First-time bar pass performance of California law schools, controlling for median LSATs

In a recent TaxProf blog post, Paul Caron ranked all law schools by their 2022 first-time bar passage rates, based on ABA data.

Based on that same 2022 data, I here examine the extent to which California law schools over- or under-performed in first-time bar passage after controlling for the median LSATs of their students. After all, we would expect Stanford students to do well on the bar regardless of the preparation they receive at Stanford. And we would expect students at Southwestern to do worse than Stanford students on the bar, again regardless of the quality of the education they receive at Southwestern. This is because we believe LSATs to be predictive of something – not sure of what – but of something.

What we really should be interested in is not bar pass rates – which are largely a function of the innate academic abilities of schools' incoming students – but rather the extent to which their students over- or under-perform on the bar exam after controlling for incoming LSATs. In other words, we should be looking at schools' value added.

Here are the relevant raw data from 2022. The first column is median LSATs, the second is distance of the school's bar passage rate above or below the state average. Schools are listed in the order of median LSATs, high to low:
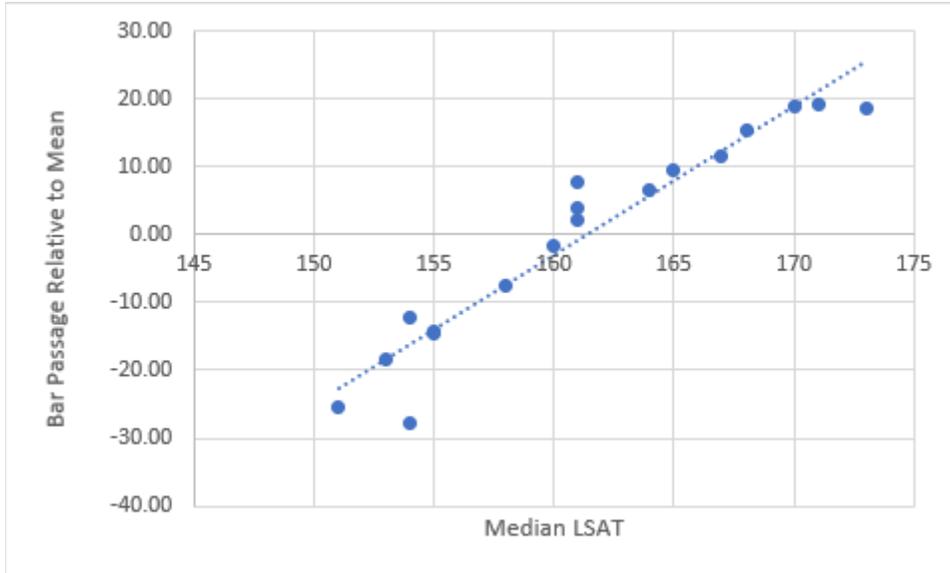
School	Median LSAT	Distance
Stanford	173	18.55
UCLA	171	19.24
UC Berkeley	170	18.94
USC	168	15.35
UC Irvine	167	11.67
UC Davis	165	9.38
Pepperdine	164	6.66
Loyola LA	161	7.66
San Diego	161	3.84
Chapman	161	2.28
UC San Francisco	160	-1.60
Santa Clara	158	-7.67
San Francisco	155	-14.28
Pacific	155	-14.52
Southwestern	154	-12.09
Golden Gate	154	-27.78
Cal Western	153	-18.50
Western State	151	-25.44

From this data, we can generate a least squares regression line, captured by the equation:

$$Y = 2.184605 X - 352.55,$$

where X is median LSAT and Y is the distance by which each school's bar passage rate is above or below the California average.

Here's the same data on a scatter plot, with the least squares regression line added.

And here are how California law schools over- or under-performed in first time bar passage in 2022, listed in the order in which they over- or under-performed:

2022	LSAT	Actual Bar Pass	Predicted Bar Pass	Value Added
Loyola LA	161	7.66	-0.83	8.49
San Diego	161	3.84	-0.83	4.67
Southwestern	154	-12.09	-16.12	4.03
Chapman	161	2.28	-0.83	3.11
UC Davis	165	9.38	7.91	1.47
UC San Francisco	160	-1.60	-3.01	1.41
Pepperdine	164	6.66	5.73	0.93
USC	168	15.35	14.47	0.88
UC Berkeley	170	18.94	18.84	0.10
Cal Western	153	-18.50	-18.30	-0.20
Santa Clara	158	-7.67	-7.38	-0.29
San Francisco	155	-14.28	-13.93	-0.35
Pacific	155	-14.52	-13.93	-0.59
UC Irvine	167	11.67	12.28	-0.61
UCLA	171	19.24	21.02	-1.78
Western State	151	-25.44	-22.67	-2.77
Stanford	173	18.55	25.39	-6.84
Golden Gate	154	-27.78	-16.12	-11.66

In other words, Loyola LA students passed the California bar at a rate 8.49 percentage points higher than their incoming median LSATs would have predicted. Conversely, Stanford students passed the bar at a rate 6.84 percentage points lower than their incoming median LSATs would have predicted.