

3.1 Action on Major Change Request - Add JD Division Allowing Graduation in 2.5 Years in Extraordinary Circumstances - University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service



OPEN SESSION
AGENDA ITEM 3.1
DECEMBER 2024
COMMITTEE OF BAR EXAMINERS

DATE: December 6, 2024

TO: Members, Committee of Bar Examiners

FROM: Natalie Leonard, Principal Program Analyst

SUBJECT: Action on Major Change Request - Add JD Division Allowing Graduation in 2.5 Years in Extraordinary Circumstances - University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service (La Verne) has filed an application (Attachment A) seeking the Committee of Bar Examiners' (committee) approval to add a JD Division that will allow students to complete the full-time JD program in 2.5 years in extraordinary circumstances, while continuing to offer the 3-year full time division. The law school requests permission for this option to take immediate effect.

RECOMMENDED ACTION

It is recommended that the committee grant permission for the law school to add a new JD division effective immediately that will allow students to complete the full-time JD program in 2.5 years in extraordinary circumstances, as set forth in Attachment A.

DISCUSSION

La Verne is a California Accredited law school located in La Verne, California. The law school offers two JD divisions: a full-time three-year JD division and a part-time, four-year JD division.

Rule 4.165(A) requires that a law school "adding a new division, full- or part-time . . . must notify the Committee and obtain that approval at least 180 days before making the change. The notice must explain in detail any effect the change might have on the law school's compliance with these rules [for accredited law schools]."

Here, the law school seeks to add an additional full-time JD division of 2.5 years in length, which is an allowable length under the Accredited Law School Rules. Rule 4.160(B)(12)(a) specifies that JD programs must take place over no less than 24 months and should generally be completed within 84 months.

The application also demonstrates how La Verne plans to maintain compliance in this division as well as the law school's other two JD divisions.

The law school projects that the three-year full-time JD and four-year part-time JD will remain the main programs, but students may petition to transfer into a 2.5-year division in extraordinary circumstances such as "when a student's circumstances are such that they may have to pursue summer study or otherwise enroll in additional units to graduate a semester early for career, personal reasons, health considerations."

The proposed division's program will utilize the same courses and similar progression to the current three-year JD division. As a result, all required elements will be included. No additional course sessions will need to be offered, so no significant additional expenditures are expected. Under ABA approval, La Verne has previously offered a JD division of 2.5 years available in extraordinary circumstances, so it already has some experience with this curriculum path.

La Verne sets forth a clear plan for achieving the program's goals. Students will be able to complete the requirements in 2.5 years by adding summer study, which is normally optional for full-time students. If needed, they may also add an additional course in some of the other semesters.

Students must apply, either immediately this semester or at the end of the first- or second-year in the future. They will need to have a 2.3 GPA or better, complete an application, and propose a plan that will fulfill all JD requirements within 2.5 years. Because bar preparation is offered in both the fall and spring terms, graduation during either semester will not compromise State Bar exam preparation.

Staff recommends that the committee grant La Verne's request for immediate approval of a 2.5-year full-time JD division. As part of the implementation, the law school should be directed to provide interested students with the terms of the program as soon as possible and to incorporate the division's requirements into the student handbook for the 2025 Spring semester. By January 31 2025, the law school should send a copy of the manual to the State Bar of California. La Verne should also include an update as to the utilization, retention, and licensure rates for each of its programs as part of the law school's periodic compliance report each year until further notice, consistent with the committee's practice. The need to continue to provide such reports can be reevaluated at the law school's next inspection.

PREVIOUS ACTION

[Committee of Bar Examiners' Meeting, August 20, 2021, Item V.F.](#)

[Open Session Minutes, Committee of Bar Examiners' Meeting, August 20, 2021, Item V.F.](#)

AMENDMENTS TO RULES

None

STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS & IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

None – core business operations

RESOLUTION

If the Committee agrees with this recommendation, the following resolution is suggested:

RESOLVED that the Committee of Bar Examiners approves University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service's request to add a full-time JD division of 2.5 years in length as set forth in Attachment A effective immediately.

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the law school provide the State Bar with an updated copy of the manual describing the program by January 31, 2025.

FURTHER RESOLVED, that the law school be required to submit progress reports as to the utilization, retention, and licensure rates of those students in the 2.5-year full-time division as compared to its three-year full-time division and part-time division, and to include those reports with its annual periodic compliance report until further notice.

ATTACHMENT LIST

Attachment A: University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service – Request for Major Change – Add Full-Time 2.5-Year JD Division Available in Extraordinary Circumstances

Ms. Natalie Leonard
Principal Program Analyst
Educational Standards-Office of Admissions
The State Bar of California
180 Howard Street
San Francisco, CA 94105

November 22, 2024

Sent Via Email: natalie.leonard@calbar.ca.gov

Re: Revised-Supplemental Request for Major Change

Dear Ms. Natalie Leonard:

Rule 4.165 Request for Approval of Major Change to School's Curriculum:

The University of La Verne College of Law and Public Service is hereby notifying the Committee of Bar Examiners of its contemplated major change to its program of legal education and seeks the Committee's approval regarding same. Pursuant to Rule 4.165, the Committee requires notice, a detailed explanation, and its advanced approval of any *"major change to a school's JD curriculum, including the number of credits, overall requirements, or teaching modality change that affects more than one-third of [its] program"* that might have an effect on the law school's compliance with the Accredited Law School Rules."

Currently Approved School Curriculum Requires a Minimum of 3-Year Residency:

On August 4, 2021, the University of La Verne College of Law assented to the terms of its April 19, 2021 Inspection Report that recommended that the Committee of Bar Examiners approve its accreditation with the understanding its JD program of legal education consists, in pertinent part, of the following:

The JD curriculum requires completion of 88 semester units and is designed to be completed in three or four academic years. An academic year consists of two semesters, each including 14 weeks of instruction and designated days for final exams. Part-time students are also required to enroll in a 7-week summer session, and most full-time students also choose to enroll in that session in order to lighten their academic-year course loads.

In August of 2021, the Committee of Bar Examiners approved the La Verne College of Law for accreditation subject to the above recited terms prescribing that the curriculum requires a minimum of three or four years of study, depending on whether a student is enrolled in the full-time or part-time program.

Request for Approval to Graduate a Student in Extraordinary Cases Upon Completion of Minimum of 2.5 years of Study:

The La Verne College of Law and Public Service requests a change to its accredited terms and that the terms of accreditation be amended to allow for and grant it the authority to graduate a student in extraordinary cases upon the completion of a minimum of 2.5 years of study, provided all its programmatic and curricular requirements have been otherwise satisfied, (i.e., all 88-units of study have been completed, including all prescribed courses required in its curriculum).

This change will have no impact on the ability for the school to remain in compliance with the Accredited Rules. The College's program of legal education will remain a program of legal education that requires 3 full-time years of study, or 4 years of part-time study. However, this change will allow the school flexibility to advance a student to graduation in extraordinary situations, (e.g. when a student's circumstances are such that they may have to pursue summer study or otherwise enroll in additional units to graduate a semester early for career, personal reasons, health considerations, etc.). In such extraordinary situations, if the student has otherwise satisfied all the other programmatic requirements and is in good academic standing, the College seeks the authority to advance the student to graduation. In such situations, the College will require that a student petition, present, and show cause that extraordinary circumstances exist, that the student is in good academic standing (a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.0 and not on academic probation), that all programmatic and curricular requirements have been satisfied, and that allowing this student to graduate upon the completion of 2.5 years will not jeopardize the student's ability to succeed in the practice of law. And upon a finding of such extraordinary circumstances and that all programmatic curricular requirements have been met, the College requests authority to advance the student to graduation.

Supplemental Considerations Supporting Requested Approval:

The College of Law and Public Service requests that this change be approved, in effect, and able to be implemented this December of 2024.

There is no need to modify the curriculum or schedule in any way, whatsoever, as the curriculum now allows bar preparation to be conducted and completed in fall or spring semester. First, the College is asking for the flexibility to be able to allow a student to graduate in extraordinary situations, after 2.5 years of residency—no sooner, and only upon their completion of all current curricular requirements, in the linear and chronological manner prescribed by the curriculum. Second, the pathway to a 2.5-year programmatic completion is only achievable and available to full-time students who choose to enroll in the College's summer curricular programming (i.e., full-time summer enrollment can effectively lead to the completion of the full-time program in 2.5 years rather than 3 years). Normally, the summer program is optional for full-time students but is required for part-time students. Thus, there will be no administrative burdens to adjust our current curricular programming in any way, nor will a pathway to early graduation require a student to pursue an unreasonable or excessive number of credits during any one semester. A full-time student wishing to graduate within 2.5 years would typically exceed their normal semester course load by 1 unit in either fall or spring semester and enroll in a maximum of 5 units per summer semester. Per the College's curriculum and its Manual of Academic Policies and Procedures (MAPP), a full-time student's normal unit load consists of up to 15 units, with permission being required for them to enroll in 16 units. Any full-time student

seeking to exceed the normal unit load during any given semester must be in good academic standing, have a GPA of 2.3 or higher, and must file a petition with the Office of the Dean, demonstrating that they have the capacity to succeed in in doing so.

Any full-time student seeking to pursue a pathway to graduation after the completion of 2.5 years will be required to petition the Registrar and the Office of the Dean of their intention, either immediately during December 2024, or, in the future, at the end of their 1L or 2L year, outlining and demonstrating how they will proceed to completion within 2.5 years, that they will have met all of the curricular requirements on or before the completion of 2.5 years, and that they are in good standing and satisfy our current requirement of having maintained a cumulative GPA of 2.3 or higher.

Students seeking to complete the program within 2.5 years will still be required to take our Capstone Bar Prep class to graduate, which is offered in both the fall and spring semesters, and therefore is available to such a student. Accordingly, students who might pursue this pathway will have all the rights, privileges, and opportunities at the law school as any other student who completes the program in 3 or 4 years.

The College seeks immediate approval for this program, and proposes, upon approval, to advise students of the option, and to update the College's MAPP, which will be distributed to all students effectuating the approval requested. The College recommends that it do so on or before January 6, 2025-the start of our winter/spring semester and agrees to send a copy of the updated manual with the relevant portion highlighted, to the State Bar by January 31, 2025.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kevin S. Marshall". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "K" and "M".

Kevin S. Marshall
JD, MPA, PHD
Associate Provost and Dean
College of Law and Public Service