

Report: Florida Coastal School of Law for sale

FLORIDA COASTAL FIRST-TIME BAR EXAM PASS RATE

The American Bar Association notified Florida Coastal in October that it may be significantly out of compliance with the ABA standards for approved law schools because of the performance of its graduates on their first sitting for the bar exam.

	Florida Coastal	State Average
July 2017	47.7%	68.4%
Feb. 2017	25.0	56.1
July 2016	51.9	66.8
Feb. 2016	32.7	55.8
July 2015	59.3	68.3
Feb. 2015	74.5	66.4
July 2014	58.0	72.6
Feb. 2014	72.9	69.1
July 2013	67.4	77.6
Feb. 2013	79.3	80.4

Source: Florida Board of Bar Examiners.

Includes results from Ave Maria School of Law, Barry University School of Law, Florida A&M University College of Law, Florida Coastal School of Law, Florida International University College of Law, Florida State University College of Law, Nova Southeastern University College of Law, St. Thomas University College of Law, Stetson University College of Law, University of Florida College of Law and University of Miami School of Law.



Photo by Monty Zickuhr

Florida Coastal School of Law is at 8787 Baypine Road in Baymeadows.

School owner InfiLaw seeking nonprofit for purchase or partnership, WSJ says.

By Andrew Warfield
Associate Editor

Florida Coastal School of Law in Jacksonville is for sale or available for partnership, The Wall Street Journal reported Saturday.

Naples-based InfiLaw, owner of Florida Coastal and its sister for-profit law school, Arizona Summit School of Law of Phoenix, is in discussions with nonprofit schools to take over or partner with it in ownership of the schools,

the Journal said.

The report highlights lower-than-average pass rates of graduates of both schools in their respective Bar exams, lowered admissions standards, financial difficulties at both schools and high loan debt borne by students who either failed to pass the Bar, dropped out or were dismissed.

Officials with InfiLaw did not respond to requests for comment.

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Officials with Florida Coastal said they are willing to discuss the WSJ story, but could not do so on Monday.

The Daily Record reported in October that the American Bar Association notified Florida Coastal that it may be significantly out of compliance with the ABA standards for approved law schools because of the performance of its graduates on their first sitting for the bar exam.

The school received a letter on Oct. 12, noting not only the Bar results, but also stating that Florida Coastal is not in compliance with admission standards, specifically that a law school shall not admit applicants who do not appear capable of satisfactorily completing its program and being admitted to the Bar.

Florida Coastal Dean Scott DeVito responded that he believes the ABA Accreditation Committee was reacting to results of the February Florida Bar exam, in which 25 percent of Florida Coastal graduates who took the exam for the first time passed.

The Florida average was 56.1 percent for graduates of all in-state law schools.

Five months later, 47.7 percent of Florida Coastal graduates sitting for the first time at the July exam passed, compared to 68.4 percent for all Florida law school graduates. DeVito added the "ultimate pass rate" for Florida

Coastal graduates is in the high 90s.

The ABA asked Florida Coastal to submit a report on its compliance with the standards and to appear before its Accreditation Committee when it convenes March 15-17 in Williamsburg, Virginia.

This isn't the first time the ABA expressed concerns with an InfiLaw school's admissions standards and bar exam results.

The ABA put the Charlotte School of Law on probation for similar results in November 2016. That school closed in August.

The ABA also put the Arizona Summit Law School in Phoenix on probation in March based on the school's 25 percent Bar exam passage rate.

Florida Coastal School of Law was founded in 1996 by law professor Don Lively with a goal of providing more minority students a pathway to a legal career even if their academic record fell short of law school admissions standards, the WSJ reported.

After some initial success — the Journal reports there were about 4,000 students enrolled at the three InfiLaw schools combined in 2012 — enrollment has since declined sharply. Thousands of students have dropped out, transferred or failed Bar exams and they cannot pay down more than \$1 billion in federal student loans.

According to information

provided by the ABA, a change in ownership of Florida Coastal could affect the timing of any disciplinary action, adding that all such situations are considered on a case-by-case basis.

However, any change in ownership must be approved by the Accreditation Committee Council, as defined in Section 105 of the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools.

It reads, "Before a law school makes a major change in its program of legal education or organizational structure, it shall obtain the acquiescence of Council for the change." The standard applies to a law school being either acquired or merged with another university.

Meanwhile, Florida Coastal earlier this month submitted a 70-page report to the ABA Accreditation Committee in response to noncompliance allegations.

"We are fully compliant, based on our data, and all of our projections indicate we will stay in compliance," DeVito said at the time.

However, if the committee disputes the data in the response, DeVito and Florida Coastal President Dennis Stone will appear before the ABA Accreditation Committee.

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