

GUIDELINES FOR CERTIFYING PRE-LEGAL AND LEGAL EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO PRACTICE LAW IN CALIFORNIA FOR GENERAL APPLICANTS

Section 6060, Article 4 of the Business and Professions Code specifies certain pre-legal and legal education requirements for certification to the Supreme Court as qualified to practice law in California. In accordance with the statute, general applicants¹ must have completed at least two years of college work, which is not less than one-half of the work toward a four-year bachelor's degree program, or have attained the equivalent by taking and passing examinations as may be prescribed by the Committee of Bar Examiners (Committee).

The legal education requirement may be met by graduation from a law school approved by the American Bar Association or accredited by the Committee that substantially requires participation in a full-time three year or part-time four year program. In addition, applicants may qualify by studying law for a required minimum number of hours for four years in an unaccredited or correspondence law school registered with the Committee, by studying law in a law office or judge's chambers or by a combination of these methods of study. Applicants who attend but do not graduate from ABA approved or California accredited law schools may also qualify to take the California Bar Examination if they satisfy the legal education requirements for unaccredited, correspondence or law office/judge's chambers law study.

The *Rules Regulating Admission to Practice Law in California (Rules)* permit law schools to certify that applicants have met the pre-legal and legal education statutory requirements for purposes of registration as law students and eligibility to take the First-Year Law Students' Examination and the California Bar Examination. Law school transcripts must be submitted within 30 days following administration of the First-Year Law Students' Examination and within 40 days following administration of the California Bar Examination. If it appears that law schools are incorrectly certifying applicants, applicants may not be certified to the Supreme Court as having met all the requirements for admission or action may be taken in accordance with the rules regarding registration (Rules XIX and XX of the *Rules*) or the *Rules Regulating Accreditation of Law Schools in California (Accreditation Rules)*.

In addition to the specific pre-legal and legal education requirements for the various categories of schools that are outlined in the statute, Rules VII, XIX and XX of the *Rules*, and the *Accreditation Rules*, the following guidelines are provided to assist law schools in their certification that individual applicants have met the pre-legal and legal education requirements

¹ A general applicant has not been admitted to practice law in any United States or foreign jurisdiction.

for admission to practice law in California.

Pre-Legal Education Requirement

Under Rule VII of the *Rules*, Section 1(a)(1), pre-legal education approved by the Committee includes bachelor's degrees awarded by educational institutions that are authorized to confer such degrees by that state's department of education or like entity. In the absence of a bachelor's degree, at least two years of study taken at a postsecondary educational institution authorized to award college credit or appropriately accredited must be verified. Such study must consist of a minimum of 60 semester units or 90 quarter units of work acceptable for a bachelor's degree with a minimum grade point average sufficient to be graduated from the college at which the study was completed. Alternatively, applicants who have earned an academic associate degree (AA or AS) from an approved college may be considered to have met the pre-legal requirement. Law schools approved by the American Bar Association and those accredited by the Committee are additionally bound by more rigorous pre-legal admission requirements for their students as set forth in the ABA standards for accreditation and the *Accreditation Rules*.

In reference to Section 1(a)(2), Rule VII, *Rules*, applicants who do not have the required college work may otherwise meet the pre-legal education requirement by taking and passing such examinations as directed by the Committee. The Committee currently requires applicants to take and achieve specific minimum scores on examinations administered by the College Level Examination Program (CLEP). Applicants must have a score of 50 or higher for the English Composition or English Composition with Essay examination administered by CLEP. In addition, applicants must have a score of 50 or higher on each of two of the following tests administered by CLEP: Humanities, Mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences and History. Applicants must register to take the examinations directly with CLEP with the request that the score reports be submitted to the law school and the Office of Admissions of The State Bar of California (Code Number 7165). Applicants must have taken and passed all required examinations before beginning their law study. For more information about CLEP, including the cost of the examinations and the address for materials, please see Bulletin 703 published by the Office of Admissions.

All students are required to file a registration application with the Committee within 90 days after beginning the study of law, which registration will require them to attach transcripts of their pre-legal study only if they have not earned a bachelor's degree. Upon receipt of the completed registration application and appropriate fee, the Committee will forward a certification form to the law school(s) for completion. Law schools will be required to certify to the Committee that each applicant has satisfied the pre-legal education requirements of Rule VII of the *Rules*. If the certification form is not completed and returned by the law school within 45 days, the applicant will be notified that the law school has not provided the forms that are necessary to complete the registration process. Students who hold a bachelor's degree are exempt from the certification procedure and in such cases, a form will not be forwarded to the law school.

Students who have obtained their pre-legal education outside the United States must provide proof to the law school that their pre-legal education meets the necessary requirements. Transcripts of their undergraduate study must be evaluated by an approved credential evaluations agency, a list of which is available from the Office of Admissions. A copy of the credential evaluation report must accompany the pre-legal certification form submitted by the law school to the Office of Admissions. Law schools may certify that law students have met the pre-legal requirements without requiring a credential evaluation report for those students who have received their general education outside the United States and were accepted as graduate students other than as graduate students in law school **and** either received a master's degree or were accepted as doctoral candidates at qualified institutions.

For a fee of \$30 for each student, the Office of Admissions will provide assistance to the law schools with complex pre-legal education evaluations through its law study evaluation process.

First-Year Law Students' Examination Qualification

For purposes of exemption from the First-Year Law Students' Examination, "satisfactory completion" of the first year of study in an ABA-approved or California-accredited law school is accomplished by advancement to the second year, whether on probation or not. However, this exemption does not apply to "special students," or those who do not have the requisite minimum two years of college work, who may be attending ABA-approved or accredited law schools.

To qualify for eligibility to take the First-Year Law Students' Examination, applicants must have completed one year of law study. The definition of one year of law study will differ depending on the category of law school or method of study as discussed in detail in the *Rules*, the *Accreditation Rules* and in the ABA accreditation standards. Upon receipt of an application to take the First-Year Law Students' Examination, a certification form will be forwarded by the Office of Admissions to the law school attended by the applicant. If law study was at more than one institution, the last law school attended will be required to certify that the student has met the necessary requirements to qualify for the First-Year Law Students' Examination. This certification by the law school shall be made in advance of the first examination for which an applicant has applied. Once eligibility is established there is no need for further certification. If for some reason the last law school attended cannot or will not so certify, the applicant must submit all necessary transcripts in order for the Office of Admissions to determine whether the applicant is qualified to take the examination.

Transcripts of certified applicants verifying completion of one year of law study may either accompany the certification form or be filed with the Office of Admissions within 30 days following administration of the examination. If the transcripts are not filed within the prescribed deadline, results from the examination will not be released to the applicant. Further, such an applicant will not be permitted to take a future examination unless and until the certification process has been completed to the satisfaction of the Office of Admissions.

Legal Education Qualification

An applicant's graduation from a law school approved by the American Bar Association or accredited by the Committee or an applicant's qualification through four years of study shall be certified by the law school from which the applicant was graduated or which was last attended by the applicant. This certification by the law school shall be made in advance of the first administration of the General Bar Examination for which an applicant has applied. Once eligibility is established there is no need for further certification on future administrations of the examination. Transcripts verifying graduation of certified applicants may be submitted after administration of the examination for which an applicant has applied, but must be submitted no later than 40 days following administration of the examination. Late receipt of the completed certification form and transcripts can result in the withholding of examination results and may cause delay in the admission of the affected applicant. Upon request from the Committee, the school shall either certify that the applicant has or has not met the legal education requirement for admission to practice law in California. If for some reason the last law school attended cannot or will not certify the applicant has met the legal education requirements for admission to practice law, the applicant must submit transcripts of all law study in order for the Office of Admissions to determine whether the applicant is qualified to take the bar examination and for admission to practice law. Applicants have the responsibility for ensuring that transcripts verifying their eligibility are received by the Office of Admissions by the deadline stated above.

Qualification by study in an unaccredited law school requires that the applicant complete a minimum of 270 hours of classroom study a year for four years. A year of study is 12 months from the date the applicant commences study. Within that 12-month period, an applicant must have completed 270 hours of study that does not include repeated courses. Such study may include clinical course work of not more than 40 hours in one 12-month period nor more than 80 hours total during the course of the four years of study. While the required 270 hours a year should normally be completed in one consecutive 12-month period, there may be exceptional cases in which these hours cannot be completed within the usual time frame, as specifically permitted in Rule XIX, Section 5 of the *Rules*. If an applicant has completed fewer than 270 hours in 12 consecutive months but has completed at least 135 hours of law study in six consecutive months, the applicant will be granted credit for one-half year of law study for that work toward the legal education requirements for admission to practice law. Hours completed during a summer session immediately prior to or immediately subsequent to a six month period may be counted toward the 135 hour requirement for one-half year of study.

Qualification by correspondence law study requires that the applicant complete a minimum of 864 hours of preparation and study each year for four years. A year of study is 12 months from the date the applicant commences study. Within that 12-month period, an applicant must complete 864 hours of preparation and study that does not include repeated courses and in which the applicant must receive passing grades during a period of not less than 48 weeks nor more than 52 consecutive weeks. Such study may include clinical course work of not more than 40 hours in one 12-month period nor more than 80 hours total during the course of the four years of study. An applicant may receive credit for one-half year of study (6 months) if he or she received passing grades in courses requiring fewer than 432 hours of preparation and study during a period of fewer than 24 nor more than 26 consecutive weeks.

The Office of Admissions will provide assistance to the law schools with complex evaluations through its law study evaluation process. The fee is \$30 and the applicant must be registered with the Committee and either have passed or become exempt from the First-Year Law Students' Examination.