



Law School Admission Council

Philip D. Shelton
President

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Vernellia Randall
Academic Excellence Program
University of Dayton
School of Law
300 College Park
Dayton Ohio 45469

Dear Vernellia:

I understand your question to be whether a school's admission policy that included a LSAT cutoff score, below which denial was virtually automatic, would be consistent with LSAC's policy guidelines regarding the proper use of the test. The answer is no. LSAC, and all other standardized testing companies that produce skills' assessment tests, has always stated that the use of a cutoff score for this test is inappropriate. The reason is that the difference between scores is insignificant and would be even if the test were a more perfect measure than it is. Using the hypothetical involving a 145 cutoff score, the information provided by the LSAT score tells you virtually nothing about the difference between a 145 and a 144. This is without regard to the fact that the Standard Error of Measurement is plus or minus three points around these scores. We report this a score band around the reported score and it means that, if students with these scores the first time they took the LSAT took the test a dozen more times, we have no idea which student would end up with the higher average score on our test.

Consider what the statisticians tell us about what happens with students whose scores are separated by ten points, or one standard deviation on the LSAT. If your school had 200 students, 100 with an LSAT of 155 and 100 with an LSAT of 145, we would expect 39 of the students with 145 to be in the top half of your first year class and 61 students with 155 scores in the top half. This represents, roughly, a 3-2 advantage for students with scores 10 points higher. You can work backward from this base to see how nominal the difference is for a single point. To expand on this point, I refer you to the article, "The LSAT -- Good, But Not *That* Good" which was in your packet at the Dreamkeeping conference.

The selection of a cutoff at 145 is particularly problematic because of its disparate impact on minority students. Looking at data for the Fall 2002 application cycle, 25% of all African-American applicants fell within the grid cell with LSAT scores between 140 and 144; 39% were above 145 and 36% were below 140. By making the cut at 145, an enormous number of African-Americans are eliminated from consideration by use of an admission tool that tells you so very little about the difference between those above and below that line.

Vernellia Randall
November 20, 2003
Page 2

Obviously, I believe the LSAT is a useful piece of information when considering all the pieces of information that are presented by law school applicants. I understand that students with higher grades, higher LSAT scores and higher LSAT/UGPA indexes will be admitted at a higher rate than those with lower scores. But there is no magic number to be derived from all these numbers. The same cutoff problem exists for grades and indexes that exist for the LSAT. The LSAT is not a mastery test, it is not a certification exam, it is not a pass-fail exam; it is a snapshot of an applicant's readiness for high level reading comprehension and reasoning skills similar to those measured on law school exams.

I hope these observations are useful to you. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,



Philip D. Shelton