



The Academy Supports the Role of the Accreditation Council of the ABA in Accrediting U.S. Law Schools

September 15, 2026-The [International Academy of Trial Lawyers](#) advocates for the Rule of Law around the world. The Rule of Law [system](#) requires a legal profession that operates independently and without interference from others, ensuring the greatest possible access to legal protections and remedies.

The work of competent, well-educated lawyers is fundamental to the Rule of Law. Lawyers have solemn fiduciary duties to protect people’s rights and represent their interests with zeal and competence. Performing these duties well requires extensive training in ethics and the substance of the law.

Since 1952, the American Bar Association’s Accreditation Council has been the body in the United States that accredits U.S. law schools. Council Accreditation requires law schools to “maintain a rigorous program of legal education that prepares its students, upon graduation, for admission to the bar and for effective, ethical, and responsible participation in the legal profession.”¹ The Council’s accreditation [standards](#) are extensive and appropriate to a learned profession. They mandate minimum standards for curriculum, faculty, library resources, and facilities. Enforcing them protects the public, ensuring that any lawyer who graduates from an accredited law school has received a sound legal education.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education began a process to strip the Accreditation Council of its role in accrediting U.S. law schools.² The basis for this action is the Department’s disagreement with Council accreditation [Standard](#) 206. This Standard, whose implementation is suspended until August 31, 2027, required in part that:

Consistent with sound legal education policy and the Standards, a law school shall demonstrate by concrete action a commitment to diversity and inclusion by providing full opportunities for the study of law and entry into the profession by members of underrepresented groups, particularly racial and ethnic minorities, and a commitment to having a student body that is diverse with respect to gender, race, and ethnicity.³

¹ ABA Standard 301: Objectives of Program of Legal Education. Available at: https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2026-2027/2026-2027-standards-chapter-3.pdf

² See “Trump Administration Attacks Bar Association’s Power to Accredite Law Schools.” Wall Street Journal. August 21, 2026. Available at: <https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/aba-american-bar-association-law-schools-accredit-trump-education-e56f4cbc>

³ ABA Accreditation Standards. Standard 206(a) Diversity and Inclusion – Suspended Until 8/31/2027. Available at:



The Academy opposes the Department’s contemplated action. For more than half a century, Council Accreditation Standards have protected the public by ensuring that every law school—and every law school graduate—meets minimum standards of competence.

The Academy also disagrees with the Department of Education’s stated reason for considering this action. Standards that require law schools to provide *opportunities* for entry into the legal profession by diverse and underrepresented groups are appropriate. They are not discriminatory. Instead, a commitment to providing *opportunities* is just that: it is a commitment to afford opportunities for legal study to those who might otherwise have been excluded. Every admitted student must still do the work, complete all required courses, and demonstrate mastery of the subjects required to graduate. And, of course, they must all pass the Bar examination before they are licensed to practice law.

A diverse legal profession is also important to society. All citizens have rights. But until recently, access to the legal profession that protects those rights was limited largely to white men. This was wrong. The ABA’s intentional commitment to diversity and inclusion has changed this for the better, opening the profession more broadly to qualified women and people of color. [Statistics](#) from the ABA confirm that real progress has been made and that much remains to be done to achieve parity in the legal profession:

- **Women:** From 1950 to 1970, only 3% of all lawyers were women. That grew to 8% in 1980, 20% in 1990, 27% in 2000, and 41% in 2024. But men still outnumber women in the U.S. legal profession by a rate of 58% to 41%.
- **Lawyers of Color:** Ten years ago, lawyers of color were just 12% of the U.S. legal profession; in 2024, they are 23%. That is less than representative of the U.S. population as a whole,⁴ but it is progress.

A commitment to diversity and inclusion is beneficial to the public and to the legal profession. And ensuring that lawyers and law schools meet minimum standards is vital to protect the public. The Academy therefore urges the Department of Education to abandon its effort to strip the Accreditation Council of its role as the accrediting agency for U.S. law schools.

https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/standards/2026-2027/2026-2027-standards-chapter-2.pdf.

⁴ See Quick Facts United States. United States Census Bureau. Population Estimates July 1, 2025. Available at: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045225>. This Census publication reports that 56.1% of people are White and not Hispanic or Latino, 20.5% are Hispanic or Latino, 13.5% are black alone, 2.1% are American Indian and Alaska Native alone, 6.9% are Asian alone, .3% are Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 4.9% are of mixed race.



About the Academy

The International Academy of Trial Lawyers (the Academy) is a fellowship of lawyers with a singular mission: to protect and promote the Rule of Law. Founded in 1954, the Academy is composed of distinguished trial lawyers recognized for skill, experience, ethics, and civility. It includes both plaintiff and defense counsel in civil litigation, as well as prosecutors and defense lawyers in criminal cases. The Academy includes trial lawyers from the United States, Canada, and more than 30 other countries. Fellowship is by invitation only. Nominees must have distinguished themselves through careers defined by exceptional trial skills, professionalism, and integrity. They become Fellows only after a rigorous vetting process that includes both peer and judicial review.

For additional information, visit IATL.net

Media Inquiries:

info@iatl.net