



An American Law School in China

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In the race for [1] [legal education in China](#), here's one step in a decidedly American direction: A new, U.S.-style law school in Shenzhen aims to be the first foreign law school to be accredited by the American Bar Association, which would enable its graduates to take U.S state bar examinations. Nearly all states limit applications for the bar exam to those who hold a degree from an ABA-accredited law school.

No other overseas law school is accredited by the ABA, but that's because none has ever sought ABA accreditation, an ABA spokeswoman told the [2] [National Law Journal](#). The spokeswoman also noted that the ABA's standards don't limit accreditation to schools within the U.S.

The new school, Peking University School of Transnational Law, is entirely separate from Peking University's law school and takes American legal education as its model— a three-year graduate J.D. program, taught in English by a predominantly American faculty teaching U.S. law. The founding dean, Jeffrey Lehman, was previously president of Cornell University and dean of the University of Michigan Law School.

In China, where any university-degree holder can sit for the Chinese bar exam, a fancy American-style degree is most likely to appeal to students who want to obtain a license to practice in the U.S., but many of those students may prefer to study and work there as well. The school appears to have acknowledged this issue by aiming to supply lawyers to international firms working in China. In that case, a foreign law credential can be useful where there's still a dual-track salary system that grants higher pay to U.S.-licensed lawyers than to local attorneys.

Dean Lehman says that while the school aspires to gain ABA accreditation, it's a very tough process that can't even be started until the school's second year of operation, and there's no guarantee that the school will be accredited.

"We are not in any position to make any representation to anyone that we will be approved by the American Bar Association prior to the graduation of any students entering now," says Lehman. "All we can say is that we are determined to devote all necessary resources, and to do all that is required, to present a program of legal education that will qualify for approval by the ABA."

-Sky Canaves

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[2] [National Law Journal](http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1202421959463): <http://www.law.com/jsp/article.jsp?id=1202421959463>