

UNT Dallas College of Law Receives Provisional Accreditation

UNT | DALLAS

Summary: Dallas' public law school was granted provisional status after three years of working to reach this level.

UNT Dallas College of Law opened its doors three years ago as an unaccredited law school located in downtown Dallas. The school's mission was to bring a diverse group of students yet maintain a lower tuition. Their biggest obstacle to reaching this goal was to receive accreditation.

As the city's first public school, their ability to be successful was important for the community. And the first step to get there has been announced. The school has received a provisional approval accreditation status by the American Bar Association. To receive full accreditation takes three years. Until they reach that time they get to take advantage of the same benefits as if they were a fully accredited law school so their students can take the bar exam.

Law school dean Royal Furgeson, a former federal judge, said, "Sometimes you rise up in your bed at 3 in the morning thinking, 'My God, this is really important to a whole lot of people, and we just can't let them down.'" Furgeson happened to be home recovering from a recent back surgery when they received the happy news. He added, "My recovery has just sped up by a factor of a thousand with this news."

If a school does not have accreditation, its students are not eligible to take the Texas bar exam. In order to practice law in Texas, graduates have to pass the bar. As Furgeson noted, "Failure was not an option here."

The school has roughly 360 students that were willing to take a chance on the law school. Their future was hanging in the balance as they waited for the school's ability to move on to the next step. He said, "Every day was like pulling a 10-ton weight up a big hill because we were just fighting so hard and swimming against the tide."

An ABA advisory committee recommended that the school not receive accreditation, citing concerns over their finances and admittance of students with lower LSAT scores. That was last year so the school took the concerns and tightened their admissions standards a little to show their willingness to improve. "But even then, we are solidly committed to using a holistic approach to admissions because standardized testing cannot fully measure the qualities needed to be a good lawyer," Furgeson said.

Even with the recommendation to not accredit the school last year, school officials were hopeful. State Sen. Royce West authored legislation to build the program. He said, "There has been turbulence. Now, we've been able to land it smoothly."

The school's first class of 74 students were already eligible to sit for the bar exam in July due to a Texas Supreme Court administrative order. The results of their exams will be the true test of the school's ability to succeed. West explains, "Their performance on the bar will be watched by everyone."

One of the students who will be taking the exam, Rafael Valbuena, worked as a paralegal for years before enrolling at the school. He notes the affordable tuition as what attracted him to the program and made it possible to finally pursue a law degree. If he passes the exam, he has already been offered a partnership at Scott Mackenzie, where he worked as a paralegal for over a decade.

Do you think Dallas needs another law school? Tell us in the comments below.

To learn more about schools in the midst of their accreditation problems, read these articles:

- [ABA Sanctions Two Law Schools for Low Admissions Standards](#)
- [Dartmouth Law Given Full Accreditation](#)
- [ABA Rejects Proposed Changes to Bar Passage Requirements](#)

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