



**New York State Bar Association
Committee on Professional Ethics**

Opinion 1306 (10/14/2026)

Topic: Unadmitted law graduate's signature block and law firm website listing

Digest: A law firm may list on its website law school graduates who are not yet admitted to practice law and may permit them to sign appropriate correspondence on behalf of the firm, provided the firm clearly and conspicuously discloses that they are not admitted to practice law. Describing such an individual as "Law Clerk" or using a disclosure such as "Not admitted" or "Not yet admitted to practice" is sufficient, so long as the communication, viewed as a whole, is not false, deceptive, or misleading.

Rules: 5.3, 7.1(a), 7.5, 8.4(c)

FACTS:

1. The inquirer, a law firm, employs law school graduates who are not yet admitted to any bar. The law firm currently refers to such individuals as "Law Clerk" on its website and requires the disclaimer "Not Yet Admitted to Any Bar" in their email signature blocks.

QUESTION:

2. Is the inquirer ethically obligated to require an unadmitted law school graduate to include a specific disclaimer in such individual's email signature block or in the law firm's or unadmitted graduate's other communications (such as on the firm's website)? If so, what disclaimers are permitted and adequate?

OPINION:

3. Although law school graduates who are not yet admitted to practice are nonlawyers and are thus not themselves directly subject to the New York Rules of Professional Conduct, a law firm that employs unadmitted law school graduates has supervisory responsibilities with respect to such individuals. Rule 5.3 requires lawyers and law firms to ensure that the conduct of nonlawyers employed or retained by the firm is compatible with the professional obligations of lawyers. *See, e.g.,* N.Y. State 943 ¶ 3 & nn. 1-2 (2012) (law firm had supervisory responsibility under Rule 5.3 concerning the job description used on a law school graduate's business cards).

4. The principal guidance for answering the inquirer's questions is Rule 7.1(a), which (as amended effective June 1, 2026) provides:

A lawyer shall not make a false or misleading communication about the lawyer or the lawyer's services. A communication is false or misleading if it contains a material misrepresentation of fact or law, or omits a fact necessary to make the statement considered as a whole not materially misleading.

5. Rule 7.5 governs professional notices and designations, including websites and similar communications, and is explicit that they may not violate the Rules. Comment [1] to Rule 7.5 similarly provides:

A lawyer's or law firm's name, trade name, domain name, web site, social media pages, office sign, business cards, letterhead, and professional designations are communications concerning a lawyer's services and must not be false, deceptive, or misleading. They must comply with this Rule and with Rule 7.1.

6. In addition, Rule 8.4(c) prohibits a lawyer from engaging in conduct involving dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation, whether in connection with the practice of law or otherwise.

7. This Committee has previously provided guidance concerning how certain law school graduates – those who are not yet admitted to practice but passed the bar examination -- may be described in firm communications. *See* N.Y. State 1298 (2026) (candidate for admission to the New York State Bar who has passed the UBE, MPRE and NYLE may identify himself with the notation, “Passed the NY state bar examination (passed not admitted).”).

8. In addition, questions similar to those posed by the Inquirer were addressed more than 30 years ago by the Committee on Professional Ethics of the New York County Lawyers Association in N.Y. County 682 (1990), which opined:

[I]t is professionally proper for a law school graduate not yet admitted to the New York Bar to sign his or her name on documents and letters on behalf of a New York law firm. However, the lawyer must clearly indicate that he or she has not yet been admitted to any bar and may not hold himself or herself out as a “Lawyer” or “Attorney at Law” on stationery. *See, e.g.*, Philadelphia Bar Association 81-65 (1981). *See also* Judiciary Law § [478]. The unadmitted law school graduate must disclose his or her non-lawyer status by including an appropriate term such as “Law Clerk” or “Legal Clerk” or “Not Admitted” after his or her signature. *See, e.g.*, N.Y. County 641 (1975); N.Y. City 884 (1974).

9. We agree with the substance of that guidance under the current Rules. A law firm may identify an unadmitted law school graduate on its website and may permit such an individual to sign email or other correspondence on the firm's behalf, provided that (i) the communication clearly and conspicuously discloses that the individual is not admitted to practice law and (ii) the correspondence does not contain legal advice or other content that requires the sender to be an admitted attorney. Whether a particular designation is sufficient depends on the communication as a whole and on whether a reasonable reader would be misled regarding the individual's status.

10. In that context, the title “Law Clerk” is ordinarily sufficient on a law firm website to convey that the individual is not admitted to practice, so long as the presentation does not otherwise imply that the person is a lawyer. Likewise, a signature-block disclosure such as “Not admitted,” “Not yet admitted”¹ or “Not admitted to practice” is sufficient if it clearly

¹ “Not yet admitted” is not misleading merely because it includes the word “yet.” Properly read, the phrase states only the individual's present status—that the person is not currently admitted to practice—and does not represent that the person has passed a bar examination, completed character and fitness review, filed an (...continued)

communicates the individual's status. The Rules do not require any particular formula, so long as the disclosure is accurate and not misleading.

11. We do not believe that the Rules require the inquirer to use the same wording in every context. Thus, if the website identifies the individual as "Law Clerk," an additional disclaimer may not be necessary there, provided the website presentation as a whole is not misleading. Similarly, for email signatures, "Not admitted," "Not yet admitted," or "Not admitted to practice" are also acceptable if they clearly convey that the individual is not admitted to practice law in any jurisdiction.

CONCLUSION:

12. A law firm may list on its website law school graduates who are not yet admitted to practice and may permit them to sign otherwise appropriate email and other correspondence on behalf of the firm, so long as the communication is not false, deceptive, or misleading. Describing such an individual as "Law Clerk" on a website or using a signature-block disclosure such as "Not admitted," "Not yet admitted" or "Not admitted to practice" satisfies that standard if the communication clearly and conspicuously conveys that the individual is not admitted to practice law.

(25-26)

application, or is certain ever to be admitted. Although "yet" may in some contexts suggest an expected future event, it does not itself convey that admission is assured or that only the passage of time remains; it simply indicates that admission has not occurred as of now.