



Supreme Court of Illinois

May 29, 2024

ILLINOIS ADOPTS NEW BAR EXAM FOR 2028

Law school graduates will take a new bar examination starting in 2028 to become licensed to practice law in Illinois, the Illinois Supreme Court and the Board of Admissions to the Bar (Board) announced today. Illinois has not yet been finalized whether its first administration will be in February or July of 2028.

The NextGen bar exam will replace the Uniform Bar Exam (UBE), which Illinois has used since 2019. The National Conference of Bar Examiners developed the NextGen exam, and Illinois joins 18 other jurisdictions that have so far announced plans to adopt it.

“The new bar exam places a greater emphasis on testing the foundational skills required to practice law instead of memorizing legal concepts and principles,” Chief Justice Mary Jane Theis said. “The NextGen exam represents a step forward in a continuing effort to ensure new attorneys possess the knowledge and lawyering skills to meet the legal needs here in Illinois.”

Illinois administers the bar exam twice a year – in February and July – and will continue to follow that schedule with the NextGen exam.

“The Board of Admissions to the Bar has been closely following the development of the NextGen bar examination, and is part of pilot and prototype testing of the exam,” explained Suzanne Schmitz, President of the Board. “Prior to making its recommendation to the Supreme Court, the Board considered the alternatives and consulted with the Deans of the nine law schools in Illinois. With the Court’s selection of 2028 as the start date, the Board will have the benefit of observing at least three administrations of the exam before it is administered in Illinois.”

With the 2028 launch date for the NextGen exam in Illinois, full-time students starting in the fall of 2025 and their law schools will have their entire three-year program to prepare for the NextGen exam. In addition, once each jurisdiction establishes its passing score for the exam, Illinois’ adoption of NextGen will maintain a pathway for examinees to transfer their passing scores into Illinois and from Illinois to other participating jurisdictions, an arrangement that has been in place in Illinois since its adoption of the UBE in 2019.

The NextGen exam will be administered over nine hours in a day and a half. It will test students on a range of legal principles including contract and constitutional law, civil procedure and criminal law, evidence, real property, torts and business associations. The exam focuses on skills used by lawyers such as identifying and analyzing legal issues, negotiation and dispute resolution, and legal research and writing, as well as advising and counseling clients.

The new exam, like the UBE, will include multi-choice questions and performance tasks, which require test-takers to apply lawyering skills to realistic scenarios. The NextGen exam also features questions that integrate a factual scenario with other legal resources, such as an excerpt from a statute or court

opinion or related documents such as portions of a deposition or a police report. The integrated question sets might focus on drafting a legal document, for example.

The Supreme Court oversees the admission and regulation of attorneys in Illinois. The Illinois Board of Admissions to the Bar administers the bar exam and processes applications for admission to the practice of law.

(FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT: James Brunner, Public Information Officer of the Illinois Supreme Court at 217.208.3354 or jbrunner@illinoiscourts.gov.)