USC law school to allow applicants with GRE scores

By Lyle Moran
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University of Southern California Gould School of Law announced Thursday it will permit prospective students to apply with only GRE scores starting this fall, becoming the latest high-profile institution to move away from mandating the submission of LSAT scores.

USC appears to be just the second American Bar Association-accredited school in California to adopt such an approach, as UCLA School of Law made a similar announcement in May.

Both schools are moving ahead in the aftermath of the ABA legal education council’s vote last month to jettison the accreditation standard requiring applicants to have taken a “valid and reliable” admissions test. The change must be approved by the ABA’s House of Delegates to become effective, and a vote is expected in August.

The ABA’s action seems to have accelerated law schools’ willingness to try new approaches to admissions. The University of Pennsylvania Law School announced earlier this month it will allow applicants to begin applying this fall with GMAT, GRE or LSAT scores.

USC law school said it will allow applicants for its fall 2019 class to apply with either a GRE or LSAT score in order to attract a larger and more diverse group of applicants.

“USC has a long history of encouraging interdisciplinary studies, and we hope that students with an interest in multiple disciplines will consider pursuing joint degree programs that include a law degree,” said Andrew T. Guzman, dean of USC Gould School of Law. “We are confident that we will attract a broader group of law school applicants by offering more entrance exam choices.”

The law school is also hopeful its new policy helps generate greater interest from students with backgrounds in science, technology, engineering and math, known as the STEM fields.

“One thing we have heard from employers is there is a need for attorneys with a background in the hard sciences, particularly with developments in that arena occurring so rapidly,” said David Kirschner, USC Gould’s dean of admissions.

He said some applicants with those backgrounds could come from other schools at USC, noting the university has strong engineering and computer science programs.
Kyle McEntee, executive director of the advocacy group Law School Transparency, said he is agnostic about whether it is wise for schools to move away from the LSAT.
“As long as they are admitting people who are completing school and succeeding on the bar exam, schools should be able to do what they want,” he said.
McEntee said it is too early to know whether admissions policies allowing students to apply with tests other than the LSAT will result in a rise in student credentials because there is not enough data about whether success on the GRE correlates to a strong performance in law school and on the bar exam.
Educational Testing Service, which administers the GRE, announced last fall it worked with 21 schools to conduct a national study that indicated the GRE is a strong and valid predictor of first-year law school grades.
Kirschner said USC was one of the participating schools, and the study helped provide the law school with additional confidence in its decision to allow applicants to apply on the basis of GRE scores.
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