

lem solving into the curriculum to permit them to do the job better.

Editor

STUDENTS

The culture of success: improving the academic success opportunities for multicultural students in law school

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Although many law schools have programs to admit multicultural students, these students have not achieved, in numbers proportionate to their percentage of law students, the traditional indicators of academic success, such as membership on law reviews. These students' relative lack of success does not result from a lack of dedication. A recently released report by the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) confirms this statement and indicates that multicultural students are as diligent and often even more diligent than white students. However, they are not rewarded with better academic performances during the first year of law school.

The study found that when compared with predictions based on their undergraduate grade-point averages, multicultural students performed significantly worse. The LSAC study confirms that this relative lack of academic success is not the result of an insufficient amount of time spent on law school related activities. Students who performed significantly better during the first year of law school do not spend more time studying than those students who performed significantly worse than expected. The LSAC Study breaks down nine study-related activities. These activities include: (1) reading cases; (2) briefing cases; (3) making and studying out-

lines; (4) reviewing assignment materials and class notes; (5) participating in study groups; (6) reading hornbooks or nutshells; (7) discussing course-related problems with friends; (8) being tutored by other students; and (9) attending special classes on first year courses.

In general, the report shows that multicultural students spend more time than white students spend in all of these categories. With both men and women, there was no difference in the basic study patterns between the students who performed better than predicted and those who performed worse than predicted. Time spent studying does not necessarily result in good grades. Students who get good grades do not necessarily study more than students who get lower grades.

There are several factors that affect students' law school performance, such as poor legal writing skills, concerns about financial conditions, overwork, discrimination and cultural factors.

The LSAC study reveals that those students who performed better than their undergraduate grade-point averages had predicted did better in their first-year legal writing course than those students who did worse than their undergraduate grade-point averages had predicted. Those students who performed worse found every aspect of legal writing significantly more difficult than did the students who did better. If difficulties with all of these aspects of legal writing carried into final examinations in other first-year courses, they well could account for much, if not most, of the variation in grades between these two groups of students.

While financial concerns distract many first-year law students, these concerns especially affect multi-

cultural students. Moreover, the LSAC study demonstrates that African-American students enter law school with larger undergraduate debts than any other ethnic group involved in the study. In addition to loans, African-American students depend more than the other groups on need-based and non-need-based scholarships to finance some portion of the costs of their second year of law school.

Studies have shown that students study more effectively if they incorporate breaks into their study schedules. Unfortunately, multicultural students in general spend less time in leisure activities, such as relaxation and recreation, than white students. Students who performed worse than predicted by their undergraduate grade-point averages spent less time on leisure activities than students who performed better than predicted by their undergraduate grade-point averages.

The LSAC Study results confirm the common wisdom that first-year law students should not hold paying jobs. Students who performed worse than predicted worked more hours at a paid job than those students who performed better than predicted. African-American students reported spending more hours working for pay than any other group.

Law school performance is strongly influenced by students' socioeconomic status. The majority of the students who performed better than predicted were in the upper-middle to upper socioeconomic status group. Likewise, students who performed worse than predicted were predominately in the lower-middle to middle socioeconomic status group. There is also a relationship between students' socioeconomic status group and ethnicity. This relationship is espe-

cially significant for the African-American and Latino-American groups because, while the distribution among socioeconomic groups did not deviate greatly for Asian-American and white students, 50% of African-American and 49% of Latino-American students were in the lower-to-middle socioeconomic group.

As many legal scholars have noted, multicultural students are subject to social isolation in law schools. These students often adopt a 'mask' to appear acculturated into the dominant culture, while trying to hold onto the values that they brought into law school. In addition, multicultural law students often feel invisible in law school classrooms and that their concerns are of little or no importance. This social isolation not only hinders multicultural students' acclimation to law school, and, subsequently, their self-confidence, but also cuts off these students from channels of information networking systems. These factors may therefore result in multicultural students not performing up to their capabilities.

A preliminary step in developing better study skills is for students to learn how to learn. Students who wish to improve their academic performances should incorporate learning theory into their study strategy. Students who performed better during their first year of law school than predicted by their undergraduate grade-point averages had more accurate expectations about the time required for particular law school related activities than those students who performed worse than predicted by their undergraduate grade-point averages. The next steps are to hone the time management skills of multicultural students, improve critical thinking skills and improve legal writing skills. One key to improving the academic suc-

cess of multicultural students is to provide a more realistic picture of law school but, ultimately, they themselves must ensure that they have the information necessary to acclimate themselves to law school.

Perceptions of stress and control in the first semester of law school

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Legal education has been the focus of much criticism. It has been charged with warping personalities, undermining ethical and social values and fostering cynicism in students. It has been seen as the source of psychological patterns inimical to later ethical practice. Perhaps its most noted criticism is its apparent propensity for inducing psychological distress in law students. In fact, the experience of legal education as stressful may be a root cause of many of the other criticisms.

Students report being pressed for time and getting insufficient sleep. Symptoms of psychological distress, such as depression and anxiety, are also quite common. Students report extreme self-punishing attitudes, obsessive self-doubt, apathy, withdrawal from normal activities, fear, apprehension, a sense of impending doom and panic attacks. Interpersonal relationships with family members or significant others are often strained. Empirical research shows that law students consistently display elevated scores on validated psychiatric symptom survey instruments. These elevations are not a function of selection bias; law students do not start out with elevated psychiatric symptoms but show increases in these symptoms following their exposure to legal education.

The increases in psychological distress appear to be specific to law school and not a function of graduate education in general. While the use of the Socratic method is a salient difference between law and other graduate programs, it may not be the primary difference contributing to increased psychological distress among law students. Research in psychology shows that one major determinant of the impact of a stressor is its controllability. Therefore, the controllability of stressors associated with legal education also may be important in determining the degree of stress experienced by law students. It should be noted that the perception of control, in some cases, may be as important as actual control. Many of the negative effects of uncontrollable stressors are ameliorated when a person either is given the illusion of control or an option to exert control, even if this option is not exercised.

Despite its importance in determining the impact of stressors, perceived control has not been assessed as it applies to the stressors experienced by law students. Helplessness is characterised by deficits in motivation, mood disturbance, interpersonal insensitivity and negative physical outcomes, all of which are experienced by law students. To study the possible sources of helplessness in law school, 52 first-year students in their eighth and ninth weeks of law school rated 16 different law school stressors on their perceived stressfulness and controllability. First-year students were chosen because this appears to be the time frame in which the nature of legal education most affects students.

Stressors were statistically grouped into six factors: time pressure, difficulty of material, feedback, lack of