


ABA Publishes Letters on Law School Accreditation Statuses

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Summary: The ABA published letters on their website detailing the accreditation statuses of several law schools, making some angry about the public disclosure.

The American Bar Association has decided to go public, posting letters on their website of the law schools not in compliance. One of those letters called out was Western Michigan University Thomas M. Cooley Law School for their admission standards, as first reported by Inside Higher Ed.

Cooley was not happy about the public disclosure of their accreditation status, filing a lawsuit against the accreditor. Cooley believes that the ABA's decision to publish the letter was illegal. The letter stated that they were not in compliance with 501(b), the accreditation standard which requires schools to only admit students with the realistic ability of graduating and passing the bar.

The ABA posted over 12 letters over the last year-and-a-half about the accreditation problems at each law school in question. The most common accreditation problem was for having low admissions standards. Some of the other law schools called out by the ABA reacted by promising to address their accreditation concerns, but pointing out that they were still accredited.

Cooley reacted by requesting to a federal judge that the letter be removed from the ABA's website and withdrawn from the U.S. Secretary of Education, the Higher Learning Commission and state regulators in Michigan and Florida, where Cooley also has a campus. They contend that they have been harmed financially and by reputation from the public letter in their lawsuit with the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Michigan.

The law school also feared how their students would react. The court filings stated, "WMU-Cooley also will face a loss of applications and matriculations, which are almost incalculable and certainly irreparable."

What Cooley fears could very likely be true given the current condition of the law school market. Law school applications have been down for the last several years, leaving law schools to compete over the few students applying. While the number of law school applications has leveled out and started to pick back up, the numbers can't support the pre-market crash numbers that law schools expanded to meet. A few law schools have adapted to this difficult environment by reducing their size or closing completely. Those who have closed include Charlotte School of Law, Whittier College, and Valparaiso University.

Law schools are faced with the reality of accepting enough students that can pay tuition and pass the bar. If a law school does not have enough of their students passing the bar upon graduation, the school loses accreditation, but if they don't have enough students that can pay, then the school can't afford to stay open. It is a tangled cycle that smaller, less elite law schools are struggling the most with.

An example of a smaller law school reducing its numbers and placing greater importance on its students is Florida Coastal School of Law, an InfiLaw school. In 2011, the school was offering admission to over half of its applicants. Very few of those actually matriculated. The students' LSAT scores were dangerously low. In 2014, the law school revamped its program and now admits less than half of its applicants. Now the school is scoring among the highest in Florida rankings and passage rates.

In an email to Inside Higher Ed, school Dean Scott DeVito said, "Our approach has been to single-mindedly focus on increasing credentials, recognizing that it will decrease our overall enrollment. This has been extremely painful for faculty and staff who have been asked to leave the school, and, because that have always put the students first, those faculty and staff have been extraordinarily professional and supportive of the changes despite the impact it has had on their professional lives."

The other law schools named by the ABA are Ave Maria School of Law, Valparaiso University School of Law, Appalachian School of Law, State University of New York University at Buffalo School of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, Texas Southern University Thurgood Marshall School of Law, Atlanta's John Marshall Law School, North Carolina Central University School of Law, Florida Coastal School of Law, Charlotte School of Law and Arizona Summit Law School.

The ABA, per demands, is striving to become more transparent, hence the public letters. Do you think this is a practice that all accrediting bodies of higher education should be doing so the public is better aware of the status of their schools? Share your thoughts

with us in the comments below.

See the following for more information:

- [Florida Coastal Students Hit 97 Percent Passage Rate on MPRE](#)
- [Arizona Summit Posts Improved Bar Exam Passage Rate](#)
- [10 Law Schools Sanctioned by the ABA](#)

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