

ASU Law options address shortage of lawyers in Arizona

New pathways to practicing law aim to make the field more accessible

By Dolores Tropiano, ASU News
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Arizona faces one of the nation's most severe shortages of attorneys, especially in rural communities, ranking among the bottom in the country for lawyers per capita.

In 2024, the American Bar Association [reported](#) just over two lawyers per 1,000 residents. The scarcity, often dubbed a "legal desert," presents real problems for people in need of legal representation.

Arizona State University is working to change that.

The Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law offers multiple ways to obtain a law education that are personalized and flexible — the newest being an option that will reduce a barrier for potential JD students.

ASU Law has launched a [test-optional pathway](#) for applicants pursuing a law degree. Slated to be offered in the fall 2026 semester, the move recognizes that LSAT scores are only one measure of a student's ability to succeed in law school.

The college will also offer new [part-time and fully online option for its juris doctor](#), starting in spring 2026. The initiative allows students to still maintain their personal and professional commitments while pursuing a law degree.

"By removing these barriers, we are creating new opportunities for future lawyers who may have thought law school was out of reach," said [Amy Best](#), assistant dean of admissions and financial aid at ASU Law.

Lots of options for gaining legal knowledge

For those who are interested in studying law, but may not want to pursue the traditional three-year program, ASU Law offers an alternative to a traditional JD degree through its [Master of Legal](#)

[Studies](#) programs.

“Law has always been an exclusive, inaccessible area of knowledge for many people who did not have the time or the resources to attend law school during a three-year program or did not ... want to become an attorney,” said [Joey Dormady](#), assistant dean of graduate programs and new education initiatives at ASU Law.

Whether you’re starting a new job in human resources or agreeing to a website’s terms and conditions, Dormady believes a little knowledge of law can go a long way.

“Everybody — and when I say everybody, I really mean everybody — can benefit from having working knowledge of the law and having some level of legal expertise,” he said. “The law touches upon virtually every industry.”

The college provides two dozen MLS specialty areas, including sports law and business, patent practice and intellectual property law.

And several new areas of emphasis are launching to serve the public: [Navajo Nation law](#), [federal contracting law](#), [land use and property development law](#), [health care law and administration](#) and [corporate and health care compliance](#).

Filling growing needs

Navajo Nation law, an online program that launched this fall, is open to all MLS students but is specifically designed to serve citizens of the Navajo Nation and those working with or within tribal communities.

“It’s the first partnership between a law school and a tribe,” Dormady said. “The Navajo tribe has had many members go through law school and become lawyers. But people often leave for opportunities off the reservation or out of their small towns.”

“This program ... will give (students) the opportunity to sit for the Navajo Nation bar,” Dormady said. “We’ll better equip them to navigate the law and policy that impacts their tribal community.”

Regarding health care law, recent changes and consolidations in the industry can make navigating the legalities of the system confusing, Dormady said.

“The landscape has changed in terms of the sheer size and scope of some of these operations,” he said.

The two new health-related programs, which start this October, will teach about everything from health care privacy and insurance to medical malpractice, employment and contract law.

Dormady says the MLS specialties were created in response to people who wanted to just sit in on ASU Law classes, and the benefits extend beyond the individual to the community, and even across the country.

“It serves two separate but similar purposes, right?” he said. “It is enriching an individual’s life within our society that is organized under a system of laws and understanding what those laws are,

what your rights under those laws are and what your obligations under the law are. And the more people know about the law and our legal system, how it all works, the better our country becomes, because we have a more informed citizenry.”

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



ASU Law students gather in the John J. Ross-William C. Blakley Law Library on the Downtown Phoenix campus. ASU photo