

Southwestern Law School Pioneers the Nation's First Accredited Online Full-Time J.D. Program



In a groundbreaking move, Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles is set to launch the United States' inaugural, fully online, full-time J.D. (Juris Doctor) program, accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA). This revolutionary development, approved by the ABA in August, has paved the way for aspiring legal professionals to access high-quality legal education on their terms.

A Barrier-Breaking Educational Innovation

The Southwestern Law School online J.D. program, slated to commence in the fall of 2024, is designed to eliminate the geographical and logistical constraints traditionally associated with pursuing a law degree. This innovative approach recognizes that many prospective law students face significant obstacles in accessing legal education due to their location or existing commitments.

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Amy McLellan, Southwestern's Associate Dean of Online Education, highlighted the program's flexibility. She explained that the classes will be online and asynchronous, allowing students to complete coursework conveniently. To further enhance the learning experience, professors will also provide optional real-time sessions on Zoom, ensuring that students receive personalized guidance and support.

Opening Doors for Aspiring Legal Minds

The Southwestern Law School's online J.D. program is expected to enroll approximately 70 to 80 students in its inaugural year. Crucially, the cost of this innovative program mirrors that of the traditional residential J.D. program, with tuition set at \$58,392 per year for full-time students and \$38,944 for part-time students. This affordability aims to make legal education accessible to a broader and more diverse range of individuals.

Accelerated Path to a Legal Career

The program's structure offers accelerated options for completion, with full-time students able to finish in as little as three years, while part-time students can take four or more years to complete their degree. Graduates from the online program will be eligible to sit for the bar exam in nearly every state, providing a pathway to legal practice. However, it's worth noting that New York imposes certain restrictions on the number of distance education courses law graduates may take.

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A Landscape of Legal Education Evolution

Southwestern Law School's pioneering move into fully online legal education follows a broader trend in the legal academia landscape. Since 2015, Mitchell Hamline School of Law introduced an ABA-approved hybrid program, and online and hybrid J.D. programs—combining online coursework with limited on-site elements—have been on the rise. This evolution in legal education seeks to meet aspiring lawyers' changing needs and expectations while expanding access to the legal profession.

In an ever-evolving legal education landscape, Southwestern Law School stands at the forefront, ensuring that aspiring legal professionals can pursue their dreams without the traditional barriers that have long hindered access to a J.D. program. With the nation's first fully online, full-time J.D. program, Southwestern is pioneering a new era in legal education.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.

