The LSAT is No Longer Required at These and Other Law Schools: Why Law Schools Are Ditching the LSAT

Summary: As law schools strive to become more diverse, they are also dropping the LSAT.

- Not long ago, only those of privilege were seemingly allowed into the law school institution.
- Diversity, however, has recently played a large part in law school admissions for those who ordinarily would not ordinarily find themselves in law school.
- With law schools now throwing out the LSAT in favor of the GRE, which diversity should only increase.

For many who aspire to the practice of law, attending law school is an invaluable step toward obtaining that career goal. Law school is structured to make a student of law approach circumstances differently than what occurs in the real world, which, in the end, is what makes up a solid law practitioner.

Rather than react or impulsively come to a conclusion, law school teaches young lawyers to analyze, break down and rebuild legal cases. It is a difficult but necessary three-year row in which a prospective lawyer reads, writes, argues, but most importantly, strengthens him or herself to become a legal resource for clients who are in need of legal assistance.

Beyond that, the sheer fact of law school remains; you cannot practice law without having gone to law school. It is impossible to do. If one does attempt it, surely the bar exam will root these school-less bandit lawyers out, and prevent them from obtaining a license to practice – that is if it is not first found out by others in the practice of law that this one particular lawyer did not adequately pay “their dues.”

So yes, law school is necessary. Some might say a necessary evil, while others could deem law school to be an essential benefit. One way or the other, if you want to become a lawyer, you first have to attend law school.

To William and Mary and Beyond!

The oldest law school in the United States is William and Mary. The school first began instructing future lawyers in January 1780. Of course, much has changed since those budding days when law schools such as William and Mary, Harvard and Yale first opened their doors to prospective lawyers.

For example, law schools instruct much differently today than what was traditionally taught only two or three decades ago. Recognizing their worldly importance (and responsibility) toward the production of quality...
attorneys who seek to improve society with fair execution and representation of the law, law schools are continually pressured to move away from the stodgy upper-class pedagogy they have educated for centuries. Now, these schools’ concentration leans toward a progressive and inclusive student body that better represents the world at large and the potential legal issues within that world.

While there has been resistance to this movement mostly from the old guard of what is now a verifiable dying breed of archaic lawyers, even the Ivy League schools, notorious for their exclusivity, now have programs that seek the opposite in race and gender from what previously roamed their hallowed halls.

Law schools now sport and tout themselves as having in-place programs that seek out minority and disenfranchised students, not to forget the mention of women, who are still woefully outnumbered in the legal profession.

The problem, however, is whether or not these actions within the legal education sector are enough to change the landscape of not just law and who represents “the law,” but as importantly, those who make laws.

No More LSATs – at least not at these schools

Over the summer, Georgetown and Northwestern, two law schools touted for their ability to produce high-end legal purveyors, announced they were no longer require incoming law students to take the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT).

As a result, Georgetown and Northwestern join the already trailblazing Harvard Law School and the highly regarded University of Arizona law program who previously determined the LSAT be no longer a measure of potential new law students had to endure before admission to their respective programs.

While there has been a backlash to this decision – much of that coming from the usual old fossils that the law profession detects as still having a pulse – many law schools throughout the country recognize that allowing future students to rely on their GREs to help them get into law schools is a positive move.

Removing the LSAT as a requirement for entry into law school produces these immediate results for prospective law students:

- Future law students are no longer burdened by yet another requirement to get into law school.
- The overall $300 fee for the LSAT ($180) and the mandatory subscription to the Law School Data Assembly Service (LSDAS) for another $121 will be one less expense for new law students.
- The GREs, also known as the Graduate Record Examination, will in most cases for post-graduate students, be required for any graduate program these students enter, not just law.
- Because post-graduate students will already need to take the GREs, their scores are reusable for other graduate programs, and not exclusive only to law school, which the LSAT is.
- Not requiring students to take the LSAT can have a direct and positive influence on diversity in American law schools and the eventual practice of law throughout the country, if not the world.

In this sense, law school admissions have (or will) become a much fairer process. Specialty tests, which have been noted as not in the least way a valid demonstrator of a person’s potential, particularly a student, are taken out of the mix. Moreover, in their place comes the GRE, which by and large is a much more standardized test for postgraduate students.

Another benefit is a student is required only to take the test once, whether or not he or she is admitted into law school.

Well, that is good for the students. However, how exactly will law schools benefit and the legal profession in general, by changing the academic prerequisites for law school?

Simple: It is called diversity.

What’s the benefit of no longer requiring LSATS?

The University of Chicago law school has been seemingly rooted forever within the top-ten law schools in the U.S. Theirs is a strong program with more than a few notable graduates such as:

- David Rubenstein
- Carol Mosley Braun
- John Ashcroft
Now, if you take these three extremely high-powered persons within the legal world at face value, you would think the University of Chicago Law School is already nicely diversified. After all, of that list, two of the men are white, one Jewish and the lone woman of the trio is black.

Fine, but according to Anna Ivey, founder of a consulting firm on law school admissions and former admissions dean at the University of Chicago Law School, much more can be done, particularly in Ms. Ivey’s alma mater.

“Law schools should be innovating; their admissions process has not changed much for a long time in the grand scheme of things,” Ms. Ivey explains in a recent article highlighting law school diversity posted on Inside Hire Ed. “In the meantime, the legal profession has changed rapidly, and the wider context as well, of course.

"Based on my own experience as a law school admissions officer, I was never all that impressed with the LSAT as the end-all, be-all, and if it were not for the rankings, I am not sure law schools would emphasize it as much as they feel forced to. This isn't just about diversity, although that matters. This is also about the skills that lawyers need today.”

Other schools are quickly following suit as they find the LSAT’s lack of necessity when it comes to determining how well a post-graduate will perform in law school. It is found that the LSAT is a somewhat prejudiced exam that isn’t necessarily employed to deny certain individuals inclusion into law school, but at the same time does not ultimately help non-privileged graduate students gain entry toward legal educations.

In the case of Georgetown University, LSAT results have not been completely removed from the law school admissions mix. In fact, the LSAT has gone from a required test to an exam regarded as supplemental.

In short, prospective Georgetown law students can take either/or/both; the GRE, the LSAT, or both exams to ensure their entry into the program.

In a recent posting on WAMU 88.5, the disavowing of all things LSAT is welcomed by many university law schools. Case in point is Georgetown itself:

“We felt that, by using the GRE, it would open up the guardrails,” explains Dean of Admissions Andy Cornblatt. “There are some terrific, terrific applicants out there from non-traditional backgrounds that should be given access to the legal profession.”

Immediate benefits

As was earlier said, dismantling the LSAT requirement for law school admissions can free up a future law student’s finances, not to mention their mind.

As a consequence, a test that is, albeit, less difficult, yet at the same time exceedingly more applicable to one’s undergraduate curriculum, but more importantly a test most graduates have taken to prepare for post-grad work, can yield a wealth of untapped legal minds, many of them coming from unlikely sources.

Of course, those are the immediate benefits for prospective law students who no longer have to worry about studying, paying for and then taking another narrowly regarded and largely useless placement test.

Keep in mind that in most cases placement exams are only good for testing in or out of an undergraduate requirement such as a foreign language, math or literature requirement. This is true because with those focuses, a student has to complete these subjects to ensure they experience a well-rounded first two years of undergraduate school.

Law, however, is a different animal.

Law is not math, a foreign language nor is it literature (though in practice, a legal career can easily incorporate math, a foreign language or literature into a case to prove a point). Law is a matter of thinking, analyzing, breaking down a legal situation, and then building it back up again.

More than a subject, the law is a way of being. Moreover, the benefit of not needing the LSAT to enter law school is beneficial in and of itself simply because:

- The LSAT is a notoriously difficult exam to crack (and some say an unfair exam).
- Because of the LSAT, many students have spent thousands to prepare for the exam.
A prospective law student only has four yearly opportunities to study for, and then take the LSAT.

A prospective law student has up to twelve opportunities per year to take the GRE, making their odds that they will grade better on this exam much more in their favor.

What say you, critics?

Of course, not everyone is onboard with this sweeping change to law school admissions.

As WAMU suggests, some critics of the LSAT decision claim the policy change is a gimmick designed to increase applicants at a time when law school applications, and as a consequence, admissions, have fallen across the board.

At the same time, major law schools such as Georgetown, which ranks as one of the top law schools in the country, has no shortage of applicants.

Cornblatt states Georgetown, the nation’s largest law school, receives more applications than any other law school in the country — about 9,000 applications came in last year.

Tanya Weinberg, Georgetown’s director of media relations, maintains that while applications to law schools have dropped by eight percent nationwide over the last five years, applications to Georgetown have shot up 17 percent.

Whether or not other law schools are utilizing GREs over LSATs as a recruitment tool is something we may never know. Nonetheless, the writing is on the wall with the influx of schools that are willing to let the LSAT fall by the admissions process wayside:

- The University of Arizona College of Law led the charge when it became the first law school in the country to allow applicants to submit GRE scores instead of LSAT scores.
- Harvard Law soon made the same change, which is still unprecedented amongst The Ivies, though others within the esteemed collegiate grouping are considering similar changes.
- Northwestern University’s Pritzker School of Law followed suit when it made its announcement at the same time as Georgetown University.

Law Schools That No Longer Require the LSAT

The University of Arizona Law School
Georgetown University
The University of Hawaii Law School
Northwestern University
Washington University in St. Louis

Diversity: It Has to Start Somewhere, So Why Not with Dropping the LSAT?

The legal world, law schools, included, likes to talk a big socioeconomic game. They like to think of themselves as fair, while also remaining distant of the prejudices and club-like atmospheres and opinions that associates
with the practice of law.

Well, some things simply cannot wait. As law firms steer themselves around with the rapidity of an ocean liner, it is the legal institutions – the law schools big and small, prestigious and not-so-prestigious who have taken up the conch in this human aspect of one of the world’s oldest professions.

Whether it is from a lack of law school applications and enrollments, or a true desire to convert the old guard network of law to a profession that mirrors the world’s diversity, something at the very least is being done about this far-reaching dilemma of inclusion within the law practice.

So why shouldn’t it start with law schools? Law schools represent the fertile minds that will continue to represent the legal world with innovative approaches to legal issues.

Who a person is, where they come from, their ethnic background, even their gender background will play a lessening role in their education, then ultimately upon graduation from law school, their interpretation of the law.

If that occurs, all people will eventually have fair representation that takes into account not the money they don’t have, or the towering social level upon which they do not exist, but their place as a human, which is all that law and justice should, at the end of the day, care about.

See the following articles for more information:

- Is Law School Worth The High Cost?
- Law School: The Most Depressing Three Years Of Your Life
- 8 Ways To Decide If Law School Is Worth It