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## ADMINISTRATION

[no material in this edition]

## ADMISSION TO PRACTICE

[no material in this edition]

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

### A survey of law school grading practices

NH Kaufman

44 *J Legal Educ* 3, Sept 1994, pp 415-423

In 1993, a survey of the grading practices of 175 accredited law schools was performed. The questionnaire covered five principal topic areas: the types of grade designation used, the use of a curve to standardise the grades, the relationship between a student's grade and class rank, information about the students being graded and recent experiences with changes

made to the grading practices and policies. The questionnaire, however, was not designed to produce statistically verifiable results.

The majority of law schools rely on the use of the traditional letter designation (A,B,C, etc.), the next most popular being the use of number grades on a scale of 100. Only five schools used the High Pass, Pass, Fail type of grading. For courses such as trial advocacy, client counselling and legal research and writing, the overwhelming majority of schools used a pass/fail grade or do not provide any academic credit.

Sixty-six percent of law schools were found to use grading curves. The use of grading curves varied within individual faculties and 40 schools indicated that grading to a curve is optional, compared to 22 schools where it is mandatory to use a grading curve. The use of curves also varies depending on the seniority of the students being graded. Curves are more readily applied to first-year courses than second and third and are more readily used for large class groups, with numbers from 30 to 50 constituting a large class. The types of curves used are chosen for their applicability to the student body being graded.

The data provided by the law schools of their students' pre-law school performance in the LSAT or their GPA were compared with the students' mean and median GPAs in law school. As expected, class means and medians increase during law school.

Forty-four law schools indicated that they had made changes to their grading policies at some point during the five preceding years. Eighteen law schools had changed their grade

designation from numbers to letters. Twelve indicated they had adopted some form of curve for the first time. Three law schools had changed from a system of voluntary use of grading curves to mandatory use of grading curves.

Among schools not using a grading curve, five found that the median and mean GPA had been creeping up. One of the schools put this down to the better composition of the applicant pool.

## CAREER PATHS

[no material in this edition]

## CLINICAL LEGAL EDUCATION

[no material in this edition]

## CONTEXT, CRITICISM AND THEORY

### The social science of ideology and the ideology of social science (The ideological impact of legal education upon the profession - a series of essays)

J M Conley

72 *N C L Rev* 5, June 1994, pp 1249-1258

A cultural shift has occurred in legal education and indeed in higher education generally due to the growing prominence of social science ideology. The positivistic ideal of the relentless pursuit of objective truth through verifiable, value-neutral research has been rejected and replaced by postmodern ideas that talk of the persuasive influence of politics and the "contingent" nature of everything. Classroom time is now devoted to critical re-examination of past research. Once-canonical works do little more than illustrate the bias of the author.