



LSAC's 2024 Knowledge Report: 2023-2024 Test Takers



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Executive Summary

LSAC's mission is to advance law and justice by promoting access, equity, and fairness in law school admission and supporting the learning journey from prelaw through practice. LSAC collaborates with member law schools, DEI professionals, prelaw advisors, and many other mission-aligned groups and individuals in this effort.

To achieve our shared goals, we need to have a clear collective understanding of the prospective law student journey, specifically:

1. When prospective law students first think about law school
2. What motivates them or might prevent them from pursuing legal education
3. How they anticipate they will be viewed and valued in law school

LSAC offers a Post-LSAT Questionnaire (PLQ) to all individuals who take the LSAT. Using data collected through PLQ responses, LSAC researchers gain important insights into what prospective applicants are thinking, feeling, and doing as they embark on the law school admission journey.

This report focuses on individuals who took the LSAT between August 2023 and April 2024, the first cohort of test takers to engage with the law school admission process after the June 2023 *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard* decision, in which the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that institutions of higher education can no longer consider an applicant's racial or ethnic status in admissions — with the caveat that they may consider an applicant's experiences, perspectives, and interests that may be expressly tied to their individual racial identity. As law schools and other institutions continue to review and adjust their policies and procedures in response to the Supreme Court's ruling, this report has several important insights to help recruit and support future law students along the prelaw through practice journey. These insights include:

- **When prospective applicants first began thinking of attending law school.** Most test takers initially considered going to law school before attending college, in many cases well before college. Indeed, Black or African American test takers reported the highest rate of first thinking of going to law school as early as elementary school.
- **Motivations for attending law school.** What motivates individuals to pursue legal education, and are there differences across groups? For example, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x, and Middle Eastern or North African/Arab test takers reported advocating for social justice and uplifting their communities among their top reasons to go to law school at rates higher than their peers.
- **Reasons prospective applicants might/would decide not to go to law school.** Taken as a whole, test takers reported these top reasons: (1) not getting accepted to their first-choice law school, (2) cost of attending or expected debt, and (3) not receiving financial aid. The research identified important variations

among different groups. First-generation college respondents and LSAC fee waiver recipients were more concerned about cost and not receiving financial aid while continuing-generation college respondents and those who did not use an LSAC fee waiver were more concerned about not getting into their top choice law school.

- **How prospective applicants view “belonging” in law school.** Across all groups, most test takers feel strongly that they, and people like them, belong in law school. On the question of whether they and people like them will be valued in law school, however, the research identifies significant differences. Black or African American, Native American or Alaska Native, Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x, Middle Eastern or North African/Arab, first-generation college graduates, and LSAC fee waiver recipients reported at the highest rates that they or people like them will not be valued in law school and that they will be underestimated.

As a community exploring new ways to support and recruit the next generation of diverse legal leaders that better reflects the U.S. population, this research provides important insights on how to better support aspiring law school applicants and promote their aspirations.

This research will be of particular interest to prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and law schools. In practical terms, the research can help inform:

- a) How prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and other stakeholders empower prospective applicants’ agency to make informed decisions by:
 - Pushing beyond the assumption that early exposure alone will impact diversity on the pathway to law school
 - Using prospective applicants’ motivations to inform guidance on how and where to apply to law school, including helping them search for schools that will offer courses and experiential opportunities that build on their “why”
 - Providing financial literacy and education on how to plan to pay for law school
 - Identifying law school environmental factors that signal to prospective applicants which law schools will provide them with the inclusive, supportive environment and experience they need to flourish
 - Connecting prospective applicants with other stakeholders to support them at every point along the journey from early exposure in prelaw through admission and beyond
- b) How law schools recruit and retain future students by:
 - Collaborating with various stakeholders in educating and supporting aspiring law students across the journey from the moment they first think about law school
 - Tailoring recruitment strategies to show how school offerings speak to and build upon applicants’ motivations for going to law school
 - Addressing concerns about paying for law school
 - Conveying to prospective applicants — through their policies, programs, and actions — how they are valued and will be supported in law school

The insights of this report can help inform a collective effort from prelaw through admission and into the classroom as we usher in the next generation of diverse legal leaders. This is the first in a series of LSAC Knowledge Reports; future reports will build on this work to share insights based on other topics addressed in the Post-LSAT Questionnaire and other LSAC data to support the legal community.

Introduction

Advancing access to justice and access, equity, and fairness in legal education requires data-informed and community-wide effort. In legal education, that community consists of a variety of stakeholders, such as prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and law schools, who must come together to effectively support access, equity, and fairness in the journey from prelaw through practice. Reliable data provides the ability to confront challenges in a consistent manner, work toward concrete outcomes, and learn from what works and what does not.

Detailed information on how prospective applicants approach their decision about why, whether, and where to attend law school is vital for prelaw advisors, law schools, pathway programs, and other stakeholders to support, guide, and attract prospective law students. This understanding is especially important in light of the U.S. Supreme Court's June 2023 decision striking down race-based admissions. In the context of shifting paradigms in law school admissions and legal education, it is more important than ever to have information that stakeholders can use to effectively support individuals, especially individuals from marginalized¹ communities, on their journeys to and through law school.

Using data from the 2023-2024 LSAC Post-LSAT Questionnaire (PLQ), this initial 2024 LSAC Knowledge Report centers on amplifying the voices of test takers as they embark on the journey to law school. The insights in this report should inspire reconsideration of the assumptions the field has made about why there is a lack of diversity in legal education and a refocusing of our collective efforts toward meaningful changes that create inclusive environments where people can flourish. Specifically, this report provides evidence that the lack of diversity in the legal field is not solely related to disparities in early exposure to the possibility of a legal career. Rather, it is due to systemic barriers along the journey that impact skills development and how prospective applicants approach law school admission, how law schools recruit a diverse applicant pool focused on what is motivating prospective applicants and their needs, and how law schools are creating environments that are truly inclusive and conducive to learning.

¹ The term “marginalized” refers to populations that have been treated as less important than the dominant population in terms of access, power, and other aspects of social processes. The term “minoritized” incorporates an understanding of social structures rather than being numerically/statistically smaller/fewer. Minoritized can be used to describe various populations and is not synonymous with or limited to racially/ethnically underrepresented populations. These terms are used throughout the report.

While many have focused on belonging in law school at a student/individual level, the data from test takers indicates the most telling question is not asking students, “Do you feel like you belong?” Instead, the legal education ecosystem needs to be asking itself, “Is this person included?” Test takers know they belong in the law school classroom, but many from marginalized groups anticipate that people like them will not be valued. Therefore, how do schools convey to prospective applicants that they value them? Cultivating a sense of belonging in the classroom once students are there must include efforts by schools and faculty to bring about environmental and structural changes that will support and effectively teach incoming students.² It is not enough to “tell” them that they belong — they already know they belong; they want tangible demonstration that others also know they belong.

Who Were the 2023-2024 Test Takers?

LSAC’s unique role of interacting with tens of thousands of people who take the LSAT annually provides an extraordinary wealth of data and exceptional insights into what aspiring attorneys are thinking and feeling along their law school journeys.

Among test takers who sat for the LSAT between August 2023 and April 2024, 17,619 responded to the PLQ and these respondents are representative of the entire test-taking population (Table 1).³ The respondent population was equally split between white respondents and respondents from racially and ethnically minoritized groups (46% and 47%, respectively). Overall, one-tenth of respondents identified as LGBTQ+.⁴ Close to one-third (30%) of respondents were first-generation college graduates,⁵ and slightly less than four-fifths (78%) would be the first in their families to attend law school. One out of seven respondents (14%) were LSAC fee waiver recipients.⁶ The distribution of LSAT scores among PLQ respondents was also similar to the scores of the entire population of test takers. The middle 50% of scores for responding test takers were between 147 and 161. Among all test takers, the middle quartiles were 145 to 160.

² Deo, M. (2024) Building Belonging. [Manuscript in progress]; Emerson, K., Hartzog, C., Mathias, K., & Ryan, K. (2023). Fostering Faculty Growth Culture Practices in California Community Colleges: Summary Report; Hurtado, S., Ruiz Alvarado, A., & Guillermo-Wann, C. (2015). Creating inclusive environments: The mediating effect of faculty and staff validation on the relationship of discrimination/bias to students’ sense of belonging. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), 60–80., University of California; Darling-Hammond, S., & Holmquist, K. (2015). Creating wise classrooms to empower diverse law students: Lessons in pedagogy from transformative law professors. *Berkeley Journal of African-American Law & Policy*, 17, 47.

³ See the Data Source and Methodology section at the end of this report for additional information about the representativeness of the data.

⁴ LGBTQ+ refers to individuals who identify with any sexual orientation other than heterosexual and/or with any gender identity other than cisgender man or woman.

⁵ First-generation college students include students with parents or guardians with an associate’s degree, some college, high school completion, or less than high school completion.

⁶ To be eligible for an LSAC fee waiver, applicants must demonstrate financial need supported by tax forms and other documentation.

How education and the admission process is experienced varies across identities and at the intersection of identities. The diversity of test-taking respondents is also found at the intersection of race and ethnicity, first-generation college status, and LSAC fee waiver status (Table 2). About two-thirds of respondents who were first-generation college graduates and about two-thirds of respondents who received an LSAC fee waiver were from racially and ethnically minoritized groups (Table 2). The insights in this initial report are primarily focused on individual identities; however, it is acknowledged that individuals with multiple minoritized identities experience compounded marginalization in education and in the workplace.⁷ As we continue to collect this data, future reports will dive deeper into intersectional identities and the experience on the prelaw through law school journey. Nonetheless, it is important to note who are the first-generation college graduates and LSAC fee waiver recipients responding to the PLQ to keep in mind the nuance required to provide effective support.

All test taker respondents in this report indicated they were certain about applying to law school. Over 70% of respondents reported they planned on applying to law school during the 2023-2024 admission cycle, 23% planned to apply during the 2024-2025 admission cycle, and 7% planned to apply during the 2025-2026 or beyond admission cycles.⁸

This group of test takers is the first group to engage with the law school admission process after the *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. Harvard* decision. Therefore, this group provides a timely snapshot of how aspiring law students are thinking and feeling about law school in the current law school admission landscape, which will help stakeholders support, recruit, and retain law school classes going forward. Specifically, the report focuses on three key areas about the 2023-2024 test takers: (1) when they first began to think about going to law school, (2) what motivates them or might prevent them from going, and (3) how they anticipate they will be viewed and valued in law school.

⁷ Deo, M. E. (2020). *Unequal profession: Race and gender in legal academia*. Stanford University Press.

⁸ All insights in this report are consistent across groups based on when test takers self-reported they planned on applying to law school.

Table 1: Percent of PLQ Respondents by Socio-Demographic Group (n=17,619)

Group	Percent of respondents
By Race/Ethnicity	
American Indian or Alaska Native	2%
Asian	11%
Black/African American	11%
Indigenous Person of Canada	<1%
Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x	10%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%
Middle Eastern or North African/Arab	3%
Multiracial or Ethnoracial (two or more) ⁹	10%
White	46%
Not Indicated	7%
By Gender Identity	
Cisgender Man	38%
Cisgender Woman	60%
Gender Diverse	1%
Not Indicated	1%
By Sexual Orientation	
LGBQ+/Not Straight	9%
Straight	77%
Not Indicated	14%
Total LGBTQ+	11%
By First-Generation College Student	
Continuing Generation	70%
First-Generation ¹⁰	30%
By First-Generation Law Student	
Continuing Generation	20%
First-Generation ¹¹	78%
Not Indicated	2%
By LSAC Fee Waiver	
Fee Waiver Recipient	14%
Not Fee Waiver Recipient	86%

⁹ The term “ethnoracial” refers to a combination of racial and ethnic identities and thereby offers a more accurate representation of the lived experiences of individuals with those combined identities (Goldberg, 1993). For example, Black people are not a monolithic group, and describing someone who is Afro-Latina/é/o/x or Afro-Caribbean only as “African American” obscures key ethnic aspects of their identities. Different ethnic identities often imply distinctly different experiences due, in part, to different immigration histories and the political-economic circumstances of each group. Goldberg, D. T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁰First-generation college graduates include students with parents or guardians with an associate’s degree, some college, high school completion, or less than high school completion.

¹¹First-generation law students are students who reported they did not have a close family member who holds a JD.

Table 2: Racial and Ethnic Diversity of PLQ Respondents By First-Generation College and LSAC Fee Waiver Status

Race and Ethnicity	First-Generation College Graduate	Continuing Generation College Graduate	Fee Waiver Recipient	Not Fee Waiver Recipient
American Indian or Alaska Native	3%	1%	4%	2%
Asian	9%	12%	6%	11%
Black/African American	18%	8%	22%	8%
Indigenous Person of Canada	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x	19%	6%	14%	8%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1%	<1%	1%	<1%
Middle Eastern or North African/Arab	3%	2%	3%	3%
Multiracial or Ethnoracial (two or more)	10%	10%	11%	9%
White	31%	54%	32%	51%
Did Not Indicate	6%	7%	5%	7%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data. Percents are rounded.

When Did They First Think About Law School?

For stakeholders investing in planning and developing pathway programs, opportunities, and resources to cultivate and support individuals' law career aspirations, it is helpful to know when individuals first consider going to law school. Historically, there has been a widely held assumption that the lack of diversity in legal education is partly driven by the lack of exposure earlier in the journey. Many have heavily focused on programs that function solely to expose students earlier to the possibility of a legal career.

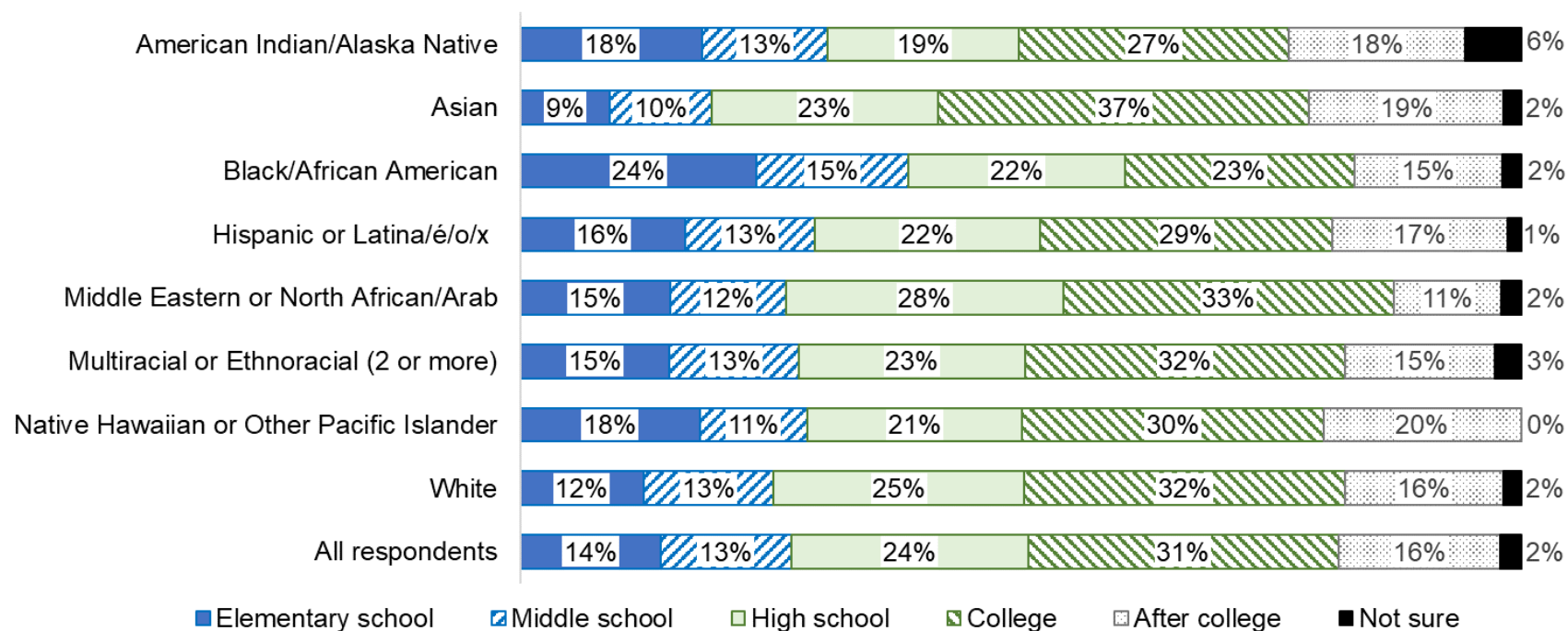
In the PLQ data, test takers reveal that most of them first thought about law school before college (Figure 1).¹² Just over half (51%) of test takers reported first thinking about going to law school before attending college, compared to less than one in three (31%) who reported first thinking about going to law school while in college (Figure 1). These trends are consistent across most racial and ethnic groups. Indeed, Black/African American test takers are of particular note; almost one-quarter (24%) of Black/African

¹² Similar findings were found in AALS & Gallup. (2018). *Before the JD*. Association of American Law Schools. <https://www.aals.org/research/bjd/>

American test takers reported first thinking about law school in elementary school, the highest of any group (Figure 1).

These insights about when test takers reported first thinking about law school provide important context to the notion that people do not pursue law school because they are not exposed early enough. Early outreach and exposure are important, but the data make it clear that we need to go beyond simply exposing students to the possibility of a legal career in order to identify what barriers may be impeding their access to opportunities and resources to develop the skills needed to effectively apply to law school and to succeed in law school. It is important that we as a community link up programs that expose young aspiring students to law with resources and other opportunities that those same students can use in their pursuit of a legal career.

Figure 1: When Did Test Takers First Think About Law School? (n=10,349)¹³



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

¹³ Due to the low number of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander respondents, data insights for this group should be interpreted with caution not to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

Motivations for and Barriers to Law School

What drives test takers to pursue legal education and what might prevent them from this endeavor are important insights for cultivating, supporting, and guiding individuals from prelaw through practice. These insights are useful for stakeholders, such as prelaw advisors and law schools, to better address barriers individuals may encounter and to recruit prospective applicants from various communities more effectively. The following insights about the motivations and barriers to law school are important for supporting a prospective applicant's law school aspirations by developing their agency to make more informed decisions on how to apply to law school, where to apply, and where to enroll given their driving motivation and their personal, professional, and academic needs.

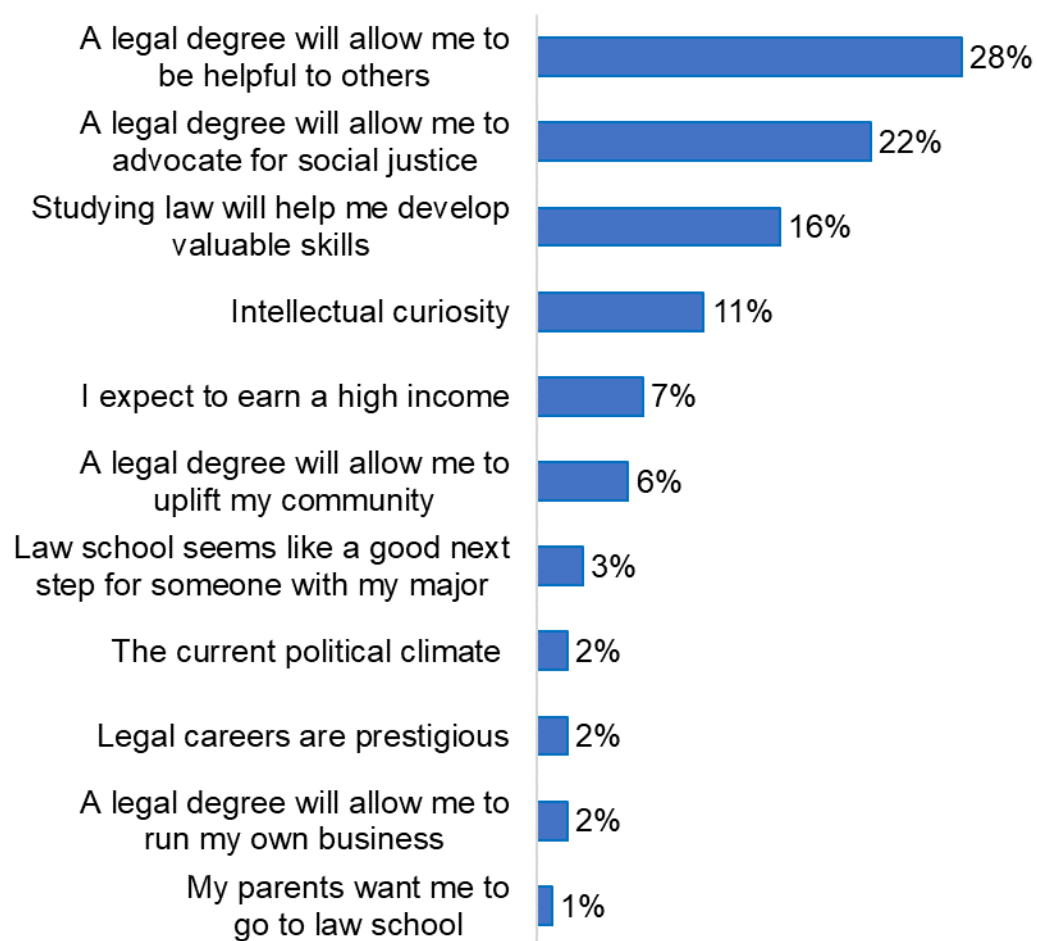
Why Are They Going to Law School?

An individual's "why" for going to law school as well as the differences in the "why" between individuals from different communities and identity groups provide insight on how to support individuals on their path to law school and where they may choose to enter the profession. These insights have practical implications for how stakeholders help prospective applicants search for schools that will cultivate their motivation and needs, and how law schools can recruit and retain aspiring law students.

The PLQ data indicate that aspiring attorneys are motivated to do good and to make a difference in the world. The top three most often ranked motivations for attending law school were (1) being helpful to others (28%), (2) advocating for social justice (22%), and (3) developing valuable skills (16%) (Figure 2).

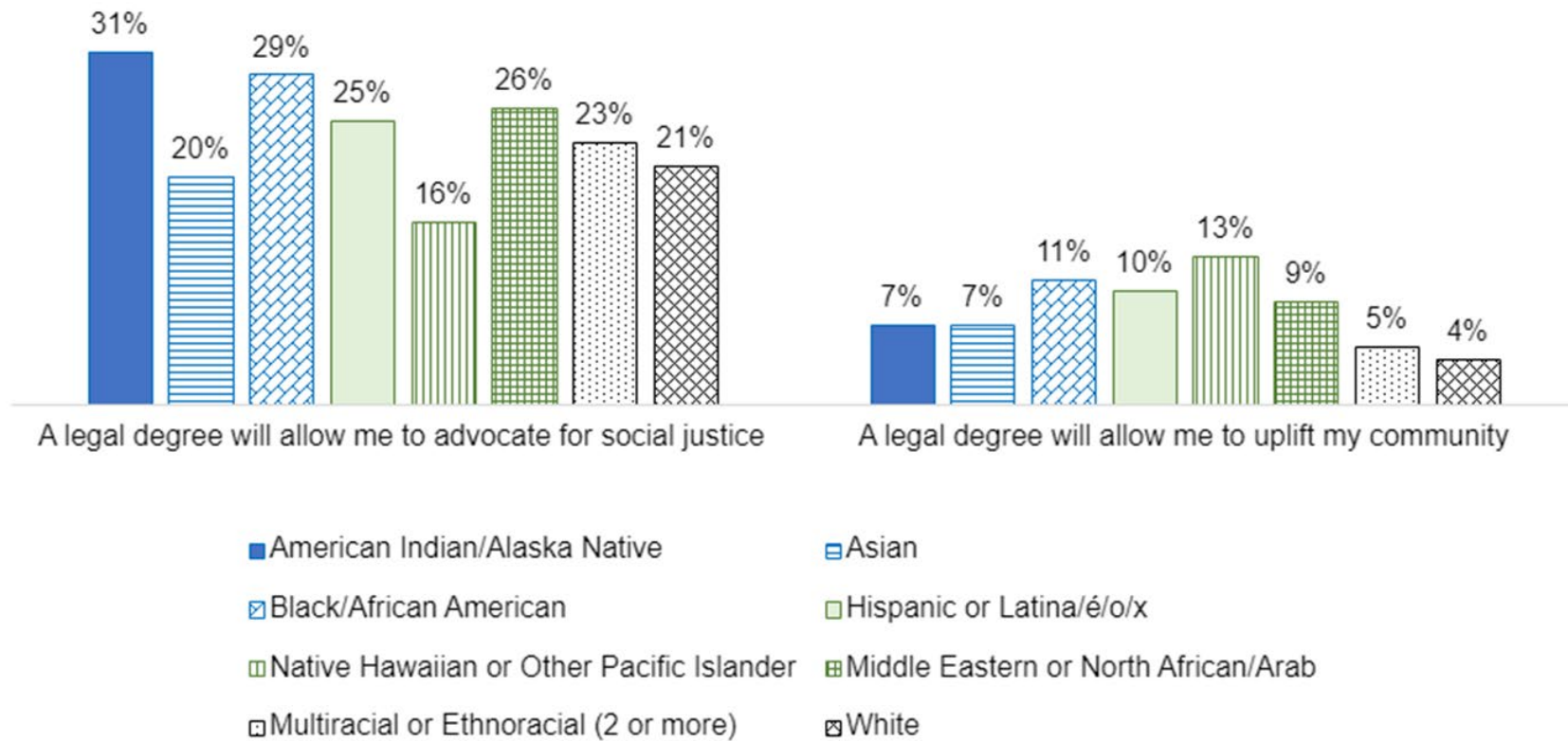
Digging deeper into the data, motivations vary based on test takers' experiences and identities. For example, larger proportions of Black/African American (40%), American Indian or Alaska Native (38%), Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x (35%), and Middle Eastern or North African/Arab (35%) respondents reported advocating for social justice or uplifting their communities as the top motivations for going to law school than their Asian (27%) and white (25%) peers (Figure 3).

Figure 2: What Is the Number One Reason Test Takers Go to Law School?
(n=15,051)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

Figure 3: Who Wants to Go to Law School to Advocate for Social Justice or Uplift Their Communities? (n=7,152)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data. The total number of respondents to this question was 15,051 of which 7,152 chose one of the motivation reasons in Figure 3. Due to the low number of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander respondents, data insights for this group should be interpreted with caution not to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

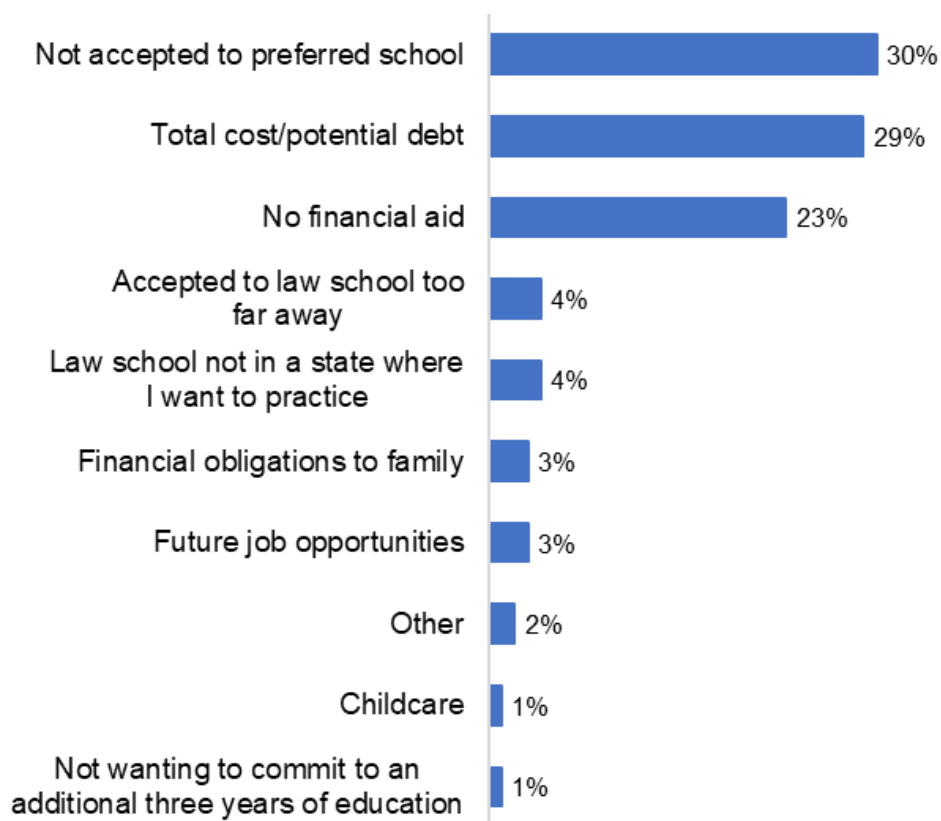
A law degree is viewed as a vehicle for social change and doing good in society, and this is particularly salient for marginalized test takers. In practical terms, law schools can use these insights to set recruitment strategies around what aspects, course offerings, and experiential opportunities their law schools provide that may speak to an aspiring law student's unique "why." Tailored recruiting strategies show prospective applicants that law schools care about why they are going to law school and have the resources to help them develop the skills they need to successfully achieve their personal and professional goals. Additionally, this insight is important for the application process and specifically for the optional or additional essays. Encouraging law school applicants to speak to their "why" as motivating factors can be a powerful way of promoting inclusion. Furthermore, if law schools have a goal of increasing access to justice, essays that help identify community connection and drive, as well as programs that assist prospective students in giving back or returning to their community, can be both motivators to applicants and positive tools for change. For prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and other stakeholders supporting prospective applicants, these insights are helpful in guiding aspiring law students to effectively search for law schools that have courses, experiential opportunities, faculty, and networks that build on their motivations for going to law school. Law school motivations are a starting point for propelling people along the path to the legal profession.

What Would Prevent Them from Going to Law School?

Test takers are aware of what barriers will prevent them from going to law school given their needs and goals. The top three factors cited include (1) not being accepted to their preferred schools (30%), (2) cost/expected debt (29%), and (3) not receiving financial aid (23%) (Figure 4).

While there is an assumption that prospective applicants are singularly driven by law school rankings, the data reveal that "preferred law school" has various meanings (Figure 4). Open-ended responses find that the factors driving school preference varied widely across individual test takers. For many test takers, not being admitted to a school close to home, or to a school that offers a part-time or hybrid program, would make it difficult for them to attend law school. In practical terms, this is helpful for prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and other stakeholders to help guide prospective applicants to effectively search for and apply to schools that meet their personal, professional, and academic needs. Such guidance can include the use of reputable sources of information to find schools that offer program structures and opportunities that meet their needs.

Figure 4: What Would Prevent Test Takers From Going to Law School if Admitted to Any Program? (n=12,950)



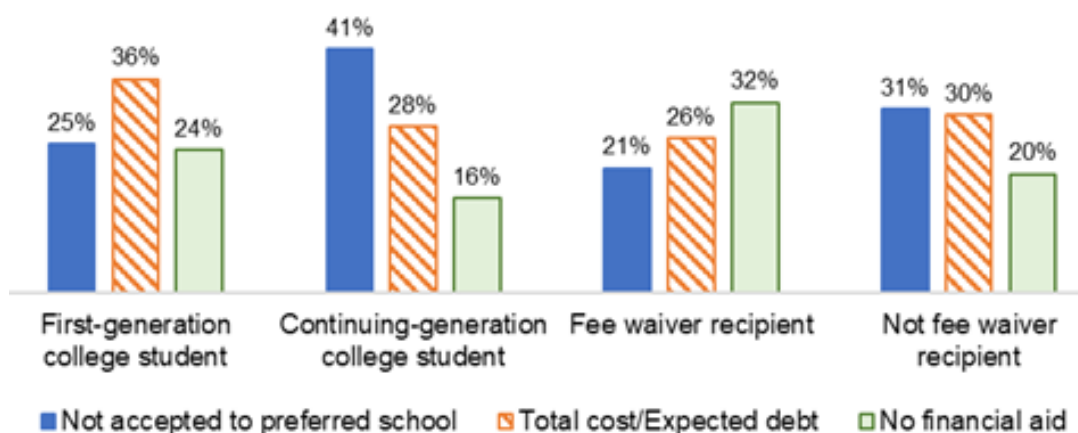
Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

The test taker data provide clear quantitative confirmation that the most difficult barriers to pursuing legal education for individual prospective applicants are highly related to their access to resources. Not receiving financial aid and the total cost associated with law school are also top factors that will prevent test takers admitted to law school from going. However, these concerns are more prominent for test takers who have access to fewer resources. For example, 36% of test takers who are first-generation college graduates listed cost and anticipated debt as the top factor that could prevent them from attending law school if they were admitted, compared to 28% of their continuing-generation peers, a 30% higher rate. Even more telling, 24% of first-generation college graduates listed not receiving financial aid as the top factor that could prevent them from attending law school, compared to just 16% of continuing-generation students, a 50% higher rate (Figure 5).

Similarly, 32% of test takers who are fee waiver recipients listed not receiving financial aid as their top reason for not attending law school if they were admitted to any program, compared to only 20% of their peers who did not use an LSAC fee waiver, a 60% higher rate (Figure 5). In contrast, 41% of continuing-generation college graduate test takers cited not being accepted to their preferred law school as their top barrier to law school, compared to only 25% of their first-generation college graduate peers, a

64% higher rate (Figure 5). Similarly, 31% of test takers who were not fee waiver recipients cited not being accepted to their preferred law school as a top barrier to law school, compared to 21% of their peers who used an LSAC fee waiver, an almost 50% higher rate (Figure 5). While these insights are not surprising, they underscore the importance of nuanced support along the journey, especially for prospective applicants with less access to resources and support. How can we address their concerns before they apply, not just when they are in the process of deciding where to enroll?

Figure 5: Top Barrier to Law School if Admitted to Any Program by First-Generation College and LSAC Fee Waiver Status (n=12,950)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

Insights on motivation and barriers to law school reveal the need to ensure that aspiring law students are guided and supported starting with their “why” which will help drive where they apply, how they apply, and how they plan for law school, both financially and academically. Deciding to go to law school is an important initial step. Attending law school is a highly personal decision and pathway efforts must center on how to help prospective applicants make informed decisions aligned and anchored in what matters most to them and their needs, rather than a prescriptive approach of dictating to prospective applicants what they should or should not do. This approach extends beyond admission by encouraging agency development. Empowering aspiring law students’ agency is critical in their investment and commitment along the journey to and through law school.

Belonging in Law School

People experience educational spaces differently based on who they are and their experiences in society; therefore, it is important to examine how test takers feel about how others perceive them and if they will be welcomed in law school. Growing research on sense of belonging finds that marginalized students are reporting at higher rates than

their peers that they lack a sense of belonging in their law school.¹⁴ Marginalized law students often must carve out their space in law school where people like them were historically excluded. While increased efforts in legal education are focused on telling incoming students that they belong, the data provided by test takers via the PLQ challenge the notion that belonging in legal education should only be addressed at the student level. Cultivating a sense of belonging requires work at both the student and institutional levels.

Long before potentially becoming law students and experiencing the law school environment and culture, test takers who responded to the LSAC PLQ indicate a strong belief that they and people like them belong in law school. However, while marginalized test takers report that they and people like them belong in law school, they anticipate not being valued and that others will underestimate them. These insights shift the way belonging in legal education is often understood and conveyed by law schools. There is a difference between test takers wanting to be in law school versus someone with authority or power wanting them there or believing they should be there. Test takers are aware and are looking for law schools that will foster an effective learning environment for all, especially marginalized students.¹⁵

People Like Them Belong in Law School

By the time prospective applicants take the LSAT, they have experienced various educational environments from early education through higher education. As they apply to law schools, their considerations will be influenced by their previous experiences and whether a law school environment is one where they will be welcomed, valued, and supported.

¹⁴ Bodamer, E. (2020). Do I belong here? Examining perceived experiences of bias, stereotype concerns, and sense of belonging in U.S. law schools. *Journal of Legal Education*, 69(2), 455-490.

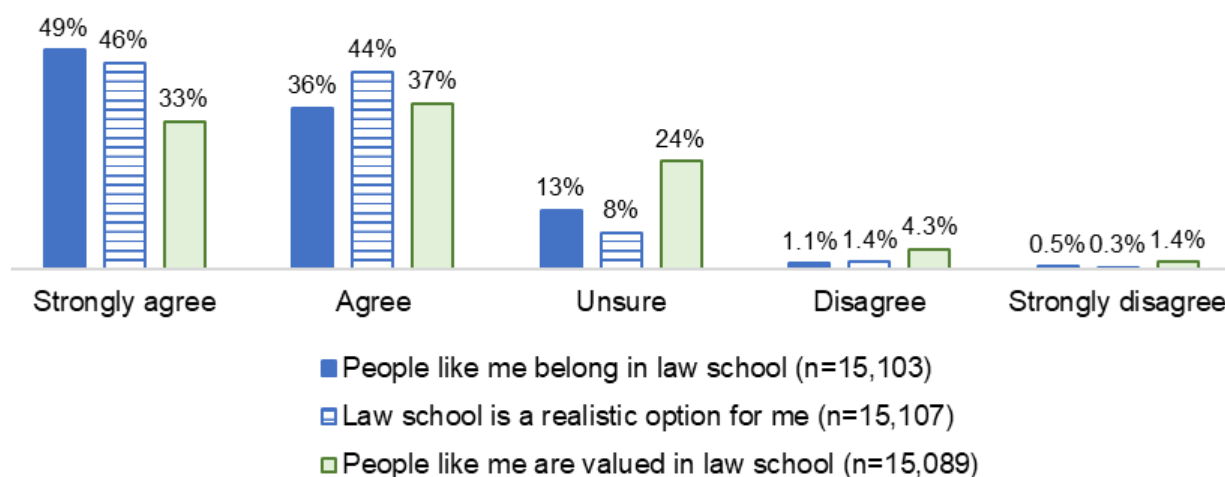
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<https://lssse.indiana.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Diversity-and-Exclusion-Final-9.29.20.pdf>; Moore, W. L. (2007). *Reproducing racism: White space, elite law schools, and racial inequality*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; Pan, Y.-Y. D. (2017). *Incidental racialization: Performative assimilation in law school*. Temple University Press; Guinier, L., Fine, M., & Balin, J. (1997). *Becoming gentlemen: Women, law school, and institutional change*. Beacon Press; Quintanilla, V. (2019, January 25). *A LSSSE collaboration on the role of belonging in law school experience and performance*. Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research. <https://lssse.indiana.edu/blog/role-of-belonging-in-law-school-experience-and-performance/>

¹⁵ Deo, M. (2024) Building Belonging. [Manuscript in progress]; LaCosse, J., Murphy, M.C., Garcia, J.A., & Zirkel, S. (2020). The role of STEM professors' mindset beliefs on students' anticipated psychological experiences and course interest. *Journal of Educational Psychology*; Muenks, K., Canning, E.A., Green, D.J., Zirkel, S., Garcia, J.A., & Murphy, M.C. (2020). Does my professor think my ability can change? Students' perceptions of their STEM professors' mindset predict in-class psychological experiences. *Journal of Experimental Psychology - General*; Hurtado, S., Ruiz Alvarado, A., & Guillermo-Wann, C. (2015). Creating inclusive environments: The mediating effect of faculty and staff validation on the relationship of discrimination/bias to students' sense of belonging. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity*, 1(1), 60-80. eScholarship, University of California; Darling-Hammond, S., & Holmquist, K. (2015). Creating wise classrooms to empower diverse law students: Lessons in pedagogy from transformative law professors. *Berkeley Journal of African-American Law & Policy*, 17, 47.

When asked about their personal feelings, most test takers reported that they agree or strongly agree that people like them belong in law school (85%) (Figure 6). A majority also reported that law school is a realistic option for them (90%). These patterns are consistent across race, ethnicity, first-generation college status, and LSAC fee waiver status, where group-based differences are not observed. While most test takers are confident that they belong in law school and that it is a realistic option, fewer test takers reported that people like them are valued in law school (70%). In other words, three out of 10 test takers anticipate that they will not be valued in law school.

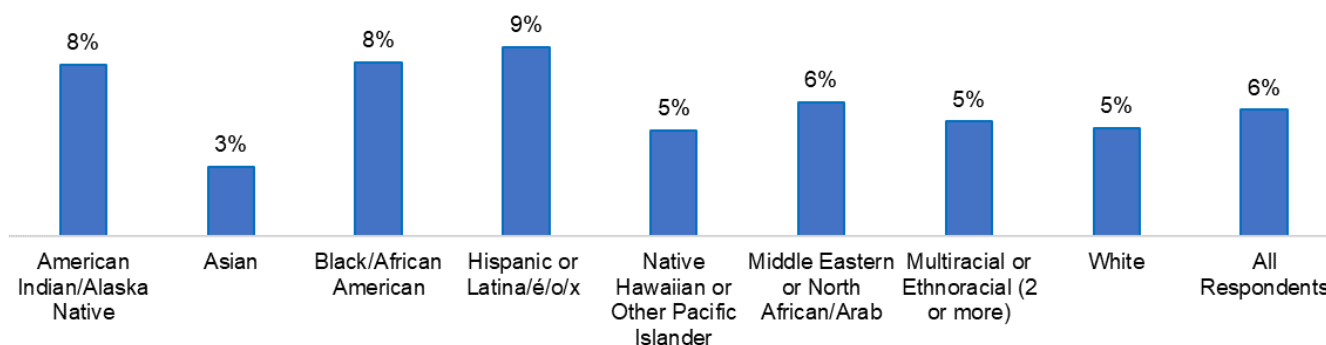
Figure 6: How Do Test Takers Feel About Whether People Like Them Belong and Are Valued in Law School?



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

Racially and ethnically marginalized test takers reported at higher rates than their white peers that people like them are not valued in law school. Nearly double the proportion of test takers who identify as Black/African American (8%), Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x (9%), and American Indian or Alaska Native (8%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that people like them are valued in law school as compared to their white peers (5%), and this proportion was nearly three times greater than their Asian peers (Figure 7). It is important to note that these disparities among racial and ethnic groups on the question of whether they or people like them are valued in law school are consistent and not observed across first-generation college status and fee waiver status. These insights provide evidence that belonging in legal education is not simply about the individual student, but also about how they experience or will experience the environment — will they be valued?

Figure 7: Test Takers Who Strongly Disagree or Disagree That They or People Like Them Are Valued in Law School (n=15,098)

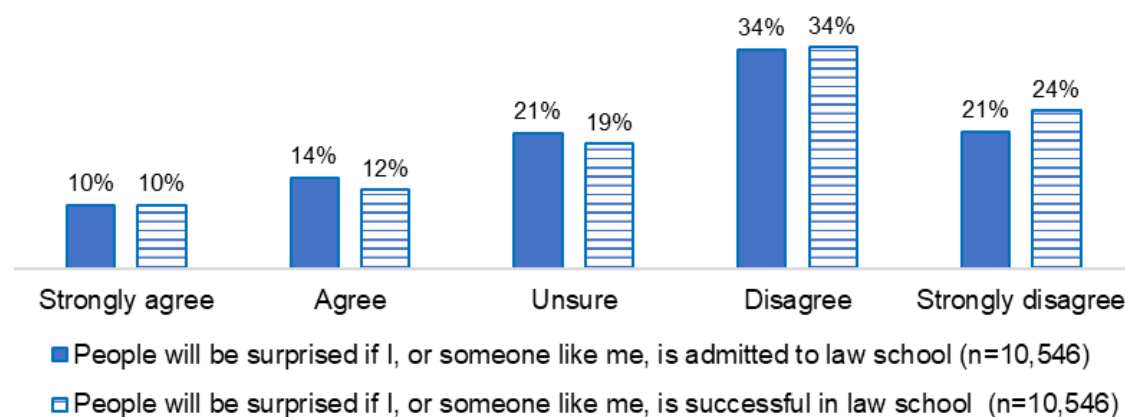


Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data. Due to the low number of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander respondents, data insights for this group should be interpreted with caution not to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

How Others Will Perceive Them Belonging in Law School

While prospective applicants generally feel that people like them belong in law school, they reported that these feelings are not shared by everyone. Close to one-quarter (24%) of prospective applicants strongly agreed or agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were admitted to law school (Figure 8). Just over one-fifth (22%) strongly agreed or agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were successful in law school. These insights imply that test takers are aware and are anticipating an environment where they and people like them are underestimated.

Figure 8: How Do Test Takers Perceive Others Feel About Their Potential?

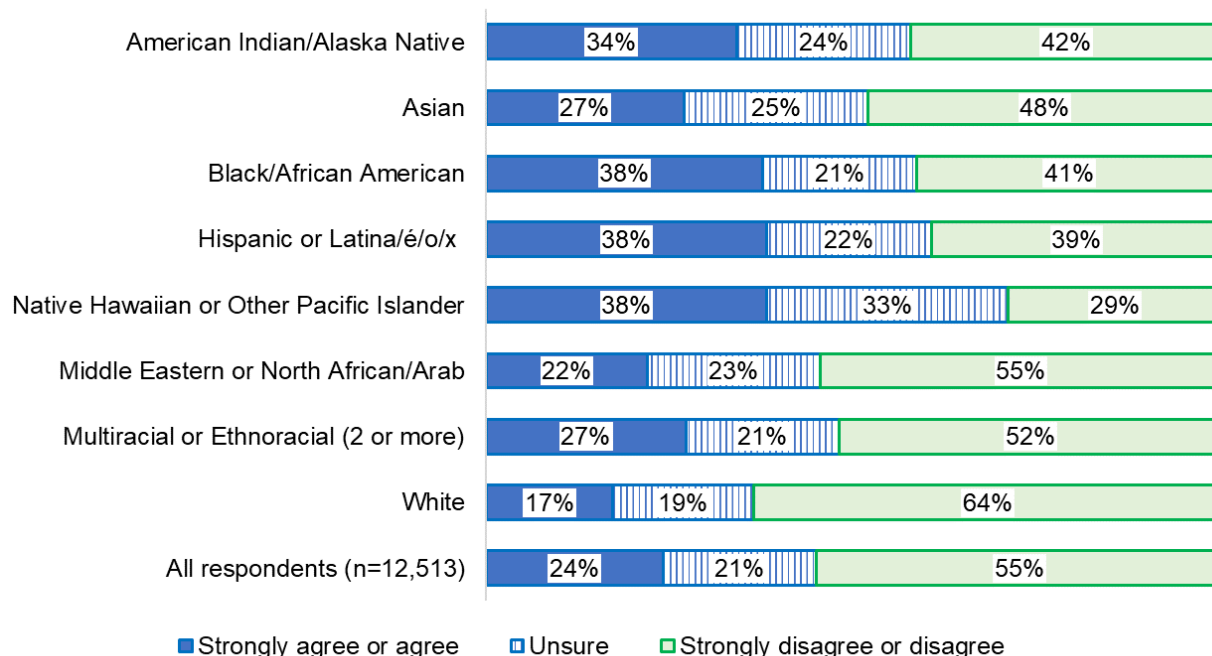


Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

Once again, racially and ethnically marginalized test takers reported at higher rates than their white peers that people would be surprised to see someone like them be admitted to law school. Close to two-fifths of Black/African American and Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x (38% for both) and 34% of American Indian or Alaska Native test takers agreed or

strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were admitted to law school (Figure 9). This is double the rate of their white peers and about 50% higher than the proportion of individuals who identify with any other race and ethnicity.

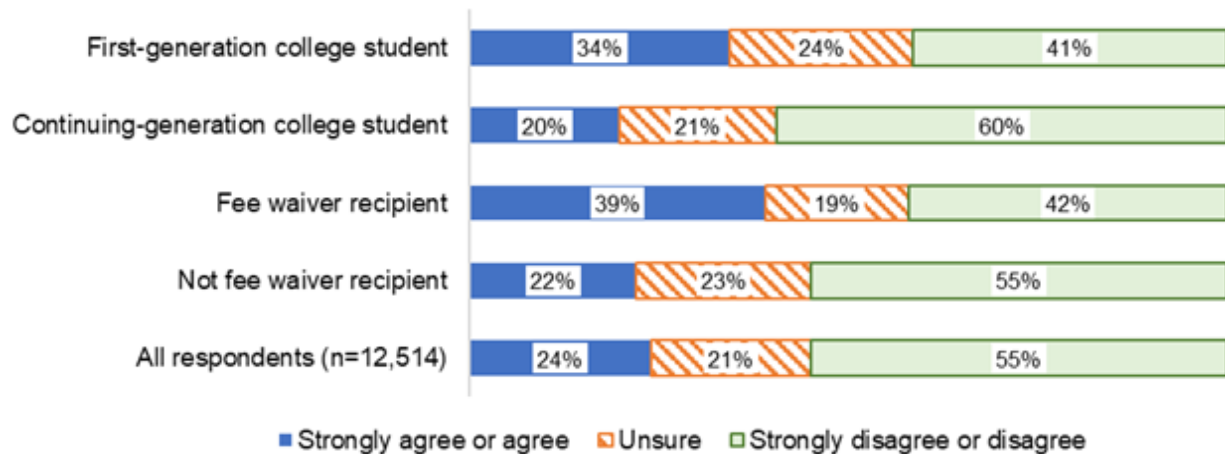
Figure 9: People Would Be Surprised if I or Someone Like Me Were Admitted to Law School by Race and Ethnicity (n=10,546)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data. Due to the low number of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander respondents, data insights for this group should be interpreted with caution not to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

Similarly, test takers with less access to social and human capital and with access to fewer resources based on first-generation college status and fee waiver status, reported at higher rates that people would be surprised to see someone like them be admitted to law school (Figure 10). More than one in three first-generation college students (34%) agreed or strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were admitted to law school, a rate 70% higher than their continuing-generation college students peers (20%; Figure 10). Similarly, more than one in three test takers with LSAC fee waivers (39%) agreed or strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were admitted to law school, a rate 77% higher than their peers who did not use an LSAC fee waiver (22%; Figure 10).

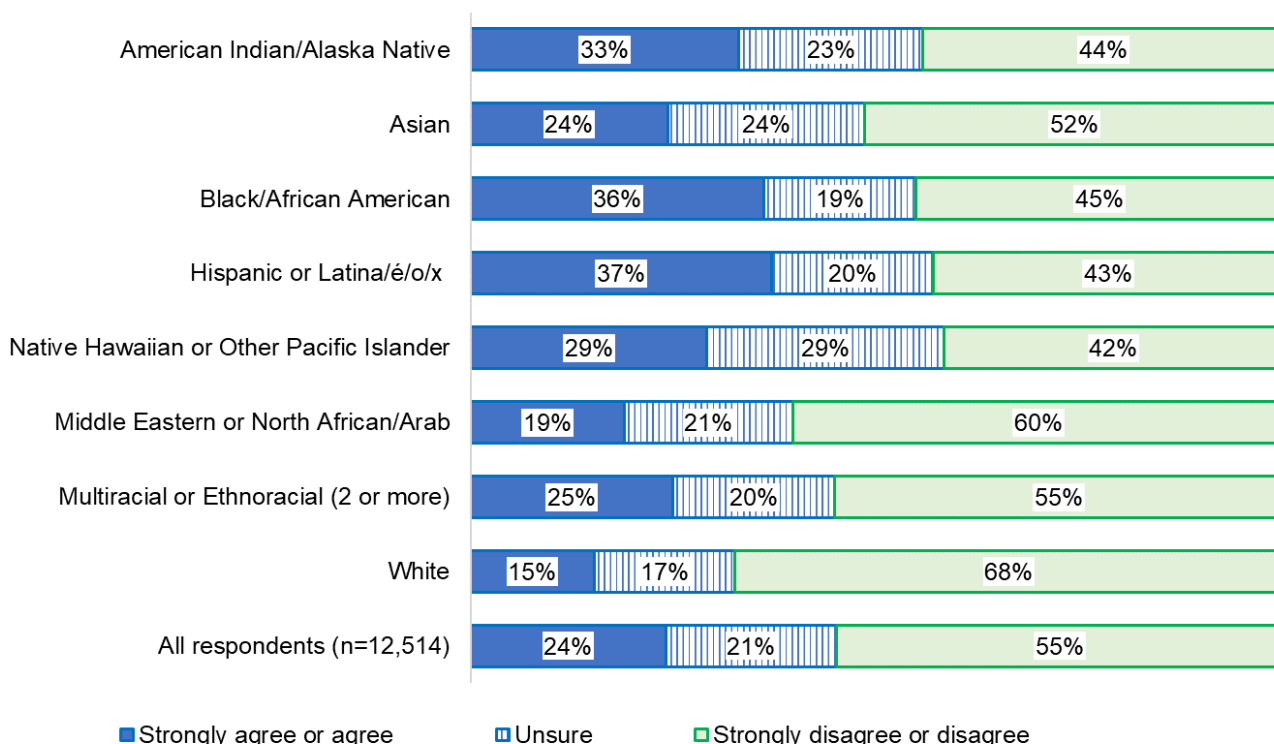
Figure 10: People Would Be Surprised if I or Someone Like Me Were Admitted to Law School by First-Generation College (n=10,316) and LSAC Fee Waiver Status (n=10,546)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

When asked about law school success, racially and ethnically marginalized test takers reported at higher rates that people would be surprised to see someone like them succeed in law school. More than one-third of Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x (37%), Black/African American (36%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (33%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were successful in law school (Figure 11). This is more than double the proportion of white test takers (15%) who reported this.

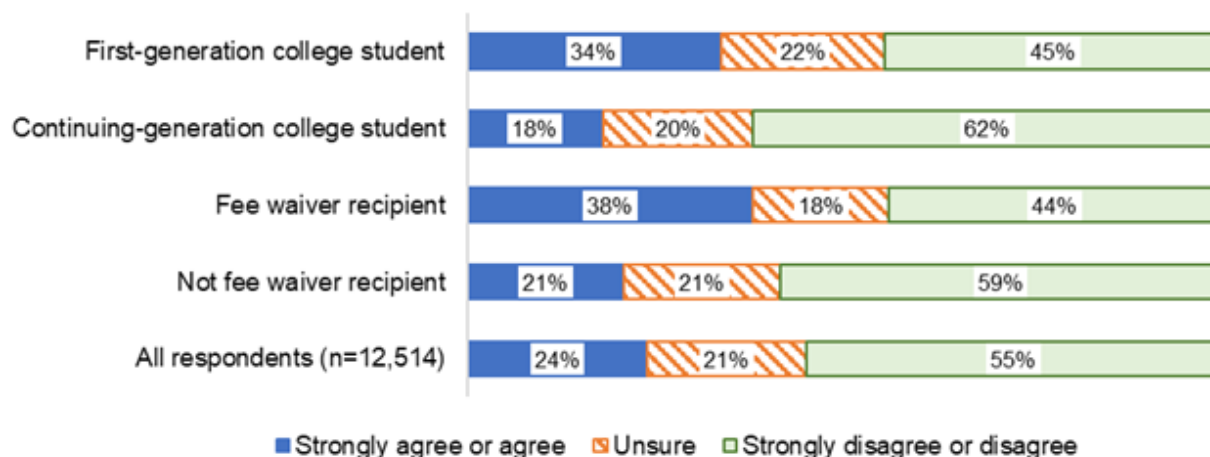
Figure 11: People Would Be Surprised if I or Someone Like Me Were Successful in Law School by Race and Ethnicity (n=10,546)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data. Due to the low number of Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander respondents, data insights for this group should be interpreted with caution not to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

And similarly, first-generation college students and test takers who used an LSAC fee waiver reported at higher rates than their continuing-generation college peers and peers who did not use an LSAC fee waiver that people would be surprised to see someone like them be successful in law school (Figure 12). More than one in three first-generation college students (34%) agreed or strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were successful in law school, a rate almost 90% higher than their continuing-generation college peers (18%: Figure 12). Similarly, more than one in three test takers with an LSAC fee waiver (38%) agreed or strongly agreed that people would be surprised if they or someone like them were successful in law school, a rate 80% higher than their peers who did not use an LSAC fee waiver (21%; Figure 12).

Figure 12: People Would Be Surprised if I or Someone Like Me Were Successful in Law School by First-Generation College (n=10,316) and LSAC Fee Waiver Status (n=10,546)



Source: 2023-2024 LSAC PLQ Data

Generally, these patterns are consistent with research in higher education that shows how students from racially and ethnically minoritized groups are stereotyped and often perceived negatively by others.¹⁶ Given their lived experiences, it is not surprising that test takers from marginalized communities anticipate that they will not be valued and will be underestimated in law school. This is critical to understand for stakeholders to proactively address prospective applicants' concerns about finding learning environments in law school where they are included and supported, both for recruitment and retention purposes. In practical terms, these insights help prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and stakeholders supporting prospective applicants to guide them in identifying what classroom and environmental factors will show that law schools are inclusive and committed to creating learning environments where they will flourish. For law schools, including admission offices, these insights beg the question of "How do you convey that students are valued?" How do you ensure you are not asking students, "Do you feel like you belong?", but rather asking yourselves, "Is this person truly included?"

¹⁶ Carter, P. L. (2005). *Keepin' it real: School success beyond Black and White*. Oxford University Press; Blair, I. V., & Banaji, M. R. (1996). Automatic and controlled processes in stereotype priming. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 70(6), 1142; Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking racism: Toward a structural interpretation. *American sociological review*, 465-480.; Fiske, S. T. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Lindzey (Eds.), *The handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 357-411). McGraw-Hill; Murphy, M. C., Steele, C. M., & Gross, J. J. (2007). Signaling threat: How situational cues affect women in math, science, and engineering settings. *Psychological science*, 18(10), 879-885.; Steele, C. M. (1997). A threat in the air: How stereotypes shape intellectual identity and performance. *American psychologist*, 52(6), 613; Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual test performance of African Americans. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 69(5), 797; Steele, C. M., Spencer, S. J., & Aronson, J. (2002). Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat. In *Advances in experimental social psychology* (Vol. 34, pp. 379-440). Academic Press.

when thinking about policies, programming, classroom structure, and student engagement. Marginalized aspiring students know they belong in law school; however, knowing you deserve to be in a space does not immediately translate into comfort in that space.

These findings and how they are used by law schools have important implications for reducing law school attrition and improving the teaching and training of future legal leaders. These aspiring law students know that they want to be and should be in law school; how schools support them will impact if they stay in law school and how they develop the skills they need to succeed in the legal profession.

Conclusion and Practical Implications

Our findings show that 2023-2024 test takers are driven to do good, to uplift their communities, and to advocate for social justice. They know that they and people like them should be in law school. At the same time, they are aware of barriers like cost and financial aid that can realistically prevent them from going to law school — an awareness acutely felt by those who have less access to resources. And test takers from marginalized communities are aware that they and people like them are often not welcomed, often not valued, and often underestimated in law school. Taken together, the voices of future law school applicants provide us with a number of guiding insights for how to better support and promote their aspirations by centering on what drives them and what they need both to get to law school and to flourish in law school.

As a community exploring new ways to support and recruit the next generation of diverse legal leaders that more fully reflect our society, these insights push us to reconsider how we reach aspiring attorneys along the pathway. To promote access from prelaw to practice requires an intentional shift away from the assumption that exposure alone will open opportunities and access to law school. Instead, these insights direct our focus to addressing the question of “How are we promoting and cultivating law school aspirations among individuals on the pathway, especially those from marginalized communities?” In other words, the key is to recognize the early awareness and interest, and to meet and connect that early interest with programs, resources, and opportunities that help build agency and capacity — translating aspiring law students’ interest into understanding and pathways. In practical terms, this means intentionally considering and linking efforts on:

- a) How prelaw advisors, pathway programs, and other stakeholders empower prospective applicants’ agency to make informed decisions by:
 - Pushing beyond the assumption that early exposure alone will impact diversity on the pathway to law school
 - Using prospective applicants’ motivations to inform guidance on how and where to apply to law school, including helping them search for schools that will offer courses and experiential opportunities that build on their “why”
 - Providing financial literacy and education on how to plan to pay for law school

- Identifying law school environmental factors that signal to prospective applicants which law schools will provide them with the inclusive, supportive environment and experience they need to flourish
 - Connecting prospective applicants with other stakeholders to support them at every point along the journey from early exposure in prelaw through admission and beyond
- b) How law schools recruit and retain future students by:
- Collaborating with various stakeholders in educating and supporting aspiring law students across the journey from the moment they first think about law school
 - Tailoring recruitment strategies to show how school offerings speak to and build upon applicants' motivations for going to law school
 - Addressing concerns about paying for law school
 - Conveying to prospective applicants — through their policies, programs, and actions — how they are valued and will be supported in law school

In an ever-changing admission and legal education environment, it is important to continue learning from test takers and aspiring law students about how they are experiencing the pathway to and through law school. As evidenced in this report, making assumptions about topics such as when people first consider law school and how they understand belonging — based on past data or data about people at a different point on the journey — may not be reliable for moving the needle to usher in the next generation of diverse legal leaders.

With this data, and additional data that LSAC will continue to gather, analyze, and share in the months and years ahead, there is an opportunity for the legal community to come together to expand access and promote equity through a supportive pathway from prelaw through practice. As we continue to collect data and conduct research, we welcome collaboration. If you want to work with us or have questions, please contact us at StrategicResearch@LSAC.org.

Data Source and Methodology

The PLQ was sent via email to all individuals who sat for the LSAT, both first-time and repeat test takers, in August, September, October, and November of 2023, as well as in January, February, and April of 2024. Respondents answered the PLQ on a secure online platform and were able to choose which questions or set of questions they wanted to answer, although some questions were required for research purposes.

Post-stratification survey weights were added to ensure that PLQ respondents are representative of the LSAT test-taking population. Weights were constructed by raking¹⁷ on demographic variables that exceeded 5% difference from the population. For the PLQ data, weights were only applied to measures for gender, as more women

¹⁷ Andrew Mercer, A. L. and C. K. (2018, January 26). *How different weighting methods work*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/2018/01/26/how-different-weighting-methods-work/>

responded to the PLQ proportionally than took the test. No other demographic categories qualified for the use of weights for this report. Because the PLQ was distributed to all test takers after each exam session, weights were also added to account for repeat test takers and those who had taken multiple tests to ensure that PLQ responses were representative of the entire test-taking population. Insights based on PLQ data (n=17,619) are generalizable for the testing population between August 2023 and April 2024.