ARE BAR EXAM SCORES AFFECTED BY LAW SCHOOL

ADMISSIONS PRACTICES?

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Most Black and Latino applicants had LSAT scores that placed them in the lowest quartile of the distribution of LSAT scores. And, for the Blacks and Latinos in this quartile, there was virtually no difference in bar passage rates between the middle and low ZLSAT groups. The same was true for the bulk of the remaining Blacks and Latinos; i.e., those in the second quartile of LSAT scores. Thus, <u>a Black or Latino applicant</u> <u>with a given LSAT score did not have a higher or lower probability of</u> <u>passing the bar exam by going to a school with others whose LSAT scores</u> <u>were substantially higher than his or her own score.</u>

Of the Asian applicants in the first quartile of LSAT, the bar exam passing rate for those in the low ZLSAT group was 22 percentage points lower than those in the middle group (14% versus 36%, respectively). This finding suggests that Asian applicants in the bottom LSAT quartile are likely to fair better on the bar exam by attending schools with students whose LSAT scores are more similar to their own scores. However, the 22 percentage point difference could be due in part to chance and the low group having a somewhat lower mean LSAT score than the middle group. Almost all of the Asian applicants above the first LSAT quartile were in the middle ZLSAT group.

The passing rate for Anglos within a quartile was virtually the same across ZLSAT groups. Thus, Anglos with especially high or low LSAT scores relative to their classmates did not have any higher or lower bar exam passage rates than would have been expected on the basis of their LSAT scores alone. For instance, among the Anglos in the top quartile, the passing rates in the middle and high ZLSAT groups were 87 and 85 percent, respectively.

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BACKGROUND

Racial/ethnic minority group students, and especially Blacks and
Latinos, tend to earn much lower Law School Admission Test (LSAT) scores
than white applicants. National enrollment figures for 1986-87 show
that the mean LSAT scores for the Anglos, Latinos, and Blacks enrolled
in law school were 32.5, 27.2, and 22.6, respectively.

Law schools try to select the best minority students that apply. And,
the most able minority students (in terms of LSAT score) tend to apply
to the "best" (i.e., most selective and prestigious) law schools, the
next most able students tend to apply to the next best schools, etc.
Thus, the large difference in mean LSAT score between minority and
nonminority students in the pool of students applying for admission to
law school is usually carried over into each school's admitted class.

One consequence of this admissions process is that in California, over
50 percent of the minority students are concentrated in the most
selective schools in the state compared to only 30 percent for
nonminority students (Klein and Bolus, 1987). A second consequence is
that Blacks and Latinos are usually in the bottom quarter of their class
on LSAT. In fact, as a result of special admissions programs, 90
percent of the Black and Latino graduates from a given law school are
likely to have LSAT scores that are lower than the LSAT scores of 75
percent of their Anglo classmates. Moreover, because LSAT is a good
predictor of LGPA regardless of race, minority students also tend to
earn LGPAs that place them in the bottom quarter of their class.

This situation led several law school deans to ask whether minority
students would do better on the bar exam if they went to schools where
their classmates' LSAT scores were more similar to their own LSAT
scores. In other words, did being at the bottom of their class in terms
of LSAT compound the problem of their generally low LSAT scores? There

Specifically, is <u>relative standing within school</u> related to passing the bar exam after controlling for the general relationship between LSAT and bar exam scores among all candidates?

This research was undertaken to assist law school applicants, admission officers, and other policymakers regarding two related issues, namely: (1) would minority (and especially Black and Latino) students tend to earn higher or lower bar exam scores if they attended law schools where their classmates' LSAT scores were more similar to their own scores versus the typical case where, because of special admissions programs, they usually have much lower LSAT scores than their classmates; and (2) is success on the bar exam related to whether applicants attend law schools where they are expected (on the basis of LSAT score) to earn relatively low, middle, or high LGPAs?

SAMPLE

The sample for this research consisted of law school graduates who had all of the following characteristics: (1) they took the California bar exam for the first time in either July 1985 or July 1986, (2) they had an LSAT score, (3) they graduated from a law school within one year of taking the exam, and (4) their graduating class had at least 30 first time takers. The total number of applicants meeting these criteria for the 1985 and 1986 exams were 3,383 and 3,282, respectively.

VARIABLES

The California bar exam has three parts: six essay questions, two performance test (PT) problems, and the Multistate Bar Examination (MBE). The MBE is a 200-item multiple choice test. One day of testing time is devoted to each section. For the purposes of this research, raw essay and PT scores within an exam were converted to a distribution that had the same mean and standard deviation as the applicants' MBE scores. The total score was defined as the mean of these three scale scores.

Table 1

MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND OTHER SUMMARY
STATISTICS BY RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

		Anglo	Asian	Latino	Black	Total
LSAT	Mean	35.79	34.42	30.57	30.87	35.28
	SD	(5.52)	(5.91)	(6.33)	(5.99)	(5.78)
ZLSAT	Mean	0.15	-0.43	-1.24	-1.34	0.00
	SD	(0.88)	(1.02)	(1.14)	(1.04)	(1.00)
Total	Mean	148.39	144.49	140.03	137.88	147.41
	SD	(10.97)	(11.18)	(10.87)	(10.36)	(11.28)
LSAT/Total Correlation		.47	.51	.47	.39	.50
Number of Applicants		5763	328	359	215	6665
Percent Passing		67.0%	50.3%	36.5%	27.0%	63.2%

Table 2

PERCENTAGE OF APPLICANTS IN THE LOW, MIDDLE, AND HIGH GROUPS
AS DEFINED BY ZLSAT SCORE AND THE TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS
IN EACH ZLSAT AND RACIAL/ETHNIC GROUP

ZLSAT Group	Racial/ethnic Group				
	Anglo	Asian	Latino	Black	Total
Low	4%	14%	42%	42%	511
Middle	92%	84%	58%	58%	5885
High	5%	2%	0%	0%	269
Total	5763	328	359	215	6665

The low, middle, and high groups had ZLSAT scores
of < -1.5, -1.5 to 1.5, and > 1.5; respectively.
Column totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

rate between racial/ethnic groups within a given combination of LSAT quartile and ZLSAT group occurred despite only very small differences in their mean LSAT scores.

Multivariate Regression Analyses

Combinations of Exam Year (1985 or 1986), LSAT, ZLSAT, and membership in the low, middle, or high ZLSAT group were used (in multiple regression equations) to predict total bar exam scores as well as scores on the essay, PT, and MBE. These equations were computed for each racial group separately as well as for all groups combined. The rationale underlying this approach is that if relative standing on LSAT within school (by itself) affects bar scores, then including ZLSAT score and/or group in the regression equation should increase the accuracy of predicting bar scores over that already achieved by LSAT alone. Exam Year was used as a control variable in the analyses that combined data across exams.

The regression analyses indicated that ZLSAT score or group did not increase the prediction of bar exam scores over that achieved by LSAT alone. This finding held for all four bar exam scores (MBE, essay, PT, and total score), for both the 1985 and 1986 cohorts, and for each racial/ethnic group.

On both exams, LSAT explained 25 percent of the variance in total bar scores in the sample of 6,665 applicants. This means that LSAT (by itself) would be right about 75 percent of the time in predicting whether an applicant would earn a total bar exam score that was above or below the median total score for all applicants. Adding ZLSAT score, ZLSAT group, or combinations of these variables to the prediction equation did not increase forecasting accuracy.

DISCUSSION

The results presented above suggest that an applicant's likelihood of passing the bar exam is neither positively or negatively affected by that applicant attending a law school with students whose LSAT scores

0.35. Thus, the size of the difference between groups in mean LSAT score corresponds to the differences between them in mean total bar scores. This finding is consistent with past research which has shown that the bar exam does not systematically widen or narrow the gap in mean scores between groups that is present in the LSAT.

CONCLUSIONS

Our research suggest that there would not be a significant increase in minority passing rates if minority applicants were more likely to attend lower or middle ranked schools (in terms of these schools' selectivity and prestige) than if there was a continuation of the current practices which result in minorities tending to graduate from the most selective schools in the state. Similarly, students with especially high LSAT scores probably would not diminish or enhance their chances of passing the bar exam by attending a school with others whose LSAT scores were more or less similar to their own scores.

Appendix A

NUMBER OF APPLICANTS PER GROUP

LSAT Quartile	ZLSAT Group	Anglo	Asian	Latino	Black
1st	Low	195	44	119	67
	Middle	1059	53	76	42
	High	0	0	0	0
2nd	Low	20	3	27	23
	Middle	1339	85	54	26
	High	1	0	0	0
3rd	Low	7	0	5	1
	Middle	1486	77	50	47
	High	47	1	0	0
4th	Low	0	0	0	0
	Middle	1395	60	27	9
	High	214	5	1	0
Total		5763	328	359	215