Study of Law School Enrollment Patterns Suggests That Law Schools Have Manipulated Entering Class Diversity as Means of Lessening Effects of Downturn

Over the past few years, law schools have been dealing with a drastic and, so far, unyielding decline in student interest. Between 2010 and 2013, student enrollments fell almost 25%, to levels not seen in 40 years. This trend has prompted many to wonder what schools have done, and what they can do, to ensure their survival in this new climate.

A new law review article, *Diversity as a Law School Survival Strategy*, explores the extent to which a pool of 196 law schools used students of color, particularly black and Hispanic students, to bolster enrollments and lessen the effects of the downturn between 2010 and 2013. The results of this analysis suggest that a school’s median LSAT score influenced the extent to which the racial composition of its entering classes changed.

Black and Hispanic students were critical components of the enrollment management calculus for private law schools with the lowest median LSAT scores. Higher-median schools tended to rely more heavily on white and Asian enrollments to stem declines. These trends led to increased racial and ethnic stratification in law school enrollments, where black and Hispanic students were more likely to attend schools with lower median LSAT scores in 2013 than in 2010, while white and Asian students were more likely to attend schools with higher median scores.

According to Aaron N. Taylor, assistant professor of law at St. Louis University School of Law and director of the Law School Survey of Student Engagement:

“Perceptions of law school quality and prestige are greatly influenced by a school’s median LSAT score; therefore, the trend of stratification may only serve to intensify racial and ethnic differences in career paths and trajectories.”

Noteworthy findings from the analysis include:

- Overall first-year student diversity increased among the 196 schools included in the analysis, but this increase was driven by schools with the lowest median LSAT scores. (Page 15, Table 6)
- Forty-seven percent (47%) of schools with the highest LSAT medians experienced a proportional decrease in the number of first-year student of colors, compared to only 15% of schools with the lowest medians. (Page 16, Table 7)
- The number of black first-year students increased 6.6% among schools with the lowest LSAT medians, but decreased 21% among schools with the highest medians. (Page 18, Table 8)
- The number of Hispanic first-year students increased 8.1% among schools with the lowest LSAT medians, but decreased 12.6% among schools with the highest medians. (Page 20, Table 10)
- The number of Asian first-year students decreased a whopping 51.1% among schools with the lowest LSAT medians, but decreased a relatively small 15.4% among schools with the highest medians. (Page 22, Table 12)
- Results of the analysis show that as the proportional enrollment of either black or
Hispanic students rose, the proportional enrollment of the other fell—suggesting that these groups may be pitted against each other in the admissions process. (Page 29, Table 17)

- Among schools with the lowest LSAT medians, enrollment of black and Hispanic students increased 5.5% and 2.6% respectively; white and Asian enrollment decreased 4.9% and 6.3% respectively. (Page 30, Table 18)

- Among schools with the highest LSAT medians, enrollment of white and Asian students increased 3.5% and 6.1% respectively; black and Hispanic enrollment decreased 2.9% and 2.5% respectively, leading to increased racial and ethnic stratification in law schools. (Page 30, Table 18)

Contact
Diversity as a Law School Survival Strategy will appear in the Spring 2015 volume of the Saint Louis University Law Journal. A full draft is attached to this email. For more information, please contact Aaron N. Taylor at ataylo65@slu.edu.