

**Pathways Implementation
Core Competencies Subcommittee
Draft Core Competencies
June 30, 2025**

I. Introduction

Core lawyering competencies are baseline-level demonstratable skills, professional behaviors, and areas of knowledge that a candidate for licensure must possess to protect the public from harm in the provision of legal services. Given the interrelationship between lawyering skills, behaviors, and knowledge, there is a necessary degree of overlap between core competencies. The core competencies apply to each licensure pathway.

The competencies are based primarily on research conducted by the Institute for the Advancement of the American Legal System (IAALS), as reported in [*Building a Better Bar: The Twelve Building Blocks of Minimum Competence*](#). The competencies also supplement with findings from IAALS' [*Foundations for Practice*](#) project, the NCBE's Testing Task Force's 2021 [*Final Report*](#), other jurisdictions efforts to frame core competencies,¹ and interviews with experts in lawyer competencies and licensing² and Washington practitioners. Academic deans from all three Washington law schools and legal practitioners with experience in mentorship, APR 6 clerkships, and foreign legal education also provided feedback on these competencies.³ Parentheticals below indicate the principal source from which each competency and explanation was derived.

II. Core Lawyering Competencies

A licensure candidate must demonstrate an understanding of legal processes and sources of law (IAALS 12 Building Blocks). Understanding legal processes and sources of law includes understanding the appropriate application of state and local law, federal law, administrative rules, and local court rules and understanding the channels of legal practice, including alternative dispute resolution processes, negotiation skills, legislative

¹ The committee reviewed the work of similar committees in Minnesota, Nevada, and Utah.

² The committee consulted with Joan Howarth, Emerita Professor of Law at UNLV's William S. Boyd School of Law and author of *Shaping the Bar, The Future of Attorney Licensing*; Logan Cornett, Director of Research Legal Education and Licensure at IAALS and co-author of *Building a Better Bar*; and Gina Alexandris, Lawyer Consultant and Coach and former Senior Director of the Law Practice Program at Toronto Metropolitan University.

³ Thank you to the following individuals for providing their insights on these competencies: Agnieszka McPeak, Gonzaga Law Associate Dean for Academic Affairs and Program Innovation; John Eason, Seattle U Incoming Associate Dean for Academic Affairs; Brooke Coleman, Seattle U Vice Dean for Academic Affairs; Elizabeth Pendo, UW Academic Dean; Helen Boyer, attorney and mentor; Eduardo Kruel, attorney licensed in Brazil and UW LL.M. graduate; Chris Maund, Seattle U Director of International Graduate Studies; Dana Raigrodski, UW Associate Teaching Professor and Director, General Law; Anita Ramasastry, UW Associate Dean for Global and Graduate Affairs; Kelly Ruhlig, UW Law Interim Director of Graduate Programs.

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processes, administrative and regulatory processes, and court processes (IAALS 12 Building Blocks).

A licensure candidate must demonstrate an understanding of threshold concepts in many subjects (IAALS 12 Building Blocks). A threshold concept is an “insight that transforms understanding of a subject.” (IAALS 12 Building Blocks at 37.) Threshold concepts “distinguish individuals who have begun to master a subject from all others” and “allow new learners to understand the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of their field rather than simply the ‘what.’” (IAALS 12 Building Blocks at 37.) This competency “focuses on understanding principles and policies that govern the law, rather than memorizing specific black-letter rules” and “allow lawyers to identify issues, search for the appropriate rule, and see nuances in the rule.” (IAALS 12 Building Blocks at 37.)

Examples of threshold concepts include constitutional law topics, such as federal/state powers and individual rights; common law topics such as negligence, contract formation and enforcement, and rights in real property; statutory topics, such as commercial and criminal law codes; and administrative law topics, including agency powers and limits, rulemaking, and adjudication. Precisely identifying an exhaustive set of threshold concepts a candidate for licensure must understand to be competent to practice law, however, has proven challenging even to experts in attorney licensure and would likely pose significant administrative costs for licensing authorities. Nonetheless, consensus among experts holds that such threshold concepts are widely incorporated into law school curricula and, in Washington, APR 6 law clerk coursework. Therefore, rather than attempt to create a list of required threshold concepts, the Core Competencies Subcommittee anticipates that this competency will be satisfied by candidate’s completion of a course of legal study in the APR 6 law clerk program or an approved⁴ law school.

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to act professionally and in accordance with the rules of professional conduct (IAALS 12 Building Blocks). This competency includes the demonstrated ability to conduct oneself with respect for and in accordance with the law, including compliance with the requirements of applicable state, local, and federal constitutions, laws, rules and regulations, and any applicable court order. A candidate for licensure may satisfy this competency by managing a law related workload (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE’s Final Report, IAALS Foundations for Practice); coping with the stress of legal practice (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, IAALS Foundations for

⁴ See the list of approved law schools generated by the Board of Governors of the Washington State Bar pursuant to APR 2(a)(5).

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Practice); pursuing self-directed learning (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, IAALS Foundations for Practice); understanding the business of maintaining a legal practice (IAALS Foundations for Practice, Ontario Lawyer Licensing Pathways); and appropriately using technology in legal practice.

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to interpret legal materials (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE's Final Report). This competency emphasizes the ability to understand and interpret constitutional provisions, statutes, judicial opinions, and regulations and the ability to evaluate how legal documents, such as contracts, should be construed.

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to identify issues (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE's Final Report). This competency emphasizes the ability to understand the “big picture” of client matters (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, IAALS Foundations); identify legal principles and legally significant facts relevant to a client matter; identify goals and objectives in client matters (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); identify legal claims and remedies that might address a client’s needs (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); identify legal and practical obstacles to achieving any proposed resolution (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); and develop strategies to guide client matters (IAALS 12 Building Blocks).

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to conduct research (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE's Final Report). This competency includes the ability to: research answers to specific legal questions (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); recognize relevant and/or dispositive legal sources applicable to a client matter; appreciate the authoritative weight of sources of law relevant to a client matter; utilize strategies to update sources of law and/or find additional sources of law that are relevant to a client matter (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); acquire facts and non-legal information for client matters; develop the factual record (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE's Final Report); and locate information about local rules or practices (IAALS 12 Building Blocks).

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to apply legal authority to the relevant facts in a client matter. This competency emphasizes the ability to make logically sound arguments based on precedent, analogy, and policy; assess the strengths and weaknesses in a client’s position and an opposing party’s position; and forecast potential outcomes of a client matter.

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to communicate as a lawyer (IAALS 12 Building Blocks, NCBE's Final Report). This competency includes the ability to

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choose a method of communication appropriate to the circumstances and audience (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); communicate the application of legal authority to the facts in a written or oral form that is appropriate for the audience, including the client, opposing counsel, the courts, and other stakeholders; draft and edit legal documents and legal correspondence (IAALS Foundations); work collaboratively with others, including opposing counsel, to address a client matter (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); and apply negotiation skills to advocate on behalf of a client.

A licensure candidate must demonstrate the ability to interact effectively with clients (IAALS 12 Building Blocks). This competency emphasizes the ability to gain a client's trust; recognize the importance of cross-cultural competence and seek available resources to understand the needs of their clients; gather relevant facts and identify client goals (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); communicate regularly with clients, convey information and options in terms that a client can understand, and help the client choose a strategy (IAALS 12 Building Blocks); manage client expectations, convey bad news, and cope with difficult clients (IAALS 12 Building Blocks).