It is never too early to plan for the bar exam. All states, the District of Columbia and the U.S. territories require passage of a bar exam before a lawyer is admitted to practice law in that jurisdiction or state. The bar exam is offered twice yearly in most states (February and July).

All jurisdictions require law students or graduates to register for the bar exam and to submit an application before taking the bar exam. Most state bar applications require letters of recommendation, references, and other personal information and charge an application fee. Additional supporting documents may be required in the applicant’s review.

**Because each state individually determines what criteria it will use to determine an attorney's eligibility for admission to practice, it is critical that you determine the individual requirements for your state. Registration deadlines vary by state and change periodically, so it is extremely important that you look at your state's bar exam deadlines as early as possible in your law school career.**

In addition to a bar examination, there are character, fitness, and other qualifications for admission to the bar in every U.S. jurisdiction. Applicants are encouraged to determine the requirements for any jurisdiction in which they intend to seek admission by contacting the jurisdiction. Addresses for all relevant agencies are available through the National Conference of Bar Examiners.

The National Conference of Bar Examiners’ website has all the information you need, plus links to every state’s own website. Start here to find your state’s bar examiner. The Comprehensive Guide on their site has a thorough overview of each jurisdiction’s requirements, with much of the information presented in table format for easy comparison.

**Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (MPRE)**

The Multistate Professional Responsibility Examination (MPRE) is a two-hour, 60-question multiple-choice examination developed by NCBE that is administered three times per year. It is required for admission to the bars of all but three U.S. jurisdictions (Maryland, Wisconsin, and Puerto Rico). Because MPRE requirements vary from one jurisdiction to another, examinees are advised to check with the bar admission agency in the jurisdiction to which they seek admission before registering for the MPRE. Passing scores are established by each jurisdiction.

Students may take the MPRE before the end of their third year, and 3Ls often take it in November. **Please note: some states require you to take the MPRE before taking the rest of the bar, so be sure to check your state’s requirements.**

Go to the National Conference of Bar Examiners MPRE page to get more information about future test dates, or to the Online Registration Page.
Character and Fitness
All states have an important and thorough "Character and Fitness" portion of the bar application. It is important to review this section as early as possible. Sometimes, in order to complete this portion, you will be required to obtain supporting documents, such as fingerprints or a driving record, which will require additional steps and lead time. Additionally, your law school application may be reviewed for consistency with the records you submit at the time of seeking admission. Examples of topics your state may cover include:

- Educational history, including any disciplinary actions;
- Employment history, including any charges of misconduct;
- Criminal history;
- Financial history, including any neglect of financial responsibilities;
- Litigation history;
- Driving history;
- Mental health;
- Substance abuse.

Consult Chart 2 in the NCBE/ABA Comprehensive Guide for an overview of character and fitness determinations of each state. To learn more about any state’s moral character requirements, visit the state’s bar admission website.

In reviewing your information and determining its significance, various factors are likely to be considered, including your age at the time the conduct occurred, when the conduct occurred, the seriousness of the conduct, your candor in providing the information, and your conduct since the incident(s) took place. For mental health and substance abuse matters, treatment for these problems is not usually enough for denial of admission. Typically examiners want to see that an applicant is taking personal responsibility and addressing the problem(s).

Do not omit information for fear that the information will prohibit you from admission. Failure to disclose information is likely to cause you more difficulty in admission than the incident itself. Answer all questions completely and honestly. Direct any questions about the character and fitness requirements to the board of bar examiners of your state.

When to Take the Bar Exam
Most graduates take the July bar exam the summer after graduation. However, students who have not obtained employment by graduation or who are working in a temporary position, such as a judicial clerkship or fellowship, may decide to defer taking the exam until later. Keep in mind that many employers hiring after graduation may require bar passage as a prerequisite for hiring. To the extent possible, learn the hiring requirements of your desired employer(s). Feel free to speak with a CDO counselor about any questions you may have on this issue.
All States Differ
If you do not have a specific destination state in mind, then note the requirements of your leading candidates. Please feel free to speak with a CDO counselor to discuss your specific situation if you are uncertain how to proceed.

It is critical to pay close attention to the requirements of each jurisdiction that must be met in order to both sit for the bar exam and be admitted to practice. Requirements vary widely and may require lead time to accomplish. For instance...

- Illinois requires students to pass the MPRE prior to sitting for the bar exam. It also specifies that students must have completed 60 credit hours or 2/3 of their law school education prior to sitting for the MPRE.

- Ohio requires students to register during their second year of law school and show proof of attendance at a one-credit hour substance abuse class prior to sitting for the bar exam.

- New York requires all candidates for admission to submit documentation showing they have completed 50 hours of qualifying pro bono service.

- California is proposing a rule requiring bar applicants to have completed 15 units of competency skills training during law school or participation in an internship or clerkship, which is higher than the standard ABA requirement for graduation and higher than other states’ that may have skills requirements.

Students should investigate carefully the requirements of the jurisdiction in which they intend to sit for the bar exam and prepare accordingly. Since jurisdiction rules and policies can change, students are strongly encouraged to consult the bar admission agency directly with questions and to ensure accuracy of the information.

Bar Exam Formats
Each state determines which combination of exam elements to administer for admission to the bar. For jurisdiction-specific information, consult the NCBE’s website.

MBE – The Multistate Bar Examination (MBE) is a six-hour, 200-question multiple-choice examination developed by NCBE and administered by user jurisdictions as part of the bar examination on the last Wednesday in February and the last Wednesday in July of each year. The purpose of the MBE is to assess the extent to which an examinee can apply fundamental legal principles and legal reasoning to analyze given fact patterns.
**MEE** - The Multistate Essay Examination (MEE) is developed by NCBE and consists of six 30-minute questions. It is administered by user jurisdictions as part of the bar examination on the Tuesday before the last Wednesday in February and July of each year. The purpose of the MEE is to test the examinee’s ability to (1) identify legal issues raised by a hypothetical factual situation; (2) separate material which is relevant from that which is not; (3) present a reasoned analysis of the relevant issues in a clear, concise, and well-organized composition; and (4) demonstrate an understanding of the fundamental legal principles relevant to the probable solution of the issues raised by the factual situation. The primary distinction between the MEE and the Multistate Bar Examination (MBE) is that the MEE requires the examinee to demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in writing.

**MPT** - The Multistate Performance Test (MPT) is developed by NCBE and consists of two 90-minute items. It is administered by user jurisdictions as part of the bar examination on the Tuesday before the last Wednesday in February and July of each year. User jurisdictions may select one or both MPT items to include as part of their bar examinations. Jurisdictions that administer the UBE use both MPT items. The MPT is designed to test an examinee’s ability to use fundamental lawyering skills in a realistic situation and complete a task that a beginning lawyer should be able to accomplish. The MPT is not a test of substantive knowledge. Rather, it is designed to evaluate certain fundamental skills lawyers are expected to demonstrate regardless of the area of law in which the skills arise.

**UBE** - The Uniform Bar Exam (UBE) is administered over two days, with the MBE given on the last Wednesday of February and July and the MEE and MPT given on the Tuesday prior to that. Jurisdictions that use the UBE may require applicants to also complete a jurisdiction-specific educational component and/or pass a test on jurisdiction-specific law in addition to passing the UBE. The UBE is designed to test knowledge and skills that every lawyer should be able to demonstrate prior to becoming licensed to practice law. It results in a portable score that can be used to apply for admission in other UBE jurisdictions.

*Study Aids* for all exams are available through the NCBE website.

**Bar Review Courses**
Many students studying for the bar choose to sign up for an optional bar review course with one of the numerous bar review companies. Many courses prepare students for both the multistate and state portions of the bar exam and for the MPRE. Others focus only on one portion of the test. For a list of some of the many bar review options, visit *FindLaw’s* website.