

San Joaquin College of Law (“SJCL”) Response to Periodic Inspection Report’s Recommended, Mandatory Actions

SJCL does not contest any of the inspection report findings but wishes to submit the following clarification and plan of action for each of the recommendations.

Recommended, Mandatory Action #1

Guidelines 2.7(A)(3) and 7.8: The law school must revise the course repetition policy to address all effects of both required and permitted course repetition.

Relevant Section in Site Inspection Report:

Course repetition is addressed in the Handbook. One section provides that students who have failed a required course are required to repeat it, in which case both grades will appear on the transcript but only the second grade will be used in calculating the cumulative GPA. A later section, on course repetition, states that only students who have failed or withdrawn from a course will be allowed to repeat it, except for students with permission to repeat the first year. This section does not address the consequences of permitted repetition to the transcript or GPA. To comply more fully with Guidelines 2.7(A)(3) and 7.8, the law school must revise the policy to address all effects of course repetition, whether repetition is required or permitted. (Guideline 7.8.)

SJCL Response:

SJCL policies regarding repetition of courses is compliant with COBE guidelines. However, SJCL administrators agree that the repetition policy applicable to students in good standing, versus the repetition policy applied to those students who have been readmitted after academic disqualification, should be clarified more thoroughly in the student handbook. Under the “Course Repetition” section in the student handbook, it states that “Course repetition is only allowed if a student has either failed the course or has withdrawn from the course....” In addition, pursuant to the “grading” section of the student handbook, if a student repeats a course, having failed or withdrawn, “both grades will appear on the student’s transcript, but the second grade will replace the first in calculating the cumulative GPA.” As pointed out in the site inspection report, however, this policy on course repetition does not apply to academically disqualified students who are permitted to retake the first year of law school. Repeating students in those cases are treated as Guideline 5.6 “Readmitted Applicants” and must repeat the entire first year. The GPA from the academically disqualified year will appear on the transcript, but will not be calculated into the GPA of the readmitted student. SJCL will clarify the repetition policy as it applies to students in good standing, having failed or withdrawn, and students who have been readmitted after being academically excluded. The new version of the student handbook will be released before the start of the summer semester, 2022.

Recommended, Mandatory Action #2

Guideline 2.3 and 6.6: The law school must revise its publications to clearly state its policies related to the award of academic credit for non-classroom activities pursuant to Guideline 6.6

Relevant Section in Site Inspection Report:

Policies related to the award of academic credit for non-classroom activities comply with Guideline 6.6 but must be stated more clearly (Guideline 2.3.) Since 2012 San Joaquin has operated with a waiver, granted by the Committee, allowing the award of up to 14 units of non-classroom credit, 6 units more than otherwise permitted by Guideline 6.6(A.) Last year, the faculty reduced the credit allowed for non-classroom work and the school will not request a further waiver of guideline limits.

Students entering the law school in or after 2020 may elect to earn up to 4 units of credit for non-classroom activities, including work done in externships, in-house clinics, teaching assistantships and directed research. An additional 4 units may be earned for work in the New American Legal (NALC) Clinic and, at the Dean's discretion, non-classroom activities other than externships. Students enrolled in the Three-Year Option must complete at least 4 "clinical units" which includes externships and in-house clinic work only, according to the self-study.

For students entering before 2020, the clinical unit cap was 8 units, 4 per placement, and 6 units for other non-classroom work including law review, a program now suspended for lack of interest.

To earn one unit of non-classroom credit, a student must complete 72 hours of work, a standard that satisfies Guideline 6.6(D.) Externships can be performed in governmental law offices or approved private legal settings. Students who work in the in-house clinics handle all major aspects of client representation under the supervision of a faculty member and, for each 3-unit clinic course, they complete a classroom component equal to 1 unit of work. These components are not counted toward the credit limits for non-classroom activities, although they are counted toward the clinical units required of Three-Year Option students.

San Joaquin's publications generally are clear and well organized but the materials on non-classroom courses in the Catalog and Handbook require clarification. To comply more fully with Guidelines 2.3 and 6.6, the law school must revise its publications to state its policies on non-classroom activities clearly and completely. It would appear advisable, for example, to refer to in-house clinics in the Catalog description for Clinical Program courses, and to explain non-classroom credit fully in the Handbook, identifying all courses or course components that qualify for such credit and the specific requirements that must be met as to each.

SJCL Response:

While the policies related to academic credit for non-classroom activities are compliant, SJCL administrators agree that the policies should be clarified. SJCL will clarify policies related to academic credit for non-classroom activities in the student handbook. The new version of the student handbook will be released before the start of summer semester, 2022.