

Determinants of Success on the Bar Exam: One Law School's Experience

2010–2023

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From 2010 to 2013, the UC Law SF first-time bar pass rate floated with the average first-time pass rate of graduates of ABA-accredited law schools in California.¹ But suddenly, in the space of three years (2014–2016), the law school's bar pass rate dropped to a much greater degree than changes in student metrics or statewide variations in pass rates could explain, to a historical low on the July 2016 administration of the California Bar Exam of just 51%. In response, the law school thoroughly revamped its approach to teaching academic and bar success skills. Within three years, the UC Law SF bar pass rate increased by about 30%. This article uses statistical analysis to assess which of the law school's academic reforms adopted after 2016 contributed to the law school's bar pass turnaround.

As discussed more fully below, UC Law SF assembled an anonymized dataset including a broad array of information covering fourteen years of graduates, with a total population of 4726 students, including demographic

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1 Throughout this article, the University of California College of the Law, San Francisco, is referred to as "UC Law SF." (It was formerly "UC Hastings.")

information, entering metrics, curricular choices, and law school academic performance.² In addition to data normally maintained in the student information system, for later years the dataset includes information about student participation in cocurricular interventions as well as postgraduation bar study choices such as the percentage of commercial bar preparation course completion and utilization of supplemental bar programming offered by UC Law SF, including the bar study aid AdaptiBar.³ Bearing in mind the caveats discussed below, the lessons learned from the analysis of this dataset may be broadly applicable to other schools.

Of the interventions we tracked and measured, no one intervention accounts for the improved outcomes at UC Law SF or for recent fluctuations in bar pass rates, though student preparedness to complete a sufficient percentage of postgraduation bar study and the skills creating that preparedness are key drivers of success and of fluctuations in the law school's pass rates over time. Multiple initiatives UC Law SF adopted in roughly the same period (2017–2023) appear to have positively impacted the law school's graduates' first-time bar pass rates, though developments we did not measure have likely impacted the pass rate as well.

The most effective pregraduation interventions we studied resulted from a paradigm shift: UC Law SF improved bar outcomes after it moved from an academic skills development model focused on the most at-risk students based on entering metrics or law school GPA (LGPA) to a model of pervasive, integrated, and iterative skills instruction aimed at all students. Examples include: (1) requiring and encouraging students to take upper-division bar subject classes, with each additional bar subject class taken associated with a 3% increase in the probability of first-time bar passage in the post-2016 period; and (2) offering for-credit bar skills classes in the 3L year focused on improving MBE performance (Critical Studies 2) and on overall bar test-taking (Critical Studies 3). The impact of these interventions varied by law school GPA band.

UC Law SF's postgraduation bar success interventions proved to be particularly positively impactful given the strong connection between the percentage of commercial bar preparation courses that graduates complete and first-time pass rates. The most effective of these interventions included the following: (1) tracking individual student performance in postgraduation commercial bar preparation courses and advising and coaching individual

2 Throughout this article, the term “bar subject classes” refers to classes that cover subjects tested on the California Bar Exam. The term “bar skills classes” refers to classes offered for credit that are specifically designed to prepare students for the California Bar Exam, which at UC Law SF are called “Critical Studies” classes. The term “commercial bar preparation courses” refers to courses students take after graduation taught by third-party bar preparation course providers such as Themis, BarBri, and Kaplan.

3 UC Law SF made AdaptiBar available to all students as part of its three-year program of study and then encouraged students to use it as a study aid after graduation to supplement commercial bar course study. See ADAPTI BAR, <https://www.adaptibar.com> (last visited Feb. 3, 2024).

students to complete a greater percentage of the assigned coursework; (2) offering supplemental law school-administered practice bar essay feedback during bar study; and (3) advising students to effectively practice MBE test-taking. Combined with LGPA, the percentage of completion of postgraduation commercial bar course and regular postgraduation practice on bar essays and MBE questions turned out to be powerful predictors of first-time bar passage.

Some of the interventions we expected to increase students' probability of bar passage did not appear to be efficacious. For example, individual specialist skills faculty anecdotally reported success working with individual students in one-on-one sessions, but students who frequently used that resource had worse outcomes. Similarly, courses that combine written legal analysis skills and doctrinal instruction aimed primarily at 2Ls and bar skills classes in the 3L year focused on bar essay writing (Critical Studies 1) negatively correlated with bar success, though that could reflect selection bias.

The study has limitations. We were able to measure the likely impact of only a subset of the bar success interventions UC Law SF adopted during the study period because the law school adopted many reforms pervasively and all at once and tracked and analyzed data regarding only a portion of them. For example, we did not track in a way that can easily be quantified and directly subjected to rigorous statistical analysis the degree to which faculty changed the way they teach and test in bar subject classes or the degree to which individual students received formative assessments with detailed individualized feedback in any of their classes.

This article proceeds as follows: Section I provides background on first-time bar pass rates and changing metrics of UC Law SF students during the study period. Section II describes initiatives UC Law SF implemented between 2016 and 2023. Section III reports the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses to identify which of those interventions worked. Section IV explores bar success intervention measurement challenges and potentially relevant factors contributing to UC Law SF graduates' performance that we have not studied. Section V addresses academic program design and concludes with reflections regarding remaining challenges.

I. The Bigger Picture

Against the backdrop of national and California statewide bar pass rate trends, this section documents the changing profile of UC Law SF's students during the study period. What's clear in hindsight is that a historical view of the population of "at-risk" students as being confined to those in the bottom quartile or decile by law school grade point average was, by 2016, no longer accurate. That realization set the table in the post-2016 era for the spate of reforms described in Section II and evaluated using the study's dataset and statistical analysis in Section III.

A. *First-Time Bar Pass Rates During the Study Period*

States have regulated entry into the legal profession by administering exams applicants must pass to be admitted to the bar and to practice law.⁴ During the study period, these exams tested a limited range of skills, mostly related to reading comprehension, memorization of black letter law, issue spotting, and written legal analysis.⁵

This article focuses on California because 91.5% of UC Law SF J.D. program graduates during the study period sat for the California Bar Exam. As of the end of the study period in 2023, the California Bar Exam had two sections administered over two days.⁶ On the first day, the written portion of the exam included five essays and one performance test, potentially covering the following topics: business associations, civil procedure, community property, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and procedure, evidence, professional responsibility/legal ethics, real property, remedies, torts, trusts, and wills and succession.⁷ The second day of testing included the Multistate Bar Examination (MBE), which was developed and scored by the National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE). The MBE consisted of 200 multiple-choice questions covering civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and procedure, evidence, real property, and torts.⁸

Figure 1,⁹ below, provides descriptive information about first-time average pass rates for all California Bar Exam test-takers each year, for test-takers who graduated from California ABA-accredited law schools, and for UC Law SF graduates who graduated in that calendar year and took the bar exam for the first time that year.

4 See Andrea A. Curcio, *A Better Bar: How and Why the Existing Bar Exam Should Change*, 81 NEB. L. REV. 363, 372 (2002); Michael J. Thomas, *The American Lawyer's Next Hurdle: The State-Based Bar Examination Systems*, 24 J. LEGAL PRO. 235, 240 (2000) (characterizing as “accepted wisdom” the role of the bar exam in protecting the public from professional errors by “ensuring that only competent lawyers are admitted to practice”). This article takes the California Bar Exam’s testing format as a given and does not critically analyze it, though there is a robust literature doing so. See, e.g., Kristin Booth Glen, *Thinking Out of the Bar Exam Box: A Proposal to “MacCrate” Entry to the Profession*, 23 PACE L. REV. 343 (2003).

5 As discussed below, that is likely to change to a degree with the National Conference of Bar Examiners’ shift to the NextGen Bar Exam starting July 2026. See NEXTGEN, <https://nextgenbarexam.ncbex.org> (last visited Sept. 24, 2024).

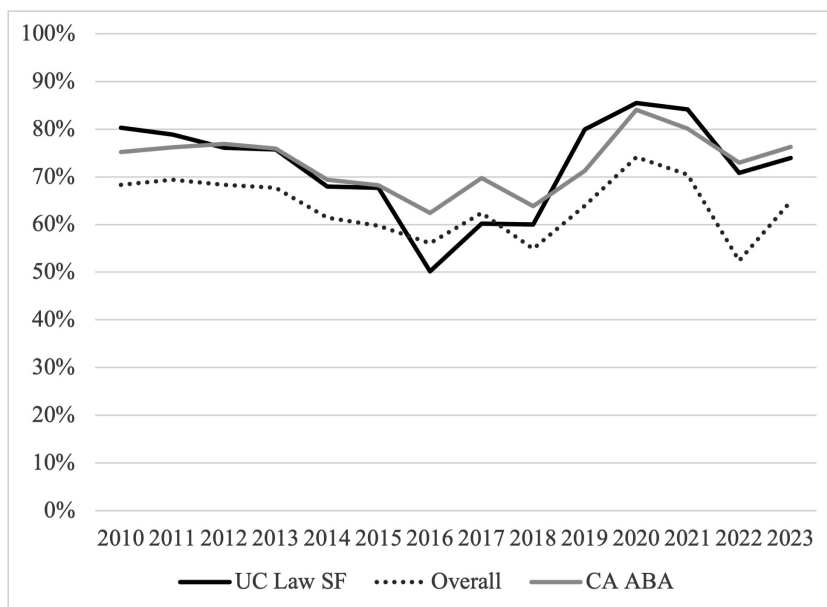
6 See *Scope of the California Bar Examination*, STATE BAR OF CAL., <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Admissions/Examinations/California-Bar-Examination/California-Bar-Examination-Scope> (last visited July 21, 2023).

7 *Id.*

8 *Id.*

9 Unless otherwise indicated, figures in this article present UC Law SF data by the graduating class year. Except where indicated, graduating class year is defined as students who graduated in May, August, or December of the same calendar year. The reported pass rate for UC Law SF is the first-time pass rate for graduates of the particular calendar year, because UC Law SF assesses the connection between the three-year program of study and bar outcomes by class year.

Figure 1: California Bar Exam Outcomes Variability by Year



Like most other jurisdictions, California experienced a decline in first-time bar passage rates¹⁰ in the early years of the study period.¹¹ UC Law SF's first-time pass rate similarly dipped below 70% in 2014 and again in 2015. However,

10 A study commissioned by the California Committee of Bar Examiners found an 18% drop in first-time pass rates from 2008 to 2016, from 62% to 44%. The first-time pass rate on the California Bar Exam on the July 2016 administration—54% for CA ABA law schools—was the lowest since at least 1990. See ROGER BOLUS, RSCH. SOLS. GRP., RECENT PERFORMANCE CHANGES ON THE CALIFORNIA BAR EXAMINATION: INSIGHTS FROM CBE ELECTRONIC DATABASES 1 (2017) <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/o/documents/admissions/Examinations/Final-Bar-Exam-Report.pdf?ver=2018-11-15-110106-057>.

11 First-time bar pass rates nationally also fell significantly during the study period. The National Conference of Bar Examiners reported a significant decline in MBE mean scaled scores, from 144.3 on the July 2013 administration to 140.4 on the July 2021 administration. According to the National Conference of Bar Examiners, “[b]oth a raw score and a scaled score are computed for each examinee. A raw score is the number of questions answered correctly. Raw scores from different administrations of the MBE are not comparable, primarily due to differences in the difficulty of the questions from one administration to the next. The MBE, like virtually all high-stakes exams, is equated. Equating is a statistical process that adjusts for variations in the difficulty of the questions, producing scaled scores that represent the same level of performance across all MBE administrations.” *The Multistate Bar Examination (MBE)*, THE BAR EXAMINER, <https://thebarexaminer.ncbex.org/2021-statistics/the-multistate-bar-examination-mbe/#step6> (last visited July 21, 2023). The MBE mean scaled score was 140.5 on the July 2023 administration. See *NCBE Announces National Mean for July 2023 MBE*, NCBE (Aug. 31, 2023), <https://www.ncbex.org/news-resources/national-mean-july-2023-mbe>.

the UC Law SF J.D. class that entered in the fall of 2013, graduated in May of 2016, and took the July 2016 California Bar Exam had a first-time pass rate that was significantly below the average first-time pass rate for graduates of other ABA-accredited law schools in California. That precipitated a period of intense innovation. It took UC Law SF approximately three years—a full J.D. class cohort cycle—to help its graduates pull back up to their traditional position at or above the statewide average.¹²

B. A Changing Student Population

UC Law SF experienced the changes in first-time bar pass rates described above during the same period in which its student population changed.

I. Changing Metrics

During the period spanning the graduating classes of 2010 through 2023, UC Law SF's student populations' entering metrics changed significantly. Figures 2 and 3 display UC Law SF's median LSAT scores and undergraduate GPAs, respectively. California ABA-accredited law school average medians are calculated from available public reporting (e.g., ABA Standard 509 reports).¹³

12 The UC Law SF classes of 2019 to 2021 experienced sustained increases in first-time bar pass rates, including historically high pass rates for graduates of the Legal Education Opportunity Program. The class of 2022's pass rate fell, driven in part by declines in performance by LEOP graduates, with gains for the class of 2023 driven by the performance of that same cohort.

13 Ideally, we would compare the changing median to the median of all graduates or bar-takers at other California ABA-accredited schools. To do so, we would need to know the full distribution of LSAT and UGPA data for all these individual students to calculate an overall median. Currently, we have only school-level medians of matriculating classes from these reports. To keep the comparison consistent, figures report data for all eighteen currently ABA-accredited law schools.

Figure 2: LSAT Medians of UC Law SF's Students by Graduating Class

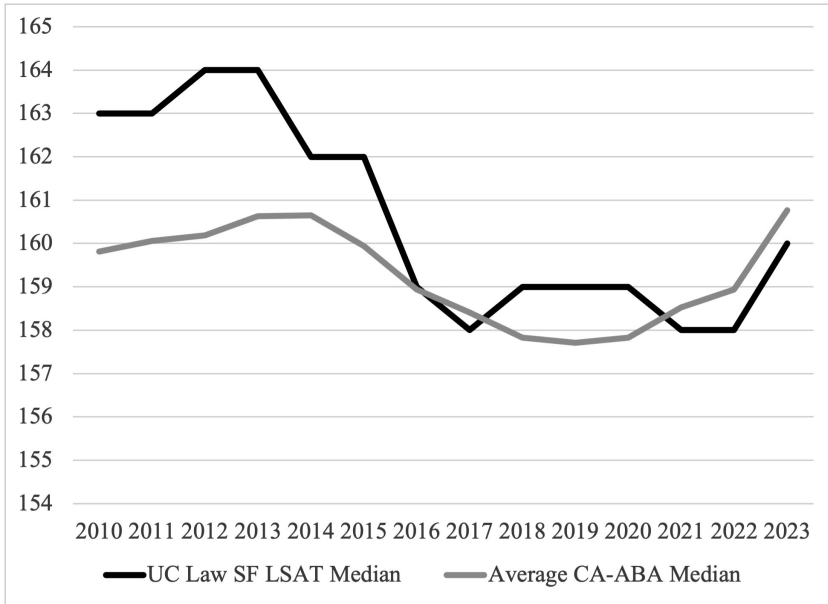
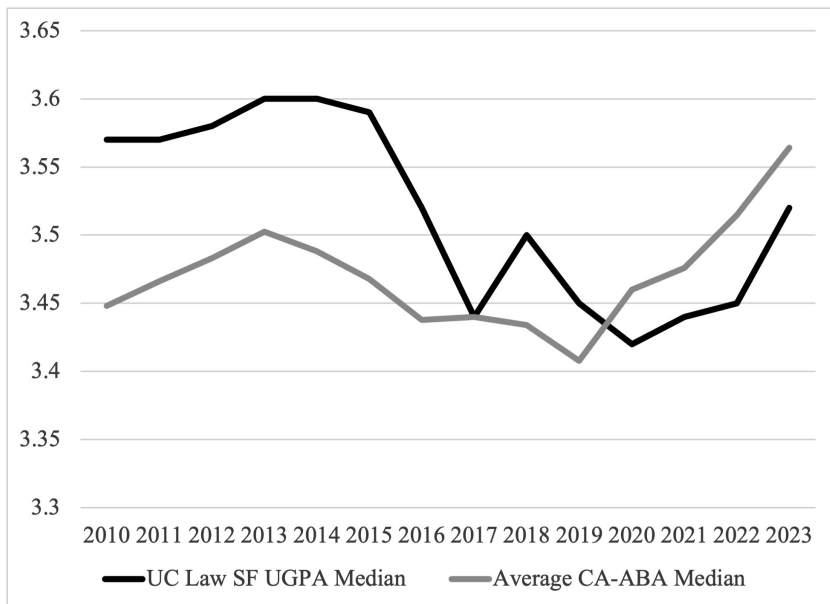


Figure 3: Undergraduate GPA Medians of UC Law SF's Students by Graduating Class



The strength of students admitted after 2012 (class of 2015), as measured by LSAT and undergraduate GPA (UGPA), declined or was flat over much

of the study period. The decline in bar pass rates for the classes of 2013 to 2016 corresponded with, but, as discussed below, was not fully predicted by, a decline in student entering metrics. The magnitude of the improved bar outcomes after 2016 exceeded the magnitude of the increase in median LSAT and undergraduate GPA and did not track well with the variation in bar outcomes.

2. Legal Education Opportunity Program

In the 1960s, UC Law SF created the Legal Education Opportunity Program (LEOP) for students who had overcome significant adversity.¹⁴ During the study period, the four areas of adversity were educational, economic, social, and physical. The program had three primary components: admissions, academic support, and community building. LEOP maintained its own admissions doorway for applicants who demonstrated that they had overcome adversity such that they could succeed in law school. The LEOP admissions process placed relatively less emphasis on traditional metrics such as UGPA and LSAT/GRE score and instead placed greater weight on other factors such as the degree to which students had overcome adversity. As a result, during the study period, the entering metrics of LEOP students were generally below those of students admitted through the general admissions process.

The following figures show the gaps each graduating class year between entering metrics on admission for each UC Law SF class as a whole and for LEOP admits:

¹⁴ See *Legal Education Opportunity Program*, UC Law SF, <https://uclawsf.edu/academics/academic-success/legal-education-opportunity-program/> (last visited July 21, 2023).

Figure 4: LSAT by Graduating Class

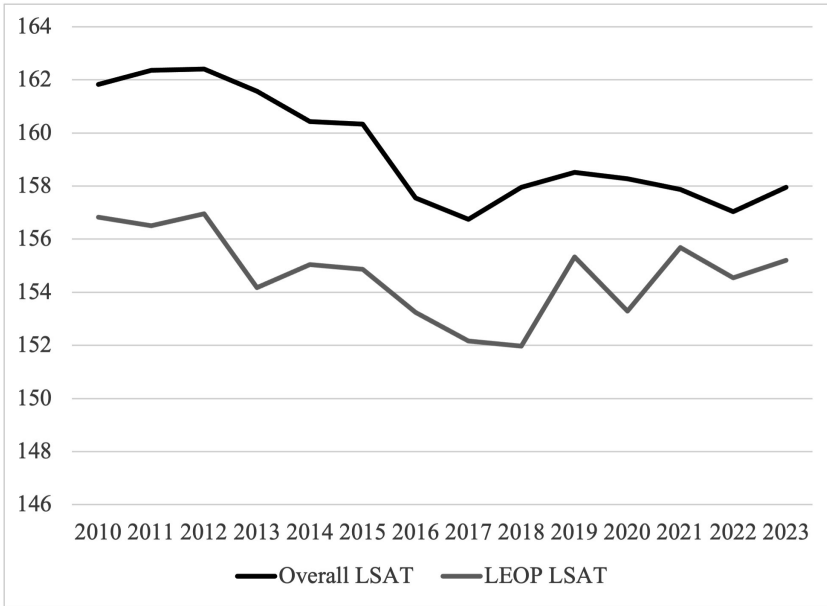
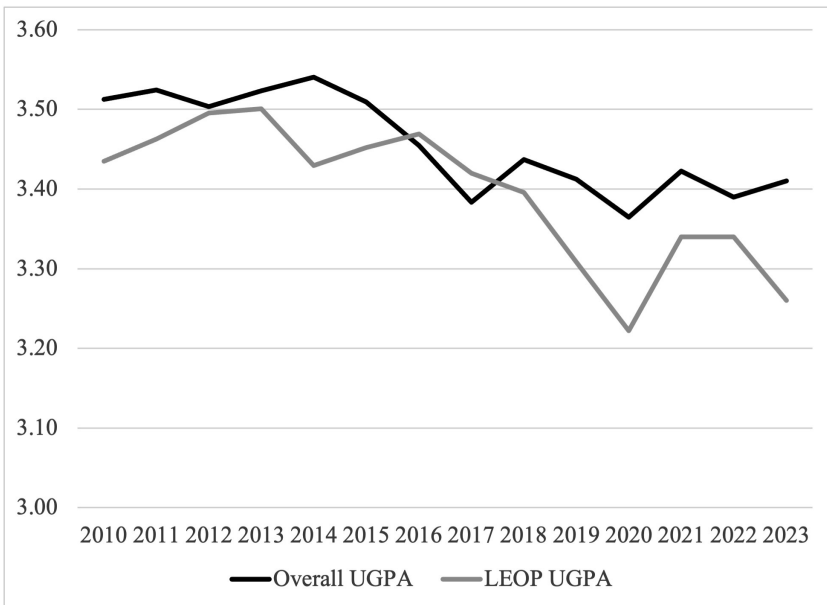


Figure 5: Undergraduate GPA by Graduating Class



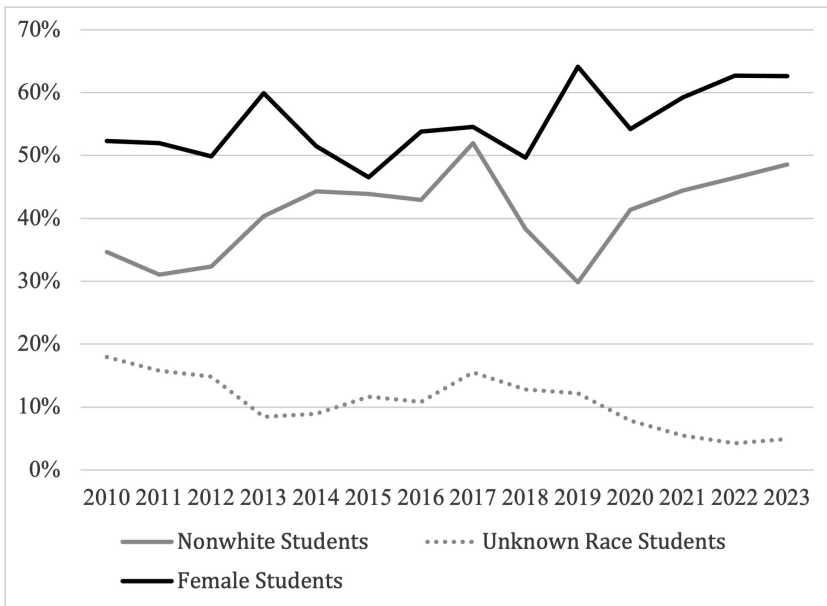
Figures 4 and 5 complicate the background factual story. The gap between LEOP and overall entering mean LSAT and UGPA partially closed during the period 2019-2021 (entering cohorts fall 2016-fall 2018). The significant

decline in LEOP pass rates in 2022 does not neatly correlate with entering metrics, nor do LEOP class of 2023's improved outcomes.

3. Diversity

During the study period, the UC Law SF J.D. classes became more diverse. This is relevant insofar as some studies suggest that the bar exam as a gateway device disproportionately negatively impacts students of color.¹⁵ Figure 6 shows an increasingly diverse set of graduating classes at UC Law SF over the study period.

Figure 6: Graduating Class Diversity

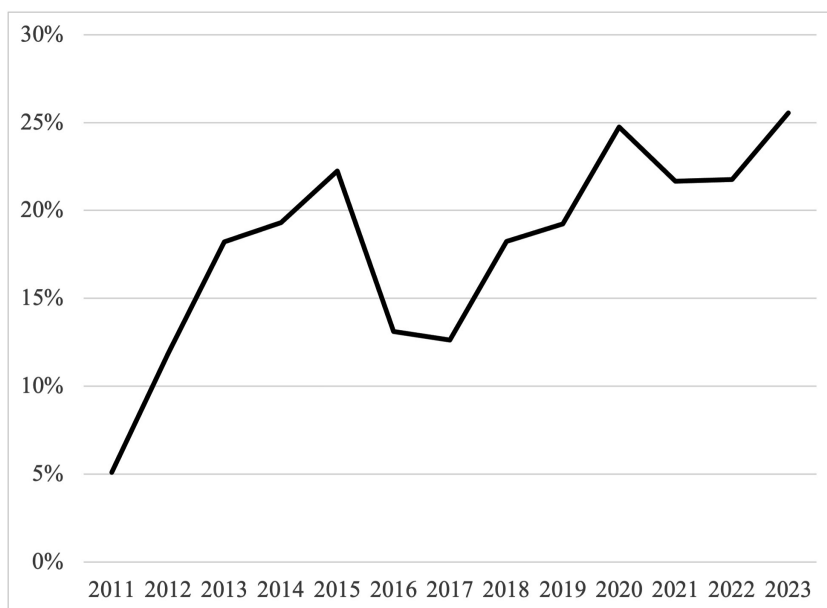


4. A Growing Population of Students with Disabilities

During the study period, UC Law SF saw a significant increase in the number of students presenting with disabilities who sought and obtained exam accommodations, predominantly extra time to complete exams.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Scott Johns, *Putting the Bar Exam on Constitutional Notice: Cut Scores, Race & Ethnicity, and the Public Good*, 45 SEATTLE U. L. REV. 853, 863 (2022) (“[B]ased on publicly available data, cut score calculus impacts bar passage outcomes across racial and ethnic groups with those most impacted: historically disadvantaged groups”); BOLUS, *supra* note 9, at 15 (“Historically, White students have made up the majority of students sitting for the CBX and have had the highest scores and bar passage rates.”).

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Figure 7: Percent of Graduates with Disability Resource Program Accommodations

The relevance of these data is explored more fully below as part of a discussion regarding special bar success challenges faced by students who receive exam accommodations during law school facilitated by UC Law SF's Disability Resource Program. We have not yet identified the causes of those challenges, though we suspect a mismatch between accommodations obtained on law school exams and the California Bar Exam is a significant part of the story. UC Law SF's data suggest that a significant percentage of graduates who received accommodations on law school exams did not obtain such accommodations when taking the California Bar Exam for the first time.

C. Changing Risk Profile

Before 2016, UC Law SF bar pass challenges appeared to be concentrated primarily among the most at-risk students based on law school academic performance (LGPA). Nationally, studies showed a relationship between LGPA, LSAT scores, and first-time bar passage rates, with LGPA being the most reliable predictor of outcomes.¹⁶ At UC Law SF, descriptive data

¹⁶ See, e.g., *What to Make of the State of Legal Education in 2015*, LAW SCH. TRANSPARENCY, https://archive.lawschooltransparency.com/reform/projects/investigations/2015/analysis/#ascertaining_risk (last visited July 21, 2023) (showing that students with LSAT scores below 150 were at "high" to "extreme" risk of failing the bar exam); LINDA F. WIGHTMAN, LAW SCH. ADMISSIONS COUNCIL, *LSAC NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL BAR PASSAGE STUDY 55* (1998), <https://archive.lawschooltransparency.com/reform/projects/investigations/2015/documents/NLBPS.pdf> ("The data in this study, consistent with several earlier studies, identify LGPA as the single best predictor of bar examination outcome, with LSAT score providing significant additional information.").

suggested a correlation between lower LGPA bands and risk of failure on the first bar exam attempt, with a cliff at the fourth LGPA quartile and a further drop-off in average first-time pass rates around the tenth LGPA decile. For example, in 2013, before UC Law SF’s pass rate dipped below 70%, the first-time pass rate by quartile appeared as shown in Figure 8, below for both LEOP and non-LEOP students, with a clear cliff in first-time pass rates associated with the fourth-quartile LGPA cohort.

Figure 8: First-Attempt California Bar Exam Passage by LGPA Quartile and LEOP Status

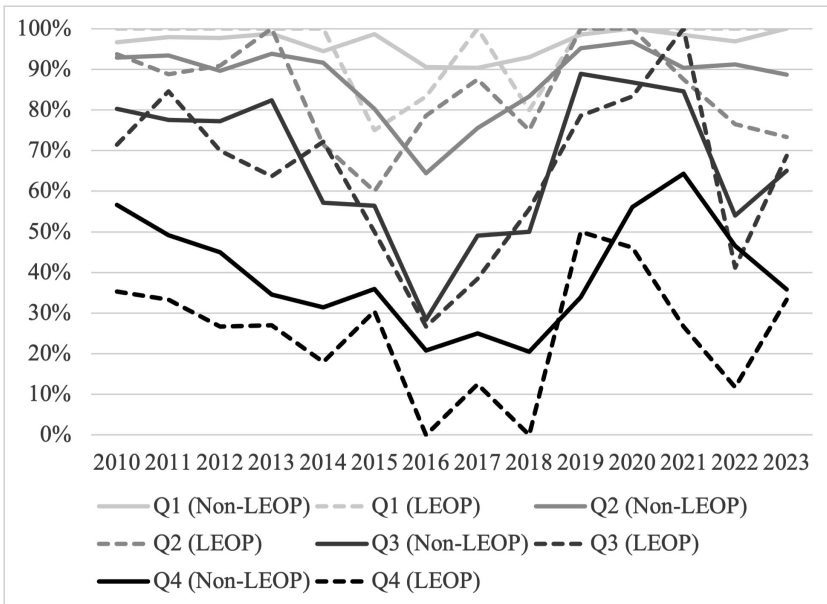
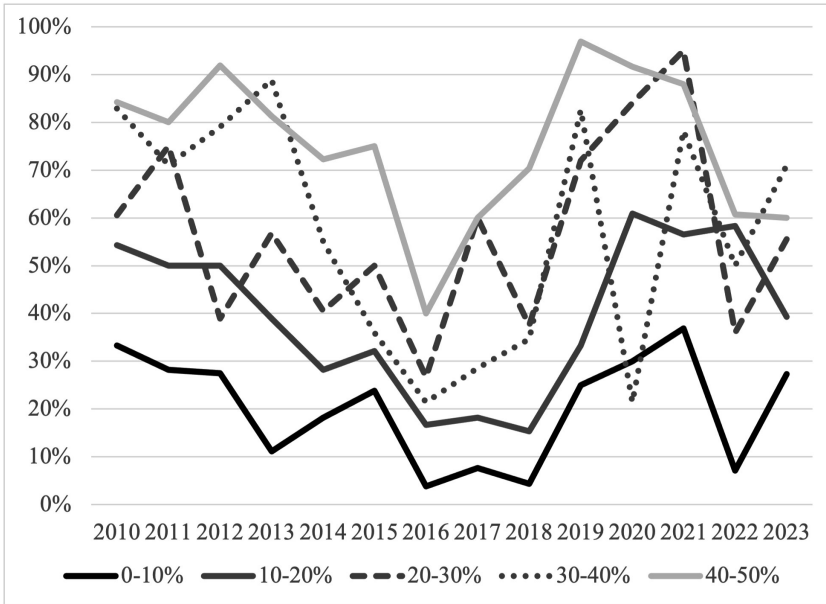


Figure 9: First-Attempt California Bar Exam Passage by LGPA Deciles (Bottom 50% Only)



Over time at UC Law SF, the average first-time bar passage rate cliff—i.e., the point at which pass rates declined significantly—shifted to higher LGPA quartiles, as demonstrated in Figure 8, above.¹⁷ Relatedly, because bar passage is a binary outcome (pass or fail),¹⁸ the location of the drop-off point in first-time bar pass rates masked growing vulnerabilities before 2013 in higher-LGPA cohorts. Figures 8 and 9, above, show how this looked during the study period. Figure 8 shows first-time bar pass rates by graduating class and by quartile for LEOP and non-LEOP graduates. Figure 9 shows first-time bar pass rates by graduating class and by each of the deciles in the bottom half of the class by LGPA.

UC Law SF’s study of this changing risk profile in 2016 led to several innovations discussed in Section II.

II. Bar Success Interventions at UC Law SF During the Study Period

By the fall of 2016, when its first-time bar pass rate precipitously fell, UC Law SF was poised for a period of rapid innovation. These innovations were grounded in a combination of (1) school-specific and individual student-level data; and (2) an understanding of what we took at the time to be best practices at other schools that had similar entering student profiles but higher bar pass

¹⁷ This pattern repeated, less severely, with regard to the class of 2022.

¹⁸ The California State Bar identifies graduates who pass the California Bar Exam but does not share their scores.

rates. As described in the preceding sections, it became clear by 2016 that UC Law SF's student population was more pervasively at risk of failing the California Bar Exam on the first try than had been the case in earlier years, suggesting that the scope of interventions should be similarly broad. While some of the interventions UC Law SF adopted were aimed at subsets of the student population (e.g., LEOP students), most of the interventions were aimed at the entire student population on the theory that a rising tide would lift all boats. Another way of characterizing the shift is to say that UC Law SF moved from a remedial conception of academic support to a pervasive model of academic skills instruction.¹⁹ This section describes the key initiatives so that the analysis of their efficacy can be appreciated against the larger backdrop of reform. Section III examines the extent to which, controlling for various factors, reforms that we systematically measured and tracked by student identification number improved student LGPAs or graduates' first-time pass rates.

The bar success initiatives that UC Law SF instituted after 2016 can be divided into five core categories—academic skills and support infrastructure, advising, cocurricular programming before and after graduation, the curriculum, and pedagogy (teaching and assessment methods).²⁰

First, UC Law SF created and staffed a new faculty-led department—the Office for Academic Skills Instruction & Support (“OASIS”). Before 2016, UC Law SF had one full-time academic support professional who was responsible for teaching a standalone course called Legal Analysis and overseeing group and individual student academic support. This academic skills staffing structure aligned with the then-prevailing understanding that California Bar Exam failure risk was concentrated in the bottom LGPA quartile and decile. In addition, the Legal Education Opportunity Program had an academic skills component focused on providing cocurricular and targeted academic support during orientation and the 1L year, but it was not managed by a dedicated academic skills specialist. Also, general J.D. population and LEOP academic skills instruction were siloed from each other. In 2016, the law

19 Laura Dannebohm and Adam Lamparello succinctly mapped the cognitive and programmatic shift educators need to make from “remedial” to “comprehensive” skills development: “[A]cademic success programs should aim to enhance the skills level of all students, regardless of class rank or entering credentials.” Laura Dannebohm & Adam Lamparello, *The Death of Academic Support: Creating a Truly Experiential, Integrated, and Assessment-Driven Academic Success and Bar Preparation Program (Part I of II)*, 42 MITCHELL HAMLIN L. REV. 110, 116 (2016).

20 Bar success measured by first-time pass rates was by no means the only academic program design goal UC Law SF pursued during the period after 2016. For example, UC Law SF also added new J.D. concentrations reflecting pathways for students to develop subject matter expertise in a broader range of practice areas, including a concentration focused on technology and innovation in the practice of law; expanded experiential offerings including new transactional offerings; and new professional development opportunities even before ABA Standard 303 made them mandatory. But bar success was one central strategic initiative as reflected in the breadth of the reforms identified in this section.

school integrated all academic skills into OASIS, appointed a faculty member associate dean and staffed the department with seven full-time academic skills specialist faculty (ultimately about 11% of all full-time faculty at the law school), including a director of Bar Passage Support, and a dedicated LEOP academic skills specialist.²¹

Second, UC Law SF organized a coordinated advising strategy aimed at sharing information with all students about the need for bar exam preparedness and the factors contributing to first-time bar passage. To coordinate messaging, academic program administrators responsible for assessment shared outcomes data with faculty and student-facing professional staff, so all persons interacting with students had a common, evidence-based foundation for advising about matters such as course selection, skills development, and postgraduation bar study.

Third, UC Law SF significantly expanded and enhanced cocurricular (not-for-credit) academic and bar success skills programming. Pregraduation, such programming included group sessions and one-on-one office hours with academic skills specialist faculty. UC Law SF also developed postgraduation supplemental bar support programming (via the “BEST Program”) designed to complement commercial bar course instruction. It included group subject matter review and the opportunity to obtain feedback on practice essays. In addition, the law school’s director of Bar Passage Support monitored student progress in commercial bar preparation courses and coached students to help them complete as much of their postgraduation coursework as possible.

Fourth, UC Law SF adjusted its curriculum. Recognizing the need for explicit, systematic, and pervasive academic skills development in the 1L year, UC Law SF created the “Sack Program.”²² The program involved the addition of a unit of academic credit to one doctrinal class in each 1L section (about eighty students) in the fall and spring semesters. Along with their normal doctrinal teaching, Sack professors taught basic academic success skills, including case reading, rule identification, the form of legal analysis (use of facts, analogical reasoning), course outlining, and MBE success skills. In addition, each Sack class provided students with multiple formative assessments with individualized feedback provided by the faculty member or student teaching assistants trained by Sack professor.²³ To help students hone core academic and bar success skills iteratively across a three-year program of instruction, UC Law SF also created a new kind of class aimed primarily

21 UC Law SF also established a Legal Writing Resource Center staffed primarily by full-time writing faculty to give students feedback on their legal writing.

22 Faculty teaching those classes were called “Sack professors” in honor of UC Law SF graduate Jerome Sack, who used to tutor law students.

23 In the fall term, each Sack professor was paired with an OASIS skills specialist faculty member. By rotating multiple faculty through the Sack Program and engaging them with skills experts, the Sack Program not only provided 1L students with a baseline of instruction but also increased faculty attention to and expertise in pedagogy and skills development writ large.

at 2Ls called “Law & Process” versions of upper-division bar classes (e.g., Legal Ethics: Law & Process or Criminal Procedure: Law & Process).²⁴ Law & Process faculty reinforced written legal analysis skills emphasized in the Sack 1L classes and provided multiple opportunities for formative assessment and individualized feedback directly from the faculty members. For 3Ls, UC Law SF created a suite of “Critical Studies” classes focused on bar exam test-taking.²⁵ UC Law SF’s faculty also voted to require all J.D. students to take MBE-tested upper-division bar subjects and encouraged faculty to create syllabi mindful of the substantive coverage of the California Bar Exam.²⁶

Finally, UC Law SF pervasively adopted teaching and testing reforms. The law school trained and encouraged faculty to teach written legal analysis skills explicitly across the curriculum,²⁷ including via formative assessment

- 24 While certain low-LGPA students were required or strongly encouraged to take Law & Process classes, enrollment in these classes was open to all students, albeit with limited seating because they were small sections. (Law & Process versions of bar classes were generally capped at twenty students, maximum, while regular upper-division bar sections were capped at eighty to 100 students).
- 25 Before 2016, UC Law SF experimented with different iterations of Critical Studies, a suite of for-credit bar skills classes. Critical Studies 1 classes were small-group (twenty to thirty students), in-person, bar essay writing classes focused on written legal analysis. This version, taught by regular UC Law SF faculty (full-time and specially trained adjuncts) attracted students who believed they could benefit from instruction aimed at improving core written legal analysis skills. After 2016, UC Law SF invited bar companies to teach Critical Studies 2 and 3. Critical Studies 2 was an MBE-success skills class staffed by Themis Bar Review, which alternated between giving students commercial bar course-like overviews of areas of the law interspersed with special training regarding MBE strategies and practice. The Critical Studies 2 classes, which tended to be larger and taught either in-person or online (synchronously or asynchronously), attracted a broad cross-section of students in terms of LGPA. Critical Studies 3, staffed by BarBri, was the version of Critical Studies that most closely approximated postgraduation commercial bar course study. It was taught asynchronously and covered multiple testing formats on the California Bar Exam, and it also attracted a broad cross-section of students (across LGPA quartiles).
- 26 Seeing hints in early statistical analyses that predated this comprehensive study that taking more upper-division bar classes correlated with higher bar pass rates, and in light of qualitative feedback on surveys from graduates indicating that they found it easier to study for the California Bar Exam after graduation if they had already taken particular bar course subjects, and noticing as of 2016 a decline in the average number of bar courses students were choosing to take even as student entering metrics were declining, the UC Law SF faculty voted to change its graduation requirements. In 2016, the only required doctrinal course after 1L year was legal ethics/professional responsibility. The faculty voted to require all students to take all MBE-tested subjects not taught in the 1L year, including evidence, criminal procedure, and constitutional law 2. Later, the faculty voted to require that students not only pass these courses (earning at least a D) but also earn a higher minimum grade of C. (Students who do not earn the required minimum grade must retake the course.)
- 27 UC Law SF trained faculty to teach academic and bar success skills pervasively across the curriculum. The initiative included formal pairings of doctrinal and academic skills specialist faculty in the Sack Program, discussed above. In addition, the law school hosted, recorded, and disseminated faculty training videos on topics ranging from tutorials on how the bar tests on the essay and MBE sections to tutorials on formative assessment.

with individualized feedback. UC Law SF also partnered with AdaptiBar to integrate practice MBE test-taking into the three-year J.D. curriculum.²⁸ In addition, the UC Law SF faculty voted to require closed-book exams in all bar-tested subjects²⁹ and a mix of bar-like essays and multiple-choice questions in subjects tested on the MBE, and to phase out the opportunity to take bar classes credit/no-credit.³⁰

Table 1, below, lists these reforms and, for each, identifies the year the initiative was first implemented and the graduating class whose bar pass rates reflected the full impact. No shading in the second column ("Initiative") indicates that the interventions were adopted broadly and aimed at all J.D. students, whereas gray shading in the second column denotes that the interventions were targeted at particular (typically at-risk) cohorts.

Category	Initiative	Start Date	Class Impacted
Academic skills infrastructure	Establish a faculty department—the Office of Academic Skills Instruction & Support (“OASIS”)—to integrate and coordinate skills instruction; staff with academic skills specialist faculty	Academic year (“AY”) AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019

28 After initial assessment suggested a positive correlation between engagement with AdaptiBar and first-time bar passage, UC Law SF decided to fully integrate AdaptiBar into the J.D. curriculum. AdaptiBar includes a database of released MBE questions presented in a format that allowed students to self-assess as they learn. Integration of AdaptiBar served two functions: (1) it exposed students to MBE-style questions early and often, and (2) it provided faculty with a ready-made tool for formative assessment.

29 The COVID pandemic disrupted the implementation of this policy. Exams in spring 2020 were take-home and open book, and faculty were not required to compromise the integrity of exam question banks by including MBE-style questions. In the 2020-2021 academic year, during which all classes were online, exams were open book and testing with multiple-choice questions was limited. Requirements regarding exam formats were scaled back into place starting in academic year 2021-2022. Anecdotal evidence obtained when supporting class of 2022 and 2023 graduates suggests that this cohort, which least benefited from the positive effects of closed-book exams, struggled to recall or memorize the substantive law when studying for the July administration of the California Bar Exam.

30 Based on preliminary data suggesting that the benefits of upper-division bar classes were apparent only when students took those classes for a letter grade, the faculty voted to eliminate credit/no-credit grading in bar classes.

Category	Initiative	Start Date	Class Impacted
Academic skills infrastructure	Professionalize and expand Legal Education Opportunity Program academic support	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2020
Academic skills infrastructure	Establish Legal Writing Resource Center	AY 2018-2019	Class of 2021
Advising	Intensify consistent and regular messaging about California Bar Exam preparedness; share outcomes data with students	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Cocurricular instruction (pregraduation)	Expand the academic skills component of orientation and enhance explicit skills development in the three-year J.D. program	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Cocurricular (pregraduation)	Assess and engage in greater quality control with regard to the LEOP TA and practice exam programs in 1L years	AY 2015-2016	Class of 2019
Cocurricular instruction (postgraduation)	Offer postgraduation summer bar course advising, monitoring, supplemental instruction, and individual coaching (“BEST Program”)	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2017
Curriculum	Adopt 1L Sack Program (systematic 1L study and skills instruction embedded in 1L doctrinal classes, for credit)	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2021
Curriculum	Expand Sack Program to upper-division bar classes ³¹	AY 2023-2024	Class of 2026

³¹ Reforms are ongoing. Starting fall 2023, UC Law SF introduced a Sack version of a required upper-division bar course aimed at 2Ls to reinforce core written legal analysis skills in the 2L year.

Category	Initiative	Start Date	Class Impacted
Curriculum	Expand 1L legal writing program—extra unit, second semester converted from credit/no-credit to letter-graded	AY 2019-2020	Class of 2022
Curriculum	Offer “Law & Process” versions of upper-division bar subject classes (skills instruction embedded in bar subject classes)	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2018
Curriculum	Expand “Critical Studies” for-credit bar skills suite of classes	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Curriculum	Require upper-division bar subject classes in addition to legal ethics/professional responsibility	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2020
Curriculum	Encourage faculty to design syllabi in bar subject classes that account for California Bar Exam coverage in terms of issues	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2020
Pedagogy	Encourage and train faculty to teach legal analysis pervasively	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Pedagogy	Encourage the use of “active-learning” techniques in which students engage with material instead of just passively listening to lectures	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Pedagogy	Encourage formative assessment with individualized feedback	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019

Category	Initiative	Start Date	Class Impacted
Pedagogy	Purchase AdaptiBar access for all three years of J.D. curriculum; normalize MBE practice; encourage assignment of AdaptiBar problem sets; encourage explicit instruction in MBE success skills pervasively	AY 2019-2020	Class of 2022
Pedagogy	Encourage faculty to adopt techniques designed to develop students as self-directed learners (e.g., asking students to self-assess)	AY 2022-2023	Class of 2025
Pedagogy (Assessment)	Require closed-book exams in bar subject classes with bar-like essay questions	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2020
Pedagogy (Assessment)	Require MBE-style questions on exams in MBE-tested subjects	AY 2017-2018	Class of 2020
Pedagogy (Assessment)	Encourage faculty to provide individualized feedback on exams	AY 2016-2017	Class of 2019
Pedagogy (Assessment)	Phase out credit/no-credit option in bar subject courses	AY 2018-2019	Class of 2021

Table 1: Bar Success Initiatives Adopted at UC Law SF

The overlap between the list of interventions in Table 1, above, and the list of factors studied in the dataset is incomplete. Nevertheless, we provide a relatively complete listing of reforms, rather than the shorter list assessed in the quantitative analysis in Section III, to provide a clearer picture of the full range of reforms UC Law SF adopted in its effort to improve first-time bar pass rates.

III. What Worked

This section uses statistical analysis to identify which of the interventions described in the preceding section drove changes in UC Law SF's graduates' first-time bar pass rates in the period 2016-2023. It's worth noting at the outset that we could explain only about half the variation in outcomes using the

most comprehensive dataset UC Law SF has ever assembled for purposes of program assessment. That said, the biggest increase in first-time bar pass rates in UC Law SF's history occurred on the July 2019 administration of the California Bar Exam, before the change in California's cut score from 1440 to 1390, and before the pandemic. As indicated in Table 1, the class of 2019 was the first to receive the full benefit of a three-year J.D. program designed to include many of the most promising initiatives. The class of 2022 outcomes reveal persistent vulnerabilities explored below, especially for students admitted through LEOP.³²

The quantitative analysis in this study proceeds in two parts. First, we consider the extent to which changes in bar outcomes at UC Law SF were attributable to matters other than academic program design, including student metrics or other measured changes in the composition of the entering classes at UC Law SF. Second, we consider the extent to which specific measured interventions contributed to improved outcomes. To put this analysis in context, we also consider data regarding the impact of student choices unrelated to bar success interventions, such as decisions to participate in nonclassroom work (e.g., journals, fieldwork).

The authors pulled the dataset used for this study from multiple sources. The primary data source was UC Law SF's Ellucian Colleague student information system (SIS), which is built upon Datatel/Unidata. After the authors identified student demographic and curricular data to be included in the study, a UC Law SF programmer exported the data from within Colleague to a series of spreadsheets. The authors supplemented those data with other sources of information tracking student participation in cocurricular programs. All sources of data were then merged by student identification number, and the authors completed statistical analyses in Stata.

As noted, the combined dataset included information about 4726 UC Law SF graduates from 2010 to 2023.³³ To prepare the data for statistical analyses, the authors cleaned and merged nearly 100 data files exported from the UC Law SF Colleague SIS and other sources so that data for all studied graduating classes could be analyzed together. Across all these graduating classes, there were over 500 different variables, including curricular choices and grades, cocurricular activity participation, bar-preparatory courses, admissions data, and first-time bar exam outcomes. The authors aggregated the data and recoded the information into meaningful variables that could be used in statistical analyses. Because the UC Law SF curriculum and record-

32 The first-time pass rate for non-LEOP graduates on the July 2022 administration of the California Bar Exam was approximately 77% (above the statewide average first-time pass rate of graduates of ABA-accredited schools of 75%), compared with a first-time pass rate for LEOP graduates of 49% (well below the ABA average and below the much higher LEOP graduate pass rates in 2019–2021). That gap narrowed for the class of 2023 but persists.

33 For various reasons, the 2010 dataset was different from the dataset for later years, so many of the analyses covered the period 2011–2023, excluding 2010.

keeping practices changed over the thirteen-year study period, the authors first standardized and combined all the variables.

A. Predicting UC Law SF's Improvement

UC Law SF's first-time pass rates in the period 2019–2023 could not be explained as a function of changing metrics of incoming students or as a function of changes in the difficulty of the bar exam. But, as noted, nor could we fully explain the changes in first-time pass rates by looking only at the factors measured in the dataset. While the study's rich dataset could be used to predict California Bar Exam passage,³⁴ none of the statistical models perfectly predicted bar passage. Even the most robust models left variation unexplained, broadly similar in magnitude to previous published studies.³⁵ Even incorporating characteristics of the exam, student characteristics, curricular performance, and the various bar success interventions studied in this article, there were still factors such as student effort that were not captured by "objective" metrics.

Table 2 displays three separate model fit statistics for each predictive model: (1) the Nagelkerke/Cragg-Uhler pseudo- R^2 ,³⁶ (2) the "accuracy," or percentage of those who failed the California Bar Exam on their first attempt who had a predicted probability of passage less than 75%, and (3) "false positives," or percentage of those marked with a passage probability of less than 75% who actually did pass the California Bar Exam on their first attempt.³⁷ First, across all three sets of models, the model fit improved as we included predictors closer in time to the exam's administration. For the full 2011–2023 period, at graduation, 79.85% of the students who failed the California Bar Exam on their first attempt were correctly flagged as having an at-risk probability of

34 We used logistic regression models predicting first-attempt bar passage on the California Bar Exam for UC Law SF graduates. While all of the predictor variables were important to consider separately, which we do in later sections, below, the purpose of these models was to estimate the variation in bar passage that could be statistically predicted. We used four separate models, all spanning the graduating classes of UC Law SF in the period 2011–2023, with Model 1 also including 2010.

35 See, e.g., Amy N. Farley, Christopher M. Swoboda, Joel Chanvisanuruk, Keanen M. McKinley, Alicia Boards & Courtney Gilday, *A Deeper Look at Bar Success: The Relationship Between Law Student Success, Academic Performance, and Student Characteristics*, 16 J. EMPIRICAL LEGAL STUD. 605, 625 (2019) ("Our best model was still only able to identify 78 percent of students who did not pass the bar, meaning the other 22 percent of students who did not pass were misidentified.").

36 This version of a pseudo- R^2 fit statistic cannot be directly interpreted the same way that an R^2 is in linear regression, i.e., the percentage of variation in the outcome explained by the model. However, this version of pseudo- R^2 is most comparable to the interpretation here—as a relative measure of the proportion of variation in bar outcomes explained by the model.

37 We primarily focused our analyses on the latter two fit statistics. If one were to change the threshold for predicted probability of passage from 75%, these fit statistics would change. The choice of 75% mirrors that in Farley, et al., *supra* n. 34, at 618. In an ideal world, a model would maximize accuracy while minimizing false positives, and the values for pseudo- R^2 would approach 1.

passage of below 75%. However, false positive rates were high—45.93% of those marked as having at-risk probabilities below 75% ended up passing the bar exam on the first attempt. Fit statistics for these same students after their 1L year and on admission to UC Law SF were significantly worse, suggesting that performance in law school is an important predictor of first-time bar passage. If we attempted to predict passage on the first attempt using only admissions metrics, we would accurately flag only 66.54% of those who fail as having a probability of passage below 75%, and 60% of those that we would flag with this low probability would actually pass.

The second and third portions of Table 2 present the results of a similar analysis just for the 2020-2023 graduating classes. The second portion of Table 2 exactly matches the 2011-2023 analyses, while the third contains various academic program interventions before and after graduation.³⁸ Comparing these two portions of the table, we see that the inclusion of data relating to these interventions better predicted bar success for the 2020-2023 classes. However, even with these measures and the inclusion of postgraduation bar-preparatory work, a large portion of variation was still unexplained. Only 80.50% of UC Law SF graduates who failed the California Bar Exam on the first attempt were accurately flagged as having a probability of passage under 75%. Similarly, 43.71% of graduates who were identified as having a probability of passage under 75% actually passed the exam on the first attempt.

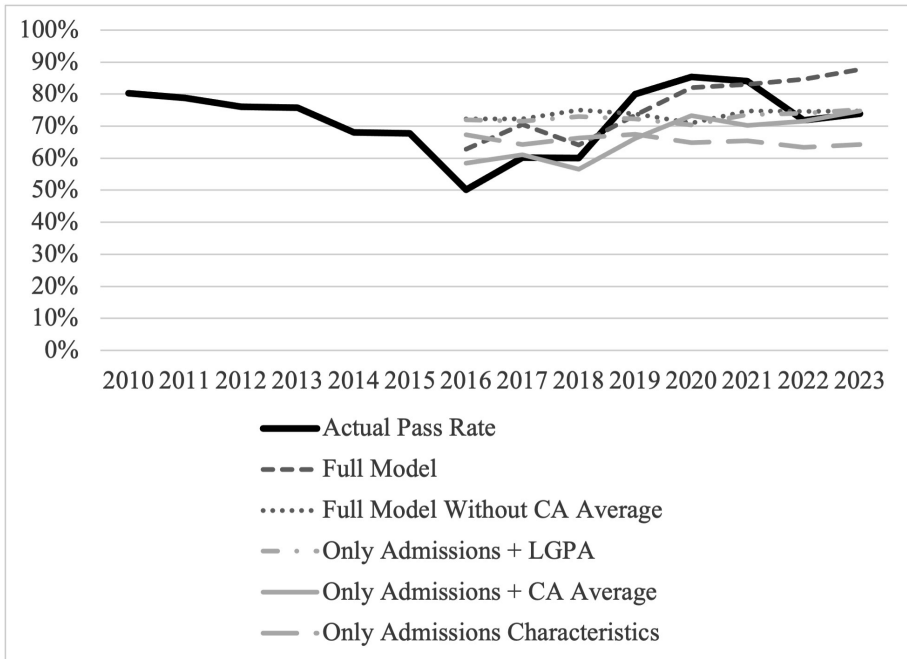
2011-2023	Nagelkerke		
	Pseudo-R ²	Accuracy	False Positives
Admissions Characteristics	0.149	66.54%	60.00%
After 1L	0.382	78.08%	47.39%
At Graduation	0.445	79.85%	45.93%
2020-2023	Nagelkerke		
	Pseudo-R ²	Accuracy	False Positives
Admissions Characteristics	0.106	47.35%	63.61%
After 1L	0.298	69.33%	53.43%
At Graduation	0.393	72.95%	50.97%

³⁸ The portion of the table without interventions for 2020-2023 is included solely as a reference, as the overall fit of the models for 2020-2023 is lower than the full 2011-2023 period. So, the results in the third portion of the table should be compared with the 2020-2023 period without interventions. The period 2020-2023 was chosen despite increases in 2019, as some interventions were not measured until the class of 2020.

2020-2023	Nagelkerke		
With Interventions	Pseudo-R ²	Accuracy	False Positives
Admissions Characteristics	0.106	47.35%	63.61%
After 1L	0.309	70.22%	51.38%
At Graduation	0.405	72.46%	50.16%
Postgraduation Prep	0.528	80.50%	43.71%

Table 2: Model Fit Statistics for Predicting First-Attempt California Bar Exam Passage

Figure 10: Predicting 2016-2023 CA First-Attempt Bar Passage from 2010-2015 UC Law SF Students



Could UC Law SF's decline in first-time bar passage rate in 2016 and relatively higher pass rates in the period 2018-2023 have been predicted? As indicated in Figure 10, above, we used data from UC Law SF students' performance on the California Bar Exam from 2010 to 2015 to predict average first-attempt pass rates for 2016-2023 with five different models.³⁹ First,

39 All lines except the actual pass rate were estimated from a logistic regression model predicting bar passage from the 2010-2015 graduating classes. The full model used final LGPA, 1L GPA, upper-division bar courses, nonclassroom units, LEOP, DRP, LSAT, UGPA, transfer

the admissions characteristics model used only information known upon admission to law school and predicted a relatively unchanging, flat trend with an average first-time pass rate in the mid- to high 60% range. Second, we estimated a model with admissions characteristics and the overall pass rate for ABA-accredited law schools in California for each exam administration to account for the overall difficulty of each exam administration. This model predicted a decline from 2015 to 2016, although not as large, and then a line that captured improvement through 2023 but did not capture the massive rise in pass rates for in the period 2019-2021. The model with only LGPA and admissions characteristics showed a pass rate roughly 5% higher than the model with only admissions characteristics, but it was also relatively flat and unchanging. When we incorporated curricular choices, including upper-division bar courses, we saw a slightly higher pass rate, suggesting number of bar courses taken in these class years predicted improved outcomes. Finally, the full model used student metrics known upon admission and performance in law school and added back in the overall pass rate for ABA-accredited law schools in California for each exam administration. This line appeared to fit the actual trend the best, particularly the improvements seen in 2019-2021, though it overestimated the pass rate before 2019 and after 2021.

Across all five predictive models, the pattern is clear: UC Law SF's graduates' aggregate performance on the exam was unexpectedly low in 2016-2018 and not explained by observable characteristics of the student body or the California Bar Exam. However, from 2019-2021, UC Law SF graduates' overall first-time pass rate on the California Bar Exam consistently *exceeded* expectations, given known metrics, including the impacts of the cut score change after July 2019. Together, this suggests that characteristics unmeasured in these models explained the significant increase in UC Law SF graduates' first-time pass rates after 2016.⁴⁰ Broadly speaking, these unmeasured characteristics were likely of two types—random chance or the numerous academic program changes that UC Law SF implemented in the study period not included in the models. Of course, some of the significant improvement in bar performance could have been due to chance. For bar results for 2022 and 2023, we saw a decline in bar

status, race, sex, and the average pass rate for ABA-accredited law schools in California for each administration. The uncertainty in prediction surrounding each of these models is not shown here to allow the plot to be readable. As shown in Table 2, however, predicting bar outcomes with precision was extraordinarily difficult, and these predicted pass rates thus contained a large amount of uncertainty. This uncertainty significantly varied across models, with the full model having the most precision.

40 Some commentators have suggested that law schools have achieved improved bar outcomes primarily by changing whom they admit or graduate. *See, e.g.,* Rory Bahadur, Kevin Ruth & Katie Tolliver Jones, *Reexamining Relative Bar Performance as a Function of Non-Linearity, Heteroscedasticity, and a New Independent Variable*, 52 N.M. L. REV. 119 (2022) (building on and critiquing Jeffrey S. Kinsler & Jeffrey Omar Usman, *Law Schools, Bar Passage, and Under and Over-Performing Expectations*, 36 QUINNIPIAC L. REV. 183 (2018)). UC Law SF achieved improved bar outcomes in ways that are not explained by changing metrics of its students, which, as indicated in Section I, Figures 2-3, were relatively flat year over year during the period in which law school outcomes improved the most. *See infra* note 41.

performance but no clear decline in any of the predictive models, suggesting this decline was not due to admissions characteristics, curricular choices, or other variables analyzed in these models. This suggests several possibilities, including pandemic effects,⁴¹ changes in the level of student engagement with interventions, or simply randomness.

As described in the next section, we conducted numerous tests of the effect of specific interventions to help rule out the possibility that UC Law SF's improved bar outcomes starting with the class of 2019 were the result of chance. The results also helped us identify the most impactful bar success interventions. While overall models at the level of a school are instructive, they do not indicate which particular interventions made a difference, nor do they allow the level of precision that analyses of individual students provides. This highlights a weakness of school-level studies of bar outcomes, because in explaining aggregate outcomes across schools, we cannot necessarily understand the individual-level mechanisms that led to these changes.⁴²

B. Efficacy of Measured Interventions

Some of the academic program design and bar success interventions described in Section II appear to have materially and positively impacted UC Law SF's first-time bar pass rate in the period 2017–2023. Other interventions for which it was possible to undertake statistical analyses do not appear to have been primary drivers of the increase in pass rates, though the degree of impact may have been masked by factors such as student engagement that are difficult to directly measure.

What independent impact did each of the measured factors have on students' LGPA and first-time California Bar Exam passage? We attempted to answer this question using statistical analysis while controlling for the effects of several additional contributing factors, such as student metrics, curricular choices, and academic program design changes.⁴³ Some of the

41 For example, class of 2023 graduates experienced their formative 1L year online, and their exams were administered in take-home, open-book format instead of the usual in-person, closed-book format for 1L doctrinal exams. The most vulnerable of them took classes in crowded homes where other family members were in the room with them while they were taking classes or studying. Some of the most at-risk students in the class of 2023 also had significant caregiving responsibilities during the period they were in lockdown.

42 This is known as an ecological inference problem. In this case, the predictive models described in this section used individual student-level data aggregated to the level of the school, which is why we unpack them in the next section. Studies of bar exam outcomes and student characteristics that use aggregate school-level data reported through ABA 509 disclosure forms suffer from this problem of inference. *See supra* note 39.

43 In each model, we attempted to make the set of control variables as parsimonious as possible, restricting it to variables we expected to confound the relationships of interest. Confounding variables are related to both our causal variable of interest and outcome and can induce a relationship between them, even when a variable has no causal effect. For example, if only higher-LGPA students took more bar subject classes, and we examined the relationship between bar subject classes and California Bar Exam outcomes, we might be misled, as part of the effect attributed to the coursework would be due to the higher LGPAs

estimated effects were “statistically significant,” meaning that we have some degree of confidence that the association is not likely due to chance. Others did not achieve conventional levels of statistical significance but nevertheless helped paint a fuller picture of the impact of various interventions on student success.⁴⁴ As noted, the measured and studied initiatives and academic program changes were not randomized, because many of them were implemented for an entire new entering class, while others required student participation and engagement. While this means that one should use caution in interpreting findings as causal, the descriptive patterns are informative for many academic program changes.

I. Characteristics Known Upon Admission

First, we estimated a series of regression models that predicted students' 1L GPA, final LGPA, and California Bar Exam passage on first attempt (“California Bar Exam passage”) from characteristics known on admission and interventions in students' 1L year of law school.⁴⁵ While our focus was primarily on the effects of academic program changes, these models controlled for a wide variety of known predictors of GPA and California Bar Exam outcomes.⁴⁶ The estimates of these predictors were not surprising—both LSAT

of students. We were also careful to avoid posttreatment bias by avoiding controlling for variables measured after particular interventions. We did so by including as controls only variables that were measured before the intervention, curricular choice, or academic program change took place.

44 Quantitative statistical analyses typically dichotomize outcomes as statistically significant or as not statistically significant. However, this dichotomy can be reductive and therefore misleading. The estimated effects we report are our best guess of the impact of the variables in this section. Even if a variable is statistically significant, this may be due to chance. If a variable has an impact that is not statistically significant, this may also be due to chance, or it may be due to lack of statistical power, a common problem with smaller datasets. Importantly, consistency of effects across time and models should be considered as evidence of the robustness of a particular association. Statistical significance provides information about the uncertainty of estimates, not the value of the estimates themselves—and depending on the control variables included, the size of the subgroups with particular combinations of characteristics, and more, we may be more or less uncertain about particular estimates.

45 All models in this section were ordinary least squares (OLS). While some might argue a nonlinear model is more appropriate for predicting bar passage, as it is dichotomous, OLS produces unbiased estimates of effects even with dichotomous outcomes, and its estimated effects are more easily interpretable.

46 The models contained the following control variables: LEOP admission, Disability Resource Program (DRP) status, LSAT, UGPA, transfer status, nonwhite, race unknown, female, age bins (up to 26, 26–30, 30–35, over 35), graduation year fixed effects, and the other variables in this table that shared the same period. Models for bar passage also controlled for the average first-time pass rate of graduates of all ABA-accredited law schools in California for that administration by entering the average pass rate for the exam administration statewide, which controlled for varying difficulty of the California Bar Exam across administrations. By having these control variables in the model, we effectively “held them constant,” or removed any shared variability that they had with other variables or interventions of interest. For LEOP and LGPA quartile subgroups, we estimated separate models for clarity. Because we estimated the control variables separately in each subgroup in these models, the overall

and UGPA were positive and significant predictors of 1L and 3L cumulative (final) LGPA and California Bar Exam passage.⁴⁷ We found statistically significant effects for 3L GPA for gender; female students achieved LGPAs that were 0.032 points higher. We also found consistent negative effects for all three outcomes for being registered with the law school's Disability Resource Program, corresponding to 1L GPAs 0.118 points lower, 3L GPAs 0.092 points lower, and a 10.9% lower probability of California Bar Exam passage. Controlling for other variables in the model, such as LSAT and UGPA, transfer students had significantly higher LGPAs than nontransfer students and a 14.8% higher probability of California Bar Exam passage. While age was not a significant predictor of GPA or California Bar Exam passage, nonwhite students had 1L GPAs 0.092 points lower, 3L GPAs 0.083 points lower, and a 5.9% lower probability of California Bar Exam passage than white students.

Admission through the Legal Education Opportunity Program was associated with a 4.9% lower probability of first-time bar passage and a 0.040 higher 1L GPA, although it was not statistically significantly related to final LGPA. This association was present even when controlling for entering metrics. The association was not present in earlier class years (2017–2021). However, because of lower-than-expected performance among LEOP students in the 2022 and 2023 exams, we saw a significant association with LEOP.⁴⁸ Overall, these baseline results were as expected—with only characteristics known upon admission, our models are not highly predictive of law school and California Bar Exam performance, and the strongest predictors among this initial subset of variables are measures highly selected upon admission, i.e., LSAT and undergraduate GPA.

2. J.D. 1L Interventions: Cocurricular Academic Skills Programming and Legal Analysis I

Table 3, below, shows the estimated effects of a subset⁴⁹ of the J.D. 1L academic program interventions UC Law SF adopted to improve academic

effect was not a weighted average of the effect in all subgroups. We also estimated models separately for each of the outcomes, without controlling for the previous outcomes along the way (i.e., when estimating the effect on final LGPA, we did not control for overall 1L GPA).

- 47 When controlling for all other variables in the model, an increase of one point of LSAT was associated with increases of 0.0273 and 0.0217 in 1L and final LGPAs, respectively, and an increase of 0.0177 in the probability of California Bar Exam passage. An increase of 1 in undergraduate GPA (e.g., 3.0 to 4.0) was associated with increases of 0.217 and 0.245 in 1L and final LGPA, respectively, and an increase in the probability of passing the California Bar Exam on the first attempt of 0.173. These effects were relatively linear across the range of each predictor variable.
- 48 Graduation year and bar exam result fixed effects are not described here, although some were statistically significant, which was to be expected, as graduation classes and the California Bar Exam have varied over time.
- 49 Because of measurement challenges and the lack of a control group, we did not analyze some of the potentially most impactful 1L interventions in this analysis, including early advising about bar skills and success, the introduction of the Sack Program (described in Table 1), and pedagogical changes. However, indirect evidence of the efficacy of pedagogical changes

performance and California Bar Exam first-time passage rates for the overall student body (including LEOP and non-LEOP students), LEOP students only, and LGPA quartiles separately.⁵⁰ All the effects can be interpreted as the estimated change in that outcome (either GPA on a 0–4 scale or probability of California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt, 0–1) associated with a one-unit increase in that variable.⁵¹ Participation in UC Law SF Office for Academic Skills Instruction and Support cocurricular academic skills programming in the 1L year (for the 2020–2023 graduating classes) was a mixed predictor of 1L GPA and California Bar Exam outcomes, with its effect depending on the type of participation.⁵² Specifically, participation in the student-led Discussion Group Leader Program overseen by the Office for Academic Skills Instruction and Support was significantly positively associated with LGPA outcomes as well as California Bar Exam passage probability, while the outcomes for individual office hours with specialized skills faculty and faculty-led group workshop attendance were not significant. In fact, for LEOP students, we found consistently *negative* and significant effects of office hours attendance (regardless of whether the office hours were staffed by a LEOP-dedicated academic skills specialist or by other OASIS faculty used by general J.D. students) and a negative effect for all students on the probability of first-time bar passage.

While a few other subgroup analyses for LEOP and GPA quartiles showed statistically significant results, including several that were negative,

may be present in the data regarding the increased efficacy of additional upper-division bar classes in the period after 2016, discussed below.

50 While the authors included control variables in these models, such variables are not presented here for simplicity. Controls included LEOP admission, Disability Resource Program (DRP) status, LSAT, UGPA, transfer status, nonwhite, race unknown, female, age bins (up to 26, 26–30, 30–35, over 35), graduation year fixed effects, and the first-attempt California Bar Exam pass rate for a given exam administration for the California Bar Exam model only. Additionally, the models controlled for the other interventions when assessing each intervention. The use of the first-attempt California Bar Exam pass rate as a control variable accounted for changes in the cut score and anything else that affected the average pass rate statewide across exam administrations.

51 The tables in this section denote statistical significance by the presence of one, two, or three asterisks. Through all the models, we have reported three levels of statistical significance: $p < 0.1$, meaning that even if there were no association, 10% of the time we would achieve a result as large or larger just by chance; $p < 0.05$, corresponding to 5%; and $p < 0.01$, corresponding to 1%. While $p < 0.05$ is most commonly used in social science, we have displayed all three for a broader picture, particularly when models lack statistical power because of small sample sizes in particular subgroups.

52 Because we analyzed data for graduates only, some effects of pregraduation cocurricular interventions may have been masked because academically disqualified students and students who do not sit for the California Bar Exam were not included in the analyses. In text, we have used the $p < 0.1$ threshold to discuss significance because of the relative lack of statistical power in many of these analyses. While this does increase the probability of committing a Type I error (that is, a false positive—finding a statistically significant effect when one does not actually exist), the tables display higher significance thresholds if one wishes to use those, and we emphasize where caution is warranted in interpretation in text.

there did not appear to be a clear pattern to these.⁵³ On the other hand, increasing numbers of students in recent matriculating cohorts have exhibited characteristics of passive learners insofar as they have proactively sought answers to questions but have struggled to take responsibility for identifying and honing academic success skills via practice and self-reflection. We suspect that the reported effects of individual office hours—i.e., that students who more frequently use academic skills specialist office hours do worse—may be measuring this passivity. UC Law SF is thus experimenting with initiatives to promote student self-directedness.⁵⁴

Intervention / Factor	Subgroup	Effect on 1L GPA (0-4)	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
OASIS Discussion Group Leader Program Attendance (2020-2023)	Overall	0.0214***	0.0149***	0.0100**
	LEOP	0.0300***	0.0182**	0.0048
	1st Quartile ⁵⁵	0.0023	0.0034	0.0029
	2nd Quartile	0.0018	-0.0014	0.0046
	3rd Quartile	0.0040	0.0011	-0.0095
	4th Quartile	0.0035	-0.0024	-0.0072
OASIS Office Hours Attendance (2020-2023)	Overall	-0.0041	-0.0011	-0.0081**
	LEOP	-0.0135**	-0.0073*	-0.0161*
	1st Quartile	0.0053	0.0020	0.0022
	2nd Quartile	0.0011	-0.0034**	-0.0058
	3rd Quartile	0.0031	-0.0001	-0.0021
	4th Quartile	0.0013	0.0026	-0.0098

53 There is no obvious causal story as to why attendance at an OASIS cocurricular event in the 1L year would have caused a student to do worse on the California Bar Exam several years later. There are, however, several possible explanations. For example, it is possible that the relationship was just purely due to chance or that the relationship was confounded by the fact that students choosing to attend OASIS/academic support cocurricular events may have been those who were likely to need more help.

54 See Michael Hunter Schwartz, *Teaching Law Students to be Self-Regulated Learners*, 2003 MICH. ST. DCL L. REV. 447 (2003).

55 In all tables, quartiles for 1L GPA are 1L GPA Quartiles; the rest are final LGPA Quartiles. The first quartile is the top 25% of the class, and the fourth quartile is the bottom 25% by GPA. LEOP impacts are separately reported, but LEOP students are also included in the quartile subgroups.

Intervention / Factor	Subgroup	Effect on iL GPA (0-4)	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
OASIS Workshop Attendance (2020-2023)	Overall	0.0167	0.0106	0.0112
	LEOP	0.0232	0.0144	0.0308
	1st Quartile	0.0315**	0.0023	-0.0134**
	2nd Quartile	-0.0063	0.0050	0.0159
	3rd Quartile	-0.0054	-0.0013	0.0076
	4th Quartile	-0.0030	-0.0035	-0.0099
Legal Analysis I (2011-2020)	Overall	-0.5290***	-0.3940***	-0.3650***
	LEOP	-0.4980***	-0.3680***	-0.4250***
	3rd Quartile	-0.0102	-0.0349***	-0.0743
	4th Quartile	-0.2260***	-0.1340***	-0.1130***
LEOP-only Interventions (2021-2023)	# of practice exams	0.0485**	0.0325***	0.0158
	# of tutorials	0.0034	0.0057	0.0040

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 3. Effects of iL Academic Program Interventions on LGPA and California Bar Exam Outcomes

When examining the dataset for the entire graduating class, we found that Legal Analysis I, a curricular intervention that predated UC Law SF's post-2016 academic program revamp and that was discontinued in 2018, was associated with lower GPAs and lower probability of California Bar Exam passage.⁵⁶ The course was designed for the most at-risk students based on LGPA after the first semester of law school, and the significant negative effects were limited to the fourth quartile, suggesting the associations might have been due to this targeting. The negative effect may have resulted from factors other than the efficacy of the course that were simply not measured by other control variables. UC Law SF replaced Legal Analysis I, a standalone course on the skill of legal analysis that was detached from any one course's doctrine or substantive law, with the Law & Process model of Constitutional Law I in the iL year and of upper-division bar subject classes; likely because of some of the same factors, the Law & Process classes showed a similar lack of efficacy in terms of improving bar outcomes, as described more fully below.

⁵⁶ Only thirteen students in the first or second GPA quartiles were enrolled in Legal Analysis I in this entire period, so these quartiles are excluded from the table.

Finally, for the 2021–2023 graduating classes, we estimated the effect of two interventions intended to help LEOP students during their 1L year—practice exams and tutorial sessions.⁵⁷ While statistical significance was hard to achieve given the smaller numbers of LEOP graduates,⁵⁸ we saw a significantly positive effect of practice exams on 1L & final LGPA, with each practice exam taken associated with a 0.049 increase in 1L GPA, and a 0.033 increase in final LGPA.

3. Upper-Division Bar Subject Classes

We also analyzed the efficacy of bar success interventions aimed at upper-division students (2Ls and 3Ls).⁵⁹ First, we unpacked the estimated effects on LGPA and California Bar Exam passage of taking additional upper-division bar subject courses tested on the California Bar Exam (e.g., business associations, constitutional law, and evidence). Table 4 presents the results.⁶⁰ Because UC Law SF made significant changes to pedagogical techniques (teaching and assessment methods) in bar subject courses starting in the 2016–2017 academic year, we separately estimated effects for graduates in the 2017–2023 period. We saw positive and significant effects across the full study period, although they were larger after 2016, suggesting that pervasive changes to teaching and testing methods described in Section II may have had an effect that is indirectly measured in the increase in the efficacy of bar subject classes.

57 We assessed these LEOP interventions for the 2021–2023 graduating classes because UC Law SF began systematically tracking these 1L interventions in 2018. As a result, we did not have reliable participation data for earlier years.

58 About 15%–20% of each class was admitted through the Legal Education Opportunity Program during the study period.

59 For these models, we included all the control variables above plus 1L GPA, all of which are positive and significant predictors of final LGPA and California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt. Additionally, we included all of the variables analyzed in this section on 2L and 3L interventions in the same overall model.

60 One could model the effect of each of the different bar subject courses (e.g., Business Associations, Evidence) separately to see if any one course were more impactful than others. Unfortunately, the number of classes and the highly variable enrollments/distribution made it difficult to robustly measure the impact of each by itself, which explains why we assessed the efficacy of bar subject classes overall rather than by specific bar subject course.

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on California Bar Exam Probability (0-1)
Upper-Division Bar Courses (2017-2023)	Overall	-0.0012	0.0334***
	LEOP	-0.0039	0.0196
	1st Quartile	0.0033	0.0182***
	2nd Quartile	0.0016	0.0340***
	3rd Quartile	-0.0028	0.0377**
	4th Quartile	-0.0051	0.0365**
Upper-Division Bar Courses (2011-2016)	Overall	-0.0043**	0.0102*
	LEOP	-0.0013	-0.0172
	1st Quartile	0.0019	0.0076
	2nd Quartile	-0.0001	0.0197*
	3rd Quartile	-0.0021	0.0214
	4th Quartile	0.0018	-0.0038

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 4. Effects of Upper-Division Bar Subject Courses on LGPA and California Bar Exam Outcomes

Specifically, over the entire period, we found that each additional bar subject class was associated with a final LGPA lower in magnitude, although it is not statistically significant after 2016. This is likely because most bar subject classes were subject to the law school's mandatory grade normalization requirements (curve), so the grade distribution in these courses was generally and significantly lower than in nonbar courses. After 2016, each additional bar subject course was associated with an increase in the probability of bar passage of 0.033, or a 3.3% increase. While this effect was not statistically significant for LEOP students, it was positive and relatively consistent in magnitude across all four LGPA quartiles.⁶¹ While the estimated effects were still generally positive, they were smaller for the 2011-2016 graduating classes, with an estimated effect of 0.010 increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage, or 1%, for each additional bar subject class taken by UC Law SF students in that period. Additionally, analyzing the bivariate relationship between bar subject courses and California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt, we saw that the effect was relatively linear from 2017 to 2023, suggesting gains with each additional

61 Additionally, when we examined 2021-2023 graduates, we continued to see positive and statistically significant impacts of bar subject coursework, even if such courses were taught online during the pandemic.

course, while the relationship from 2011 to 2016 suggested a plateau, and even potentially a slight decline after six upper-division bar subject courses.

4. Upper-Division Curricular Interventions to Improve Bar Outcomes

We assessed five additional upper-division (post-1L year) curricular changes: three courses intended as preparatory for the California Bar Exam (Critical Studies 1, 2, and 3),⁶² which we analyzed separately from 2011 to 2016 and 2017 to 2023; Legal Analysis 2 (which ended in the 2018 graduating class); and “Law & Process” versions of upper-division bar courses, a replacement for Legal Analysis 2. Table 5 displays the estimated effects of the critical analysis courses on final LGPA and California Bar Exam outcomes, while Table 6 displays the estimated effects of Legal Analysis 2 and its replacement, Law & Process courses. Critical Studies 1 was negatively associated with final LGPA and California Bar Exam passage. The effects were concentrated among LEOP students from 2011 to 2016. The 2017–2023 version of Critical Studies 1, however, showed no statistically significant association with GPA or probability of first-time bar passage. Critical Studies 2, offered for 2017–2023 graduates, was also associated with lower final LGPAs but did not have an overall statistically significant association with first-time bar passage. However, we saw a large, positive, and statistically significant effect for students in the fourth GPA quartile. For Critical Studies 3, offered for 2020–2023 graduates, positive associations with California Bar Exam passage were statistically significant for the third quartile.

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
Critical Studies 1 (2011–2016)	Overall	-0.0925***	-0.1030***
	LEOP	-0.1390***	-0.1420**
	1st Quartile	0.0238	-0.1730**
	2nd Quartile	0.0019	0.1230
	3rd Quartile	0.0006	-0.0341
	4th Quartile	-0.1080***	-0.0395

62 See *supra* note 24 (describing these courses).

2010-2023

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
Critical Studies 1 (2017-2023)	Overall	-0.0074	-0.0103
	LEOP	0.0072	-0.0589
	1st Quartile	-0.0126	0.0248
	2nd Quartile	-0.0095	-0.0239
	3rd Quartile	0.0064	0.0770
	4th Quartile	0.0170	-0.0971*
Critical Studies 2 (2017-2023)	Overall	-0.0202***	0.0273
	LEOP	0.0071	0.0346
	1st Quartile	-0.0145	0.0079
	2nd Quartile	-0.0107	-0.0074
	3rd Quartile	-0.0033	0.0210
	4th Quartile	-0.0095	0.1370**
Critical Studies 3 (2020-2023)	Overall	-0.0211**	0.0387
	LEOP	0.0023	0.0999
	1st Quartile	-0.0006	0.0073
	2nd Quartile	-0.0049	0.0466
	3rd Quartile	-0.0071	0.1140*
	4th Quartile	-0.0225	0.0093

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 5. Effects of 2L & 3L Coursework on GPA & California Bar Exam Passage

Table 6 shows that Legal Analysis 2, offered for 2011-2018 graduates, was not significantly associated with final LGPA but was negatively associated with California Bar Exam passage.⁶³ Table 6 also shows the results of our assessment of Law & Process versions of bar subject courses, a curricular offering intended to replace and move beyond the standalone legal analysis course. Such courses were significantly associated with an increase in final LGPA but not in the probability of California Bar Exam passage. Each additional course was

63 Fewer than ten students in the first or second quartile took Legal Analysis 2 in the study period, so these quartiles were excluded from the analysis. The fact that few high-performing students took this class likely drove the overall negative result.

associated with an increase in LGPA of 0.030. This effect was most clearly present for LEOP students and those in the first and fourth LGPA quartiles.⁶⁴

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
Legal Analysis 2 (2011-2018)	Overall	-0.0176	-0.0845**
	LEOP	-0.0102	-0.1040
	3rd Quartile	0.0001	0.0527
	4th Quartile	0.0037	-0.0172
Law & Process Courses (2017- 2023)	Overall	0.0301***	-0.0307*
	LEOP	0.0129	-0.0452
	1st Quartile	0.0272**	-0.0017
	2nd Quartile	-0.0078	0.0256
	3rd Quartile	0.0031	-0.1030***
	4th Quartile	0.0239***	-0.0321

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 6. Effects of Legal Analysis 2 and Law & Process Courses on GPA & California Bar Exam Passage

5. Other Curricular Choices

To give us more perspective on the bar success curricular interventions UC Law SF adopted during the study period, we also examined the impact of other curricular choices that students made in their 2L and 3L years, with the estimated effects of eight of them shown in Table 7.⁶⁵ This section describes what we found but does not address the efficacy of bar success interventions per se and instead explores the broader question of the effect of competing curricular choices that students inevitably make in their 2L and 3L years.

First, we saw positive and statistically significant overall effects of earning credit for serving as a teaching assistant (TA) or research assistant (RA) on final LGPA, with each unit of credit associated with a 0.012 or 0.016 increase

64 While we saw a statistically significant and negative effect on the probability of first-time bar passage for those in the third quartile, and a slight negative association overall, driven by this strong association in the third quartile, we did not identify a plausible causal mechanism here.

65 Examining the effects of these eight factors over a shorter time frame, i.e., 2017-2023, we found that the estimated effects were nearly identical in substantive interpretation. We show the estimated effects over the entire study period because doing so gives us greater statistical power. We estimated these effects while controlling for the effects of the other variables in this section.

in GPA, respectively. However, we did not see overall statistically significant effects on the probability of California Bar Exam passage for RA units. This is not surprising, because TA work often reinforces core California Bar Exam success skills, whereas RA work often involves tasks like coding of empirical data that may not directly hone the skills necessary for success on the California Bar Exam. For LGPA outcomes, we saw that these effects were generally largest and sometimes statistically significant for those in LEOP and those in the fourth LGPA quartile. For California Bar Exam outcomes, we saw that teaching assistant units were significant predictors of exam passage for LEOP students and those in the fourth quartile.⁶⁶ For example, each TA credit a LEOP student earned was associated with a 0.052 (or 5.2%) increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt for fourth-GPA-quartile students.

Units of academic credit earned in student competitions (e.g., moot court) were a statistically significant predictor of California Bar Exam passage but not of LGPA. Overall, we saw that each credit earned was associated with a 1.1% increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage. The effects appeared to be concentrated among upper LGPA quartiles, although their statistical significance varied. Credits/units earned in judicial externships were a statistically significant predictor of both LGPA and California Bar Exam passage, with each additional unit of academic credit associated with an increase of 0.005 in GPA and a 0.6% increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage. These effects for both LGPA and California Bar Exam passage appeared to be concentrated among LEOP and fourth-quartile students.

For the number of experiential course fieldwork units earned, we saw a positive and statistically significant effect on the probability of California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt. Each unit of academic credit was associated with a 0.7% increase. We did not see significant associations with LGPA, and the largest associations with first-time bar passage were concentrated among students in the second and fourth LGPA quartiles.

66 While it is not common for fourth-quartile LGPA students to serve as TAs, the UC Law SF academic regulations require students serving as TAs to have earned a minimum grade in the class for which they are serving as TAs and do not have a minimum LGPA requirement.

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
TA Units Completed (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0107***	0.0153**
	LEOP	0.0201***	0.0643***
	1st Quartile	0.0062**	-0.0013
	2nd Quartile	0.0020	-0.0025
	3rd Quartile	-0.0013	0.0206
	4th Quartile	0.0163**	0.0515*
RA Units Completed (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0162***	-0.0043
	LEOP	-0.0074	0.0276
	1st Quartile	0.0105*	0.0077
	2nd Quartile	0.0028	-0.0218
	3rd Quartile	0.0058	0.0334
	4th Quartile	0.0185	-0.0353
Competition Units Completed (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0010	0.0110***
	LEOP	-0.0015	0.0255*
	1st Quartile	-0.0008	0.0074**
	2nd Quartile	-0.0002	0.0118**
	3rd Quartile	0.0016	0.0095
	4th Quartile	0.0030	0.0057
Judicial Externship Units Completed (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0045***	0.0053***
	LEOP	0.0043**	0.0058
	1st Quartile	0.0002	0.0041***
	2nd Quartile	0.0009	-0.0022
	3rd Quartile	-0.0004	0.0006
	4th Quartile	0.0060***	0.0122*
Fieldwork Units Completed (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0007	0.0066***
	LEOP	0.0000	0.0079*
	1st Quartile	-0.0013	0.0033*
	2nd Quartile	-0.0001	0.0062*
	3rd Quartile	0.0000	0.0032
	4th Quartile	0.0018	0.0079*

2010-2023

Intervention/ Factor	Subgroup	Effect on Final LGPA (0-4)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
Journal Participation (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0066	0.0218
	LEOP	0.0226	0.1110**
	1st Quartile	0.0008	-0.0041
	2nd Quartile	-0.0023	0.0051
	3rd Quartile	-0.0013	0.0070
	4th Quartile	0.0097	0.0708
Study Abroad (2011-2023)	Overall	-0.0159	0.0293
	LEOP	-0.0443*	-0.0178
	1st Quartile	-0.0303*	-0.0850***
	2nd Quartile	-0.0030	0.0208
	3rd Quartile	-0.0103	0.0618
	4th Quartile	-0.0127	0.0544
Concentration (2011-2023)	Overall	0.0236***	0.0044
	LEOP	0.0012	0.0156
	1st Quartile	0.0112	-0.0264*
	2nd Quartile	-0.0022	-0.0036
	3rd Quartile	0.0000	-0.0275
	4th Quartile	0.0302***	-0.0016

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 7. Effects of Other 2L & 3L Curricular Choices on GPA & California Bar Exam Passage

Conventional wisdom is that journal work increases the probability of first-time passage on the California Bar Exam. Study abroad and earning a J.D. concentration certificate (i.e., specializing) are often believed to negatively impact first-time bar passage rates. Our findings did not fully match the conventional wisdom. For journal participation, we saw no statistically significant effect on LGPA or California Bar Exam passage overall, but we did see positive and statistically significant effects on California Bar Exam passage for LEOP students. We found that students who studied abroad had slightly lower LGPAs, and that this effect was concentrated in the first quartile. Additionally, for the first quartile, study abroad was associated with an 8.5% decrease in the probability of California Bar Exam passage. Finally, we found that students who completed the requirements to earn a concentration

certificate had significantly higher LGPAs, 0.024 higher than those who did not; but there was no clear association with California Bar Exam passage.

6. Postgraduation Interventions

For the graduating classes 2017–2023, we also assessed postgraduation bar success interventions. Specifically, we considered the effects of graduates' choice of commercial bar company (Themis, BarBri, etc.) and the impact of varying degrees to which graduates completed their commercial bar preparation courses or participated in supplemental postgraduation law school bar support programming (the BEST Program), including taking practice essays administered by the law school or using AdaptiBar. We estimated models predicting California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt, displayed in Table 9.⁶⁷ If we just considered whether a graduate participated in these programs at all, we saw only some statistically significant differences in California Bar Exam passage probability, particularly for BarBri, Themis, and BEST. That is largely because a binary analysis (participation or nonparticipation) fails to account for engagement.

However, when we considered *how much* of this work graduates completed,⁶⁸ we saw the massive impact that completion of these postgraduation programs can have. For commercial bar preparation courses BarBri, Kaplan, and Themis, we found that completing 100% of the program (versus 0% of it) was associated with a 32.5%, 29.7%, and 42.9% increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage on the first attempt.⁶⁹ These effects were generally large and positive, although their statistical significance varied across subgroups and were greatest in magnitude among lower GPA quartiles.

With BEST, UC Law SF's supplemental postgraduation bar study program offered to recent graduates studying for the California Bar Exam, we found an increase in the probability of first-time bar passage of 0.0038 (or 0.38%) for each practice essay submitted. Participation in BEST involved more than just doing practice essays because trained faculty and other bar tutors scored and provided individualized feedback on each practice essay. In 2022 and

67 These models controlled for all of the variables in preceding models—admissions characteristics, 1L performance, and 2L/3L curricular choices, as well as final LGPA. Unsurprisingly, final LGPA was a statistically significant predictor of first-time bar passage.

68 For BarBri, Kaplan, and Themis, the measure was from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating that a graduate completed 0% of the program and 1 indicating that the graduate completed 100% of the program. AdaptiBar engagement was measured in the hundreds of questions answered correctly. BEST engagement was measured as a function of the number of practice essays submitted for feedback. Because of a few outliers, any student who completed more than twenty-five BEST essays (the 99th percentile) was winsorized and recoded to twenty-five.

69 These effects were linear across the percentage of course completion, too, with no clear “threshold” beyond which bar passage was more likely. Because of their linear nature, it was possible to interpret an increase in the probability of bar passage in smaller increments, as well. For example, completion of 10% of the BarBri postgraduation commercial bar preparation course was associated with an increase in the probability of California Bar Exam passage of 3.25%; completion of 10% of Kaplan was associated with an increase of 2.97%; and completion of 10% of Themis is associated with an increase of 4.29%.

2023, especially, we noticed that some at-risk students substituted practice essays for commercial bar course completion, which was not a successful bar success strategy for the reasons noted in the preceding paragraph, given the dramatically positive effects of course completion.

With AdaptiBar, we saw an increase in the probability of first-time bar passage of 0.0083 (or 0.83%) for every 100 questions answered correctly.⁷⁰ Effects appeared to be concentrated in the lowest GPA quartiles. Once a graduate answered roughly 1000 AdaptiBar questions correctly, the probability of first-time bar passage was nearly 100%, although this changed slightly from year to year, partly owing to the small number of students who completed that many practice MBE questions.

All of these estimated effects on California Bar Exam passage controlled for the effects of each other—suggesting that these gains were additive and not eclipsed by one preparatory method or another.

Intervention / Factor	Subgroup	Participation/ Indicator	Usage/Completion
		Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)	Effect on Probability of First-Time Bar Passage (0-1)
BarBri (2017-2023)	Overall	0.1090*	0.3250***
	LEOP	0.0979	0.4400***
	1st Quartile	-0.0229	0.0997***
	2nd Quartile	0.3820***	0.4730***
	3rd Quartile	0.0913	0.2280**
	4th Quartile	-0.2010	0.2020*
Kaplan (2017-2023)	Overall	0.0605	0.2970***
	LEOP	-0.0592	0.4530*
	1st Quartile	-0.0777	0.0661
	2nd Quartile	0.0806	0.2510**
	3rd Quartile	0.3020*	0.3910***
	4th Quartile	-0.0797	0.2800

70 This effect also appeared to be linear across the full span of questions answered, up to a 100% pass rate.

		Participation/ Indicator	Usage/Completion
Themis (2017-2023)	Overall	0.1720***	0.4290***
	LEOP	0.1950	0.6770***
	1st Quartile	-0.0348	0.0980***
	2nd Quartile	0.3750***	0.5070***
	3rd Quartile	0.2250	0.4220***
	4th Quartile	0.4480	0.5800***
BEST (2017- 2023)	Overall	0.0746***	0.0038*
	LEOP	0.1060	0.0089*
	1st Quartile	0.0097	0.0009
	2nd Quartile	0.0612*	0.0022
	3rd Quartile	0.1560***	0.0103**
	4th Quartile	0.0483	0.0281
AdaptiBar (2017-2023)	Overall	0.0409	0.0083***
	LEOP	-0.0536	0.0093
	1st Quartile	-0.0118	0.0018
	2nd Quartile	0.0072	0.0098**
	3rd Quartile	0.0509	0.0163**
	4th Quartile	0.1690*	0.0117
Private Tutor (2017-2023)	Overall	0.0809	-
	LEOP	0.0800	-
	1st Quartile	0.0041	-
	2nd Quartile	-0.0064	-
	3rd Quartile	0.0789	-
	4th Quartile	0.1930	-
Obligations (2019-2021)	Overall	-0.0237	-
	LEOP	-0.0795	-
	1st Quartile	-0.0056	-
	2nd Quartile	-0.0453	-
	3rd Quartile	-0.2389**	-
	4th Quartile	0.1006	-

		Participation/ Indicator	Usage/Completion
AdaptiBar Funds (2020- 2021)	Overall	0.0163	-
	LEOP	0.3460*	-
	1st Quartile	-0.0072	-
	2nd Quartile	0.0332	-
	3rd Quartile	0.0718	-
	4th Quartile	0.0502	-
Bar Prep Funds (2020- 2021)	Overall	0.0065	-
	LEOP	-0.0980	-
	1st Quartile	0.0000	-
	2nd Quartile	0.1361	-
	3rd Quartile	-0.0698	-
	4th Quartile	-0.1177	-

Guide to statistical significance: * = $p < 0.1$, ** = $p < 0.05$, *** = $p < 0.01$

Table 8. Effects of Postgraduation Commercial Bar Courses

We also studied measures of several other postgraduation characteristics: whether the student hired a private tutor, had other obligations while studying (e.g., work or caregiving), or received law school funding for AdaptiBar or to otherwise assist in preparation for the California Bar Exam. We found no statistically significant overall effects for any of these measures, partly owing to small sample sizes, although we saw a negative effect of obligations for those in the third LGPA quartile and a large and positive effect of AdaptiBar funds for LEOP students.

All of the above reported effects controlled for all prior student characteristics and curricular choices, including typical highly predictive measures such as LSAT and LGPA. Nevertheless, we found that these additional programs helped explain further variation in the probability of first-time bar passage. When controlling for these bar-preparatory programs, we still saw that some earlier predictors remained significant, although more proximate predictors swamped the effects of some earlier predictors. For example, the number of upper-division bar subject courses still had an estimated effect of 0.026 (or 2.6%) on the probability of first-time bar passage and remained significant at $p < 0.01$. When controlling for all these things, we also saw that few characteristics known upon admission were significant predictors or had large substantive magnitudes—LEOP admission, Disability Resource Program (DRP) status, race/ethnicity, sex, and age all lacked statistical significance. While these had some predictive power when examining entering students, once we controlled for performance during and after law school, their predictive power waned.

IV. Measurement Challenges

A. *Factors Not Measured*

For some of the bar success interventions UC Law SF adopted after 2016, we lacked sufficient data to assess efficacy. For example, after the law school hired and trained a full team of academic skills specialist faculty in 2016, these specialist faculty were able to share pedagogical expertise with other doctrinal faculty, which likely improved teaching across the board in ways the study dataset did not directly measure. For other interventions, we had data, but the interventions were rolled out for all students, depriving us of a control group within graduation cohorts. For example, UC Law SF added a unit of writing instruction to the second semester of legal writing, moving from two to three units, and converted the grading scheme from credit/no-credit to graded. But that happened in a single year, all at once, for all 1Ls that year. For yet other interventions, we had data revealing whether students participated at all, but we struggled to account for the quality of student engagement, creating the possibility that information about the efficacy of the intervention was suppressed by outcomes for students who participated less than enthusiastically. We also struggled to address various forms of bias, including selection bias (e.g., the fact that less confident or self-directed students often more heavily lean on one-on-one office hours with skills specialists or take particular classes like Critical Studies 1) and posttreatment bias (controlling for which, as indicated above, can lead to unreliable estimates of the effects of some interventions).

B. *Assessment Challenges in Unstable Environments*

1. A Dynamic Academic Program

The variables we measured were in constant flux. In some instances, that change was the result of real-time innovation in programming. Also, different faculty implemented interventions differently. For example, we analyzed the impact of Law & Process versions of upper-division bar courses, but each faculty member taught that class differently, using a range of pedagogical techniques and assessment methods. Similarly, we looked at the effect of student academic support meetings with academic skills specialist faculty, but different faculty approached those meetings differently during the study period.

2. Changing Exam Conditions

During the period covered by this study, the California Bar Exam format changed at five key moments, and the amount of variability in exam administration format is most significant in the latter part of the study period when the dataset is richest, i.e., in the period 2017–2021, due to the tracking of cocurricular intervention participation not normally captured in the law school's student information system. First, in 2017, the California State Bar changed the California Bar Exam from a three-day exam to a two-day exam, reducing the number of one-hour essay questions from six to five, and reducing the performance tests from two three-hour tests to one ninety-minute test.⁷¹ In

71 Patrick R. Dixon & Alan S. Yochelson, *Shhh... California Examinees Maybe Sleeping in After Day Two of*

the summer of 2020, when the pandemic first disrupted exam administration, the July administration was delayed until October, giving students extra months to study, the number of MBE questions was reduced from 200 to 100, and scoring was handled in a unique way for that administration.⁷² Then, in 2021, the cut score was changed from 1440 to 1390, as discussed below.⁷³ Starting with the October 2020 administration, the exam was administered on the ExamSoft platform, which some examinees found glitchy.⁷⁴ Finally, in the period 2020-2021, the exam was mostly take-home, with relatively longer breaks than normally afforded between essays and performance tests. In July 2022, the exam reverted to an in-person format, with shorter breaks. California has just announced new expected changes, as well.⁷⁵

In addition, just before the July 2019 administration of the California Bar Exam, the California Bar inadvertently released essay topics to some law school deans, prompting the state bar to take remedial action that materially changed exam conditions.⁷⁶ Because of the accidental release of information, the bar decided to notify all exam-takers of the tested subjects in the days leading up to the July administration of the California Bar Exam. That allowed test-takers to focus last-minute preparation on the subset of topics that might be covered in the written portion of the exam, making that administration arguably different from any prior or subsequent administrations.

The authors controlled for these variations by controlling for exam difficulty, but it's possible that UC Law SF students as a cohort responded differently from some other graduating class cohorts to the disruptions listed above.

V. Lessons for Academic Program Design; Next Frontiers

This section reviews some of the high-level academic program design lessons learned from this study and identifies areas of future inquiry where we cannot yet explain disparities in California Bar Exam passage outcomes.

the Bar Exam, 86 THE BAR EXAMINER 30 (June 2017), <https://thebarexaminer.ncbex.org/article/june-2017/shhh-california-examinees-may-be-sleeping-in-after-day-two-of-the-bar-exam-2/>.

72 See Order Concerning Modifications to the California Bar Exam (Cal. Aug. 10, 2020), <https://newsroom.courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/newsroom/document/2020081012125776.pdf>.

73 See Order re Request for Approval of Proposed Amendments to the California Rules of Court (Cal. Jan. 28, 2021) (<https://newsroom.courts.ca.gov/sites/default/files/newsroom/2021-01/20210128062716391.pdf>).

74 See, e.g., Sam Skolnik, *California Bar Exam Flaws Hurt 2% of Test Takers, State Finds*, BLOOMBERG L. (Sept. 18, 2021), <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/business-and-practice/california-bar-exam-flaws-hurt-2-of-test-takers-state-finds> (reporting on both summer 2021 and summer 2020 exam technical challenges).

75 See Memorandum from Cody Hounanian & Amy Nuñez, Program Dirs., Off. of Admissions, The St. Bar of Cal., to Bd. of Trs. (Jan. 18, 2024), <https://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/agendaItem/Public/agendaitem1000032055.pdf> (noting reduction in testing sites, among other changes expected starting February 2024).

76 See Michelle Lou, *California State Bar Accidentally Releases General Topics of Its Upcoming Exam*, CNN (July 28, 2019), <https://www.cnn.com/2019/07/28/us/california-bar-exam-general-topics-released-trnd>.

A. Academic Program Design Choices Matter

As noted, we found a relationship between entering metrics and bar outcomes. But entering metrics told only part of the story. At least some of UC Law SF's bar success initiatives appear to have significantly impacted student bar outcomes. While not every intervention could be easily studied, we were able to measure the efficacy of many of the program design choices we made.

B. Academic Program Design Extends Past Graduation and into the Postgraduation Bar Study Period

The findings regarding the powerful impact of postgraduation interventions demonstrated that law school bar support ideally should extend through bar study in the form of advising, coaching, and practice test feedback to ensure that graduates don't stop short of the finish line. In 2016, UC Law SF graduates didn't complete as much of their postgraduation bar coursework as did graduates of peer schools. Once we discovered that fact and started systematically tracking the postgraduation progress of each graduate, we were able to design effective interventions, including individual student-level advising and coaching based on actual completion data supplied in real-time by commercial bar preparation companies, and we were able to supplement that with additional practice and feedback opportunities. Using data from those efforts, we were able to articulate a clear message to our graduates, i.e., that to build on the foundation of law school and pass the exam on the first try, they needed to complete at least 80% of the commercial bar preparation course assignments and supplement such work with additional practice essays and practice MBEs. The data analyzed above show that these interventions positively impacted the probability of bar passage.

C. Pervasive and Targeted Interventions

The shift from an academic skills and support instructional model focused on supporting the most at-risk students to a pervasive model of instruction seemed to help broad cohorts of students. But these efforts were additive. The law school didn't choose between pervasive and targeted bar success initiatives. It pursued both kinds. Class of 2022 LEOP outcomes suggested that disruption can disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, even controlling for factors such as admission metrics and LGPA. Significant gains for the LEOP class of 2023 cohort suggest that targeted advising and support interventions for especially vulnerable populations had a positive impact as a supplement to pervasive interventions applied to all students. (The main programmatic changes for classes of 2022 and 2023 LEOP students were in the form of targeted 3L and postgraduation bar success advising and support.)

D. A Key Nexus: Educators' Insight, Assessment, and Program Design

To obtain the evidence necessary to inform program design, a law school needs to ask the right questions, a project that requires the involvement of administrators and faculty with knowledge of the academic program, the law school's culture, classrooms, students, and programming. For example, if one looks at the UC Law SF dataset assembled for this study and asks whether a

particular upper-division bar subject class correlates with greater success on the bar exam, the answer is not clear. But if one asks whether the total number of upper-division bar classes positively correlates with higher bar pass rates, the answer is “yes.” Administrators and faculty who have worked with graduates in the trenches and seen how challenging it is for them to memorize bodies of law they have not previously studied understand the difference between the efficacy of any one specific bar subject class and the efficacy of taking enough bar subject courses, in total, before graduation to make bar study manageable. Insight supports the framing of hypotheses that statistical analysis can test.

E. The Next Frontiers

UC Law SF’s commitment to academic program innovation helped its graduates improve their bar pass rates. But challenges remain.

i. Persistent Gaps

a. Bottom-Quartile Students

Students across all four LGPA quartiles benefited from many of the reforms, and some of the benefits were, as noted, concentrated in the lower quartiles. However, pass rates among fourth-quartile graduates remained relatively low throughout the study period.

b. LEOP

Before we added 2022 and 2023 data, LEOP status was not associated with negative bar outcomes when controlling for only admissions metrics. The 2022 and 2023 LEOP class outcomes suggested that students in this cohort continued to have special needs, even after the period of reform described above. One theory is that LEOP students were especially vulnerable to pandemic disruption, given their backgrounds as students who had overcome adversity. But LEOP graduates had historically high pass rates for the program in 2020 and 2021, which were also pandemic years, suggesting that a pandemic narrative goes only so far in explaining the LEOP class of 2022 outcomes.

c. Accommodated Students

We could not explain the lower California Bar Exam passage rates of persons who received exam accommodations while in law school. Theories address the fact that approximately up to half the DRP students who received disability-based exam accommodations while in law school did not apply for accommodations on the California Bar Exam, such that they did not get the time accommodations to which they were accustomed when they took the very high-stakes California Bar Exam. Also, many of the students’ disabilities placed them at a disadvantage relative to students who do not have disabilities when studying for the exam in the period between graduation and the administration of the exam, given that postgraduation bar study is essentially a roughly ten-week race against the clock. Because students were not required to report the degree to which they obtained accommodations on the California Bar Exam that mirror the exam accommodations they received during law school, we could not test our hypotheses.

2. Student Engagement and Self-Directedness

In several places, this article has gestured at the complicating effect that student engagement has on measuring the efficacy of bar success interventions. A related problem, also mentioned above, is that the law school has faced an increasingly difficult challenge of helping students develop along the spectrum from being passive to self-directed learners.⁷⁷ It may be that some interventions, such as faculty-staffed individual office hours held for the purposes of honing academic and bar success skills, will show greater efficacy if we can identify and better support those students who struggle to self-assess and self-directedly change to apply what they are being taught. UC Law SF is still in the process of identifying proxies for self-directedness that can be measured, such that we can rigorously assess our efforts to help students advance on the spectrum and the effects of those efforts on first-time bar pass rates.

3. A New Bar Exam

The California State Bar established a California Attorney Practice Analysis (CAPA) Working Group to “gauge the alignment between the content of the California Bar Exam and the practice of law in California” by studying what new attorneys do and what they need to know to function effectively.⁷⁸ In May 2020, the working group released its recommendations. The working group recommended that the exam focus on a more limited array of topics than does the current California Bar Exam, reducing the scope of coverage from thirteen subject areas to eight.⁷⁹ Also, the group identified six broad competencies that should be assessed on the exam: drafting and writing; research and investigation; issue spotting and fact-gathering; counsel/advice; litigation; and communication and client relationship.⁸⁰ To follow up on these recommendations, the California Supreme Court and State Bar Board of Trustees established a Blue Ribbon Commission on the Future of the California Bar Exam, which released its final report in May 2023.⁸¹

On October 10, 2024, the California Supreme Court issued an Administrative Order Concerning Recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Commission on the Future of the Bar Exam and the Alternative Pathway Working Group.⁸² The

77 See Schwartz, *supra* note 53.

78 THE ST. BAR OF CAL., THE PRACTICE OF LAW IN CALIFORNIA: FINDINGS FROM THE CALIFORNIA ATTORNEY PRACTICE ANALYSIS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CALIFORNIA BAR EXAM: FINAL REPORT OF THE CALIFORNIA PRACTICE ANALYSIS WORKING GROUP (May 11, 2020), <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/Portals/o/documents/reports/2020/California-Attorney-Practice-Analysis-Working-Group-Report.pdf>.

79 *Id.* at 2. The topics are administrative law and procedure, civil procedure, constitutional law, contracts, criminal law and procedure, evidence, real property, and torts.

80 *Id.*

81 See ST. BAR CAL., BLUE RIBBON COMMISSION ON THE FUTURE OF THE BAR EXAM: REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (2023), <https://board.calbar.ca.gov/docs/agendaItem/Public/agendaitem1000030806.pdf#page=6>.

82 See Administrative Order 202-10-10-01 (October 10, 2024) (available at <https://www.calbar>).

order adopts the Commission's recommendations other than the establishment of a portfolio bar exam option, with some minor modifications. As of the date this article was submitted for publication, it was unclear when or how the State Bar will implement these recommendations.

More immediately, driven by budget concerns and a desire for more flexibility *viz* exam administration (e.g., opening up the possibility of transitioning to remote and center-based exam administration), the California State Bar is planning to move away from using the National Conference of Bar Examiners' MBE questions and is contracting with Kaplan Exam Services, LLC to create the exam questions.⁸³ As of the date this article was submitted for publication, the California State Bar had just renewed a request for approval of the plan to transition to Kaplan.⁸⁴

UC Law SF and other law schools will likely need to reevaluate and redesign their academic programs to ensure success on the new exam once its contours are clear. This study demonstrates that continuous, data-driven, evidence-based reform will be a key part of every law school's toolkit in the years to come.

VI. Conclusion

Law schools' student populations, academic programs, and teaching cultures and practices are different, such that study findings based on UC Law SF's experience with prior iterations of the California Bar Exam may not translate to a different law school or exam. Also, the fact that UC Law SF, using the largest dataset the law school ever assembled, was still unable to explain some of the variability in its own graduates' bar outcomes highlights that statistical analyses can reveal only so much about how best to support students and help them pass a bar exam on the first attempt. Despite these and other limitations noted above, our findings may be useful to other law schools, including, for example, findings about the efficacy of pervasively implemented pregraduation academic and bar success interventions and the benefits of law school-provided postgraduation support. More broadly, the study underscores the benefits of measuring the impact of academic program design choices to guide innovation.

ca.gov/Portals/o/documents/admissions/Examinations/California-Supreme-Court-Admin-Order-2024-10-10.pdf.)

83 See State Bar, Kaplan, Sign Five-Year California Bar Exam Development Contract, California State Bar News Release (August 13, 2024) (available at <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/About-Us/News/News-Releases/state-bar-kaplan-sign-five-year-california-bar-exam-development-contract>).n

84 See Renewed Request that the Supreme Court Approved Proposed Modifications to the California Bar Exam, filed by the State Bar of California (October 4, 2024) (available at <https://www.calbar.ca.gov/portals/o/documents/admissions/examinations/Renewed-Request-to-Approve-Proposed-Modifications-to-the-CA-Bar-Examination.pdf>).