

Academic Requirements

Students Matriculating Fall 2020 or Later – 2023 Update

Updated July 21, 2023

See College of Law [Student Handbook](#)

Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree¹

A. Overview

To be eligible for a J.D. degree, a student must:

1. Meet the credit hour requirements;
2. Meet the length of study requirements;
3. Achieve a cumulative grade point average of at least 2.1;
4. Take and complete all required courses;
5. Satisfy the writing requirements; and
6. Satisfy the experiential course requirement.

B. Credit Hour Requirements

A student must receive credit for 88² credit hours of course work. For purposes of these Graduation Requirements, “course” and “course work” refer to any credit-bearing activity recognized by the College of Law. Of the 88 credit hours required for graduation:

1. At least 64 must be earned through courses that require attendance in regularly scheduled classroom sessions or direct faculty instruction (“faculty instruction courses”). Faculty instruction courses shall be so designated in the course registration materials. (The definition of “faculty instruction course” is subject to ABA Standards; among the courses that are excluded from the definition, as of January 2016, are co-curricular (student-run) courses, field placements, independent studies, supplementary writing, directed writing and research, and non-law courses.)
2. No more than 6 may be earned through participation in co-curricular (student-run) courses. Co-curricular courses shall be so designated in the course registration materials.
3. No more than 6 may be earned through independent studies, supplementary writing, and directed writing and research, except as permitted by the Dean or the Dean’s designate.
4. No more than 9 may be earned through field placements, except that a student may, with the approval of the Dean or the Dean’s designate, count up to 14 such credits toward graduation. A student may count toward graduation up to 3 credits from a summer legal placement in addition to the number otherwise permitted by this paragraph. For purposes of this paragraph, a “field placement” includes the student’s on-site experience as well as any associated seminars, tutorials, and other forms of guided reflection on that experience.

¹Graduation Requirements for The J.D. Degree, adopted by the faculty on October 8, 2015; amended May 19, 2016; November 30, 2016; September 29, 2017; December 4, 2017; April 30, 2020.

²The requirement of 88 credit hours of coursework for graduation applies to students entering the College of Law as first-year students in the fall of 2020 or later and students entering the College of Law as transfer students or two-year J.D. students in the Fall of 2021 or later. Students entering the College of Law prior to these dates must complete 84 credit hours of coursework for graduation.

5. No more than 29 may be earned through studies, activities, or field placements outside the United States.³
6. No more than 15 may be earned through distance education courses. Distance education courses shall be so designated in the course registration materials.⁴
7. None shall be for course work taken before the student enrolled in a law school.
8. No more than 34 may be from credits transferred from other ABA-accredited law schools, and no more than 30 such credits may be earned prior to enrolling at the College of Law.
9. None shall be transferred from non-ABA-accredited law schools in the United States, except as permitted by the Dean or the Dean's designate and applicable ABA Standards.
10. No more than 20 may be earned through non-law courses. Credit hours from a non-law course may count toward the J.D. degree only if they are approved by the Dean or the Dean's designate pursuant to the College of Law's policy on Non-Law Courses.
11. No more than 17 may be from courses taken during any one semester.⁵

To receive credit for a course, a student must satisfactorily complete all course requirements established by the instructor. In courses with a final exam, the instructor may preclude a student from taking the final exam if the student has not first satisfied all of the instructor's course requirements as to class attendance, written work, special readings, oral reports, etc.

A course shall not count toward the number of credits required for graduation unless the student receives a course grade of 1.8 or higher, or, in a course taken Pass/Fail, a grade of Pass.

C. Length of Study Requirements

A student must complete the required course work in no fewer than 27 months and, except in extraordinary circumstances and with permission of the Dean, no more than 84 months after the student has commenced law study at the College of Law or at a law school from which the College of Law has accepted transfer credit, whichever was earlier.

If the College of Law grants credit for prior law study at a law school outside the United States as permitted under ABA Standard 505(c), only the time commensurate with the amount of credit given counts toward the length of study requirements.

D. Required Courses

Required law school courses include:

1. All first-year courses: Civil Procedure; Constitutional Law I; Contracts; Criminal Law; Introduction to Law and Legal Reasoning; Introduction to Legal Theory and Perspectives on the Law⁶; Legal Analysis, Writing, and Research I and II; Property; and Torts;
2. Constitutional Law II;
3. A qualifying course in Professional Responsibility. Qualifying courses shall be so designated in the course registration materials.

³Students who entered the College of Law as first-year students prior to the fall of 2020 and students entering the College of Law as transfer students or two-year J.D. students prior to the Fall of 2021 are limited to 28 credit hours earned through studies, activities, or field placements outside the United States.

⁴Amended February 17, 2022. On May 14, 2020, the faculty adopted the following policy: "Section II(B)(6) (Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree) and Section III(C) (Enrollment in distance education courses) of the College of Law's Academic Policies and Procedures shall not apply to courses taken in the Spring 2020, Summer 2020, March 2020 Intersession, and May 2020 Intersession." On November 5, 2020, the faculty approved an extension of that policy: "Section II(B)(6) (Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree) and Section III(C) (Enrollment in distance education courses) of the College of Law's Academic Policies and Procedures shall not apply to courses taken from the August 2020 Intersession through the May 2021 Intersession, inclusive."

⁵Students who entered the College of Law as first-year students prior to the fall of 2020 and students entering the College of Law as transfer students or two-year J.D. students prior to the Fall of 2021 are limited to 16 credit hours from courses taken during any one semester.

⁶The requirement of Introduction to Legal Theory and Perspectives on the Law applies only to students entering the College of Law as first-year students in the Fall of 2023 or later and students entering the College of Law as transfer students (including those entering as advanced standing J.D. students) in the Fall of 2024 or later. (Adopted by the faculty February 16, 2023.)

Entering first-year students are required to take all of the first-year courses and one elective and cannot register for different courses or fewer hours without permission of the Dean of Students.

E. Writing Requirements.

See Writing Requirements policy.

F. Experiential Course Requirement

A student must complete one or more experiential courses totaling at least six credit hours. Experiential courses shall be so designated in the course registration materials.

G. Designation of courses

The designation of a course as an experiential course, faculty instruction course, distance education course, writing course, co-curricular course, or qualifying Professional Responsibility course shall be valid only for the particular semester(s) that the course is so designated.

A student may not count any course toward both the experiential and professional responsibility requirements. At least one of the courses a student counts toward the upper-level writing requirement involving direct and ongoing faculty supervision must not be counted toward the experiential or professional responsibility requirements.

H. Credit for Courses Taken Outside the University of Iowa College of Law⁷

1. *Courses Taken Prior to Matriculation at the College of Law*

Except as provided below, no student shall receive credit hours toward the J.D. degree for courses taken prior to matriculation in the J.D. program at this law school.⁸

2. *Transfer Credit*

a) Credit for Previous Legal Studies

Subject to the limitations in Part B of the Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree, credit hours for studies undertaken as a J.D. degree student at another ABA accredited law school prior to enrolling at the College of Law may be transferred to the J.D. degree at the College of Law. No credit hours shall be transferred for any course in which a grade of less than a "D" was received. Grades received at another law school shall not be counted in ascertaining the student's weighted cumulative average for any purpose.

Subject to the limitations in Part B of the Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree, credit hours earned at a law school outside the United States may be counted toward the J.D. degree, provided that the Dean or the Dean's designate determines that the College of Law would have granted credit towards satisfaction of J.D. degree requirements if earned at the College of Law.

Students may transfer in no more than 10 distance education course credits from previous legal studies in satisfaction of the required first-year courses listed in Section (II)(D)(1).

b) Transfer of Credits After Admissions.

College of Law students visiting at ABA-accredited law schools after enrollment at the College of Law may transfer credit hours subject to the limitations in Part B of the Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree. Students seeking credit for courses taken as a visitor at another law school must obtain permission from the Dean or the Dean's designate and comply with all relevant College and University policies regarding study at another institution.

College of Law students visiting at a law school outside the United States must first obtain the permission of the Dean or the Dean's designate, who shall ensure compliance with the relevant ABA Standards and Criteria. Students shall also comply with all relevant College and

⁷Amended language adopted by the faculty on January 24, 2018 (prior citations deleted); amended again on February 17, 2022.

⁸Amended September 23, 2021; February 17, 2022.

University policies regarding study abroad and at another institution. Credit hours transferred for such studies are subject to the limitations in Part B of the Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree.

3. *Transfer of Credit for Externships Earned at another School*⁹

Except in the case of students who bring externship credits with them when they transfer into the College of Law, a student seeking to receive academic credit at this college for a field placement program taken or arranged through another law school must secure the approval of the administrator and the Curriculum Committee prior to beginning the field placement program. The administrator may set and enforce appropriate deadlines for applications for approval of such field placements. If a field placement program arranged by another law school has been previously approved, the administrator may approve subsequent requests for credit through that program by the approval process described in the Policy on Field Placements. This approval process is not meant to discourage students from registering for externship programs at other schools, nor should the approval requirement be taken to suggest that the other school's program must conform in all respects to our own.

4. *Non-Law Courses*¹⁰

A student seeking to count credit hours from a non-law course toward the J.D. degree must obtain the approval of the Dean or the Dean's designate. The student must provide the Dean (or the Dean's designate) with a course description for the course. Credit hours for the course will be approved only if all of the following conditions are satisfied:

1. The student can demonstrate that the course either (a) contributes to the professional competency of an attorney, or (b) provides perspective that will broaden the student's understanding of some aspect of law or the legal process.
2. The subject matter of the course does not duplicate that of a course offered by the College of Law.
3. The subject matter of the course does not duplicate that of another course the student has taken in any program.
4. The student takes the course after matriculating in the College of Law's J.D. program.
5. The course is either (a) graduate level (currently level 5000 or above); or (b) supported by a compelling argument demonstrating how a particular lower-level course will specifically benefit the student's legal education.

A student's ability to count non-law credit hours toward the J.D. degree is also subject to the restrictions in the Graduation Requirements for the J.D. Degree, the College of Law's Joint Degree Program policy, and any other applicable University, College of Law, or departmental requirements.

A course that is taken outside the College of Law for credit hours towards a law degree will be graded according to the course's standard grading practices. These grades will appear on the student's transcript but will not be used in computing a law student's cumulative average. A pass, or a grade of "C" or higher, is required for law school credit.

Students who take courses outside the College of Law may be subject to course rules that are set by the partner program, and those rules may differ from rules in the College of Law. But law school policies on misconduct apply to joint degree students even with respect to the students' conduct in non-law courses.

Because non-law courses cannot count toward the J.D. degree without meeting the requirements of this policy, the College of Law strongly recommends that students seek the Dean's (or the Dean's designate) approval of any non-law course prior to enrolling in the course.

I. **Distance education courses**¹¹

1. *Definition of "distance education course"*

(a) Definition. "Distance education course" means one in which students are separated from all faculty members for more than one-third of the instruction and the instruction involves the use of

⁹College of Law Field Placement Policy, adopted by the faculty on May 9, 2013; amended March 21, 2017.

¹⁰Amended language adopted by the Faculty of the College of the Law on December 4, 2017.

¹¹Course Approval and Crediting Policy, adopted by the faculty October 20, 2016. Amended February 17, 2022.

technology to support regular and substantive interaction among students and between the students and all faculty members, either synchronously or asynchronously.

(b) Accommodations. Remote participation in a non-distance education course by a student as an accommodation provided under law (such as the Americans with Disabilities Act) or under exceptional circumstances shall not cause the course to count towards the distance education credit limits in the graduation requirements for the J.D. degree (Sections II(B)(6) of the Academic Policies and Procedures) for that student. The law school shall document all instances in which it permits a student's remote participation in a non-distance-education course for which the credits will not be counted towards the credit hour limits in the graduation requirements.

(c) Hybrid courses. Other than as provided in paragraph (b), when a portion of the students in a course are separated from all faculty members for more than one-third of the instruction, the course will count as a distance course as to those students, but not as to the other students in the course.

(d) Field placements. A field placement in which the student works remotely—that is, where the student is not physically present at the site of the placement—shall not count as a distance education course under this policy. Any separately credited course accompanying a field placement, however, will be subject to the definitions in this section.

(e) Courses during the pandemic. Courses completed between February 2020 and May 2022, inclusive, shall not count as distance education courses.

2. *Requirements*

Distance education law school courses for which credit is given towards the J.D. degree must provide regular and substantive interaction among students and between the students and faculty teaching the course.

(a) Regular interaction. Regular interaction between a student and a faculty member in a distance education course shall include:

- (i) providing the opportunity for substantive interactions with the student on a predictable and scheduled basis commensurate with the length of time and the amount of content in the course as defined in Section IV(B)(3) on the crediting of courses;
- (ii) monitoring the student's academic engagement and success; and
- (iii) ensuring that the faculty member is responsible for promptly and proactively engaging in substantive interaction with the student when needed on the basis of such monitoring, or upon request by the student.

(b) Substantive interaction. Substantive interaction in a distance education course requires engaging students in teaching, learning, and assessment, consistent with the content under discussion, and includes at least two of the following:

- (i) providing direct instruction;
- (ii) assessing or providing feedback on a student's coursework;
- (iii) providing information or responding to questions about the content of a course; or
- (iv) facilitating a group discussion regarding the content of a course.

3. *First-year courses*

Except as provided in Section II(H)(2)(a) on the transfer of credit from previous legal studies:

- (a) students may not take any of the required first-year courses listed in Section (II)(D)(1) as a distance education course; and
- (b) no elective taken during a student's first year in law school shall be taken as a distance course. For purposes of this requirement: (i) the May intersession and the summer session shall not count as part of the student's first year, and (ii) Advanced Standing J.D. students shall not be considered first-year students.

4. *Annual review*

Starting in the 2023-24 academic year, the Registrar will annually report to the faculty on the law school's use of distance education courses, including, but not limited to, the number of distance courses offered, the number of credits for each distance course, and the number of students enrolled in each distance course. The report will be placed on the agenda for discussion at a faculty meeting no later than February of each year.