

Legal Ed Considers Eliminating Admissions Test Standard and Increasing Distance Ed Credits



The council of the American Bar Association's (ABA) Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar has voted to resubmit a proposal to eliminate the requirement that accredited law schools use an admissions test like the LSAT or GRE. The decision was made during a council meeting held in Arizona last Friday. The proposal will be resubmitted to the House of Delegates for the August 2023 ABA Annual Meeting.

The council also approved a suggestion to allow up to 50% of a law school's credits to be offered online without special permission. Under the existing version of Standard 311, law schools are limited to granting up to one-third of the required credit hours through distance education without council approval.

The council's strategic review committee suggested both proposals. The council's chair of the strategic review committee, Daniel Theis, said Friday that "there is more education to be done" regarding the admissions test standards.

The proposed revisions to law school accreditation standards and rules are sent to the House for concurrence up to two times. Still, the council has the final decision on matters related to law school education. At the February midyear meeting, the House had previously voted against proposed revisions to Standards 501 and 503 of the ABA Standards and Rules of Procedure for Approval of Law Schools.

Discourse around Standard 503 has been plentiful. Initially, it required all ABA-accredited law schools to use the Law School Admission Council's Law School Admission Test. In 2016, the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law received a variance to accept the Graduate Record Examination and the LSAT. A handful of other schools followed suit, and the council of Legal Ed in 2018 brought a resolution to cut Standard 503.

It was met with opposition from the Young Lawyers Division and the Minority Network, a group of law school admissions professionals. It was withdrawn shortly before the House vote was scheduled. Later, in 2021, in a closed session, the council voted to allow the GRE to be used as an entrance exam in addition to the LSAT. That addressed an application of the standard, not a revision, and did not require concurrence from the House.

Regarding the distance education proposals, the council's strategic review committee surveyed 1,394 third-year law students about distance education in February 2022. The survey found that 68.65% of respondents wanted to earn more distance education credits than their schools offered. The council has granted substantive change or variance requests for online and hybrid JD programs at 13 law schools.

In other council business, the group approved proposed revisions for clarification to Standard 307, which addresses studies and field placement outside the United States. Additionally, the council approved a proposed revision to Standard 509, which focuses on required disclosures, to replace "administrators" with "staff" in the annual questionnaire for reporting purposes.

The proposed changes in legal education could have far-reaching implications for prospective law students who may no longer need to take admission tests and can earn more credits online. However, more education is needed before any final decision is made. The ABA will continue to monitor the situation and provide necessary updates.

REFERENCES:

Legal Ed will resubmit proposed elimination of admissions-test standard and consider increasing distance ed credits