



Helping Lawyers Meet the Cost of MCLE Requirements

Written on January 14, 2010 by [Donna Seyle](#)

It's great having found friends and colleagues on Twitter whose directions and passions are aligned with my own. One such person is the author of this post, [Tim Baran](#), whose dedication and integrity continually inspire me to "carry on." Tim is Principal and founder of uMCLE (Uniform Mandatory Continuing Legal Education), a premier service and resource hub for continuing legal education presenters and providers, attorneys and other CLE professionals. uMCLE advocates for uniform MCLE standards, offers CLE accreditation services and explores the intersection of CLE with Social Media and other emerging platforms and applications. He has been involved in the legal profession for fifteen years, including federal court, law school and law firms, serving from 1999-2008 as the director of library services and the continuing legal education program at Anderson Kill & Olick law firm in New York City.

The economic downturn continued with past year with over [12,000 layoffs](#) reported at large law firms, of which around 40 percent were attorneys. The numbers expand when considering attorney layoffs that were not reported or who separated voluntarily. At the same time, more states have passed new rules mandating continuing legal education (CLE) for attorneys with [New Jersey](#) (2010) the latest.

Mid-size and large law firms, organizations, government entities and corporations have traditionally underwritten the "professional development" cost of the mandatory courses, often producing in-house programs that provide the necessary credit hours. But the staggering rates of law firm lay-offs over the past couple of years have resulted in a growing number of newly unemployed and freelance attorneys. With significantly reduced resources, these attorneys are burdened further by the ever increasing number of costly mandatory CLE requirements.

The discussion, often led by [Carolyn Elefant](#), [Scott Greenfield](#) and other enduring advocates, has moved beyond questioning [the need](#) for mandatory rules to focusing on the burdensome, archaic rules regarding technology, [marketing/ethics](#), [social media](#), [uniformity](#) and other emerging concerns.

However, little attention has been paid to how the newly unemployed and freelance attorneys can *afford* to comply. Do meaningful cost savings opportunities exist? Who's responsible? How can it be accessed? The responsibility lies with all parties involved: CLE regulators who administer the rules, CLE Providers who produce accredited activities and courses, and by the attorney seeking assistance.

Continuing Legal Education Regulator

A long-term solution is for state [CLE administrators](#) and boards to advocate for changing or promulgating new rules so that reciprocity will be granted for credits earned at approved courses taken in other states, and remove current limits on the number of credit hours that can be earned via on-demand programming such as streaming video or DVDs.

Reciprocity will greatly reduce the number of courses that attorneys licensed to practice in multiple jurisdictions need to complete resulting in a corresponding reduction in cost. It will also eliminate the need for providers to accredit courses in every jurisdiction, significantly reducing production costs which can then be passed on to the attorney.

We can all agree that the cost of watching a course online or on DVD far lower than attending a live conference. Yet, incredulously, many states severely limit the number of credit hours that can be earned via this medium, and those that do burden the viewer with many verification and other procedures making the experience often burdensome and not terribly conducive to learning.

Continuing Legal Education Providers

CLE providers consistently offer great deals and need-based scholarships. Current rules, procedures and accreditation application fees severely dampen further opportunity for providers to cut costs. Hopefully, providers will begin to expand their use of free social media marketing to bring more attention to their courses and available resources.

Attorneys - Diligence

Attorneys must be diligent. Check [bar association websites](#), not just your own state and local bars but other states since many courses are accredited in multiple jurisdictions and credit can also be claimed via reciprocity for the states that offer it.

Many prominent providers such as [PLI](#), [Lawline](#) and [West LegalEdCenter](#) offer deals and specials. Sign up for their email notices. Organizations, law firms and corporations occasionally offer free seminars. A simple [Google search](#) will return a listing of current free and discounted courses along with sites that compile more focused listings like [Social Media Presents: Free Legal Webinars](#) right here on [Freelance Law Firm](#).

Finally, a rich source of real-time news and information are the many social media platforms. If you haven't already done so, sign up for an account and follow CLE entities on [Twitter](#) who often tweet about free and discounted programs. Also check out the CLE providers who do post and advertise about their discounted courses on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#). Diligence pays off.

These are just a few of the solutions for making CLE more affordable for newly unemployed or freelance attorneys. Can you think of others?