

To: All Returning Law Students
From: Jenny Hutcherson, Dean of Students
Re: Juris Doctor Program Policy Updates – Effective Immediately
Date: May 27, 2025

The Law School Faculty recently approved updates to policies in the Juris Doctor Program. This memo serves as notice of policy updates and information, effective immediately, which may affect you now and in the future. Notification of these updates and program changes is in anticipation of their addition to the Student Handbook in the upcoming academic year.

Academic Deficiency Policy

A J.D. student who receives a grade of D+ or below in a first-year course will be regarded as having an academic deficiency in that course that must be remedied. The student must either repeat the course or take an upper-class course or courses to be designated by the Dean of Students in order to remedy this gap in the student's legal education.

A J.D. student will be placed on academic watch status if, at the close of the first semester of law study or the end of any subsequent term, the student's semester merit point ratio *or* cumulative MPR falls in the bottom 5% of the class. Students with multiple incomplete grades may be placed on academic watch status at the discretion of the Administrative Committee based upon a recommendation from the Dean of Students.

Being placed on Academic Watch status is not reported on the student's transcript or to employers but requires that the student complete the following each semester while on Academic Watch:

- Meet with the Dean of Students to review course selection. Courses must include:
 - election of at least 1 exam course
 - election of at least 1 bar tested subject
 - total enrollment of 17 hours or less in the academic semester
- Meet with the Director of Academic Support regarding the faculty- adopted learning outcomes. This will include a review of exam skills, time management, and more.
- Students on Academic Watch status will not be eligible for the following:
 - Study Abroad/Exchange programs
 - Pro Bono Scholars Program
 - Registration in more than 4 credit hours of Externship or outside courses, including supervised writing and teaching courses without approval by the Dean of Students.
- Students who fail to satisfactorily meet, at any time, the requirements to engage with the Dean of Students or the Director of Academic Support will be referred to the Administrative Committee for potential placement on Academic Intervention status outlined further below.

A J.D. student will be removed from Academic Watch status once they have improved their MPR above the bottom 5%. Conversely, a student will be elevated to 'Academic Intervention' status

following two total semesters on Academic Watch status when they have not improved their MPR above the bottom 5% or sufficiently remedied their multiple incompletes, or at any time when the Administrative Committee of the faculty judges their efforts to engage with the Dean of Students and Director of Academic Support to be unsatisfactory.

Being placed on Academic Intervention status is not reported on the student's transcript or to employers but requires that the student complete the following additional steps each semester while on Academic Intervention:

- Meet with the Dean of Students for pre-registration and final registration.
- Students on Academic Intervention status will not be eligible for the following:
 - Study Abroad/Exchange programs
 - Pro Bono Scholars Program
 - Externships
 - Outside courses, including supervised writing and teaching courses
- Meet with the Director of Academic Support and conduct pre-graduation exit counseling to discuss plans to remedy academic shortcomings and discuss strategies concerning whether to take the bar exam and how to properly prepare for the bar exam with the law school's enhanced support.

The faculty Administrative Committee will consider whether a J.D. student should be dropped for scholastic deficiency: a) if at the close of the first year of law study or at the end of any subsequent term (except the student's final term), the student's cumulative merit point ratio is less than 2.8 or b) if the merit point ratio in each of two successive terms (except the student's final term), when calculated separately, is less than 2.8.

Class Attendance Policy

Regular in-person classroom attendance is required of students. Students are advised that excessive absences can result after reasonable written warning by: 1) grade lowering; 2) removing a student from the course; 3) denial of permission to complete course work and/or sit for the exam; or 4) another mechanism announced in the course syllabus prior to the end of the add/drop period.

Missing more than one-fifth of classes for any reason is presumptively excessive. Students who are ill or have another valid reason for missing class are encouraged to contact the instructor directly. Students are required to notify the Dean of Students if they miss three or more days of class in a row. If a student is excluded from an exam, a grade of F is presumptively entered, or in the case of a clinical course, the student may receive a lowered grade or grade of U. Faculty members will be provided various methods to facilitate the monitoring of attendance.

Faculty members may establish a higher standard of regular attendance than that described above, and may also take this higher standard of attendance into account in determining the student's grade as long as the faculty member has, before the end of the add/drop period, announced an intention to do so or has included that intention in the syllabus or other class materials distributed in the first week of class.

The student's obligation to be in regular attendance derives both from faculty rule and the rule of state bar examiners. As a prerequisite to a student's admission to the bar, the Dean must certify to state boards of law examiners that the student has been in regular attendance. The Law School must be the student's principal commitment during each semester. Extensive outside employment by students is also disfavored because of its tendency to interfere with the student's academic life at the Law School.

Changes to Study Abroad Policy

The following changes have been made to the eligibility requirements for Study Abroad.

- Students must have a minimum required cumulative MPR of 3.2 to be eligible to apply.
- Student must submit a statement of purpose indicating how the study abroad opportunity ties to their overall career goals.
- Student must receive, and acknowledge receipt of, disclosures re: accommodations (this will take the form of a statement by the school conveying that the study abroad partner institution may not maintain accommodations and/or student support services that are comparable to what is available at Cornell.)
- Students must submit to the Dean of Students (DOS) documentation showing either that they have completed all of their degree requirements prior to their study abroad; or alternatively that they have a clear and well-defined plan for timely meeting their degree requirements.
- The Dean of Students must evaluate and sign-off on study abroad applications.
- The design-your-own-program option is discontinued for all new applicants.

Changes to Pro Bono Scholars Program Application Requirements

The following changes have been made to the eligibility requirements for the Pro Bono Scholars Program.

- Students must have a 3.3 cumulative MPR to be eligible to apply. This is a "bright line" requirement. No students below a 3.3 are eligible.
- Students who are on academic watch or academic intervention are ineligible.
- Cornell has a 5 semester "residency" requirement. Students who have studied abroad or taken a full-time (12 unit) externship are ineligible to apply.
- Students are responsible for securing a qualifying placement by August 15, 2025. Otherwise, you will not be able to enroll in PBS for the Spring 2026 semester.
- Because of the significant commitment to PBS, students may not enroll in any other law school classes in the Spring of their PBS placement (including TA positions, etc.)
- Acceptance in the program is conditional. Students must be making satisfactory progress in preparation for and are deemed ready to pass the bar. If it is determined by mid-January 2026 that the student is not ready, the student will not be allowed to participate in the PBS program. In that case, a student may convert their placement into a general externship or take other classes.