

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2017

COVER STORY

ABA mulls scrapping law school admission tests

By Lyle Moran
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Law schools would no longer need to require applicants to take a standardized test under a proposal the American Bar Association's legal education council will consider next month.

That revision to the ABA's accreditation standards would be a major change from the mandate that ABA schools ensure applicants have taken a "valid and reliable admission test."

Most law schools require applicants to take the LSAT, but recently several schools have started permitting the submission of Graduate Record Examination scores.

A growing debate over the role the GRE should play in law school admissions helped spur the ABA to consider updating its accreditation standard regarding such tests, Standard 503.

A proposal the ABA sought comment on earlier this year called for creating a process by which tests other than the LSAT could be approved for use by all law schools instead of continuing to allow individual schools to prove that another test is valid and reliable.

Earlier this week, the ABA announced its Standards Review Committee recommended the legal education council consider three other options.

The option to eliminate the admission test would instead require that such a test would be one factor in determining whether schools are admitting only applicants who appear capable of graduating and becoming lawyers.

A second option would require an admission test that assists schools in assessing an applicant's ability to graduate, and the schools would have to publish the tests they accept. The tests schools require would not need to be deemed "valid and reliable" by the ABA.

Another alternative would retain the "valid and reliable" admission test mandate, but not automatically state the LSAT is qualified as meeting that definition.

The University of Arizona's James E. Rogers College of Law was the first ABA school to announce it would accept GRE-only applicants, and it welcomed its second class under that policy this fall. Marc L. Miller, the law dean at



Courtesy of James E. Rogers College of Law

Marc L. Miller, dean of the University of Arizona's law school, said removing the mandate for applicants to take standard admission tests would inspire innovation in determining who is likely to succeed and become a lawyer.

Arizona, joined other colleagues in expressing opposition to the initial ABA proposal to revamp the admission test standard.

He and five other deans suggested in a June letter that there are "many and better ways other than a standardized test to determine whether a law school believes an applicant can succeed in law school and pass the bar."

Miller said Wednesday he was pleased with the alternative proposal to eliminate the admission test requirement.

"Removing the mandate would be an invitation to innovation," he said.

Some law schools could decide to require students admitted without having taken a standardized test to sit for an exam after their first year to provide feedback and get support if needed, Miller said. Most law schools would

likely still require most applicants to have taken an admission test, he added.

The LSAT is administered by the Law School Admission Council. Kellye Y. Testy, the council's president and CEO, said she expects the LSAT will be used by most member schools regardless of whether the ABA requires an admission test.

"The LSAT is the only test designed specifically for legal education, the fairest mechanism to ensure a level playing field, and gives law schools a uniform method of assessing each applicant's ability to thrive in their studies and in the profession," Testy wrote in an emailed statement.

The ABA's legal education council will discuss the standardized test issue when it meets Nov. 2 -4 in Boston.