



Association of American
Law Schools

Procedures for Obtaining Membership

This memorandum describes the procedures for seeking membership in the Association of American Law Schools. Membership signifies that a law school has met the requirements of membership specified in Article 6 of the Bylaws and Chapter 6 of the Executive Committee Regulations, as well as the qualifications specified in Section 2-2 of the Bylaws. The Executive Committee holds applicant schools to the highest standard when considering their application, and seeks to assist schools in maintaining those standards after they become members of the Association. Chapter 7 of the Executive Committee Regulations outlines the procedures for admission and provides in part:

7.1 Application for Membership

- a. **Time for Making Application.** A law school seeking membership shall at least 21 months before the annual meeting at which it seeks to have its application for membership considered by the House of Representatives notify the Executive Director of its intention to file an application, 13 months before that annual meeting it shall file a notice of readiness, and at least eleven months before that annual meeting, shall file its application for membership.*
- b. **When a School is Eligible to be Admitted.** A law school may not be admitted to membership in the Association until it has offered five years of instruction and has graduated its third class.*
- c. **Application Fee -- Site Evaluation Expenses.** An applicant for membership in the Association shall upon making application pay an application fee of \$35,000.00. The applicant school shall also reimburse each member of the team who inspects the school in connection with the application for all expenses reasonably incurred in making the site evaluation and preparing the site evaluation report and the member of the site evaluation team designated to confer with the Membership Review Committee concerning the site evaluation for all expenses reasonably incurred in attending the conference with the Membership Review Committee.*
- d. **Withdrawal of Application for Membership.** A law school that has applied for membership may withdraw its application without prejudice at any time before a final decision on its application is made by the Executive Committee. A law school that withdraws its application for membership after an Executive Committee decision to deny the application shall not be permitted to renew its application or file a new application until 24 months thereafter.*

The process leading to membership in the Association of American Law Schools begins with an informal discussion between the dean and other representatives of the interested law school with the Executive Director. It concludes when the House of Representatives acts at the AALS

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Annual Meeting on the recommendation of the Executive Committee that the school be admitted to membership. The procedures and timetable outlined here are designed to assure the applying school that there is adequate time for a careful and thorough consideration of its application, and to assure the Association's members that orderly and adequate procedures are employed in admitting a school to membership. Communications and inquiries should be addressed to the Executive Director. Informal consultations with the Executive Director are also welcome.

The Application Process

1. **Self-Study** – A law school should complete a self-study before informing the Executive Director of the school's intention to apply for membership. Since there is no single way to conduct a successful self-study, specific criteria cannot be provided, although a few suggestions may be helpful. The self-study should state the goals that the law school has set for itself, identify and analyze the areas of the school's strengths and weaknesses in light of those goals, and relate present and prospective resources to the stated objectives. The self-study should be prepared not only by the dean but also a representative faculty committee, if not the entire faculty. Most schools will find that several months must be devoted to the task. Effective self-study reports are brief, candid, and realistic.

2. **Staff Review and Consultant on Readiness** – After the self-study is completed, a school should request an AALS staff review of aspects of the school's program that directly relate to the Association's core values, as specified in Section 6-1 of the AALS Bylaws. Materials to be submitted include, but are not limited to, the self-study report, student and faculty profiles (including list of scholarship by faculty member for a 3 year period), tenure policies, processes to evaluate and programs to improve teaching, and nondiscrimination policies. AALS staff, in consultation with the dean, will determine if any additional materials shall be submitted for review. This step allows a school to gauge where it stands with regard to meeting membership requirements, before it expends substantial resources on a consultant on readiness.

After the staff review is completed, a school contemplating application for membership must appoint a consultant to advise it as to its readiness to make the application. To assure the school and the AALS that the consultant on readiness is qualified to give the required advice, the dean should confer with and obtain the written acquiescence of the Executive Director before retaining the consultant. As a condition of acquiescence, the Executive Director will meet face-to-face with the consultant to review the AALS' membership requirements. A separate memorandum describes the responsibilities of the consultant on readiness.

The staff review and appointment of a consultant on readiness serve the school's interest in avoiding the disappointments that can flow from a premature application and identify areas needing additional attention. The consultant may not be a person affiliated with the school, nor one whose association with the school or members of its administration or faculty may impair his or her capacity to provide objective, candid, and fair advice. The consultant should be someone with substantial experience in legal education, with the AALS, with at least one of its member schools, and should be conversant with the AALS' requirements for membership. The consultant is expected to inform himself or herself thoroughly of the school's condition, by visit and otherwise, and to advise the school of possible deficiencies. The school should expect to compensate the consultant for his or her services. It must be stressed, however, that the

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consultant reports to the law school and not to the AALS, consequently, the consultant's report should be made to the dean and not to the AALS. Although the Consultant's report is shared with the AALS Executive Director for review, it will not be distributed to the site team or to AALS Committees.

3. Notice of Intention to Apply for Membership – At least 21 months before the annual meeting at which a school wishes to have its application for membership acted upon, after the staff review and after the consultant on readiness has informed the dean that the school is adequately prepared to pursue membership, the school should submit to the Executive Director a Notice of Intention to Apply in the form of a letter signed jointly by the president or chancellor of the university (or chair of the Board) and the dean. The letter should state that: the president and dean are informed about the requirements of membership; the school has engaged a consultant on readiness and the AALS has acquiesced in the appointment of this consultant; and the consultant has advised the school either that it qualifies for membership or the consultant expects it will be qualified at least 13 months before the annual meeting at which it will be considered. The letter should also request that the AALS take steps necessary to admit the school to membership. The dean will then be furnished with the Membership Application Questionnaire, and the dean and the Executive Director should discuss the procedures for processing the school's application for membership and the schedule for meetings of the AALS' Membership Review Committee, Executive Committee, and House of Representatives.

4. Scheduling the Site Evaluation – The on-site evaluation of the school is made during the spring term. After the Notice of Intention to Apply for Membership is submitted, the dean and the Executive Director should confer about the times most appropriate for the visit. It is essential that the visiting team have an opportunity during its visit to confer with the dean and the president or chancellor. The conventional time for the visit is from Sunday afternoon until early Wednesday afternoon at a time when classes are in session. The team's visit generally begins with a Sunday evening conference with the dean and concludes with a Wednesday morning or Wednesday afternoon conference with the president, dean, and any other university officials whom the president may invite. On occasion, visits are scheduled for Tuesday evening until Friday afternoon and, rarely, from Wednesday evening until Saturday noon.

5. Notice of Readiness for Membership – At least 13 months before the annual meeting at which a school wishes to have its application considered for membership acted upon, the school should submit to the Executive Director a Notice of Readiness in the form of a letter signed jointly by the president or chancellor of the university (or chair of the Board) and the dean. The Notice of Readiness should state that the school is familiar with the AALS membership requirements, and that both the school and the consultant on readiness believe that the school now fully complies with all AALS membership requirements. Attached to the Notice of Readiness should be a letter from the consultant to the dean stating that he or she believes that the school now fully complies with all AALS membership requirements. If the school or the consultant believe that the school is not completely ready at this time, the AALS will not go forward with the planned site visit. One hard copy and one electronic copy of the school's self-study should be sent to the AALS office at this time.

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6. Application for Membership – An applicant school that has submitted a timely Notice of Readiness shall also submit a formal Application for Membership at least 11 months before the Annual Meeting at which the school wishes to have its application for membership acted upon. The application should be accompanied by the payment of the nonrefundable application fee as provided in Executive Committee Regulation 7.1.

7. Information Furnished to the Team – The dean should furnish each member of the visiting team and the AALS office with both paper and electronic copies of the AALS Membership Application Questionnaire, as well as paper and electronic copies of the school's self-study to members of the visiting team, as soon as feasible and no later than eight weeks before the visit.

8. The Site Evaluation – The site evaluation team is usually comprised of five to seven members, including a dean, librarian, and a full-time law teacher. The applying school's program and organizational structure are considered in selecting the team. The dean and the chair of the site evaluation team will make the arrangements and will develop the schedule for the visit. The members of the team will submit their expenses to the dean, who will arrange to have these expenses reimbursed promptly. This is in addition to the application fee paid to AALS under Executive Committee Regulation 7.1. A separate memorandum contains suggestions for the conduct of the site evaluation.

9. Site Evaluation Report – The team will promptly prepare a comprehensive report setting out its factual findings with respect to the different aspects of the school's administration and program. The team does not make any conclusions about compliance with membership standards and does not recommend whether the school should be admitted to membership. When the team has completed its draft, the report will be submitted to the AALS office for mailing to the dean and president or chancellor for review. They are expected to report promptly any errors of fact they may identify. Appropriate corrections will then be made before the report is duplicated and distributed to the Membership Review and Executive Committees. The report should be completed by early summer.

10. Consideration by the Membership Review Committee – The Executive Director will transmit to the members of the Membership Review Committee copies of the report and any supplementary material provided by the dean, and the application for membership will be placed on the committee's meeting agenda. The meeting is usually held in late summer, and the dean and president are expected to meet with the committee at the AALS office. The chair of the site evaluation team or a designated team member will attend the meeting so that committee members may question a member of the team directly concerning any matters about which they want further information. Executive Committee Regulation 7.1(c) provides that the applicant school shall reimburse this team member for the expenses incurred in attending this meeting.

11. Membership Review Committee's Report to the Executive Committee – The Membership Review Committee will advise the Executive Committee whether or not it considers the application ready for action and, if so, what action it recommends.

12. Consideration by the Executive Committee – The recommendation of the Membership Review Committee will be placed on the agenda of the Executive Committee for its fall meeting,

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which is usually held in November. The chair of the Membership Review Committee presents its recommendations to the Executive Committee and the dean is expected to meet with the Executive Committee at the AALS office. After studying the report and hearing the presentations, the Executive Committee may determine to: (1) recommend to the House of Representatives that the school be admitted to membership; (2) refer the application back to the Membership Review Committee for inquiry or action; or (3) not recommend the school for membership at this time.

Application Timeline

	Self-Study
	Staff Review
	Consultant on Readiness
April	Submission of Notice of Intention to Apply for Membership
December	Submission of Notice of Readiness for Membership
February	Submission of Application for Membership
Spring	Site Visit; submission of materials to site team and AALS office no later than eight weeks prior to site visit.
Late Summer	Membership Review Committee Meeting
Fall	Executive Committee Meeting
January	House of Representatives Meeting

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