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# Most Diverse Law Schools

Blacks and Hispanics make up a greater share of law students, thanks to declining enrollment among Asian and white students. Here's our guide to the top schools when it comes to diversity.

BY MIKE STETZ

When it comes to law school enrollment, it's hard to find a silver lining for schools that are struggling. The numbers continue to drop, drop, drop.

But there might be one bright spot. Some schools are becoming more diverse as this trend continues.

The National Jurist ranked the most diverse law schools in the nation. Texas Southern University - Thurgood Marshall School of Law in Houston received the top honor.

That's not exactly a surprise, given that the historic African-American law school has a history of fostering diversity. It finished fourth when this magazine last did a study two years ago. A number of other top schools fared well again, such as the University of the District of Columbia - David A. Clarke School of Law. Previously No. 1, the school came in second this year.

However, our analysis showed an inter-

esting development: The drop in enrollment — caused by the souring job market for new law grads — has not been consistent among races. While the number of law students has fallen about 15 percent from 2011 to 2013, the number of minority law students did not match that decline, falling only 4.2 percent.

Asians saw the biggest drop in law school students — 16 percent, according to our analysis. Since they are a minority group, it makes the 4.2 percent drop in overall minority enrollment all the more striking. When Asians are removed from the equation, the number of minority law students actually increased.

White enrollment dropped at a doubled-digit rate of 14.8 percent.

Conversely, the number of black law students fell just 1.6 percent, and Hispanics held steady. A consistent number of these minorities still apparently see law school

as a viable option. And since applications continue to drop, they are getting into law school.

Earlier, when competition for law school seats was steeper, they might not have, particularly if they fared poorly or marginally on the LSAT, a test on which whites traditionally score better and one that schools put much emphasis on.

"Schools, in general, are digging deeper into their application pools," said Gilbert Holmes, dean of University of La Verne College of Law in Ontario, Calif. "And they're finding more minority students."

Two years ago, his school finished 19th in our ranking of Most Diverse Law Schools. This year, it rose to No. 3. Hispanics made up 20 percent of the school's student body in 2011. In 2013, it was 26 percent.

For many law schools, achieving greater diversity has been a struggle. That's because,

PHOTO BY TYLER OLSEN/SHUTTERSTOCK

up until a few years ago, they were seeing a historically high number of applicants. And the reality was that whites and Asians had better academic and LSAT scores.

Since better-performing students help bolster rankings, schools were eager to pluck them from the huge pool of applicants. They also sought high-performing minorities, who, like high-performing whites, generally came from more affluent households. Because of that, law schools were hit with criticism that they were failing to truly diversify.

Now, it appears, some just might be.

This year's ranking is similar to, but slightly different from the one we did two years ago. It rewards schools with the most racial diversity in both the student body and faculty.

We broke down each school into six categories — percentage of minority faculty; percentage of black students; percentage of Asian and Hawaiian students; percentage of Hispanic students; percentage of American Indian students; and percentage of Caucasian students. We assigned each school a score from one to 10 for all categories, except for American Indians. We assigned each school a score from one to five for that category, given the much smaller number of students.

A school that matched the U.S. national average for any race received a seven (or 3.5 for American Indian), and a school that was 30 percent or greater than the national average received a 10 (or 5 for American Indian). We then weighted the student categories as 75 percent of the final diversity score and faculty at 25 percent.

The final outcome is a list of schools that have a breadth of races both in student bodies and faculties. Texas Southern University has a final score of 7.1, followed by University of the District of Columbia at 6.52 and University of La Verne at 6.35.

## Best law schools for diversity

	Law school	Minority faculty Fall 2014	Hispanics	American Indian	Asian & Hawaiian	Black	2014 Grade	2012 grade
1	Texas Southern University	78.9%	31.1%	1.1%	5.8%	48.1%	A+	A+
2	University of the District of Columbia	46.8%	8.2%	0.0%	7.5%	38.1%	A+	A+
3	University of La Verne	33.3%	28.4%	0.7%	11.2%	6.0%	A+	A
4	Atlanta's John Marshall Law School	31.5%	4.8%	1.9%	9.6%	32.2%	A+	A
5	Florida A&M University	57.1%	13.4%	0.8%	2.9%	53.0%	A+	A+
6	CUNY School of Law	31.6%	19.4%	0.0%	13.4%	8.8%	A+	A+
7	Arizona Summit	31.6%	16.3%	1.3%	5.7%	14.5%	A+	A
8	North Carolina Central University	62.0%	4.8%	3.0%	1.8%	50.0%	A+	A
9	Barry University	19.4%	22.6%	1.6%	5.7%	15.5%	A+	B+
10	Florida International University	45.9%	47.0%	0.8%	2.0%	8.6%	A+	A+
11	Southwestern Law School	25.8%	22.7%	0.4%	11.9%	4.9%	A	A
12	Western State College of Law	21.3%	21.4%	1.4%	15.4%	6.7%	A	A
13	University of San Francisco	25.0%	18.3%	0.6%	15.8%	7.9%	A	A+
14	Rutgers—Newark Law	19.1%	12.2%	0.3%	13.4%	13.4%	A	A
15	Thomas Jefferson School of Law	13.8%	19.1%	2.0%	14.2%	8.7%	A	A-
16	UC Davis Law	39.7%	9.9%	0.0%	27.6%	1.7%	A	A-
17	Northeastern University	19.5%	14.5%	1.2%	10.1%	9.1%	A	A
18	University of Hawaii	48.2%	13.9%	0.0%	53.9%	0.6%	A	A+
19	NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center	21.2%	27.7%	0.2%	4.7%	10.1%	A	A
20	Southern University	65.7%	2.2%	0.9%	1.2%	58.2%	A	A
21	Stanford Law School	18.2%	13.8%	0.6%	13.6%	8.6%	A	A
22	University of New Mexico	29.2%	37.1%	9.5%	2.9%	1.3%	A	A
23	University of Maryland	15.8%	10.7%	0.3%	13.2%	11.6%	A	A-
24	American University	15.7%	14.3%	0.3%	12.4%	9.0%	A	A
25	California Western School of Law	14.6%	17.0%	2.9%	15.5%	2.9%	A	A-
26	Charlotte School of Law	21.4%	5.1%	2.6%	3.4%	29.7%	A	A
27	Howard University School of Law	80.4%	5.6%	1.3%	3.0%	86.9%	A	A-
28	South Texas College of Law	13.2%	17.3%	0.5%	9.9%	5.7%	A	A-

Overall, the number of law schools with a black population at or higher than the national average increased from 11 to 18 in the past two years. The number of law schools with a Hispanic population at or higher than the average increased from 14 to 18. But the number of schools with an Asian population at or above the average dropped from 107 to 86.

The number of law schools with 20 percent or more minority faculty increased from 28 to 31. And the number with 10 percent or more increased from 120 to 136.

The number of law professors fell by 7.4

percent, but minorities made up a greater percentage of the pie, growing from 13 percent to 14.3 percent. So law school faculty is becoming more diverse too.

University of La Verne saw a jump from 22.7 percent to 33 percent in its faculty diversity, for instance, helping it climb in the ranking.

Holmes said diversity is vitally important because it enriches the law school experience. The nation is becoming more diverse, and students need to experience these changes. If the enrollment crisis is causing an increase in diversity at some



schools, students will benefit greatly, he said.

"It provides for richer discussion," he said.

### Are the wrong people headed to law school?

Experts who study LSAT scores had predicted a change in law school enrollment. The percentage of top scorers was going down in greater numbers than the percentage of poorer scorers. In short, the best students were shying away from the LSAT because they didn't think a law degree had good value.

Jerry Organ, a professor at University of St. Thomas School of Law - Minneapolis, was one of those studying these trends. In a story for *The National Jurist* in February, he said he did not think the trend was worrisome, even though he believed the Class of 2013 to be the weakest of any class since 2002.

"In my view, the real quality of a lawyer has much or more to do with capabilities and competencies not measured by the LSAT and [undergraduate GPA]," he said at the time. "Practical wisdom, a client-centered attitude, a fiduciary disposition, initiative and perseverance, integrity and trustworthiness are not captured in this set of objective criteria."

He continued: "Even if we have fewer students with high LSATs and UGPs, we may have more students with those capabilities and competencies that will enhance the quality of the legal profession."

He likened the change to law schools becoming less "blue bloods" and more "blue collar," even if by slight margins.

Others, however, were troubled by the trend. The Atlantic magazine published an article in 2012 titled, "The Wrong People Have Stopped Applying to Law School." The author, an editor at the publication, was concerned that "many [poorer performing students] will likely be heading to J.D. mills that offer them a coin-flip's chance of getting a job after graduation."

Dean Dannye Holley of Texas Southern University is not surprised by the white flight of students from law schools today. They are more likely to have the perception that a law degree is no longer worth it, particularly when it comes to the financial reward.

Many minority students, in general, go to his law school looking to work in the



## Who's up and Who's down

The chart to the right includes every law school that prepared an ABA Standard 509 form and had more than 100 students. Grades are based on how well each school matches with the U.S. average for the different minority populations. For students we looked at Asian and Hawaiian, black, Hispanic, Caucasian and American Indian populations. For faculty, we compared overall

minority percent with the percent of minority faculty. While 80 schools improved their grade from 2012 and 42 kept the same grade, only 11 improved by a full letter grade or more. Faulkner University (from D+ to B-), New York Law School (C+ to A-), Duke University (C- to B+) and University of Maine (D to B-) improved the most.

### Up:

Faulkner University: D+ to B-  
New York Law School: C+ to A-  
Duke University: C- to B+  
University of Maine: D to B-

### Down:

Baylor University: B- to D+  
Georgetown University: C+ to D  
University of Arkansas at Little Rock: B+ to C

public sector, he said. They are aware that the jobs are generally lower paying, but they are attracted to that type of work.

Holmes, dean at University of La Verne, noted that he graduated from law school in 1972, an era of much social upheaval when a growing number of lawyers entered the field hoping to make a difference rather than to make money.

In the 1990s, he noticed a shift among some minorities, and that was toward making money.

"I have no data to conclude that," he said. "I just think the expectations were raised."

Now, he senses the pendulum shifting back toward more public-service-oriented work.

"I think it's fairly even," he said.

Even the Atlantic magazine writer who was suspicious of the dropping LSAT scores noted the importance of public sector work and that students who do not rock the LSAT are needed: "Now, some of these stu-

dents probably need to go to law school for the good of society. I mean that sincerely. A lot of them likely come from less affluent backgrounds and will likely be willing to work for small firms and government offices that provide services for people who cannot afford to hire Williams & Connolly every time they need legal help. These are your small town lawyers, your inner city lawyers."

Anthony E. Varona, professor and associate dean for Faculty and Academic Affairs at American University Washington College of Law, has argued that diversity is so important it should be rewarded in rankings. Personally, he's not surprised that law school remains popular with students of color.

"We always will have a need for smart and culturally attuned lawyers in working class communities, communities of color, and in entire geographic areas of the nation that remain underserved by affordable, good lawyers," he said. "It's often the

Law School	2012	2014
Albany Law	B-	C+
American University	A	A
Appalachian School of Law	C	C-
Arizona State University	B	C+
Arizona Summit	A	A+
Atlanta's John Marshall	A	A+
Ave Maria School of Law	C-	C+
Barry University	B+	A+
Baylor University	B-	D+
Belmont University	NR	C-
Boston College	B	B
Boston University	B-	B
Brigham Young University	C+	C-
Brooklyn Law School	B-	B-
California Western School of Law	A-	A
Campbell Law School	D	D+
Capital University	C-	C
Cardozo School of Law	B-	B
Case Western University	C-	B-
Catholic University	B-	C-
Chapman Fowler School of Law	B-	B-
Charleston School of Law	D+	C-
Charlotte School of Law	A	A
Chicago-Kent College of Law	B-	B
Cleveland-Marshall College of Law	C-	C
Columbia Law School	B+	B-
Cornell Law School	A	A-
Creighton University	D+	D+
CUNY School of Law	A+	A+
DePaul University	C+	B-
Drake University	C-	C-
Drexel Law	C+	C-
Duke University	C-	B+
Duquesne University	D	D
Elon University	C+	B-
Emory University	B	B
Faulkner University	D+	B-
Florida A&M University	A+	A+
Florida Coastal School of Law	B+	A-
Florida International University	A+	A+
Florida State University	C	B-
Fordham Law School	B-	B+
George Mason University	C+	B-
George Washington University	C+	B+
Georgetown University	C+	D
Georgia State University	B-	A-
Golden Gate University	B+	A-
Gonzaga University	C-	D+
Hamline University	C+	C+
Harvard Law School	A-	B+
Hofstra University	A	A-
Howard University School of Law	A-	A
IU Maurer School of Law	C	B-
IU McKinney School of Law	C	C
Lewis & Clark Law School	A-	B+
Liberty University	B	C+
Lincoln Memorial	NR	D
Louisiana State University	B+	C+
Loyola Law School, Los Angeles	B	A-
Loyola University Chicago	B-	B
Loyola University New Orleans	B	B
Marquette University	C	C+
Mercer University	C	B-
Michigan State University	B-	B-
Mississippi College	D+	D
New England Law	C-	C+
New York Law School	C+	A-

Law School	2012	2014
New York University	C+	B
North Carolina Central University	A	A+
Northeastern University	A	A
Northern Illinois University	A-	A-
Northern Kentucky University	D	D+
Northwestern University	A-	B-
Notre Dame Law School	A-	B-
NSU's Shepard Broad Law Center	A	A
Ohio Northern University	D+	D+
Ohio State University	B+	B
Oklahoma City University	B	B
Pace University	B-	B
Pacific McGeorge School of Law	B-	B+
Penn State Law	C+	C-
Pepperdine University	B	B+
Quinnipiac University	C-	C-
Regent University	B-	C
Roger Williams University	C-	C-
Rutgers — Camden	C+	B-
Rutgers—Newark Law	A	A
Saint Louis University	C	C-
Samford University	C	C
Santa Clara University	A-	B+
Seattle University	A	A-
Seton Hall University	C+	B+
SMU Dedman School of Law	B	B-
South Texas College of Law	A-	A
Southern Illinois University	D+	C-
Southern University	A	A
Southwestern Law School	A	A
St. John's University	B+	B+
St. Mary's University	B+	A-
St. Thomas University	A+	A-
Stanford Law School	A	A
Stetson University	C	C+
Suffolk University	B-	B
SUNY Buffalo Law School	C+	C
Syracuse University	B+	B-
Temple University	A-	A-
Texas A&M	B	C+
Texas Southern University	A+	A+
Texas Tech University	B+	B+
The John Marshall	B-	A-
Thomas Jefferson School of Law	A-	A
Touro Law Center	B-	A-
Tulane University	D+	C
UC Hastings	A-	B+
UC - Irvine	NR	A-
UC Berkeley School of Law	B+	A-
UC Davis Law	A-	A
UCLA	A-	B+
Univ. of Arkansas at Little Rock	B+	C
Univ. of Arkansas, Fayetteville	C-	C
Univ. of the District of Columbia	A+	A+
University of Akron	C-	C-
University of Alabama	C-	C-
University of Arizona	A-	B+
University of Baltimore	C+	B-
University of Chicago	A-	A-
University of Cincinnati	C+	C-
University of Colorado	A-	B
University of Connecticut	C+	B
University of Dayton	C-	C-
University of Denver	C+	C-
University of Detroit Mercy	C-	D+
University of Florida	B-	B+
University of Georgia	C+	B-

Law School	2012	2014
University of Hawaii	A+	A
University of Houston	B+	A-
University of Idaho	C-	D+
University of Illinois	A-	A-
University of Iowa	C+	C
University of Kansas	C+	C-
University of Kentucky	C	D+
University of La Verne	A	A+
University of Louisville	D	D+
University of Maine	D	B-
University of Maryland	A-	A
University of Massachusetts	NR	B-
University of Memphis	C-	B-
University of Miami	A-	A-
University of Michigan	B	B-
University of Minnesota	B+	C+
University of Mississippi	C-	C
University of Missouri	C	C-
University of Missouri KC	D	D+
University of Montana	C-	D+
University of Nebraska	F	F
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	B+	A-
University of New Hampshire	C	C-
University of New Mexico	A	A
University of North Carolina	A	B
University of North Dakota	D+	C-
University of Oklahoma	B+	C+
University of Oregon	B	C
University of Pennsylvania	A-	B+
University of Pittsburgh	C-	C+
University of Richmond	C-	C
University of San Diego	A-	B
University of San Francisco	A+	A
University of South Carolina	C-	D+
University of South Dakota	D	D+
University of St. Thomas	C+	C-
University of Tennessee	B-	C+
University of Texas	B+	B+
University of Toledo	D	D
University of Tulsa	C	C+
University of Utah	D+	D+
University of Virginia	B-	B-
University of Washington	B	B+
University of Wisconsin	B-	C+
University of Wyoming	C-	C-
USC Gould School of Law	A-	A-
Valparaiso University	B+	B+
Vanderbilt University	C+	B-
Vermont Law School	C-	C
Villanova University	C+	C
Wake Forest University	C+	B
Washburn University	C	C-
Washington and Lee University	C-	C
Washington University	B+	B
Wayne State University	C	C+
West Virginia University	D+	D
Western New England University	C-	C+
Western State College of Law	A	A
Whittier Law School	B+	A-
Widener Law, Delaware	C+	C+
Widener Law, Harrisburg	C-	C
Willamette University	C+	B
William and Mary Law School	C+	C-
William Mitchell College of Law	C+	C
WMU-Cooley	A-	B+
Yale Law School	B+	B

young members of these communities that perceive the need for accessible lawyers and opt for a career in law with the hopes of filling that need.”

### What top schools are doing

Holley of Texas Southern is used to his school receiving honors for diversity. It doesn’t get old either, he said.

His school dates back to the late 1940s when a black postal worker who wanted to enter University of Texas School of Law sued the state of Texas. To thwart the move, the state created a “separate but equal” black-only school for a number of professions, including law. Later, a young African-American lawyer, Thurgood Marshall, would successfully argue before the U.S. Supreme Court that the new school was separate, but certainly not equal. It led to the University of Texas’ ultimate integration.

As the years passed, Texas Southern University became a leader in the training of African-American attorneys. And it still is. From a five-year period ending in 2012, the school produced 43 percent of the newly licensed African-American attorneys in the state of Texas. The school has only 5 percent of the state’s total law school enrollment.

But it also has evolved to become an attractive school for Latino students, given the growth of the Hispanic population in the state. More than 30 percent of the school is Hispanic. Holley also notes that white students find it attractive, given how society is becoming more diverse. During the past several years, between 15 percent to 20 percent of the student body has been white.

Holley shared quotes by students, noting the importance of diversity in making their decision to come to the school.

“Growing up as a military brat and being in the military myself, I was always used to being around a diverse group of people,” wrote Ricardo Ramos Jr., Class of 2014. “You won’t find diversity at any other law school the way you will at TMSL. I felt at home. It was where I needed to be.”

Holley notes there are 200 American Bar Association-accredited law schools and each has “a different narrative” when it comes to how these minority students are being absorbed. Some schools are not seeing gains, while others are improving significantly.

Diversity only goes so far in attracting students, he said. His students want an education that makes them practice-ready and competitive with the best, he said. They may feel more welcome at the school, and their views may be more readily heard, but that’s not the end-all, be-all. They also want clinics and externships and other practical training.

“Our students want to feel they are getting a current legal education,” he said. “Our students are looking to move forward.”

University of La Verne’s Holmes hopes the enrollment changes will bring positive benefits, such as schools offering more personal academic support and enhancing programs such as bar exam preparation. Realizing students’ true potential could become a greater focus, he said. At his school, those programs have been successful.

In February, first-time test takers from University of La Verne passed the California bar at an 85.7 percent rate. That was the result of a more aggressive bar exam prep program which the school undertook because of lower passage rates in prior years.

Holmes expects his school to see an even greater rise in diversity in the coming years because his school has switched to a new tuition model. It’s done

away with scholarships and now offers a flat rate — \$25,000 a year. Some schools’ tuition rates vary widely among students because some receive scholarships and others don’t. Normally, high-achieving students get the aid to attract them to the schools — again for rankings.

When several minority students found they couldn’t get decent scholarships, they turned to his school, Holmes said.

### Looking beyond race for diversity

One question is whether this trend toward higher minority enrollment will be lasting. Some argue that job opportunities will rebound, as more baby-boomer lawyers retire and the pool of possible candidates

shrinks. That could lead to an increase in competition, again, for law school seats.

This year, the percentage of students who scored the highest on the LSAT increased, according to Slate magazine. In other words, smart students are being lured back to law school.

Diversity remains a hot-button issue in society. This year, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the state of Michigan’s earlier voter initiative banning affirmative action at the state’s public universities. If applications to law schools increase, public law schools in Michigan can’t use race as a factor for admission.

A number of other states, including California and Florida, have similar laws. Proponents of affirmative action argue that those restrictions make it much more difficult for schools to diversify.

Others argue that race-based admission practices are no longer necessary, given how diverse the nation has become. It would make more sense, some argue, to offer advantages based on socioeconomic factors.

“Having a more racially and ethnically diverse legal profession is desirable, particularly given the rapidly changing demographics of the country,” said Richard Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at Century Foundation, a progressive think tank, who’s been a vocal supporter of having affirmative action benefit those in the lower socioeconomic segment of our society, regardless of race.

He noted that top law schools have low representations of such students. One study showed that just 2 percent of law students at the nation’s top law schools come from the bottom socioeconomic quarter of the population.

“I hope the changing makeup of law school classes also remedies this dramatic under-representation,” he said.

Top-tier schools have seen application drops as well, but top applicants still compete aggressively to get into such schools. The schools may have been forced to dig deeper into their applicant pools, but the pools are quite deep. They’re not taking a chance with an applicant with a 147 LSAT score. The median for Harvard Law School was 173 for the Class of 2013.

But are other law schools seeing a broader socioeconomic range of students as enrollment drops? That’s an unknown. Race, not income, is the only factor in determining diversity at this time.



Dean Gilbert Holmes