

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL

Los Angeles, CA

Graduation Requirements Policy

Faculty policy.

Revision history: Formerly a part of the annually revised Student Handbook; established as a standalone policy in August 2022; revised in August 2023; technical edits made in May 2024.

Related policies: Academic Disqualification, Academic Probation, and Academic Improvement Programs Policies; Academic Policies and Procedures; Financial Aid Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy; and Student Honor Code.

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A. Overview

Requirements for a student to receive the Juris Doctor degree from Southwestern Law School are listed below. See *Academic Policies and Procedures* for the standards a student must meet to remain in good academic standing while enrolled at the law school. SCALE and LL.M. students should refer to the *SCALE Program Policies* and *Master of Laws Program Policies* for graduation requirements. SCALE and LL.M. students are subject to the following policies not explicitly delineated in the *SCALE Program Policies* and *Master of Laws Program Policies*.

1. All J.D. students must satisfactorily complete 87 units. If a student receives a grade of "F" in a course, the course is not considered satisfactorily completed, and Southwestern will not grant course or unit credit. A student may not graduate with a grade of Incomplete on their transcript. A student may not extend their degree date after completing 87 units and required courses satisfactorily.
2. All students are required to complete six enrollment terms to graduate. "Enrollment term" is defined in Section C below.
3. All students must maintain a cumulative grade point average (GPA) of at least 2.330 (C+), calculated based on all work completed at Southwestern.
4. All students must satisfy the provisions of *Academic Policies and Procedures*, including "*Minimum Number of Classroom Credits Required for J.D. Students*" and "*Length of Course of Study*."
5. All students must enroll in and complete all courses designated by the faculty as required. The required courses are (in alphabetical order, not in the order students take the courses):
 - Business Associations
 - Civil Procedure I and II
 - Constitutional Criminal Procedure
 - Constitutional Law I and II
 - Contracts I and II
 - Criminal Law
 - Evidence
 - Legal Analysis, Writing, and Skills (LAWS) I and II
 - Legal Profession
 - Property
 - Torts
 - A course that satisfies the upper-division writing requirement
 - Six units of coursework that satisfy the experiential requirement

Students may not satisfy the upper-division and experiential writing requirements using the same course.

Students must also satisfy the Bar Readiness Curriculum, per Section F of this Policy.

Per ABA Standard 303(c), students must complete the programming provided by Southwestern on bias, cross-cultural competency, and racism at the start of the program of legal education and at least once again before graduation.

6. All students must pass all required courses with a D- or higher grade. A student who fails a required course must repeat that course during the next semester it is offered. See "*Repeated Courses*" in *Academic Policies and Procedures* for information on calculating a passing grade in a two-semester course and the effect of repeated courses on the GPA.
7. Any student who has been academically disqualified and subsequently readmitted to the law school may be required to meet additional requirements determined by the Academic Standards Committee.
8. Each student is responsible for regularly monitoring their academic progress and ensuring they comply with all graduation requirements and academic standards.

B. Character and Fitness

Absent extraordinary circumstances as determined by Southwestern's President & Dean, the student must not have any pending Honor Code, disciplinary, or Title IX matters; unresolved admission application amendments; or criminal charges to receive the Juris Doctor degree.

C. Minimum Enrollment Terms

All J.D. students are required to complete six enrollment terms to graduate. Students complete enrollment terms as follows:

1. Full-time students earn one enrollment term credit for each fall or spring semester completed satisfactorily (6 semesters x 1 enrollment term unit = 6 enrollment term units).
2. Part-time students earn 0.75 of an enrollment term credit for each fall or spring semester completed satisfactorily (8 semesters x .75 enrollment term unit = 6 enrollment term units).
3. SCALE students earn 0.67 of an enrollment term credit for each term or grading period completed satisfactorily. SCALE students attend nine terms, or grading

periods, during their program (9 periods x .67 enrollment term unit = 6 enrollment term units).

4. Summer sessions, summer-abroad law programs, and intersession programs do not count as enrollment terms, except for units completed in the required SCALE summer session.
5. Students who complete an approved semester or year-long visit at another institution or who transfer into Southwestern will be awarded enrollment term credit for the terms they completed at the other institution.
6. Additional rules and guidance:
 - a. Enrollment term credits are earned when a student is charged the normal, flat-rate tuition for a semester or SCALE term and completes at least one unit.
 - b. If a student has completed six enrollment terms but has not completed 87 units, the student will be charged per unit tuition for any remaining units. Students in the SCALE 2.5-Year Modified Curriculum are excluded from this rule.
 - c. If a student has not completed six enrollment terms, regardless of how many units the student needs to graduate, the student will be charged flat-rate tuition for a semester or SCALE term. For example, if a student needs only a few units to reach 87 units but has not completed six enrollment terms, the student will be charged the full flat program rate because tuition for six enrollment terms has not been paid or the terms of flat-rate tuition have not been completed.
 - d. For information regarding early graduation requests, please see Appendix A.

D. Upper-Division Writing Requirement

Southwestern has adopted an upper-division writing requirement for graduation. A student may fulfill this requirement by taking either a seminar or a course specifically approved and designated as meeting the writing requirement. Successful completion of the Law Review or Law Journal fall writing courses will also satisfy the writing requirement. Some courses designated to meet the writing requirement may also be designated as meeting the experiential requirement; however, the same course cannot satisfy both requirements. Students who take a course to fulfill the writing requirement may not use the same course to meet the experiential requirement.

Because writing instruction requires a low student-faculty ratio and out-of-classroom supervision of students' research and writing, enrollment in seminars and similar courses typically will be limited to 20 students.

For more information regarding seminar standards and guidelines, see Appendix B.

A course may be specifically approved and designated by the faculty as meeting the upper-division writing requirement according to the following criteria:

1. The course must require the student to timely submit at least three written and graded assignments, at least two of which must be research assignments. The written research assignment(s) must total at least 30 pages.
2. Examples of writings that would meet the research requirement include research memoranda, memoranda of points and authorities, trial briefs, appellate briefs, and papers of publishable quality.
3. Examples of writing that would not meet the research requirement are bare pleadings, discovery requests, and documents not involving substantial original research and writing by the student.
4. Under these criteria, a course can be designated as meeting the writing requirement upon request of the professor to the faculty Curriculum Committee. The writing requirement designation does not attach to a course title but to the specific course requirements described in the registration materials distributed to the students. The designation of a course meeting a writing requirement must occur before the commencement of the academic term in which the course is scheduled. Assuming that the student is otherwise eligible to register for the seminar or course that satisfies the writing requirement, registration is open to second- and third-year full-time students and second-, third-, and fourth-year part-time students.

E. Experiential Requirement

Per [ABA Standard 303](#), Southwestern has adopted an experiential requirement for graduation. Students must complete at least six credit hours of coursework specifically approved and designated as meeting the experiential requirement. Students must take at least one unit in oral communications-focused courses. Registration materials will outline courses meeting the experiential requirement each semester. Some courses that meet the experiential requirement may also be designated as meeting the writing requirement. However, the same course cannot be used to satisfy both requirements. Students who take a course to fulfill the experiential requirement may not use the same course to meet the writing requirement.

F. Bar Readiness Curriculum

All students are required to complete a Bar Readiness Curriculum before their graduation. Courses include Cal Bar Writing: Skills and Strategies, MBE: Skills and Strategies, Wills and Trusts, Community Property, Remedies, and other bar-related courses. Students in the Online J.D. Program are required to complete Practical Lawyering Skills instead of Remedies as part of the Bar Readiness Curriculum.

Students with a GPA of 3.33 or above at the end of their second year in bar-tested courses completed as part of their first or second year may opt out of the Bar Readiness Curriculum. For full-time students, the bar-tested courses used to calculate the opt-out eligibility GPA currently include Torts, Property, Civil Procedure I and II, Criminal Law, Contracts I and II, Evidence, Constitutional Law I and II, and Business Associations. For part-time students, these courses include Torts, Property, Civil Procedure I and II, Criminal Law, Contracts I and II, and Constitutional Law I and II. The Bar Readiness Curriculum was carefully constructed to maximize all students' chances of passing the bar exam on their first attempt. Thus, even for students who have a GPA at or above 3.33, the Bar Readiness Curriculum is strongly recommended.

Regardless of GPA, required courses for all SCALE students and students enrolled in the Online J.D. Program include Cal Bar Writing: Skills and Strategies, MBE: Skills and Strategies, Wills and Trusts, Community Property, and Remedies for SCALE students and Practical Lawyering Skills for students in the Online J.D. Program.

The Bar Readiness Curriculum is subject to change due to Southwestern's ongoing commitment to annually review and modify its course offerings to better prepare students for the Bar Exam.

The Student Services Office will publish the Bar Readiness Curriculum each spring for the upcoming academic year. Requirements can be modified from year to year based on course offerings.

G. Graduate Employment Survey and Exit Interview with the Career Services Office

To be awarded the J.D. degree, all graduating students must complete a Graduate Employment Survey and an Exit Interview with the Career Services Office. The ABA and NALP require all law schools to collect this information, which is reported anonymously to protect the graduate's privacy.

H. Awarding Diplomas

After confirming with the Registrar's Office that graduation and other requirements have been met, Southwestern Law School will award diplomas at the conclusion of the fall and spring semesters, the summer term, and the January intersession. Absent extraordinary

circumstances as determined by the Dean, to receive a diploma, a student must have completed all graduation requirements by the date the Vice Dean(s) establishes for faculty to submit grades for graduating students. In addition, absent extraordinary circumstances as determined by the Dean, the student must not have any pending Honor Code, disciplinary, or Title IX matters; unresolved admission application amendments; or criminal charges.

I. Commencement

Southwestern Law School holds one commencement per year following the conclusion of the spring semester. Eligible students are permitted to participate in one commencement ceremony only.

Students graduating in May can participate in the commencement scheduled immediately after graduation.

Students graduating in December or at other times can participate in the commencement scheduled immediately before or after graduation. December graduates must notify the Administrative Services Office at least six months before the scheduled commencement date if they intend to participate in the commencement before their graduation. Otherwise, it is assumed that December graduates will participate in the commencement following graduation, and no notification is required.

If a student eligible for graduation has an extenuated circumstance and cannot participate in the commencement program on the regular schedule, the Dean has authority to grant an exception.

J. Policy Revisions

Southwestern reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice.

Appendix A

Early Graduation Request

Early graduation requests apply only to non-SCALE students who wish to complete their legal studies early but would be short no more than one enrollment term unit and would not have paid the expected six enrollment term units of tuition. Based on enrollment terms, early graduation would not be allowed unless a student who wishes to finish early:

1. requests a waiver (no later than one semester before the student’s last semester) of the missing enrollment term, **and**,
2. if approved, pays an early graduation fee of one term’s tuition, based on the student’s academic program, which would be added to the last semester’s charges. However, for full-time students, this early graduation fee subtracts all summer tuition paid by the student, and for part-time students, the early graduation fee subtracts all summer tuition paid by the student above the ten units expected that part-time students take during the summer sessions.

In addition, some students may switch academic programs as their needs and conditions allow. Below are some examples of when students changing programs may also need or want to request early graduation. All examples assume that the student completes each semester, i.e., does not take a leave of absence during a semester. Please note that to switch from the part-time to the full-time day program, a student’s cumulative GPA must be at least 3.300, and the Associate Dean of Student Services must grant approval. In Scenarios 1 and 2, a student may formally switch their academic programs and meet the enrollment term requirements. In Scenarios 3 to 5, the student would not meet the enrollment term requirements and would need to complete the items listed above for an early graduation request.

Scenario 1: Changing from Full-Time to Part-Time	Year	Program	Enrollment Term Earned Fall	Enrollment Term Earned Spring	Total Enrollment Terms	Cumulative Enrollment Terms
No Early Graduation Request Needed	1	Full-Time	1	1	2	2
	2	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	3.5
	3	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	5
	4	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	6.5

Scenario 2: Changing from Part-Time to Full-Time	Year	Program	Enrollment Term Earned Fall	Enrollment Term Earned Spring	Total Enrollment Terms	Cumulative Enrollment Terms
No Early Graduation Request Needed	1	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	1.5
	2	Full-Time	1	1	2	3.5
	3	Full-Time	1	1	2	5.5
	4	Full-Time	1	0	1	6.5

Scenario 3: Graduating Early While Remaining Part-Time	Year	Program	Enrollment Term Earned Fall	Enrollment Term Earned Spring	Total Enrollment Terms	Cumulative Enrollment Terms
Early Graduation Request Is Needed	1	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	1.5
	2	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	3
	3	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	4.5
	4	Part-Time	0.75	0	0.75	5.25

Scenario 4: Changing from Part-Time to Full-Time	Year	Program	Enrollment Term Earned Fall	Enrolment Term Earned Spring	Total Enrollment Terms	Cumulative Enrollment Terms
Early Graduation Request Is Needed	1	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	1.5
	2	Full-Time	1	1	2	3.5
	3	Full-Time	1	1	2	5.5
	4	Full-Time	0	0	0	5.5

Scenario 5: Changing from Full-Time to Part-Time	Year	Program	Enrollment Term Earned Fall	Enrollment Term Earned Spring	Total Enrollment Terms	Cumulative Enrollment Terms
Early Graduation Request Is Needed	1	Full-Time	1	1	2	2
	2	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	3.5
	3	Part-Time	0.75	0.75	1.5	5
	4	Part-Time	0	0	0	5

Appendix B
Seminar Standards and Guidelines

- A. A seminar paper will be required for each student enrolled in a seminar.
- B. The seminar requires the timely submission, at points throughout the semester to be established by the professor, of a topic outline, including a bibliography, and at least one draft of the seminar paper before submission of the final paper. The writing must display substantial legal writing skills and reflect in-depth research and cogent legal analysis. It must be original work, and all sources must be properly footnoted. To promote academic integrity, papers must be submitted through Turnitin.
- C. Except with the professor's prior written approval, all research papers submitted for credit will have been prepared and researched solely for the course for which they are submitted.
- D. Each student must submit their final seminar paper by email to Faculty Support Services at facultysupport@swlaw.edu. The professor will return one graded copy of each seminar paper to the Registrar's Office when the final grades for the seminar are submitted. A second unmarked copy will be forwarded to the law library, specifically indexed and placed in locked files, available only to faculty.
- E. Since active oral participation is a seminar goal, each student can engage in oral analysis and argument of issues with other seminar members. This may be accomplished in a variety of ways within the discretion of the professor.