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Roger Williams University School of Law

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June 8, 2018

Law School News

Dean Yelnosky Applauds Uniform Bar Exam Decision

RWU Law Dean applauds Rhode Island for decision to use a Uniform Bar Exam, says it opens 'huge market' for graduates.



Dean Michael J. Yelnosky Image Credit: Peter Silvia/RWU Law

June 8, 2018

Ed Fitzpatrick

Roger Williams University School of Law Dean Michael J. Yelnosky on Friday applauded Rhode Island for deciding to use a Uniform Bar Exam rather than the more customized exam it has been administering for decades.

On Thursday, the state Supreme Court announced that Rhode Island will administer the Uniform Bar Exam, beginning in February 2019. The court's order follows a year-long study by the Rhode Island Board of Bar Examiners, which recommended adoption of the Uniform Bar exam. In doing so, Rhode Island will join 29 states, including all of the New England states, plus Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Local adoption of the Uniform Bar Exam opens up a huge market for our graduates to find the job that best suits them without the need to take multiple bar examinations.

“Local adoption of the Uniform Bar Exam opens up a huge market for our graduates to find the job that best suits them without the need to take multiple bar examinations,” Yelnosky said. “It also brings Rhode Island’s bar licensing scheme into what has become the mainstream – a structure that is more national than local and that focuses on the wide breadth of largely uniform law as opposed to the much, much smaller areas of idiosyncratic state law.”

The content of the new bar examination will vary only slightly from the previous exam, and the passing score will not change. The major change – and it is dramatic – is that the score a test taker receives on the Uniform Bar Exam, is portable, meaning that it can be transferred to other Uniform Bar Exam jurisdictions for purposes of admission to practice in those jurisdictions. Currently, if a law school graduate sits for and passes the Rhode Island bar examination, he or she is eligible to practice only in Rhode Island.

Beginning in February, that same graduate would (assuming he or she obtains a passing score in the other jurisdictions) be eligible to seek admission to practice in the 31 Uniform Bar Exam jurisdictions. In its order, the state Supreme Court noted that “the UBE responds to today’s challenging legal job market and the need for law school graduates to seek work in other jurisdictions.” Adoption of the Uniform Bar Exam will also benefit Rhode Island by “making it easier for law school graduates from around the country to bring their talents here,” the court wrote.