

## American Bar Association Calls for Diverse Hiring Approach in Law Firms Beyond Grades and Class Rank



The American Bar Association (ABA) has underscored the need for law firms to reassess their [hiring criteria](#). The ABA's House of Delegates, the organization's policy-making body, recently adopted a resolution advising law firms to expand their evaluation methods when considering potential associates. This call for change comes as the legal community grapples with limited diversity among lawyers and equity partners.

Traditionally, law firms have heavily emphasized academic achievements, such as class rank and grades, in their recruitment processes. However, the ABA contends that this narrow focus has hindered efforts to achieve a more diverse and inclusive legal profession. The ABA's resolution urges law firms to consider a broader range of factors when selecting law students for positions, aiming to mitigate the disparity in minority representation within the legal field.

The resolution specifically recommends that law firms consider attributes beyond academic metrics. These include a candidate's legal research and writing skills, engagement in pro bono work and community service, participation in extracurricular activities, personal qualities like teamwork and resilience, as well as the individual's background and unique experiences. By adopting a more comprehensive evaluation approach, law firms can identify candidates with diverse skill sets and perspectives, ultimately contributing to a more dynamic workforce.

**See also: [Supreme Court Urged to Implement Ethics and Transparency Reforms, According to ABA Task Force](#)**

The ABA's Law Student Division, which submitted the resolution, emphasizes the need to revisit [hiring practices](#), particularly during the on-campus interview process. The report accompanying the resolution underscores the significance of reevaluating these practices to ensure [greater diversity and inclusivity in the legal profession](#).

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The issue of diversity in the legal industry is not new, with various bar associations, law schools, and law firms working over the years to increase the representation of minority lawyers. However, concerns have arisen due to a recent U.S. Supreme Court ruling that restricts the consideration of race in college admissions. This ruling has raised apprehensions that efforts to increase the number of minority law students may face challenges, potentially reducing their presence in the legal pipeline.

Current statistics further highlight the existing diversity gap within law firms. Only 9% of law firm equity partners identified as people of color in 2021, and merely 22% were women. The conventional practice of relying heavily on class rank and grades during the summer associate recruiting process, known as OCI (on-campus interview), has been criticized for limiting the discovery and integration of diverse talent into law firms.

Research has shown that minority law students, particularly Black and Latino students, often score lower than their white counterparts on standardized tests such as the Law School Admission Test and the bar exam. Implicit biases in testing, educational inequalities, and being first-generation college or law students are among the factors contributing to these disparities.

The ABA's resolution argues that the exclusive emphasis on academic achievements also disadvantages students who have faced additional challenges, such as those working part-time to finance their legal education or those with non-traditional academic backgrounds. Such students may possess valuable skills and perspectives that could enrich law firms' environments.

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While the resolution is not legally binding on law firms, the ABA proposes several measures to facilitate its implementation. These include conducting workshops and webinars to educate law firms about holistic evaluation methods, encouraging law schools to adopt inclusive evaluation practices during on-campus interviews, and establishing best practices for law student hiring. Additionally, the ABA could acknowledge and commend law firms that embrace holistic [hiring approaches](#) and foster inclusive workplaces.

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