

## Legal Experts' Advice for Law Grads Taking the Bar Exam Amid COVID-19



Given that the bar exam is stressful enough in normal conditions, let alone in a global pandemic - to say this is not the best year for a law school grad would be an understatement.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak has completely shaken the legal profession, many states are still struggling to make the right decision in terms of time and place for administering the bar exam.

Some states are postponing the exam to September. Other states have announced the bar will be administered online. A number of states have greenlit diploma privileges. A few states that have opted for the online bar examination are postponing the test due to technical issues.

All in all - it's a hot mess.

This is definitely a challenging time to be finishing law school, and the current uncertainties likely add to your anxiety, which was already through the roof.

JD Journal spoke with legal professionals, academics, and experts to share their two cents and help you cope with this anxious and stressful period.

"Preparing for the bar exam under the best of conditions is no easy task, but asking you to do it during the worst pandemic in 100 years puts an added level of stress and uncertainty on aspiring practicing attorneys. But we also know that you are tough -- law school tough," said Amit Schlesinger, executive director of Bar Prep programs, Kaplan.

"Speaking from experience, we know that studying all the material and content comes with its own challenges, but rest assured that you will be successful because of all the hard work you've put in. At Kaplan, we have been with students every step of the way making changes (daily) to our course to provide updates as each jurisdiction has been deciding what format and when to administer this summer and fall. And keep in mind that while the pandemic will likely only last a short time, relatively speaking, your career in law will span decades. You're almost there," Schlesinger said.

Sara Berman, Director of Programs for Academic and Bar Success at AccessLex Institute, a nonprofit dedicated to the betterment of legal education, advises aspiring lawyers to stay strong.

"No matter what format your bar exam takes if you must sit for a bar exam now or in the future, focus on training fundamental skills. In other words, learn and memorize key rules of law, but also engage as thoroughly as possible in developing and sharpening your critical reading, logical analysis, time management, and clear and effective writing skills. The bonus? Improving such skills is never a waste of time because they are all transferable to law practice," Berman said.

As you get ready for the exam, and despite uncertainties swirling around you, focus on two things: self-care and total immersion in test preparation.

To become licensed and pursue your career goals, you must get through this; the best thing you can do now is to get through it safely and successfully. Know that by surviving this challenging period, you will demonstrate extraordinary grit and resiliency - traits that are important to legal employers, said Berman.

Remain informed and nimble. Stay away from the chatter and on top of any actual updates from your jurisdiction. Try not to let yourself get too rattled as you face the last-minute curveballs that will inevitably come your way. And, always remember (on tough days especially) that you are entering an important profession, one that is indispensable to future clients and to the future of our democracy, said Berman.

Catherine Bramble, Director of Academic Advisement & Development at BYU Law School, says it's ok for bar exam takers to feel frustrated and anxious.

"You are taking the bar exam—a difficult test under ideal circumstances—in the midst of an unprecedented global pandemic. Acknowledge those feelings and the reality of your situation," said Bramble. "Second, the antidote to anxiety is action. Nothing can replace quality hours of study. Treat your bar study like a full-time job and schedule each day with a starting time, a stopping time, and reasonable breaks. To ensure that you stay on task, ask yourself, "Could I bill my client, the bar, for this?" Multi-tasking and distractions like social media checks significantly decrease the effectiveness of your study; you can't bill five-

"Third, optimize your brainpower by paying attention to other aspects of your health, specifically sleep, diet, and exercise. And don't forget about your mental health. Your brain functions at higher levels when it is in a positive state than when it is negative, stressed, or neutral. Finally, believe in yourself. You have conquered years of challenging study to join the less than one percent of people in the world who will obtain a graduate degree. Remember, YOU CAN DO THIS!"

You are overwhelmed by so many things at the moment. For the past couple of years, you worked so hard, you did everything right and invested so much. Now, you feel like your legal career hangs by a thread. You are not alone; a lot of law grads prepping for the bar feel the exact same way. At this point, there is only one universal truth: focus on the things that you can control.

He's not a legal expert per se, but as Gandalf of Lord of the Rings would put it, "All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."

So, what you can do is try to be as rational as you can and start prepping for the bar as if nothing has changed.

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