



Managing Director's Guidance Memo

Bachelor's Degree/J.D. Programs

January 2015

Background

This memorandum provides general guidance relating to bachelor's degree/J.D. programs (commonly referred to as 3+3 Admission Programs), in response to inquiries the Managing Director's Office has received from a number of schools seeking clarification or direction regarding the application of the Standards to such programs.

The typical bachelor's degree/J.D. program grants law school admission to select, usually highly credentialed undergraduate students who have completed three years of undergraduate study. The students matriculate to the law school and are able to count the credits earned during their first year of law school toward their undergraduate degree. Thus, by completing the equivalent of three years of undergraduate study and three years of law school, the students earn both an undergraduate degree and a J.D. degree.

The most common questions relating to the application of the Standards and Interpretations to bachelor's degree/J.D. programs relate to the following issues:

- the authority to admit students into bachelor's degree/J.D. programs under 502(b)(1);
- the need to require an LSAT score;
- the application of Interpretation 503-3 to students admitted into bachelor's degree/J.D. programs; and
- the question of whether acquiescence is required prior to starting a bachelor's degree/J.D. program.

Guidance on how the Standards and Interpretations may apply to a typical bachelor's degree/J.D. program is provided below.

The Authority To Admit Students Into Bachelor's Degree/J.D. Programs Under 502(b)(1)

Standard 502(a) mandates that a law school "shall require for admission to its J.D. degree program a bachelor's degree that has been awarded by an institution that is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education." However, Standard 502(b)(1) provides that **notwithstanding subsection (a)**, a law school may also admit to its J.D. degree program "an applicant

who has completed three-fourths of the credits leading to a bachelor's degree *as part of a bachelor's degree/J.D. degree program* if the institution is accredited by an accrediting agency recognized by the United States Department of Education.”

GUIDANCE:

The requirement that the students be admitted “as part of a bachelor’s degree/J.D. degree program” represents a change from previous Standard 502 that permitted admission of students who had completed three-fourths of their bachelor’s degree without requiring the admission be part of a bachelor’s degree/J.D. program. The description of the program in the Standard as a “bachelor’s degree/J.D. degree program” mandates that “3+3 admissions programs” require that the applicants earn their bachelor’s degrees by being able to count the credits earned during their first year of law school toward their undergraduate degree for the program to qualify under Standard 502(b)(1).

*If the school is operating a qualifying bachelor’s degree/J.D. program, the admission of applicants pursuant to that program who have completed three-fourths of the credits toward their bachelor’s degree complies with Standard 502 and does not require a variance under Standard 107 **provided that all other Standards relating to admission of students are complied with**. In particular, a law school operating a bachelor’s degree/J.D. program must still comply with the requirement of Standard 311(e) that “Credit for a J.D. degree shall only be given for course work taken after the student has matriculated in a law school. A law school may not grant credit toward the J.D. degree for work taken in a pre-admission program.”*

The Need to Require an LSAT Score for Applicants Admitted Under a Bachelor’s Degree/J.D. Program

Standard 503 mandates that “A law school shall require each applicant for admission as a first-year J.D. degree student to take a valid and reliable admission test to assist the school and the applicant in assessing the applicant’s capability of satisfactorily completing the school’s program of legal education.” Additionally, Interpretation 503-1 states: “A law school that uses an admission test other than the Law School Admission Test sponsored by the Law School Admission Council shall establish that such other test is a valid and reliable test to assist the school in assessing an applicant’s capability to satisfactorily complete the school’s educational program.”

GUIDANCE:

Standard 503 applies to the admission of applicants through a bachelor’s degree/J.D. program; such applicants are not exempt from the requirement simply by virtue of being admitted through a bachelor’s degree/J.D. program and, therefore, generally must take the LSAT examination. However, as described below, Interpretation 503-3 (admission without requiring an LSAT) also applies to applicants admitted through a bachelor’s degree/J.D. program in the same manner that it applies to applicants who have earned their bachelor’s degree.

Interpretation 503-3 Applies to Applicants Admitted Under Bachelor's Degree/J.D. Programs

Interpretation 503-3 creates an exception to the requirement in Standard 503 that a law school shall require each applicant for admission as a first-year J.D. degree student to take a valid and reliable admission test. Interpretation 503-3(a) permits a law school "to admit no more than 10% of an entering class without requiring the LSAT from: (1) Students in an undergraduate program of the same institution as the J.D. program; and/or (2) Students seeking the J.D. degree in combination with a degree in a different discipline."

In addition to the 10% limit, students admitted under the exception in Interpretation 503-3 must meet additional conditions imposed by subsection (b) of the Interpretation. They must have "(1) Scored at or above the 85th percentile on the ACT or SAT for purposes of subsection (a)(1), or for purposes of subsection (a)(2), scored at or above the 85th percentile on the GRE or GMAT; and (2) Ranked in the top 10% of their undergraduate class through six semesters of academic work, or achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above through six semesters of academic work."

GUIDANCE:

Applicants admitted through a bachelor's degree/J.D. program are not excluded from Interpretation 503-3; a law school may admit applicants through a bachelor's degree/J.D. program without requiring the LSAT, provided that all the requirements of the Interpretation are complied with. Specific guidance on compliance with Interpretation 503-3 is provided in a separate Managing Director's Guidance Memo related to Standard 503 and Interpretation 503-3.

Compliance with Interpretation 503-3 when admitting applicants through a bachelor's degree/J.D. program requires particular attention to the requirement of subsection (b)(2) that applicants admitted under the Interpretation "Ranked in the top 10% of their undergraduate class through six semesters of academic work, or achieved a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or above through six semesters of academic work." Because applicants admitted through a bachelor's degree/J.D. program typically will not complete their sixth semester of academic work until the spring semester immediately preceding their fall semester matriculation into law school, the information required to determine their eligibility for admission without an LSAT under Interpretation 503-3 will not be available until very late in the admissions cycle. Conditional offers of admission present one way to address this issue. Applicants who meet the top 10% or 3.5 cumulative GPA threshold after five semesters could be offered admission conditioned on the applicant maintaining that eligibility after six semesters. Similarly, applicants who fall short of the thresholds could be offered admission conditioned on the applicant achieving either the top 10% or a 3.5 cumulative G.P.A. after six semesters. In both cases, applicants given conditional offers should be counseled to take the steps required to continue their undergraduate program (registering for classes, applying for financial aid, etc.) in the event they fail to meet the conditions of the admission offer after completing six semesters.

Finally, although bachelor's degree/J.D. program need not be limited to undergraduate students from the same institution as the law school, Interpretation 503-3(a)(1) limits admission of non-dual degree applicants without an LSAT score to "Students in an undergraduate program of the same institution as the J.D. program."

No Acquiescence is Required Prior to Starting a Bachelor's Degree/J.D. Program

Standard 105 requires a law school to obtain the acquiescence of the Council before it makes a major change in its program of legal education. Subdivision (a)(12) of Standard 105 includes as a major change "The addition of courses or programs . . . such as that represent a significant departure from existing offerings or method of delivery since the last most recent accreditation period including combined undergraduate and J.D. programs, such as 2/4, 4/2 programs,"

GUIDANCE:

Although the reference in Standard 105(a)(12) to "combined undergraduate and J.D. programs" could be read to include bachelor's degree/J.D. programs, implementation of a typical bachelor's degree/J.D. program does not constitute a major change requiring acquiescence of the Council. Bachelor's degree/J.D. programs can be distinguished from the combined programs referred to in the Standard (2/4, 4/2) in that the programs specified are not specifically authorized by the Standards as a bachelor's degree/J.D. program is by Standard 502(b)(1). The specified programs also could raise compliance issues under the Standards: a 2/4 program suggests applicants are admitted before competing three-fourths of the credits leading to a bachelor's degree, and a 4/2 program suggests the school may be granting credit for a J.D. degree for course work taken prior to the time a student has matriculated in a law school, contrary to Standard 311(e). In short, the reference to "combined undergraduate and J.D. programs" in Standard 105(a)(12) does not include typical bachelor's degree/J.D. program; such programs generally do not constitute a major change requiring acquiescence of the Council.

The Managing Director's Office will issue Guidance memoranda from time-to-time when new Standards or Interpretations have been adopted or when, in the course of the Office's dealings with schools about compliance with the Standards, a number of schools are asking for clarification or direction regarding a particular Standard, Interpretation or reporting requirement. The Office does its best to provide helpful guidance, but we remind schools that we do not have the authority to bind the Council or the Accreditation Committee. That said, the Council and the Accreditation Committee understand the necessity of providing guidance and will take that guidance into account in any determination about a school's operating in compliance with the Standards.