



# U.C. Irvine Law Wins Full Accreditation from ABA

Karen Sloan, *The National Law Journal*

June 9, 2014 | 0 Comments

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University of California Irvine School of Law.  
Photo courtesy of UC Irvine.

The American Bar Association has granted full accreditation to the University of California, Irvine School of Law at the earliest possible opportunity—five years after the school opened its doors in 2009. It gained provisional accreditation in 2011.

“From the outset, our goal has been to build a top law school that emphasizes preparing students for the practice of law at the highest levels of the profession,” dean Erwin Chemerinsky said. “I am very proud that the decision by the ABA is at the earliest possible time under the ABA rules.”

The ABA's Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar voted to grant full accreditation during its meeting on Friday.

Considerable criticism greeted initial plans to build a new law school in California when the Irvine project was announced. Did a state so loaded with law schools (it now is home to 21 accredited by the ABA) need another one?

Chemerinsky has argued that Irvine would offer something different in its emphasis on both public service and real-world training. For example, each student must complete a live-client clinic, and 1Ls perform client-intake interviews at legal aid and public defender offices.

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"We've built a terrific faculty, recruited terrific students, and we've created an innovative curriculum," Chemerinsky said in an interview Monday. "ABA accreditation is an important milestone, and it's a good time to reflect on what we've achieved."

That the Orange County law school would gain the full blessing of the ABA was a foregone conclusion, according to several law professor bloggers who have followed the school's first years.

But it remains to be seen whether Irvine will realize Chemerinsky's ambition: To rank among the top 20 law schools in the nation according to the U.S. News & World Report. The school will receive its first U.S. News ranking next spring, and Chemerinsky said it's possible it would rank among the top 20.

Irvine has recruited well-known and prolific scholars to its faculty—Chemerinsky himself is a noted constitutional law expert. But the school has lost some of the student recruiting momentum it enjoyed in its first years, when scholarship money was available to all students. Private donations allowed Irvine to waive tuition for the initial class of 60 students, luring those boasting top LSAT scores and undergraduate grade-point averages. The following two classes received tuition waivers of one-half and one-third, respectively. The academic credentials of Irvine's incoming classes have declined slightly since then.

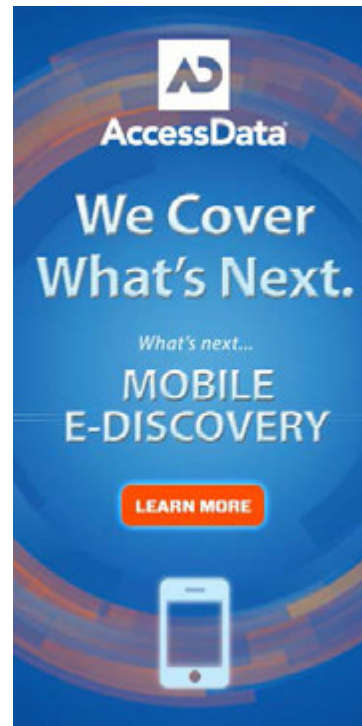
Academic credentials of incoming students account for a quarter of a school's U.S. News ranking. Reputation among lawyers, judges and other academics also factor heavily.

Still, Irvine's enrollment has been gradually increasing at a time when competition for students has become stiffer than ever due to a national decline in applications. The school is on schedule to meet its goal of bringing in 180 new students per year and maintaining a faculty of 56 by 2019, Chemerinsky said.

Irvine is doing well in placing its students in judicial clerkships. It sent 22 percent of the class of 2013 into prestigious federal clerkships—behind only Stanford Law School and Yale Law School.

Irvine's class of 2012 had the second highest pass rate in the state at 90 percent on the July administration of the California bar examination, but fell to No. 8 in 2013 with a pass rate of almost 78 percent.

Contact Karen Sloan at [ksloan@alm.com](mailto:ksloan@alm.com). For more of *The National Law Journal's* law school coverage, visit: <http://www.facebook.com/NLJLawSchools>.



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