

## The 1995 National Study of Law Student Performance

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In September 1995, Richard Sander, Kris Knaplund, and Kit Winter wrote to every ABA-approved law school in the United States to invite their participation in a study of first-year law students. The principal motivation for the study was the investigation of whether there was a significant “gender gap” in law school – a gap either in the grades men and women received, or in how the law school was experienced by men and women. There was wide interest in these questions at the time, and no less than thirty law schools responded with a commitment to participate.

In early November 1995 we distributed a printed questionnaire to the schools. At nearly all the schools, questionnaires were distributed to first-year students at the end of one of their classes during the last two weeks of class. Students who wished to participate signed a disclosure statement, granting us permission to match their questionnaire to background records provided by the school. The signature page was detached from the questionnaire and mailed separately to Sander et al. Students thus completed their questionnaires anonymously, but codes on the questionnaires allowed the study coordinators to later match survey response with the background information in each student later provided by the school. The Pine Company in Los Angeles machine-tabulated all the survey data.

At the thirty participating schools, nearly seven thousand students completed questionnaires – about 78% of those enrolled in the classes surveyed. Accounting for absences from class, the apparent response rate was well over 80%. Twenty of the participating schools ultimately provided the study coordinators with complete background information on students (e.g., first-semester grades, LSAT scores, and undergraduate GPA), and a 21<sup>st</sup> school provided all background data except undergraduate GPA. This dataset includes the data provided by those twenty-one schools.

Variables from the survey are coded according to the survey questionnaire. The questionnaire items being with a “q”, followed by a number. For example, “q29” is the question that asks about political preference (see pdf version of questionnaire). Responses are generally coded logically: the first choice after a question is coded as “1”, the choice is coded as “2”, and so on. In the case of “yes/no” questions, “yes” is coded as “1” and “no” is coded as “0”.

Participating schools provided us with information on each student in the classes surveyed, including data on each course that they took, the grade they received in the course, the student’s gender, and their overall first-semester GPA. Schools had a variety of grading methods, of course, but the data that we report here is in all cases standardized by school. “ZGPA” is thus a standardized measure of first-semester GPA; the mean GPA of all students is set at zero, and the standard

deviation of all student gpas is set at 1. A student with a ZGPA value of -0.5 therefore had a first-semester GPA that was one-half of a standard deviation below the school-wide average.

Although participation rates in the survey were quite high, and students completing the questionnaire generally responded to all substantive questions, a quarter or so of the respondents did not respond to some or all of the demographic questions (e.g, race, gender, socioeconomic background) at the end of the survey. In the case of gender, we had data provided by participating schools on nearly all students; the gender variable in the survey is based on the school data, supplemented by survey responses when school data was missing. In about twenty cases where the school data conflicted with the survey data, we relied on the school data. The survey variable on gender is also included in the dataset.

Please note that some early versions of this dataset (posted between October 18<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>nd</sup>, 2004) had extraneous or incorrectly labeled variable labels, or included an incorrectly-standardized version of undergraduate GPA. We believe the currently posted versions of the data are correct; data users should check to make sure their datafiles reflect the most recently posted data.