

 [Click to Print](#) or Select '**Print**' in your browser menu to print this document.

Page printed from: [Texas Lawyer](#)

ABA Delays Accreditation Decision for UNT College of Law

KAREN SLOAN, Texas Lawyer

November 17, 2016

The American Bar Association has delayed a decision on whether to provisionally accredit the University of North Texas Dallas College of Law, which is the country's newest law school.

The ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar [announced Thursday](#) that it has sent the fledgling school's application for provisional accreditation back to an advisory committee for further evaluation. That decision leaves current third-year students in limbo as to whether they will be eligible to sit for the July 2017 bar exam.

"The ABA's decision simply says, 'Let's study the issue some more,'" said Dean Royal Furgeson in a written statement. "Our plan is to be fully engaged in that study process, and we look forward to continuing our work with the ABA."

The council's decision to withhold provisional accreditation was not unexpected. The ABA committee tasked with examining accreditation matters in August [recommended against extending that status](#), citing concerns over the qualifications of admitted students and the school's finances. Law school leaders appeared before the council last month in hopes of persuading members that North Texas is in compliance with ABA rules and that it gives careful consideration to students it admitted with lower LSAT scores and undergraduate grades.

The school is being closely watched in legal education circles and has enjoyed public support from several prominent advocates who applaud its mission of serving a diverse student population at an affordable cost. Tuition is relatively low at \$15,200 a year, and 55 percent of students are minorities.

University of California, Irvine School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky; Ohio State University Michael E. Moritz College of Law professor Deborah Merritt; and University of Richmond law professor David Epstein each penned op-eds in support of the school.

"There is room—indeed necessity—for many different types of law schools," Chemerinsky [wrote in the National Law Journal](#). "UNT has created a novel approach and it should have the chance to prove that it works."

The ABA's accreditation committee found the school to be out of compliance with the rule requiring law schools to maintain "sound admission policies and practices," noting that it has fallen short of the median 150 LSAT goal set out by the university regents. The school's median LSAT in 2015 was 146. The 25th percentile was 143.

Ferguson has defended the school's admissions procedures, saying administrators looked beyond just grades and LSAT scores for other potential signs of success, such as military or work experience.

The ABA council has lately stepped up enforcement of its rules that law schools admit only students who are capable of graduating and passing the bar. [It has reprimanded three law schools since August](#) for enrolling students with low academic credentials. The ABA is under pressure from the Department of Education to boost law school oversight at a time when bar pass rates nationwide are declining.

North Texas is hardly the only new law school that faced hurdle in obtaining ABA accreditation. In the past five years, four other new schools saw their initial accreditation bids denied, but each eventually overcame their deficits and gained the ABA's blessing.

North Texas officials said Wednesday that the law school will petition the Texas Supreme Court to allow its graduates to sit for the bar in the event that the school has not secured provisional accreditation by next summer.

Copyright 2016. ALM Media Properties, LLC. All rights reserved.