

Colleges of Law  
Major Change Request

The Colleges of Law (COL) seeks approval for a major change, as required under Rule 4.165, permitting COL to move its hybrid J.D. program in-person residencies from the Ventura campus to a new location in Pasadena, CA starting in the fall semester 2025. Over the last seven years, the hybrid J.D. program's enrollment has steadily increased to the point where the Ventura campus facilities have reached capacity. COL is looking to lease a larger space from Pacific Oaks College that, like COL, is affiliated with The Community Solution, a non-profit system of higher education institutions. Fortunately, the campus was unaffected by the wildfire that swept through the area in January 2025.

**Executive Summary**

COL currently has an onsite J.D. program in two locations, Ventura and Santa Barbara, and those two onsite programs will continue to deliver a quality legal education to the Central Coast as they have been doing for nearly 56 years. COL's hybrid J.D. program, however, was distinctly built to deliver its program primarily asynchronously. Students come to the Ventura campus 13 weekends a year for monthly residencies. All cohorts – 1Ls, 2Ls, 3Ls, and 4Ls – are all on campus at the same time on the same weekend. Due to space limitations on the current Ventura campus, COL seeks to hold its 13 residency weekends each year at a location in Pasadena. The Pasadena residency location was selected after exploring a variety of closer options because (1) the space located provided ample room for the expanding hybrid J.D. program and (2) it is more convenient for the majority of our hybrid J.D. students.

By this proposal, nothing about the hybrid J.D. program will change with the exception of the location of the monthly residencies. COL will ensure that on its website, in the admission process, as well as in all marketing materials, this will be clearly communicated to the public and to all applicants.

**The Proposal**

This proposal will first provide an overview of the hybrid J.D. program, describe the effect of the space limitations on the teaching and learning experience, and finally discuss the Pasadena facilities and student response to the recommended move.

**I. BACKGROUND INFORMATION****A. Accreditation Background**

The Committee of Bar Examiners (CBE) approved COL's hybrid J.D. as a pilot program in October 2017. COL matriculated its inaugural class in August 2018. At the time, COL was the first accredited law school in California to obtain approval for an online or hybrid J.D. program. In 2020, the CBE approved the hybrid J.D. as a permanent program alongside the COL's campus programs in Ventura and Santa Barbara.

In its annual report, COL confirms that it complies with the accreditation rules. In the 2024 report, the institution recorded an enrollment of 397, of which 175 were enrolled in the hybrid J.D. The students are from across California, including as far north as San Francisco and as far south as San Diego. The institution's cumulative bar pass rate is 59.4%. Over three graduating cohorts, the hybrid J.D. program has a cumulative bar pass rate of 48.97%. The most recent graduating cohort to sit for the bar exam had a 45% first-time bar pass rate.

## **B. Program Overview and Organizational Context**

### *Hybrid J.D. Program Delivery*

The hybrid J.D. program is 70% asynchronous and 30% in-person with one weekend residency per month. Students travel to the Ventura campus four times each semester—approximately once each month—to learn in person with professors and their peers. The first and third residencies are with lead instructors, the second residency emphasizes lawyering skills, and the final residency is dedicated to final exams. The remainder of the time, students work through asynchronous modules in the Canvas learning management system. Each Canvas course includes professor videos, required readings, weekly assignments, and other important learning resources.

While there are deadlines set in the program, students decide when and where to engage with course material. Unlike fixed-facility programs, where students must be in a designated classroom at a predetermined time, the format of the hybrid J.D. program offers substantial flexibility. This flexibility is particularly appealing to working adults and offers a pathway for non-traditional students that has generally been unavailable in J.D. programs. It also expands the availability of legal education beyond commuting distance and to legal deserts in California.

### *Signature Features*

The hybrid J.D. program has several unique features: high-touch philosophy, in-person weekend residencies, a foundational semester, writing across the curriculum, required practical lawyering skills courses, and a capstone course.

### *High Touch*

The hybrid J.D. high-touch system is designed to provide a comprehensive and personalized student experience. This multi-faceted approach begins with an immersive orientation and legal boot camp that acclimates students to the rigors of law school. The event, scheduled for August, offers students a chance to immerse themselves in a typical weekend residency experience. During the event, students engage with faculty and peers and gain insight into the structure and expectations of the hybrid J.D. program. This opportunity allows them to familiarize themselves with the residency experience, ask questions, and build connections that will set the tone for their academic journey.

Once the program commences, students participate in individualized curriculum roadmap meetings with the program manager or student services coordinator. These one-on-one sessions help students chart an academic course that makes sense for their personal circumstances. While there is some flexibility in curriculum planning, the hybrid J.D. program follows a cohort model. This means that students generally take the same core courses alongside their cohort, with opportunities to diverge through directed studies, internships, and elective units.

Complementing these personalized roadmap meetings, every student is assigned an academic advisor who provides ongoing support throughout their law school experience. Academic advisors offer advice on law school success strategies, exam preparation, and career planning. In Fall 2024, the hybrid J.D. program introduced a reimagined active academic advising model. Each 1L now receives regular communications from the academic advisor, who also holds regularly scheduled virtual office hours.

During office hours, the academic advisor guides students through deliberate practice, including essay exam issue spotting and MBE-style questions. The academic advisor also supports students in identifying goals and generating action plans. This is in addition to the academic advisor's work with students who are on academic probation or who receive academic advisement letters.

In addition, first year law students are paired with experienced upper-class HJD peers who provide guidance and support. These mentors share practical tips, offer emotional encouragement, and host regularly scheduled virtual office hours. Recently, the program introduced facilitated study groups, where mentors help students apply evidence-based learning strategies like spaced repetition and deliberate practice. Through these peer connections, students build a strong sense of community and develop essential skills for success in law school.

This integrated, high-touch approach not only equips students with the tools and support they need to excel academically but also promotes a nurturing and collaborative learning environment. By combining comprehensive orientation, personalized academic planning, dedicated advising, and peer mentorship, the program ensures that every student is empowered to thrive in law school and beyond.

### *Weekend Residencies*

The hybrid J.D. program includes four in-person weekend residencies each semester at the Ventura campus. These residencies run from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturdays and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Sundays. These residencies serve as dynamic experiences where students can collaborate directly with professors and colleagues in person. This face-to-face interaction enhances understanding through real-time discussion and hands-on activities. In addition, the residencies are designed to strengthen their relationships with their classmates and professors.

In these ways, the weekend residencies offer a unique platform for personal and professional growth.

### *Foundational Semester*

The hybrid J.D. program is structured with a logical sequence of courses. The first year begins with a foundational semester, which covers legal fundamentals, legal research, and legal writing, followed by core doctrinal courses in Torts I, Contracts I, and Criminal Law in the spring. Students may start in either fall or spring, with varying completion timelines. Those who start in the spring join the fall start students for the foundational semester. The foundational semester is a unique program feature and is intended to provide students with the knowledge and skills to effectively navigate law school. For example, in Introduction to Legal Fundamentals, students receive instruction in critical reading strategies, reading and briefing cases, effective notetaking, course outlining, and essay exam IRAC.

### *Writing Across the Curriculum*

Writing across the curriculum is an educational approach that integrates writing assignments and instruction across academic disciplines. Integral to this approach, students complete writing assignments outside of their writing course, including client letters, demand letters, memoranda, and motions. To complement these efforts, the administration supports students in maintaining a writing portfolio, which can be drawn upon to provide writing samples to prospective employers. This not only showcases students' diverse writing capabilities but also demonstrates their practical experience and readiness for real-world legal tasks.

Evidence suggests that students who engage in consistent, varied writing practice perform better in professional settings, as they are more adept at articulating complex ideas clearly and persuasively. Additionally, having a comprehensive portfolio gives students a competitive edge in the job market, making them more attractive to potential employers who value demonstrated proficiency in legal writing.

### *Lawyering Skills*

Practical lawyering skills are emphasized through four tracks: Practical Skills, Litigation, Transactional, and Professional Development and Leadership. These tracks ensure that students are not only versed in theoretical knowledge but also proficient in practical application, which is often neglected in traditional legal education. By integrating these practical skills into the curriculum, students gain hands-on experience that is crucial for effective lawyering.

This approach benefits students by providing them with the tools needed to handle real-world legal issues, thus bridging the gap between academic learning and professional practice. It also equips students with the necessary skills to excel in various legal environments, whether they pursue careers in litigation, transactional law, or other specialized fields. The focus on

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professional development and leadership prepares students to navigate the complexities of legal practice with confidence and competence.

Students must complete at least five different Lawyering Skills units and may elect to complete more. These skills tracks take place during the third residency each semester, providing an opportunity to apply theory in a hands-on setting.

*Lawyering Skills Tracks*

Skill track 1: Practical skills

Legal writing is incorporated into every semester of the hybrid J.D. program, with a particular focus on the practical skills track. This track covers essential skills, including interviewing, fact-finding, and problem-solving.

Skill track 2: Litigation skills

The litigation skills track equips students with essential pretrial and trial competencies. Students learn best practices for filing motion papers, drafting effective discovery (including e-discovery), interviewing witnesses, arguing motions, and preparing for trial.

Skill track 3: Transactional skills

The transactional skills track prepares students for corporate, business, and real estate law. It emphasizes deal-making, contract negotiation, and best practices for drafting contract terms. This track equips future transactional lawyers to counsel clients on business-related legal issues, proving invaluable for corporate negotiations.

Skill track 4: Professional development and leadership

The professional development and leadership skills track enhances students' entrepreneurial and legal abilities. It provides a business development foundation for those starting their own practice or managing a smaller one, and it prepares students to interact with corporate clients. This track covers networking, project management, emerging technologies, and financial literacy.

*Capstone Course*

A capstone course concludes the program, requiring students to engage in a series of exercises, crafted to simulate real-world legal scenarios and elaborates upon concepts and themes introduced in Introduction to Legal Fundamentals in the foundational semester.

Capstone provides ample opportunities for students to explore important and innovative topics in legal education, including access to justice, cultural competency, professional identity formation, and wellness. In this way, the course pioneers often-overlooked areas in legal education and prepares students to be change-makers.

From research assignments to writing tasks, performance tests, and professional responsibility essays, students in the Capstone course demonstrate their competence in critical thinking, problem-solving, and ethical decision-making—a testament to their readiness for the challenges of legal practice. The course serves as a comprehensive immersion into the complexities of legal practice.

### *Program Structure*

The hybrid J.D. program is designed to require 84 units of academic credit to be completed over a period of 40 months, using a blend of online and onsite engagement.

First, the question that all constituencies ask about the hybrid J.D. program – from potential professors to program applicants – is “how” does it work? While the hybrid J.D. program’s curriculum tracks the onsite curriculum, it is delivered differently. For example, for each three-unit onsite course, students are expected to spend approximately nine hours (three hours per unit) preparing for class and three hours attending class. In the hybrid J.D. program, students are expected to spend the exact same amount of time per course. Through the learning management system, Canvas, students have access to the materials and cases that must be reviewed and read in preparation for their class. Instead of attending an in-person class, however, students are given three hours of active-learning assignments, exercises, and assessments to practice using the materials they studied that week to test and solidify their understanding. Once the assignments are turned in, the professor reviews the assignments and provides individual and/or global feedback to the students and the class. This process is the same for each course: prepare; actively engage with the material; receive feedback. It is a continuous learning loop.

Each week, students work individually and at their own pace, but they have access to each other and – most important – their professors regularly. They may be online, but they are not on their own. In fact, the access to and availability of the professors is one of the strengths of the hybrid J.D. program. Students do not have to wait until the monthly residency to engage the professors; they can do so any day of the week.

### **C. Class Attendance and Engagement**

The hybrid J.D. program has been designed with an infrastructure to ensure that students both “attend” class and are “engaged” with the material. Students must complete their weekly assignments and assessments for each course to constitute class attendance. In the hybrid J.D. program, students do assignments and formative assessments in lieu of attending a live class; if

they do not complete their work, they are marked absent. Class attendance is monitored and tracked on three different levels. First, Canvas identifies every late and/or missing assignment. Second, the course professor will reach out to any student who is not present in the class or has failed to turn in an assignment. Third, the program manager or student services coordinator tracks attendance weekly in each course. If a student is struggling or not participating in a course, the program manager or student services coordinator will intervene. If the attendance issue escalates, the Associate Dean will meet with the student and formally advise them of the consequences of failing to attend class, including possible administrative withdrawal from the course or the program.

The companion issue to class attendance is class engagement. A student may turn in work each week, but it might be superficial or lack meaningful participation. To guard against that, the hybrid J.D. program uses two distinct but mutually supportive systems. While the weekly assignments receive feedback but are not graded (for purposes of the final course grade), each assignment receives a score from 1-4 (1 is Inadequate; 2 is Developing; 3 is Competent; 4 is Exemplary). A student and professor can look across the semester and see the number of 1s and 2s a student has received on assignments and assess both engagement and understanding. Professors have the flexibility to adjust this scoring system, but specific, actionable feedback and monitoring of student performance remain constant. In addition, the hybrid J.D. program has developed a student engagement policy that is applicable to each course; this policy is discussed at orientation, is posted on the home page of each course in Canvas, and is included in every syllabus.

On the Canvas home page for each course –

#### Important Grading Information

Your final grade in this course will be based entirely on a final examination. You are required, however, to complete all ungraded assignments and discussions within this online course in a timely fashion.

You will receive a score (not a grade) for these assignments and discussions that will allow you and the COL to assess and track your understanding and mastery of the material over the course of the semester. These specific scores will NOT count toward your final grade; however, your final grade may be lowered by up to two steps based on your preparation for and engagement in this course and timely completion of all required assignments.

See Course Syllabus for additional and important grading information.

#### **D. Student and Academic Services**

The hybrid J.D. team includes Andrea Funk, Dean of the program, Brandy Price, Associate Dean, Rosalie Robles, Program Manager, and Jessica King, the Sr. Student Services Coordinator. The team works remotely except for residencies or other in-person events such as commencement. The team primarily communicates with students through email, phone calls, Zoom meetings, and a monthly newsletter. In addition, the program has an academic advisor and student mentors who help guide students through the program. Students meet with the academic advisor and student mentors via Zoom and during the residency weekends.

The hybrid J.D. students also have access to other student and academic services remotely. April Vincent, the Associate Dean of Student Success and Bar Preparation program, and Jen Louie, the Program Manager for the program, have created an online forum on Canvas for students across all the J.D. programs to access materials and to communicate with the program. All academic success workshops are held via Zoom, recorded, and posted on the Student Success Canvas page for students to watch. Students can make appointments to meet with Dean Vincent via Zoom.

Since the addition of the hybrid J.D., COL has created remote options for other student services events, such as speakers or career service panels. If an event is tied to a location, such as an awards night dinner, duplicate events are held at each campus and during the hybrid J.D. residency. The Student Bar Association (SBA), the COL student government, is built as a blended group with students from all three programs. While each campus or program has a chapter, the unified group meets remotely. The same is true for the Delta Phi Theta, the professional law fraternity.

While hybrid J.D. students are welcome to be on campus at times other than the residency weekend, it rarely (if ever) occurs. Most students choose the hybrid J.D. because they are unable to travel to the current campus locations in the evening or they live too far away to make commuting viable. Because COL offers all its services remotely, including access to all library resources, there is little need for a hybrid J.D. student to access either campus. To the extent they want or need access to a physical campus, the Santa Barbara and Ventura campus remains open to them.

#### **II. Ventura Facility Capacity**

The hybrid J.D. program holds 13 residency weekends per year, an orientation for 1L students before the semester begins plus one residency each month during the academic year. All hybrid J.D. students are required to attend the residency in-person. When the hybrid J.D. started, COL opted to host it at the Ventura campus because it is larger than the Santa Barbara campus and it had sufficient onsite parking available. The Ventura campus is two floors with multiple classrooms, office space, a study space, and a large community room. It also has an



administrative suite with offices on the first floor as well as faculty offices on the second floor. In addition, there is a men's bathroom, a women's bathroom, and two gender-neutral bathrooms.

When the hybrid J.D. launched, the community room became the hub of the residency. Students arrived for the residency between 8 a.m. and 9 a.m. on Saturday morning when coffee and a light breakfast are available in the community room. They would gather there and check-in with staff, faculty, and each other. Classes began at 9 a.m. followed by a break for lunch. Because the Ventura campus does not have easy access to restaurants, lunch and afternoon snacks were provided in the community room where there were plenty of tables. Students returned to classes in the afternoon until 5 p.m. The process was repeated on Sunday, although the day ended at 1 p.m.

As the hybrid J.D. grew, COL had to adjust how it used the facilities and how it structured the weekends. To accommodate the students and faculty on campus over a weekend, COL rented executive restrooms to add to the available campus facilities. As more students joined the program, it became challenging to find space for students who needed accommodations during final exams. The number of accommodated exams often exceeded the number of available offices, requiring a staggered exam schedule. Then, in the fall 2022, the 1L class exceeded the size of the largest classroom on campus. The traditional 1L classroom somewhat comfortably accommodates 55 students, while the hybrid J.D. program began with over 60 students. To manage the increased enrollment, COL converted the community room into a classroom. The community room, however, was not designed to be a classroom and the acoustics and dimensions made teaching and learning more challenging. In addition, transforming the community room into a classroom on Friday afternoon and then returning it to a community room on Sunday afternoon became a logistical challenge. Finally, this shift eliminated the community room as a gathering place for all students. The loss of a common space meant that students disperse to eat lunch or while on break, returning to their classroom or gathering in the parking lot.

To address these space constraints, COL began to explore alternative spaces to hold the weekend residencies.

### **III. Pasadena – Pacific Oaks College Location**

COL and Pacific Oaks College have a longstanding relationship. Both institutions are part of The Community Solution, a nonprofit system of six higher education institutions. As part of the same system, COL and Pacific Oaks share many services, including the IT network and the learning management system, Canvas. As a result, when students and faculty are on the Pacific Oaks campus they will be on the same network with the same access as when they are on the Ventura campus. In addition, the same IT support analyst will be with them during the residency. Other than location, the students will not experience an interruption in services.

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In addition, COL and Pacific Oaks have collaborated on several academic projects, including a B.A.-to-J.D. Pipeline program. Pacific Oaks has a small BA completion program as well as a master's in justice and advocacy. Before COVID, Pacific Oaks then-president Patricia Breen worked with COL to develop a pipeline program that would provide Pacific Oaks graduates a pathway to a J.D. The program was designed to identify students interested in pursuing a law degree and provide them with academic support, such as specific writing courses, and mentorship while in the B.A. program to ensure they were prepared for the rigors of the J.D. program. Unfortunately, COVID interrupted the launch of the program, so the plan was not realized. In addition to the pipeline program, COL and Pacific Oaks have also collaborated around master's courses.

Finally, COL anticipates that cost savings and an eventual increase in revenue will offset expenses for renting space in Pasadena. Currently, COL rents executive washrooms to accommodate the students on the weekend. This expense will be eliminated. Pasadena has more than sufficient restroom facilities. COL also rents tables and chairs to accommodate the larger 1L class in the Ventura community room. This expense will also be eliminated. In addition, the HJD academic team and staff do not live in Ventura and must stay in hotels during the residency weekend, a cost absorbed by the school. Because the team lives closer to Pasadena, this cost will be reduced. Finally, there is the potential for an increase in revenue. COL receives its largest number of inquiries for the hybrid J.D. from the greater Los Angeles area. By moving the hybrid J.D. residencies to the area, COL could see an increase in enrollment.

Pacific Oaks has a large two-building campus located on 4 acres in Pasadena, California. with onsite and street parking, and within walking distance of hotels and restaurants. Although it was once a residential campus, most of the academic programs are now online and many of the faculty work remotely. The campus is not only large enough to handle the hybrid J.D. program's current enrollment, it will also allow for the program to grow. A fuller description of the campus and its amenities is included in the lease agreement.

COL academic and admissions team visited Pacific Oaks on November 19, 2024, to tour the facilities and to determine if the location and space met COL's needs. The campus classroom space is more than sufficient to address a growing program. The classroom technology is excellent. The bathroom facilities would obviate the need for executive restrooms. There is plenty of common space to accommodate communal lunches and private space to host accommodated students during final exams. The campus is staffed on the weekend with facilities personnel, IT support, and security.

After visiting the campus, the Vice President of Enrollment assessed how current students would be affected if the residencies moved to Pasadena. Most students would have a *shorter* drive to the residencies if they were held in Pasadena. Currently, 30% of hybrid J.D. students drive less than an hour to attend residencies in Ventura. If the residencies were held in Pasadena, 51% of students would drive less than hour. Only 5% of current students would have a longer commute.

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Next, President Nehmer met with the hybrid J.D. student bar association leaders to discuss moving to a larger facility. The student leaders responded positively to the idea of more space as well as to Pasadena as a potential location.

In mid-January, the hybrid J.D. team sent a survey to all current students to assess their reaction to a potential move. Out of 108 total responses, an overwhelming majority, 94 participants, or 87% enthusiastically said they would continue. The comments were filled with positivity and excitement about the change.

On the other hand, 6 respondents (5.5%) said they would not continue, and 14 (12.9%) indicated they were unlikely to but had not made a final decision. The primary concerns cited were the additional commute and cost, with the commute being the most significant factor for most individuals.

At the January residency, Dr. Nehmer met with the students to discuss the potential move. He spoke to them about the reasons for the move and invited their feedback and input. Most of the students were in favor of the move. For the several who had concerns, he invited them to a meeting to further discuss viable options for making the transition possible. Only six students expressed interest in attending that meeting. At the follow-up meeting, only one of the students attended (although all were invited and four accepted the invitation). Dr. Nehmer, Dean Funk, Rosalie Robles, and Jessica King spoke with the student at length and explored various options, including a possible transfer to the Santa Barbara campus. The student lives near Santa Barbara and would like to practice in the community. The meeting concluded with several ideas to explore, including possible scholarships or other support for students most impacted by the move.

Since that meeting, the HJD team has been working with the current students who are either uncertain or unable to go to Pasadena for the residency. For some students transferring to the ground program (either Santa Barbara or Ventura) is a viable option. In fact, for those intending to transfer to the Santa Barbara campus, it makes more sense for them because they want to practice in that community. For the remaining few, the stumbling block is either the commute or the hotel stays. The Board of Trustees is developing a scholarship fund to assist with the additional cost of driving and/or staying overnight. The institution is also working with hotels in Pasadena to secure a discounted rate for students, as was done in Ventura. Every student has been spoken with, and the HJD academic team is determining what needs to happen so that each student can complete their degree with Colleges of Law.

Because of how the residencies are structured, it would not be possible or effective to attempt to host them separately at the Ventura and Pasadena locations. As described earlier, the residencies present a unique opportunity for students to learn in relationship with each other, to engage in hands-on activities, including group work, and to network with their peers and their faculty. The faculty that are teaching the students in the online part of the program are

also teaching them at the residencies. The lawyering skills weekends allow students in different years and cohorts to learn together. The student experience and learning would be undermined if the residencies were split. If a student wants to complete their J.D. in the hybrid J.D. program and is unable to travel to Pasadena, then it may be possible for students to attend remotely for the remainder of their program.

Dean Funk also contacted the faculty who teach in the program to apprise them of the potential change and to gauge their interest in continuing to teach. Fifteen of the eighteen faculty all live much closer to Pasadena, so virtually all faculty members expressed openness to and support for this move, with only one professor voicing some reservations because of a longer commute; since that initial conversation, however, the professor has committed to teaching in Pasadena.

In addition to speaking with current students, the Admissions team is alerting applicants to the potential change:

*Hybrid JD residencies are currently held at COL's Ventura Campus, which is nearly at capacity for the number of students enrolled in the program. We are exploring moving the residences to Pasadena to allow for more capacity and provide a better experience for students. Would this move impact your decision to enroll in the hybrid JD program?"*

The applicant response has been universally positive.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

COL is confident that moving the hybrid J.D. residencies to Pasadena will improve the teaching and learning environment and enhance the student experience. The program would complete the current academic year at the Ventura campus and start the new academic year in Pasadena. Student and academic services will continue uninterrupted and hybrid J.D. students will still have access to the Ventura and Santa Barbara campuses as they do now as well as a larger space in Pasadena to accommodate the HJD's growing enrollment.