

AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION  
Standing Committee on Paralegals  
321 North Clark Street  
Mail Stop 19.1  
Chicago, Illinois 60654-7598

## **APPROVAL PROCESS PROCEDURES, REPORTING INSTRUCTIONS AND GENERAL INFORMATION©**

### **SUBMISSION OF REPORT AND FEES**

The following are the procedures to apply for approval or reapproval of a paralegal education program:

1. Prepare your application materials using the forms provided by the ABA Standing Committee on Paralegals on its website at <http://www.abanet.org/legalservices/paralegals/process.html>.
2. Using the forms available on the website, submit **one** paper copy and **two** CD-ROMs of self-evaluation reports, exhibits and related materials. The CD-ROM is to be in Adobe PDF format. Each PDF file should include bookmarks for relevant sections and each file should be titled in a way that clearly describes the file contents. Please continue to send any material, such as institutional literature and copies of catalogues, that is not readily available in or convertible to electronic format in hard copy.
3. Send the materials to the Chair of the Standing Committee on Paralegals, American Bar Association, 321 North Clark Street, Mail Stop 19.1, Chicago, Illinois 60610-4714.
4. If this is an initial application, submit the application fee of \$1,500, by check or money order payable to the American Bar Association, at the time the materials are submitted.
5. Approved programs are invoiced for the reapproval application fee approximately six months before the date reapproval materials are due.
6. If you have any questions concerning the procedure for submitting your materials, please contact Mattie Evans, Approval Process Manager, at: [evansm@staff.abanet.org](mailto:evansm@staff.abanet.org) or (312) 988-5617.

### **PREPARING SELF-EVALUATION REPORTS**

Please adhere to these procedures in preparing your report and exhibits:

1. Self-evaluation reports must be separated from the exhibits. Three-ring loose-leaf binders may be used but are no longer required.

2. The report must be prepared using a standard 12-point font size, on standard weight 8 1/2" by 11" paper.
3. Report pages are to be numbered consecutively.
4. The title page must be signed by the president or a dean of the institution, and by the program director, and should include:
  - The complete name, address, and telephone number of the institution and program.
  - The month and year of submission. If submitting a reapproval application, indicate the month and year the report is due. If an extension has been granted for a reapproval application or interim report, the month and year the report was originally due must also be shown. The date the report is originally due is the date to be used in the next subsequent report as the date of the last report.
  - If the program is approved, the date that its approval is set to expire.
  - A table of contents following the title page.
5. The report and exhibits must be submitted using the standard forms posted on the website.
6. Each section heading and subsection question must be copied verbatim and the response to that particular item must be presented directly below the question or, if so indicated, as an exhibit.
7. The only exhibits to be submitted are those requested.
8. If a form is provided for an exhibit, the exhibit must be submitted using the standard form.
9. Exhibits must be identified by the number specified on the Uniform Table of Exhibits.
10. If an exhibit does not apply to the program, the report and the table of exhibits must so indicate.
11. Tabbed dividers must be used to separate and identify exhibits.
12. The pages of exhibits should not be enclosed in plastic sleeves except for documents that do not conform to binder size, such as program brochures, catalogues, posters, etc.

## **REVIEW OF REPORT AND EXHIBITS BY ABA**

The self-evaluation report and exhibits are reviewed by the staff and one of the Standing Committee's educational consultants.

If the review of the report reveals that the program does not meet one or more guidelines or if additional information or revisions are required to complete the report or to assess compliance, the staff informs the program director in writing, specifying in detail the necessary changes.

The program must submit a revised self-evaluation report by the date designated by the ABA staff, which report is further reviewed by the staff and the educational consultant.

A site visit is scheduled when the application is found to be substantially complete and the program appears to be operating in compliance with the Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs.

The program director must send copies of the final revised self-evaluation report and exhibits to the members of the site visit team and to the ABA.

- The final revised self-evaluation report sent to the ABA must be on a CD ROM, formatted as previously described. No hard copy of the report and exhibits is required at this time.

- Unless otherwise advised by the Chair of the site visit team, hard copies of the final revised self-evaluation must be sent to the site visit team.

## **SELECTION OF SITE VISIT TEAM AND SCHEDULING OF SITE VISIT**

When the staff and the educational consultant have determined that the self-evaluation report and exhibits are substantially complete, the staff contacts the program director to determine possible dates for a site visit.

The site visit team for initial approval of a paralegal education program ordinarily consists of three members: a representative of the ABA Standing Committee or Approval Commission, a program director or paralegal educator from another institution offering an ABA-approved program, and an experienced paralegal or paralegal manager.

The team for a reapproval visit ordinarily has two members: a representative of the ABA Standing Committee or Approval Commission and either a program director, a paralegal educator, an experienced paralegal, or a paralegal manager. Every effort is made to include a lawyer and a nonlawyer on every team.

All members of site visit teams are bound to adhere to the Statement of Conduct for Evaluators, Commissioners, and Standing Committee Members in the Approval Process of Paralegal Education Programs. This Statement affirms the obligations of site visit team members to be impartial and fair, to avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety, to preserve confidentiality, and to avoid conflicts of interest. If a program being visited believes that a site visit team member has a conflict of interest that should prevent service on the team, the program director should so inform the staff at the time the team is selected.

Once members of the site visit team have been selected, staff informs the program director of the names and affiliations of the team members and the dates of the visit. Arrangements for site visits are made as soon as possible after a report is ready, but at least three weeks prior to the visit.

Once the visit is scheduled, the program director must immediately:

1. Send copies of the final self-evaluation report and exhibits directly to each team member and a CD ROM containing the report and exhibits to the ABA.
2. Prepare a draft agenda for the site visit per the instructions below and send it to the team chair.
3. Arrange with site visit team members for travel and accommodations and for payment or reimbursement of expenses.

Site visit team members review the report before the visit and may request additional information through the chair of the site team.

## **EXPENSES OF THE VISIT**

The applicant institution is required to bear the cost of travel, meals, and lodging for the site visit

team. Arrangements **MUST** be made by the institution for direct payment of transportation and lodging expenses or for reimbursement of expenses to site visit team members. (G-104.I)

## **SITE VISIT**

The purpose of the site visit is for the team to verify and supplement the information contained in the self-evaluation report so that the Approval Commission can assess compliance with the Guidelines for the Approval of Paralegal Education Programs. Program directors should verify that the information submitted in the self-evaluation report is still accurate and should provide a supplement at the time of the visit if changes have been made or are contemplated.

The site visit usually lasts one and one-half days and consists of the following activities:

1. Meetings with the program director.
2. Meeting with the president of the institution.
3. Meeting with representative group of students.
4. Meeting with graduates of the program.
5. Meeting with the faculty.
6. Meeting with the advisory committee.
7. Observation of legal specialty classes in session.
8. A tour of the physical facilities, including library and classrooms.
9. Meetings with key administrators and staff, such as placement director, admissions counselor, academic dean, and director of student services.
10. Review of records, such as faculty evaluations, student files, and samples of student work. (See more below.)
11. An exit meeting at which the evaluation team advises program officials of tentative findings and recommendations.

A draft agenda for the site visit must be prepared by the program director and sent to the chair of the evaluation team as soon as possible after the visit has been scheduled. The chair reviews the agenda and requests any necessary changes to the schedule, which is then finalized and sent by the program director to the members of the site visit team.

During the visit, the site team meets in executive session several times. Adequate time should be provided in the schedule of activities for these meetings. A private meeting room should be provided for use of the team for the duration of the visit. Clerical assistance and/or access to computers should be available at the team's request. The final agenda will be determined by the chair of the site visit team.

Please see the Instructions for Hosting a Site Visit for more detailed information on site visits.

## **SITE VISIT TEAM REPORTS AND ACTION BY THE ABA**

The Approval Commission and Standing Committee rely on the site visit report to learn about the paralegal education program. The primary purpose of the report is to provide the Commission and

Committee with the foundation they need to review the program's compliance with the Guidelines. The report of the site evaluation should be written to give as much information as possible to the Commission and Committee so that they may take appropriate action, based on the team's report.

When the site visit team has agreed upon the report, it should be transmitted only to the Site Visit Coordinator. The chairperson of the site team shall not distribute the report to the program. Members of the team shall consider the report to be a confidential document and shall not share it with others.

In accordance with procedures established by the Standing Committee, the report will be reviewed by staff and the Educational Consultant. The chair may be asked to amplify or modify certain portions so that the report will provide the Commission and Committee the information needed to determine the program's compliance with the Standards. Following this review, the Site Visit Coordinator will forward the report to the program. The program director will review the report and may correct factual mistakes. In the event, the program director wishes to respond to the report or include new information occurring after the site visit that may be relevant to one or more the site team's observations, the program director may send any such response to the Site Visit Coordinator who will distribute it to members of the site team. Comments from the program, and any additional comments from the team will be attached to and made a part of the site evaluation report that will be submitted to the Approval Commission.

The report should be completed as soon as possible after the site evaluation visit. We ask the team to submit the completed report to the Site Visit Coordinator no later than three weeks after the conclusion of the site visit. The report should be submitted electronically by e-mail attachment. ABA staff use Microsoft© Word word processing software. The process is simpler if reports are submitted in that format.

The Approval Commission does most of the work of the approval process. The Commission, consisting of 13 volunteers, meets twice a year for consideration of paralegal education programs seeking approval or reapproval. Meetings are usually held in the fall and spring (late October/early November and late April/early May). Dates of the Approval Commission meetings are posted on the Standing Committee website. The Approval Commission makes recommendations concerning the status of the program to the Standing Committee. Materials for each meeting must be in hand and ready for printing approximately three weeks before a meeting.

Members of the Approval Commission include paralegal educators, practicing lawyers, and paralegals. All members read each site evaluation report, but one Commission member, the Chair of the site evaluation team, presents the report at the meeting. After consideration of the site evaluation

report and other relevant materials, the Approval Commission may:

- recommend approval or reapproval, if it concludes that the program is in compliance with the Guidelines;
- conclude that a program is not in compliance with one or more guidelines or that compliance cannot be assessed in which case it will defer action and notify the program of the specific information or action needed prior to making a recommendation to the Standing Committee. In such cases, the program is required to submit a progress report and may be required to host a follow-up site visit.

Other actions that may be taken with regard to a program's status include granting or denying approval or reapproval, issuing warnings, placing an approved program on probation, issuing an order to an approved program to show cause why its approval should not be withdrawn, and withdrawing approval. Warnings may be issued by the Approval Commission Chair or the Commission as a whole; probation or an order to show cause why approval should not be withdrawn may be imposed by the Standing Committee. All other actions are taken by the House of Delegates at the recommendation of the Standing Committee. Dates of the Standing Committee and House of Delegates meetings are posted on the Standing Committee's website.

## **APPEALS**

Recommendations of the Standing Committee to the House of Delegates may be appealed in accordance with the ABA Constitution and Bylaws, and related policies.

## **INTERIM REPORTS AND ANNUAL FEES**

The period of approval is seven years. Approved programs are required to furnish the Standing Committee with an interim report on each two-year and four-year anniversary of the date that its approval or reapproval became effective. (G-104.H) Effective September 1, 2008, programs will submit one interim report during the seven-year approval period.

The effective date of a program's reapproval is the date the program was scheduled to have been reapproved, i.e., seven years from the month and year of its last approval by the House of Delegates. The date of the visit or the action by the House is **NOT** the effective date of approval or reapproval.

Each approved program pays an annual fee. Approved programs are invoiced for the annual fee in February of each year. The fee is due on or before May 1 of each year. Approved programs do not pay annual fees in the year in which a reapproval application is submitted

Failure to submit interim reports or annual fees on time may subject the program to monetary penalties and possible sanctions including withdrawal of approval as described in G-104.H.

## **MAJOR CHANGES**

Each approved program also has an affirmative responsibility, whether a report is due or not, to notify the Committee in writing of any major change which affects its program at the time the

change  
is made or should have been discovered.

The initial offering of a legal specialty course in an accelerated, compressed, or totally online instructional format as described in G-302J is considered to be a major change. (G-104.J)

While not necessarily a major change, a change in program directorship must also be reported.

© 2007 American Bar Association

All rights reserved.

The American Bar Association hereby grants permission for copies of these forms to be made by any institution of higher learning or for use by not-for-profit organizations, provided that no fee is assessed or royalty is paid. Requests to reproduce materials in any other manner should be addressed to: Copyrights & Contracts Department, American Bar Association, 321 North Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60654-7598; Telephone: (312) 988-6102; Facsimile: (312) 988-6030; E-mail: [copyright@abanet.org](mailto:copyright@abanet.org).

Produced by the Standing Committee on Paralegals

10-17-07