

SOUTHWESTERN

LAW SCHOOL Los Angeles, CA

Length of Study for the J.D. Degree Policy (for students entering before August 2025)

Faculty policy. Effective immediately for students entering before August 2025.

Revision history: Formerly a part of the Academic Policies and Procedures; established as a standalone policy in September 2025; substantive edits (including adding Sections B, D, and E) were made in September 2025.

Related policies: Academic Policies and Procedures; Repeated Courses Policy; Withdrawing from Southwestern; Student Health-Related Leave of Absence and Return Policy; Leave of Absence and Return Policy; Switching J.D. Programs; SCALE Program Policies; Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedures (Including Complaints Implicating ABA Standards) (under development).

Other related materials: [Professional Licensure by Program](#); [Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements](#)

Scheduled review date: May 2027 (Student Services Office)

A. Typical Progressions

To be eligible to receive the J.D. degree, a student must complete the course of study required for the degree in no fewer than 24 months and no more than 84 months after the student has commenced law study at Southwestern or at a law school from which transfer credit has been accepted.

Generally, SCALE students are expected to complete their course of study within two years, full-time students within three years, and part-time students within four years.

SCALE students who wish to pursue the 2.5-year option should consult Section O of the *SCALE Program Policies*.

J.D. students who wish to switch J.D. programs (e.g., online full-time to residential full-time) should consult the *Switching J.D. Programs* policy.

B. Relationship to Licensure

Students should consult the requirements for licensure in their chosen jurisdiction(s). Some jurisdictions impose different minimum and maximum time limits to earn the J.D. For example, [Alabama](#) (as of July 2025) requires “a course of law studies that extend[s] for at least 3 academic years.”

C. Continuous Enrollment

Students are expected to maintain continuous enrollment throughout their program. Failure to enroll in any semester will be treated as a withdrawal from Southwestern unless a student has been granted a leave of absence, approval to visit another ABA-approved law school, approval to participate in an exchange program (e.g., Hague Exchange Program), or has been admitted into a concurrent-degree program (e.g., J.D./M.B.A. Program). For more information about withdrawing or taking a leave, refer to the *Withdrawing from Southwestern* policy, *Student Health-Related Leave of Absence and Return Policy*, or *Leave of Absence and Return Policy*.

D. Extension Beyond 84 Months

1. Petition to extend

An extension beyond 84 months will be granted only in extraordinary circumstances, and only for a defined period. Examples of grounds for an extension may include a serious illness, a serious family emergency, military service, or other exigent circumstances outside the student's control. This process for seeking an extension is separate from Southwestern's leave of absence processes.

A student may apply for an extension of the 84-month deadline by submitting a written petition to the Associate Dean for Student Services, who will, in turn, forward the petition to the faculty Academic Standards Committee for review and a decision.

The student's petition must include the following:

- a detailed explanation of the specific grounds for the requested extension, including the specific hardship experienced and why the student is able to return and complete the J.D. degree;
- the additional time requested (e.g., one semester, one year), with an explanation of why that time is both necessary and sufficient;
- documentation that supports the request (in terms of the hardship and timing);
- a proposed completion plan (e.g., what courses will be taken when; other steps to help ensure academic success), including a bar-study plan; and
- other information that will allow the Academic Standards Committee to evaluate the factors outlined in Section D.2.b below.

Before seeking an extension, students using GI Bill benefits should consult with the Veterans Administration and Southwestern's designated Military/Veteran advisor in the Student Services Office about the months of credit-bearing enrollment funded under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

International students on an F-1 or J-1 visa should understand that an extension request can create status-violation risks and should consult with the Registrar, the law school's Designated School Official for SEVP, before requesting an extension.

2. Academic Standards Committee review

a. *Timing*

The Academic Standards Committee review process can take up to 45 days to complete, depending on the time of year the petition is received. Students seeking an extension should plan appropriately.

b. *Factors and process*

The Academic Standards Committee will consider the factors below when evaluating a student's petition. The Committee will weigh the factors holistically. While no single factor is determinative, failing to satisfy the core criteria—extraordinary hardship beyond the student's control and a credible path to complete the degree—will result in the Committee denying the petition. The student will not be invited to appear before the Committee.

Existence of extraordinary circumstances: The student must demonstrate a serious hardship outside of their control that directly impeded their ability to finish the J.D. degree within 84 months. The burden is on the student to provide information and documentation that proves the qualifying hardship and timing by clear and convincing evidence. The student's narrative and evidence must demonstrate a direct causal link between the extraordinary circumstance and the delay in studies (for example, medical records for a serious illness that forced an enrollment gap). Circumstances that are within the student's control or due to personal preference (e.g., voluntary gap for work, bar-exam timing, or enrichment activities) do not meet this standard and will not merit an extension.

- **Academic progress to date:** The Committee will review the student's academic record and progress in the J.D. program to gauge the feasibility of completion. This review will include the number of credits earned, academic performance, and the student's academic standing during the program. As part of the review, the Committee will review the student's official transcript, including any courses in progress. For courses in progress, the Committee may seek information about the student's attendance, engagement, and performance. A student who has completed a substantial portion of the curriculum in good academic standing is in a better position to merit an extension than one who has made minimal progress. The Committee may consider whether the student has complied with relevant academic policies.
- **Resolution of issues and capacity to complete the program:** The petition must persuade the Committee that the extraordinary obstacle has been or soon will be sufficiently resolved or ameliorated so that the student can resume studies and successfully complete the degree (e.g., health has improved, family crisis has stabilized, military deployment has ended). This factor assures the law school that granting an extension will likely lead to degree completion as opposed to prolonged difficulties. The Committee may request evidence demonstrating the student's ability to handle coursework successfully (for example, a doctor's clearance to

return to full-time or part-time study if the issue was medical).

- **Previous extensions or leaves:** The Committee will consider whether the student has received prior extensions or taken multiple leaves of absence, and the circumstances surrounding any past interruptions. Repeated delays might raise concern, unless each was tied to a legitimate extraordinary cause. If prior leaves and adjustments were appropriately handled and part of navigating the same extended hardship, the Committee will consider that context. Overall, the student's history should reflect that an extension is a last resort, not a pattern reflecting a lack of diligence.
- **Impact on academic standards and bar passage:** The Committee will consider the request in light of maintaining academic and accreditation standards. The Committee will balance compassion for the student's documented situation with the need to uphold the integrity of the degree timeline and help ensure that the student will meet all educational requirements and pass the bar examination.

c. *Documenting an extension*

If the Committee grants an extension, it will prepare a memorandum that will be provided to the student and placed in the student's file (although no medical records or information should be included in that file). The memorandum should include the following information:

- The specific justification for the extension.
- The specific extension, which should be for a defined period that is only as long as necessary for the student to finish the J.D. requirements. The Committee may set an extension different from the one requested in the student's petition. This section of the memorandum should explain why the extension period is reasonable and sufficient for the student to complete all remaining credits.
- A concrete completion plan (such as a term-by-term course schedule or credit load that demonstrates the student can graduate within the extension), including a bar-study plan.
- Any conditions associated with the extension, such as a requirement that the student meet regularly with the Associate Dean for Student Services or a faculty member in the Academic Success and Bar Preparation program; take certain courses; achieve certain milestones; or complete other steps designed to increase the student's chances of completing the degree by the extended deadline.
- Any consequences if the student fails to abide by the completion plan or fulfill the stated conditions.

d. *Appealing a denial*

A student denied an extension may appeal that decision under the *Student Complaint and Grievance Policy and Procedures*.

E. *Policy Revisions*

Southwestern reserves the right to change or modify any aspect of this policy at any time, with or without prior notice. However, any petition to extend the 84-month maximum to earn the J.D. degree will be reviewed under the policy that was in effect at the time the petition was submitted, unless the student consents to using the revised policy.