

# NextGen Bar Exam Coming July 2026!

By MAGGIE CASTINADO

**T**he NextGen Bar Exam Program has been in development by the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) following an empirical three-year study testing industry professional standard, creation of a Taskforce for Testing, which presented its final report in April of 2021, with collaboration and input informed by various stakeholders, such as working with the American Bar Association's (ABA) Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, since 2019. With a significant shift in bar examination procedures, the Connecticut Bar Examining Committee, as well as other jurisdictions, recently voted to adopt the new exam, set to debut with the July 2026 exam administration. The NextGen exam represents a pivotal change in how we assess the readiness of future lawyers by aligning more closely with the demands and complexities of our current legal practice and is a response to the evolving nature of the legal practice. It is designed to test a broad range of foundational lawyering skills and legal concepts, including civil procedure, contract law, evidence, torts, business associations, constitutional law criminal law, real property, and beginning July 2028, family law. However, the arguments against the NextGen bar exam, and for the most part, the bar exam in general, cover a range of concerns regarding legal education, exam relevance, and the impact on diverse populations.

One significant argument against the NextGen bar exam is the shift towards a more integrated approach that combines

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knowledge and skills in a manner aiming to better reflect “real-world” legal practice. Critics understand the intention is to make the exam more relevant to the practices of law, however, believe that it may not adequately capture the complexities and nuances of actual legal work. And although the NextGen Bar Exam intends to reduce reliance on memorization and focus more on practical skills, concerns exist about whether it can truly measure a candidate’s competency in legal practice.

According to the National Council of Bar Examiners (NCBE), these areas have been identified as essential for competent entry-level legal practice, reflecting the changing legal landscape. In addition to the foundational concepts, the NextGen Bar Exam will also assess key lawyering skills such as legal research, legal writing, issue spotting and analysis, investigation, client counseling and ne-

gotiation, and dispute resolution. These skills are vital for the effective practice of law, highlighting the exam’s focus on practical, applied legal knowledge rather than just memorization. The Law School Admissions Council (LSAC) conducts research to help strengthen our profession, guide students, and counsel schools with two things in mind: 1) We must continue to expand access to the legal profession and 2) Legal education needs to evolve with the time. Together with the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS), LSAC is launching a nationwide research project to update Foundations for Practice, which is the collective of the legal skills, professional competencies and proficiencies that make lawyers successful. This research is designed to help schools improve legal education, help employers assess hiring decisions and help bar associations deliver and create relevant programming to their members.<sup>1</sup>



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Moreover, there remains concern about the impact of the bar exam on diversity within the legal profession. Perhaps this is no longer relevant or a concern for many; however, critics argue that the bar exam may serve as an unnecessary barrier to entry for marginalized and diverse populations. Others wonder whether a bar examination is necessary at all....

The format of the exam is also a departure from traditional methods, featuring a mix of multiple-choice questions, integrated question sets, and longer performance tasks, which is designed to evaluate candidates' ability to apply their knowledge in practical scenarios. The exam spans one- and one-half days with sessions designed to test both depth and breadth of candidates' legal skills.

Connecticut is among the first jurisdictions to adopt the NextGen bar exam. Although the exam utilizes a focused

set of fundamental legal concepts and principles needed in today's practice of law, many feel the exam eliminates very important and necessary subjects such as trust and estates, probate, and family law. Connecticut is committed to maintaining a high standard of legal proficiency and adapting to the changing landscape of the legal practice, but does this new exam accomplish this?

As we approach the implementation of the NextGen bar exam, I would encourage prospective exam takers, legal educators, employers, and the wider legal community to review the following resources: NextGen Bar Exam Fact Sheet,<sup>2</sup> The Fall 23 Background Info Report,<sup>3</sup> and Final Report of the Testing Taskforce April 2021.<sup>4</sup>

**Additionally, the CBA will be hosting a CLE on the NextGen Bar Exam on May 16, via Zoom, from 12:00 p.m. - 1:30 p.m.,** which will give an update on where

things stand. Panelists will include Hon. Anne Dranginis (ret.), Chair of the Connecticut Bar Examining Committee; Professor Mary Beattie, Director of Academic Support, University of Connecticut Law; Hon. Deborah Tedford (ret.), State Chair for Connecticut of the American College of Trust and Estate Counsel; and a hiring partner/DEI Committee major law firm, among others. Hope to see you there! ■

#### NOTES

- 1 [www.lsac.org](http://www.lsac.org)
- 2 [www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/0823-nextgen-bar-exam-jx-fact-sheet.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=8b2587b9\\_2](https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/0823-nextgen-bar-exam-jx-fact-sheet.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=8b2587b9_2)
- 3 [www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/nextgen-background-info-report-fall23.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=65cb292f\\_4](https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/nextgen-background-info-report-fall23.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=65cb292f_4)
- 4 [www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/ttf-final-report-april-2021.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=27d9a34\\_2](https://www.ctbar.org/docs/default-source/publications/connecticut-lawyer/ctl-vol-35/4-marchapril-23/ttf-final-report-april-2021.pdf?Status=Temp&sfvrsn=27d9a34_2)