2 – 2.4
C	1.9 – 2.1
C-	1.5 – 1.8
D+	1.3 – 1.4
D	1.1 – 1.2
F	1.00
H (Honors)	N/A
P (Pass)	N/A
L (Low Pass)	1.70

First Year Course Grading “Curve”

Grades for all letter-graded first-year courses can range from 1.0 to 4.3 on a mandatory curve. The average of the grades for each course must be between 3.15 and 3.25. The grade distribution must be as follows:

20-25% of students must receive a grade in the range of 3.7 or above.

20-25% of students must receive a grade of 2.6 or below.

8-12% of students must receive a grade of 2.0 or below, and these students also count toward satisfying the requirement that 20-25% receive grades of 2.6 or below.

Legal Writing and Research is graded pursuant to the upper year course grading curve.

Upper Year Course Grading “Curve”

Grades for upper-division courses which are not on the H/P/L/F or P/F scale can range from 1.0 to 4.3 on a mandatory curve. The average of the grades for each course must be between 3.3 and 3.4. The grade distribution must be as follows:

20-25% of students must receive a grade of 3.7 or above.

25-30% of students must receive a grade of 3.0 or below.

No more than 8% of students may receive a grade of 2.0 or below.

EXCEPTION: The curve is only recommended, rather than mandatory, for upper year courses with an enrollment of 25 or fewer students and for graduate tax courses (except Tax I and Corporate Tax). The mean for such courses cannot exceed 3.6.

Ranking

Many students and employers like to understand where a certain cumulative GPA ranks against other GPAs for the same class year.

- At USD, first-year full-time JD students are only ranked after the completion of the first year.
- First-year part-time students are not ranked until their third semester (however, they can obtain a letter from the Law School Registrar indicating their approximate rank had they been ranked with the first-year full-time students).
- Only the top 25% of each group of JD students receive an ordinal rank on their transcript.
- Class rank cut-offs are posted online by the Law School Registrar.

www.sandiego.edu/law/registrar/grading-and-ranks/

Good Academic Standing

Students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 2.4 to remain in good academic standing. First-year students who complete their first year with a cumulative GPA below 2.4 are academically disqualified.

Students who are disqualified after their first year with a cumulative average of at least 2.2 but below 2.4 may petition for readmission. First-year students who complete their first year with a cumulative GPA

below 2.2 cannot petition for readmission. *The rules state that generally, petitions for readmission will not be granted.* Readmitted students are placed on academic probation and given one semester to remedy their GPA to the 2.4 good standing threshold.

Academic Improvement Plan

First Year Academic Improvement Plan

The Academic Improvement Plan provides a select group of students with additional support and coursework to help improve their academic performance. The AIP is designed to help students holistically, including one-on-one counseling and special curriculum changes, providing the tools needed for them to reach their goals.

Students who complete the first semester of law study with a cumulative GPA below 3.0 are subject to the First Year AIP. Students will be required to participate in Academic Success Fellow study groups in the spring semester, as well as meet with an Academic Success & Bar Programs (ASBP) counselor.

Students on the First Year AIP are not permitted to be a representative of a student organization. Students with a GPA above or equal to 2.5 may petition Law Student Affairs for an exception to this rule.

During the summer session following the first year, students who were subject to First Year AIP may not receive academic credit for courses outside the law school. Students with a GPA below 2.5 may not study abroad in the summer session after the first year.

Students on the First Year AIP with GPAs below 2.5 who do not comply with the terms of AIP *shall* be dismissed. Students with GPAs above 2.5 who do not comply with the terms of AIP *may* be dismissed.

Second and Third Year Academic Improvement Plan

Continuing students who complete any subsequent spring semester with a cumulative GPA below 3.0 are subject to Upper Division AIP. Students will be required to successfully complete a designated course, Issue Spotting & Legal Analysis, in the fall semester. Students must also successfully complete (with a grade of 1.9 or above) four upper-division courses on subjects covered on the bar exam (not including Professional Responsibility). Students on AIP must complete these requirements prior to graduation. The bar-subject requirement remains for students even after they achieve a cumulative GPA above 3.0.

Students on Upper Division AIP are not permitted to be a representative or officer of a student organization. Students may also not receive credit for courses outside the law school. Students may petition Law Student Affairs for an exception to this rule.

Students on Upper Division AIP must remain in residence for the following fall and spring semesters.

Students subject to Upper Division AIP who do not comply with the terms of AIP will be dismissed or, if they have reached the end of their studies, shall not be permitted to graduate until all AIP terms have been satisfied.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS & BAR PROGRAMS (ASBP)

Academic Success

The Academic Success side of ASBP offers a variety of services and programs specially designed to help law students succeed during each year of law school.

The cornerstone of Academic Success is the Fellows Program. Fellows are upper-division law students who are selected for each first-year course who will attend class and be a resource to first-year students. Fellows are selected in part because they succeeded in their appointed class, and they usually are selected to work with the same professor with whom they took the course originally. Fellows hold office hours, which are open for all students to ask questions and get study help. Fellows in the spring semester also hold study groups, which are part of the Academic Improvement Plan, for students who might need a little extra help to get through the first year of law school. Fellows also hold workshops throughout the year, including around midterms and finals.

Academic Success is available year-round for drop-ins and appointments. These one-on-one meetings can be to discuss study habits and strategies, exam preparation, or anything at all that can help students to get through law school. Email lawacademicsuccess@sandiego.edu for more information about the resources available or visit calendly.com/asbp to make an appointment.

Bar Programs

The Bar Programs side of ASBP provides advice on succeeding on the bar exam. Success on the bar exam begins during law school, and ASBP is here to help.

The Bar Exam

Timing of the Bar Exam

The bar exam is usually taken in the first offering after graduating from law school (July for May graduates, or February for August or December graduates). Typically, you must sign up for the bar exam while you are still in law school. Dates and deadlines vary by state.

Cost of the Bar Exam

It is important to note that the bar exam can be quite expensive, especially when considering fees for laptops and for passing through moral character or character and fitness determinations (depending on the jurisdiction), as well as the price of a commercial bar preparation program. The required forms for each of these are also typically quite detailed and require time and effort.

You Need to Purchase a Commercial Bar Prep Course

To succeed on the bar exam, you should plan to purchase a commercial bar course from a provider such as BARBRI, Themis, or Helix. These courses will teach graduates everything they need to know on the bar exam. Typically, law school courses do not teach all of the potential law that can show up on the bar exam, so it is perilous to take the bar exam without first doing a full preparatory course. Further, these commercial bar courses provide additional assistance, such as offering large banks of multiple-choice questions, graded essay and PT practice, courses for passing the MPRE (see below), and more. BARBRI, Themis, and Helix are the only primary commercial bar course providers recommended by ASBP.

There are companies that provide supplemental commercial bar preparation, such as AdaptiBar (which provides excellent supplements for the MBE/MCQ), Critical Pass (MBE/MCQ flashcards) and BarEssays (which provides help with California Bar Exam essays). ASBP typically can provide discount codes for these supplemental bar preparation providers. The usefulness and nature of these supplements may change along with the changes to the bar exam.

You Also Need to Take Bar Topic Electives

Even though your commercial bar course will teach you the law, it is quite important that you still take many of the bar courses that will be on your bar exam, as noted in the sections above regarding course selection. This is because it can be overwhelming to have to learn numerous areas of law completely from scratch through a commercial bar course. The areas of law within a topic such as, for example, Evidence, can be packed with rules so dense that it is very difficult to learn it in just a couple of days of lectures after graduating. Better, then, that you take the Evidence course here at USD, and then the commercial bar course acts primarily as a refresher.

A Positive Attitude and Strong Mental Game are Required to Pass

The bar exam is quite difficult. Like law school, it is graded on a curve (sort of), and quite a lot of preparation and thought must go into even just signing up for the bar. However, thinking about the law and its application is likely a large part of why you went to law school, so in some ways, preparing for and taking the bar exam can actually be fun, if you look at it in the right light. In fact, while extensive legal knowledge is required to pass the bar exam, so too is strong mental fortitude required to face the exam.

We are Here to Help!

The ASBP office is here to help you get through the bar exam. Many graduates make frequent meetings with one of the ASBP counselors to stay on track and get study and preparation guidance. Sometimes, it helps just to have a counselor affirm that you are on the right track, and that can help you mentally get through a few more weeks of study. You may just want to know the differences between BARBRI and Themis. Email lawacademicsuccess@sandiego.edu any time you have questions about the bar exam or might just need a little bit of encouragement.

The MPRE

As part of becoming a licensed attorney, most states require that applicants pass the Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination, or MPRE. The MPRE is a sixty-question, two-hour multiple-choice exam covering the Model Rules of Professional Conduct. The MPRE is offered three times a year: in November, and in March and August (two weeks after the bar exam). The score required varies by jurisdiction.

The MPRE is unique in that you can take it prior to graduating law school. In fact, most students take MPRE concurrent with or immediately after completing the required Professional Responsibility course. Typically, BARBRI, Themis, and Helix offer free MPRE preparation courses, so you can see what their services are like when studying for the bar exam. <https://www.ncbex.org/exams/mpre>.

Moral Character Application

A positive moral character determination is one of several requirements for admission to the practice of law in any jurisdiction. For the CA State Bar, the moral character review process takes several months and examines past conduct to ascertain whether the applicant is honest, fair, trustworthy, observes

fiduciary responsibilities, is financially responsible, and respects the rights of others and the judicial process. The CA State Bar will look at criminal records, university code violations, employment history, administrative proceedings, driving records, references, and more as part of their review. In character and fitness jurisdictions, the bar may also examine untreated substance abuse or mental illnesses and their potential impact on the applicant's fitness to practice law.

When Should I Work on the Moral Character Application?

Generally, we advise students to work on this in the fall of their final year. Technically, you can submit the application even as a 1L, but this is not advised because you must update the bar within 30 days of any material developments until licensure, e.g. new jobs, new addresses, etc.

It takes time to pull together all of the required information and documentation to complete the Moral Character application. The full list of requirements is available online at the State Bar of California's website, as is important information to review prior to beginning your application and, if applicable, rehabilitation factors that may be considered when evaluating applicants.

www.calbar.ca.gov/Admissions/Moral-Character.

Students applying for licensure in other jurisdictions can find the relevant requirements on the National Council of Bar Examiners website. www.ncbex.org/character-fitness.

Licensure Checklist & Fees

A checklist toward CA licensure is online

www.sandiego.edu/law/student-affairs/bar-programs/taking-the-bar.php (and provided as a bookmark with a physical copy of this guide). This page also contains guidance specific to non-CA jurisdictions.

Students seeking licensure should familiarize themselves with the associated fees. California fees as published in January 2026 are as follows:

Register with the State Bar of CA	\$155
Moral Character Determination Application	\$900
Application to take the CA Bar Exam	\$878
Laptop fee to take the CA Bar Exam	\$153

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

May I take summer school classes and reduce my tuition during a regular (fall or spring) semester?

No. Payment for summer school courses is in addition to the regular semester tuition owed by each student. Although summer school is an additional out-of-pocket expense, some students find it beneficial to take summer school. Students should consult with the Office for Law Student Affairs to review their options.

May I switch from the full-time division to the part-time division or vice versa?

Yes. Students interested in transferring from the full-time division to the part-time division, or from the part-time division to the full-time division, must submit a request in writing to the Office for Law Student Affairs outlining their intended academic plan. Students who switch divisions will be subject to hybrid residency requirements. Students may only transfer between divisions once. Students subject to the Academic Improvement rules may not be eligible to switch divisions. Students should consult with the Office for Law Student Affairs to review their options.

Is it possible to lower my letter-graded credit requirement?

Yes, under limited circumstances. If you complete a judicial externship, Law Student Affairs will reach out to you about the option to lower your letter-graded credit requirement by up to 3 credits. The default will be to lower the requirement for you, but you may opt out of this if you wish.

Modifications to the 70 letter-graded credit requirement are also made for students who are approved for a visit, participate in a semester exchange, or transferred from another law school.

As a full-time student, may I take 17 credits in a regular semester?

Yes. Upon petition and approval by the Office for Law Student Affairs, a full-time student may take 17 credits once in their law school career. The student must pay the per unit charge for the extra credit on top of their full-time block tuition.

As a part-time student, may I take 12 credits in a regular semester?

Yes. Upon petition and approval by the Office for Law Student Affairs, a part-time student may take 12 credits once in their law school career. The student will still be classified as a part-time student for academic purposes (however, enrolling in 12 credits may result in full-time classification for other purposes, such as parking, etc.). The student must pay the per unit charge for the extra credit on top of their part-time block tuition.

May I graduate a semester early if I have enough credits?

Maybe, under limited circumstances. USD Law can waive one semester of the residency requirement upon petition. This is typically limited to students not on the Academic Improvement Plan and upon a showing of good cause. Talk to an academic advisor about this early in your law school career, as it typically takes advanced planning.

DEGREE MAP TEMPLATES

Full-Time Template (fillable version: tinyurl.com/DegreeMap)

COURSE	Letter Graded	Non-Letter Graded	Total
1L YEAR FALL			
Torts (Required)	4		
Civil Procedure (Required)	4		
Criminal Law (Required)	4		
LWR I (Required)	2		
EAP I (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	14	1	15
1L YEAR SPRING			
Constitutional Law I (Required)	4		
Contracts (Required)	4		
Property (Required)	4		
LWR II (Required)	2		
EAP II (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	28	2	30
2L YEAR FALL			
SUB-TOTAL			
2L YEAR SPRING			
SUB-TOTAL			
3L YEAR FALL			
SUB-TOTAL			
3L YEAR SPRING			
TOTAL			

Part-Time Template (fillable version: tinyurl.com/DegreeMap)

COURSE	Letter Graded	Non-Letter Graded	Total
1P YEAR FALL			
Torts (Required)	4		
Civil Procedure (Required)	4		
LWR I (Required)	2		
EAP I (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	10	1	11
1P YEAR SPRING			
Contracts (Required)	4		
Constitutional Law I (Required)	4		
LWR II (Required)	2		
EAP II (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	20	2	22
2P YEAR FALL			
Criminal Law (Required)	4		
SUB-TOTAL			
2P YEAR SPRING			
Property (Required)	4		
SUB-TOTAL			
3P YEAR FALL			
SUB-TOTAL			
3P YEAR SPRING			
SUB-TOTAL			
4P YEAR Fall			
SUB-TOTAL			
4P YEAR SPRING			
TOTAL			

(Full-Time) EXAMPLE - Toward Criminal Litigation Concentration

COURSE	Credits	Non-Letter Graded	Total
1L YEAR FALL			
Torts (Required)	4		
Civil Procedure (Required)	4		
Criminal Law (Required)	4		
LWR I (Required)	2		
EAP I (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	14	1	15
1L YEAR SPRING			
Constitutional Law I (Required)	4		
Contracts (Required)	4		
Property (Required)	4		
LWR II (Required)	2		
EAP II (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	28	2	30
2L YEAR FALL			
Professional Responsibility (Required)	3		
Evidence	4		
Criminal Procedure I	3		
Agency Externship		4	
SUB-TOTAL	38	6	44
2L YEAR SPRING			
Tax I (Required)	3		
Corporations	4		
Death Penalty	2		
Controlled Substances	3		
Evidence Advocacy Lab (Experiential)		2	
Mock Trial		1	
SUB-TOTAL	50	9	59
3L YEAR FALL			
Constitutional Law II	3		
Remedies	4		
Criminal Procedure II	3		
Mediation Skills (Experiential)		2	
Trial Advocacy (Experiential)		2	
SUB-TOTAL	60	13	73
3L YEAR SPRING			
Multistate Bar Exam Review (Required)	4		
Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing (Required)		2	
Trusts & Estates	3		
Law of Intimate Relations (Upper Division Writing)	3		
Law Firm Specialty Externship		3	
TOTAL	70	18	88

(Full-Time) EXAMPLE - Toward Business & Corporate Law Concentration

COURSE	Letter Graded	Non-Letter Graded	Total
1L YEAR FALL			
Torts (Required)	4		
Civil Procedure (Required)	4		
Criminal Law (Required)	4		
LWR I (Required)	2		
EAP I (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	14	1	15
1L YEAR SPRING			
Constitutional Law I (Required)	4		
Contracts (Required)	4		
Property (Required)	4		
LWR II (Required)	2		
EAP II (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	28	2	30
2L YEAR FALL			
Tax I (Required)	4		
Corporations	4		
Evidence	4		
Negotiations		3	
Advocacy Competition Team (Transaction Law)(Experiential)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	40	6	46
2L YEAR SPRING			
Professional Responsibility (Required)	3		
Constitutional Law II	3		
Corporate Tax	3		
Contract Drafting (Upper Division Writing)	2		
Corporate Counsel Externship (Experiential)		2	
Advocacy Competition Team (Transaction Law)(Experiential)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	51	9	60
3L YEAR FALL			
Criminal Procedure I	3		
Community Property	3		
Securities & Regulations	3		
Business Transactions in Emerging Markets	2		
Corporate Counsel Externship (Experiential)		2	
Advocacy Competition Team (Transactional Law)(Experiential)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	62	12	74
3L YEAR SPRING			
Multistate Bar Exam Review (Required)	4		
Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing (Required)		2	
Remedies	4		
Biotechnology Law (Upper Division Writing)	2		
Entrepreneurship Clinic		2	
TOTAL	72	16	88

(Part-Time) EXAMPLE - Toward Health Law Concentration

COURSE	Letter Graded	Non-Letter Graded	Total
1P YEAR FALL			
Torts (Required)	4		
Civil Procedure (Required)	4		
LWR I (Required)	2		
EAP I (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	10	1	11
1P YEAR SPRING			
Contracts (Required)	4		
Constitutional Law I (Required)	4		
LWR II (Required)	2		
EAP II (Required)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	20	2	22
2P YEAR FALL			
Criminal Law (Required)	4		
Professional Responsibility (Required)	3		
Criminal Procedure I	3		
Law Review (Upper Division Writing Requirement)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	30	3	33
2P YEAR SPRING			
Property (Required)	4		
Tax I (Required)	3		
Health Law & Policy	3		
Law Review (Upper Division Writing Requirement)		1	
SUB-TOTAL	40	4	44
3P YEAR FALL			
Constitutional Law II	3		
Evidence	4		
Corporations	4		
SUB-TOTAL	51	4	55
3P YEAR SPRING			
Trusts & Estates	3		
Community Property	3		
Administrative Law	4		
Independent Supervised Research Paper		1	
SUB-TOTAL	61	5	66
4P YEAR Fall			
Health Law & Bioethics	3		
Remedies	4		
Medical Malpractice		3	
E-Discovery Law		1	
SUB-TOTAL	68	9	77
4P YEAR SPRING			
Multistate Bar Exam Review (Required)	4		
Fundamentals of Bar Exam Writing (Required)		2	
Mediation Skills		2	
Agency Externship I		3	
TOTAL	72	16	88

Online version of this guide



www.sandiego.edu/law/academics/jd-program/graduation-requirements/