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Legal Education in India

Legal education is the education of individuals who intend to become legal professionals or those who simply intend to use their law degree to some end, either related to law (such as politics or academic) or business. It includes:

- First degrees in law, which may be studied at either undergraduate or graduate level depending on the country.
- Vocational courses which prospective lawyers are required to pass in some countries before they may enter practice.
- Higher academic degrees.

Legal education (general)

In addition to the qualifications required to become a practicing lawyer, legal education also encompasses higher degrees such as doctorates, for more advanced academic study.

In many countries other than the United States, law is an undergraduate degree. Graduates of such a program are eligible to become lawyers by passing the country's equivalent of a bar exam. In such countries, graduate programs in law enable students to embark on academic careers or become specialized in a particular area of law.

In the United States, law is a professional doctorate degree known as a Juris Doctor. Students embark upon only after completing an undergraduate degree in some other field (usually a bachelor's degree), and is considered to be a first professional degree program. The undergraduate degree can be in any field, though most American lawyers hold bachelor's degrees in the humanities and social sciences; legal studies as an undergraduate study is available at a few institutions. American law schools are usually an autonomous entity within a larger university.

Faculty of law is another name for a law school or school of law, the terms commonly used in the United States. This term is used in Canada, other Commonwealth countries and the rest of the world. It may be distinguishable from law school in the sense that a faculty is a subdivision of a university on the same rank with other faculties, i.e., faculty of medicine, faculty of graduate studies, whereas a law school or school of law may have a more autonomous status within a university, or may be totally independent of any other post-secondary educational institution.

In addition in some countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada and some states of Australia, the final stages of vocational legal education required to qualify to practice law are carried out outside the university system. The requirements for qualification as a barrister or as a solicitor are covered in those articles.

India

Pre-1987, Indian legal education was traditionally offered as a three years graduate degree. Today, law degrees in India are granted and conferred in terms of the Advocates Act, 1961, which is a law passed by the Parliament both on the aspect of legal education and also regulation of conduct of legal profession. Under the Act, the Bar Council of India is the supreme regulatory body to regulate the legal profession in India and also to ensure the compliance of the laws and maintenance of professional standards by the legal profession in the country.

To this regard, the Bar Council of India prescribes the minimum curriculum required to be taught in order for an institution to be eligible for the grant of a law degree. The Bar Council also carries on a period supervision of the institutions conferring the degree and evaluates their teaching methodology and curriculum and having determined that the institution meets the required standards, recognizes

the institution and the degree conferred by it.

Traditionally the degrees that were conferred carried the title of LL.B. (Bachelor of Laws) or B.L. (Bachelor of Law). The eligibility requirement for these degrees was that the applicant already have a Bachelor's degree in any subject from a recognized institution. Thereafter the LL.B. / B.L. course was for three years, upon the successful completion of which the applicant was granted either degree.

However upon the suggestion by the Law Commission of India and also given the prevailing cry for reform the Bar Council of India instituted upon an experiment in terms of establishing specialized law universities solely devoted to legal education and thus to raise the academic standards of legal profession in India. This decision was taken somewhere in 1985 and thereafter the first law University in India was set up in Bangalore which was named as the National Law School of India University (popularly 'NLS'). These law universities were meant to offer a multi-disciplinary and integrated approach to legal education. It was therefore for the first time that a law degree other than LL.B. or B.L. was granted in India. NLS offered a five years law course upon the successful completion of which an integrated degree with the title of "B.A., LL.B. (Honours)" would be granted.

Thereafter other law universities were set up, all offering five years integrated law degree with different nomenclature. The next in line was National Law Institute University set up in Bhopal in 1997. It was followed by NALSAR university of law set up in 1998. The National Law University, Jodhpur offered for the first time in 2001 the integrated law degree of "B.B.A, LL.B. (Honours)" which was preceded by the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences offering the "B.Sc., LL.B. (Honours)" degree. The Prestigious M.S. University has also started Baroda School of Legal Studies since 2005, which also offers 5 years integrated law course. It has a uniqueness of having computer applications and yoga & stress management as subjects. Another achievement in this field was the setting up of National Law University, Delhi at New Delhi, the first national law school of the capital.

However despite these specialized law universities, the traditional three year degree continues to be offered in India by other institutions and are equally recognized as eligible qualifications for practicing law in India. Another essential difference that remains is that while the eligibility qualification for the three year law degree is that the applicant must already be a holder of a Bachelor's degree, for being eligible for the five years integrated law degree, the applicant must have successfully completed Class XII from a recognized board of education in India.

Both the holders of the three year degree and of the five year integrated degree are eligible for enrollment with the Bar Council of India upon the fulfillment of eligibility conditions and upon enrollment, may appear before any court in India.

However with effect from December 2010 all fresh law graduates or those who have already cleared their law graduation but have not yet enrolled with the bar council must clear a bar examination to be entitled to practice before courts or tribunals in India.

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