

Cautionary Policies Concerning LSAT Scores and Related Services

These Cautionary Policies are intended for those who set policy and criteria for law school admission, interpret LSAT scores and LSDAS reports, and use other LSAC services. The Policies are intended to inform the use of these services by law schools, and to promote wise and equitable treatment of all applicants through their proper use.

I. The Law School Admission Test

Because LSATs are administered under controlled conditions and each test form requires the same or equivalent tasks of everyone, LSAT scores provide a standard measure of an applicant's proficiency in the well-defined set of skills included in the test. Comparison of a law school's applicants both with other applicants to the same school and with all applicants who have LSAT scores thus becomes feasible. However, while LSAT scores serve a useful purpose in the admission process, they do not measure, nor are they intended to measure, all the elements important to success at individual institutions. LSAT scores must be examined in relation to the total range of information available about a prospective law student. It is in this context that the following restraints on LSAT score use are urged:

Do not use the LSAT score as a sole criterion for admission.

The LSAT should be used as only one of several criteria for evaluation and should not be given undue weight solely because its use is convenient. Those who set admission policies and criteria should always keep in mind the fact that the LSAT does not measure every discipline-related skill necessary for academic work, nor does it measure other factors important to academic success.

Evaluate the predictive utility of the LSAT at your school.

In order to assist in assuring that there is a demonstrated relationship between quantitative data used in the selection process and actual performance in your law school, such data should be evaluated regularly so that your school can use LSAT scores and other information more effectively. For this purpose Law School Admission Council annually offers to conduct correlation studies for member schools at no charge. Only by checking the relationship between LSAT scores, undergraduate grade-point average, and law school grades will schools be fully informed about how admission data, including test scores, can be used most effectively by that school.

Do not use LSAT scores without an understanding of the limitations of such tests.

Admission officers and members of admission committees should be knowledgeable about tests and test data and should recognize test limitations. Such limitations are set forth in the Law School Admission Reference Manual and are regularly discussed at workshops and conferences sponsored by Law School Admission Council.

Avoid improper use of cut-off scores.

Cut-off LSAT scores (those below which no applicants will be considered) are strongly discouraged. Such boundaries should be used only if the choice of a particular cut-off is based on a carefully considered and formulated rationale that is supported by empirical data, for example, one based on clear evidence that those scoring below the cut-off have substantial difficulty doing satisfactory law school work. Note that the establishment of a cut-off score should include consideration of the standard error of measurement in order to minimize distinctions based on score differences not sufficiently substantial to be reliable. Significantly, cut-off scores may have a greater adverse impact upon applicants from minority groups than upon the general applicant population. Normally, an applicant's LSAT score should be combined with the undergraduate grade-point average before any determination is made of the applicant's probability of success in law school.

Do not place excessive significance on score differences.

Scores should be viewed as approximate indicators rather than exact measures of an applicant's abilities. Distinctions on the basis of LSAT scores should be made among applicants only when those score differences are reliable.

Do not misuse repeater scores.

LSAC research indicates that when an applicant has taken the LSAT more than once, the average of the scores has more predictive validity than any one of the separate scores unless special circumstances that undermine the predictive validity of one of the scores are present. In the absence of such circumstances, a decision to use one of the separate scores rather than the average is probably unwise.

Carefully evaluate LSAT scores earned under accommodated or nonstandard conditions.

LSAC has no data to demonstrate that scores earned under accommodated conditions have the same meaning as scores earned under standard conditions. Because the LSAT has not been validated in its various accommodated forms, accommodated tests are identified as nonstandard and an individual's scores from accommodated tests are not averaged with scores from tests taken under standard conditions. The fact that accommodations were granted for the LSAT should not be dispositive evidence that accommodations should be granted once a test taker becomes a student. The accommodations needed for a one-day, multiple choice test may be different from those needed for law school coursework and examinations.

Avoid encouraging use of the LSAT for other than admission functions.

The LSAT was designed to serve admission functions only. It has not been validated for any other purpose. LSAT performance is subject to misunderstanding and misuse in other contexts, as in the making of an employment decision about an individual who has completed most or all law school work. These considerations suggest that LSAT scores should not be included on a law school transcript, nor routinely supplied to inquiring employers. Without the student's specific authorization, the Buckley Amendment would preclude the latter, in any event.

II. The Law School Data Assembly Service

The LSDAS summarizes undergraduate academic records in uniform fashion. It does not reflect differences in grading patterns or overall student body ability from college to college. LSDAS Reports therefore provide only generalized information, the specifics of which must be probed in the decision-making process.

Do not rely on the grade average reported by LSDAS without examining necessary additional information.

Decisions should not be based on cumulative averages as they appear on the LSDAS Report alone. The following information is found on the LSDAS Report and accompanying student transcripts and should be considered when interpreting grade-point averages:

- the undergraduate institution at which the averages were earned, and (when known) the colleges or departments within the institution;
- the distribution of grades at the institution, and the applicant's approximate rank in that distribution;
- the applicant's performance from year to year; and
- the types of courses in which the applicant excelled or did poorly.

Do not treat the one-page LSDAS Report as a substitute for the actual transcript.

Interpretive information about college transcripts and grades can be obtained by consulting the Guide to Undergraduate Colleges (furnished by LSAC) and the transcript(s) which accompany each LSDAS Report. The transcript tells much more than the LSDAS Report alone and should always be examined.

Do not misuse the predictive index available on the LSDAS Report.

LSAC will produce an index calculation on the LSDAS Report to the law school. The index calculation is unique for each law school. The index is a convenient starting place for the evaluation of each applicant. It is based on a combination of LSAT score and undergraduate grade-point average (UGPA), as specified by the law school. A law school should base its index formula on evidence of the predictive value of LSAT and UGPA for that particular law school. The validity study available annually to each law school by LSAC provides a formula for the statistically optimal combination of these two predictors. A law school should have a carefully considered justification if it uses any other index formula.

The simplicity and seeming precision of the index figure poses a risk that excessive weight will be placed on it. Admission officials should remember that the index is derived using methods that are subject to limitations discussed in the Law School Admission Reference Manual.

For application deadline purposes, a transcript's receipt at LSAC should be considered timely by the law school if the receipt date at LSAC is at least four weeks before the school's deadline.

Processing and mail delays can occur in the LSDAS system, particularly during peak periods; applicants should not be disqualified or disadvantaged as a result of these delays.

III. The Law School Candidate Referral Service

The Candidate Referral Service enables eligible law schools to search the LSAC database to identify registrants who have characteristics specified by the schools and who have given their permission to be in the Candidate Referral Service. While this service provides candidates an opportunity to be made aware of educational and scholarship possibilities that they might not otherwise have considered, it places a concomitant responsibility on law schools to be sensitive and realistic in their encouragement of applications. Accordingly:

- Law schools using Candidate Referral Service data to initiate communications with prospective applicants should identify this source.
- Law schools should attempt to recruit only those persons who appear to have a reasonable chance for acceptance if they apply, and who, if admitted, would have a reasonable chance to succeed academically.
- Persons contacted should be provided with information about admission procedures and standards, so they may understand their chances of being accepted.
- Candidate Referral Service information should be used for recruiting purposes only by the law school to which the information has been released.

IV. Law School Admission Test and Employment

- Employers of law school students or graduates should not seek or use LSAT scores of individual students.
- Law schools should neither include LSAT scores on student transcripts nor supply individual LSAT scores to employers.

V. General Statement on Confidentiality of Law School Admission Council

Law schools that use LSAT scores, LSDAS Reports, and related data should maintain a system for protecting the privacy of applicants. In particular, they should:

- treat such data confidentially;
- release such data to persons not associated with the admission process only with the consent of the applicant (except where the data may be aggregated in a form not identifiable with individuals); and
- use summary and other aggregated data with discretion and for the purposes intended.

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