

Assessment of Law School Bar Passage Rates

It is important for potential students to consider how likely a law school is to pass the bar exam.



You need to pass the bar exam in the jurisdiction where you plan to practice law if you want a U.S. license to practice law.

A few exceptions do exist, however. A jurisdiction may, in rare instances, grant diploma privilege to alumni from a particular law school, which means they would not be required to pass the bar exam to work as an attorney and represent clients within the jurisdiction.

If one goes to the University of Wisconsin - Madison or Marquette University and obtains a law degree there, the bar examination requirement that generally applies to aspiring attorneys there is waived, though alumni of these schools must still obtain character and fitness certifications as well. A few other jurisdictions also temporarily honored diploma privileges for law school graduates after the coronavirus pandemic erupted in 2020.

The passage of the bar exam is a requirement for most legal jobs, so legal education experts recommend that law school candidates compare pass rates for recent graduates at various J.D programs.

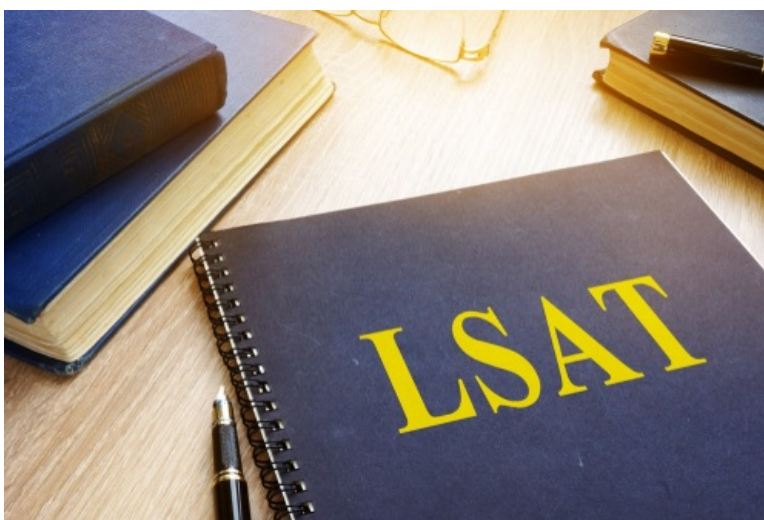
To assess how a law school's quality compares to that of others and decide if it deserves accreditation, the American Bar Association examines its bar pass rates. According to its website, "the performance of a law school's graduates on the bar exam is most likely the best measure of the quality of a school" when evaluating its quality. Prospective law students should take this data point into account when choosing a school when determining where to study.

Law schools in California and Florida, for instance, offer famously difficult bar exams, so their bar pass rates may be lower even though they offer similar quality courses. Future lawyers should keep this in mind when evaluating bar pass rates at different law schools.

Furthermore, extremely selective law schools are increasingly enrolling students with exceptionally high scores on the Law School Admission Test or Graduate Record Examinations General Test, and they tend to be skilled test-takers who tend to perform well on any standardized test, including the bar exam.

Experts warn, however, that the fact that someone excels on an entry exam does not mean that person will pass a bar exam on their first try, as the knowledge and abilities assessed on these exams are different.

LSAT and Bar Exam Differences



An LSAT, which has a minimum score of 120 and a maximum score of 180, is designed to assess a potential law student's academic readiness for law school and whether they have the logical, analytical, and reading comprehension skills necessary to perform well in legal courses. On the other hand, a bar exam ensures that a graduate of a law school has a sufficient understanding of the law and the ability to practice it effectively. An average test takes two days and includes questions on constitutional, contract, and criminal law.

Terra Gross, founder of the Attuned Legal, LLC law firm in Illinois, noted in an email that the LSAT is designed to be "taken before the student goes to law school, quite possibly before the test-taker has any exposure to legal reasoning and writing." In comparison, bar exam success indicates how well students perform after completing a rigorous law school curriculum that prepares them for legal reasoning and analysis. Even though many law students still have to take private bar study courses to prepare for the Bar, the result is likely more closely linked to the student's law school experience than their LSAT scores."

Given the quality of the median LSAT score among their entering students, their attrition and transfer rates, certain law schools' bar pass rates may be higher or lower than they should have been. The reason for this is that some schools offer students preparing for the bar valuable academic support, whereas others fail to provide adequate assistance.

Among the most prestigious law schools in the country, both the LSAT and the bar exams are particularly good, according to Amit Schlesinger, executive director of Kaplan's legal programs.

Despite this, Schlesinger claims that there are "outliers" - schools with modest incoming student scores that produce graduates who pass the bar at a rate much higher than average. Those who graduate from those J.D. programs outperform predictors, he says, describing the phenomenon as a very positive sign about the quality of education they provide.

LAW SCHOOL (NAME) (STATE)	MEDIAN LSAT SCORE FOR ALL 2020 ENTRANTS	2019 BAR PASSAGE RATE FOR FIRST-TIME TEST-TAKERS (STATE)	OVERALL BAR PASSAGE RATE IN THAT STATE	HOW MUCH BETTER GRADS DID THAN STATE BAR PASSAGE RATE
Stanford University (CA)	171	92.4% (CA)	59.5%	55.3%
University of California— Berkeley	168	88.7% (CA)	59.5%	49.1%
University of California— Los Angeles	169	87.5% (CA)	59.5%	47.1%
University of Southern California	167	86.6% (CA)	59.5%	45.5%
University of California— Davis	163	85.3% (CA)	59.5%	43.4%
Pepperdine University (CA)	162	81% (CA)	59.5%	36.1%
University of Virginia	170	100% (NY)	73.5%	36.1%
University of California— Irvine	166	80.6% (CA)	59.5%	35.5%
University of Pennsylvania (Carey)	170	99.2% (NY)	73.5%	35.0%
Harvard University (MA)	173	98.9% (NY)	73.5%	34.6%

According to the U.S News Best Law Schools rankings for 2022, the following law schools have the highest percentages of graduates passing the first-time law bar exam they took in the jurisdiction where their graduates most frequently took the bar exam. A Wisconsin law school is not included on this list since its graduates are granted diploma privileges and treated as if they passed the bar exam.

The Stanford Law School, which boasted an impressive median LSAT score of 171, had the highest bar exam pass rate out of any ranked law school, at 55.3% better than its state average.

Legal education experts warn that attending a top law school does not guarantee to pass the bar on your first attempt. Tests that measure readiness for learning, such as the LSAT, differ from tests that assess theoretical and practical skills that are indispensable for a particular career.

Schlesinger stresses that law school students whose LSAT scores are higher than average may find it easier to pass the bar exam than their peers, but students whose scores are below average should understand that they might have a harder time passing the bar, he warns.

Lisa Young, Kaplan's Executive Director of Academics for Bar Prep Programs stated:

"A fluctuation of .7 on the Multistate Bar Exam is not all that significant and not inconsistent with the fluctuations over the last ten years. That data point in itself is nothing to necessarily be concerned about. The more important data point is the drop in the overall bar passage rate we are seeing in almost all the states that have already released this information -- and some of these drops are quite large. These have been incredibly challenging and unique examination cycles because of a host of factors, including online learning and technical glitches on bar exam day, none of which likely helped student performance. The most important thing that those of us in the legal education community can do is give students a quality learning experience that will help them pass the bar and become practicing attorneys."

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