

PROFESSIONALISM

Background

Lawyers proudly refer to the practice of law as a profession. The organized bar has developed programs and activities to help and encourage lawyers to maintain their professionalism.

Many states include ethics and professionalism as part of their mandatory continuing legal education requirements.

In at least 12 states, newly-admitted attorneys are required to take a professionalism course. For example, The Florida Bar Young Lawyers Division presents “Practicing with Professionalism,” a two-day Supreme Court mandated program for all newly-admitted lawyers to The Florida Bar.

The Texas Center for Legal Ethics and Professionalism, incorporated in 1989 under the auspices of the Texas Bar Foundation, developed a course called “A Guide to the Basics of Law Practice,” offered on a voluntary basis to all third-year law students at nine Texas law schools.

As another example, although not mandatory, the State Bar of Montana sponsors a Rookie Camp for new lawyers that addresses issues that lawyers often confront early in their careers. Topics include developing and maintaining client relations and managing a professional practice.

More than 100 state and local bar associations have adopted standards of civility, courtesy, and conduct as aspirational goals to promote professionalism, as have at least a dozen courts.

At least 25 bar associations have commissioned task forces or committees to make recommendations on improving professionalism. Ten states (FL, GA, NJ, NM, NY, NC, OH, OR, SC, TX) have established professionalism commissions. Professionalism columns have become regular features in bar journals and newsletters.

Each year the ABA Standing Committee on Professionalism presents the E. Smythe Gambrell Professionalism Awards to deserving state and local bar and law school professionalism programs.

Missouri Bar Activities

Missouri Supreme Court Rule 15.05(e) requires all new admittees to The Missouri Bar to obtain three hours of ethics, professionalism or malpractice prevention credit (ethics) within 12 months of admission. Rule 15.05(f) requires all lawyers actively practicing law in Missouri to obtain three hours of credit in ethics, professionalism or malpractice prevention every three years.

Each spring, The Missouri Bar conducts a three-hour professionalism program at Missouri law schools to provide third-year students an opportunity to satisfy the requirement of Rule 15.05(e).

The Board of Governors has adopted the following “Principles of Civility”:

It is the duty of each lawyer to conduct themselves with dignity and civility. Toward that end, each lawyer shall be:

Respectful
Trustworthy
Courteous
Cooperative

The Purcell Professionalism Award is presented by the Missouri Bar Foundation each year at The Missouri Bar Annual Meeting.