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USC DELAYS NEW TAX PROGRAM

Gould School of Law has yet to hire an academic director to oversee the LL.M.

By Anna Scott

Daily Journal Staff Writer

LOS ANGELES - The University of Southern California's Gould School of Law is delaying the start of its graduate program in tax law until next year.

The tax LL.M. program, announced in September, was expected to commence this fall but has been pushed back until fall 2011.

Gould Vice Dean Scott Altman said Monday that officials decided to delay the curriculum after being unable to secure an academic director to head the program.

It was not clear what stage USC is at in finding a director for the program or why it was not able to appoint a director at this point Altman said the school received strong interest from applicants but was not more specific.

"We did have a good application pool," he said. "I was very surprised we didn't end up finding a director. We had some very good candidates." He would not say how many applied for the job.

The dismal job market that experts say would likely await graduates of the one-year program in 2011 was not a factor in delaying the start date, Altman said, though he conceded, "I suppose it's probably true that the job market two years from now will be better than the job market one year from now."

USC officials planned to enroll 20 to 25 students for the inaugural year. Students began applying for the \$44,647 a year program in October, and some have already been accepted.

"We let folks know long before they had to make any important decisions that we would be delaying," said Altman. "For those we admitted, we deferred their admission."

Altman declined comment on the number of applications the school received, how many students have been accepted into the program or whether the applicant pool was smaller than anticipated.

"That was not our core reason" for pushing the program back, he said. "It was not part of the decision-making."

Only six of the top 20 law schools offer tax LL.M. programs, and USC would be the only one on the West Coast.

An LL.M. can be a valuable credential for early career tax attorneys, experts say.

"Generally, the LL.M. in tax law is probably the only meaningful LL.M. as it relates to job viability," said Lyndon Parker, managing director of Los Angeles legal recruiter Mestel & Co. and a former tax attorney with the Internal Revenue Service. "There are many other LL.Ms, but that seems to be the one that gets the most attention from law firms, accounting firms and so forth."

Nonetheless, the current hiring market remains bleak even for the most promising law school graduates, industry observers say.

"All in all, it's a difficult time for someone coming out of school," said John Jameson, who heads the Beverly Hills-based legal recruiter The Jameson Group. "To the extent they get delayed for an extra year, assuming they can afford it, it's probably a good thing for the students."

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