

LSAC: Celebrating 75 Years in Legal Education

FULL TRANSCRIPT

[White text appears on a blue screen.]

Voiceover: In 1945, the admissions director at Columbia Law School wrote to the College Entrance Examination Board suggesting the creation of a “law capacity test” to use in admission decisions. In 1948, the first administration of the LSAT® gave birth to the idea that became the Law School Admission Council. The Law School Admission Council was born of a simple goal — ensure that admission to law school was, is, and will be based on performance ... not privilege.

[Upbeat music plays as the LSAC logo animates on screen. The title “Celebrating 75 Years in Legal Education” appears and fades out.]

Marcilynn Burke: My involvement with LSAC® began when I was a prospective law student. The LSAT was my gateway to the legal profession.

John Valery White: I began working with LSAC by attending the Dream Keepers Conference, which is a conference LSAC put on in 2003 in response to the Grutter decision, but also as a mechanism of getting minority professors involved in trying to diversify legal education.

Kent Syverud: I was a law dean for 18 years, and I chaired the Law School Admission Council Board of Trustees under Presidents Shelton and Bernstine.

Philip Shelton: My involvement with LSAC started in 1975, on June 1, at the Annual Meeting.

Susan Krinsky: I became more involved with LSAC probably in 1984. The reason I remember that date is that I had a 6-week-old daughter who I actually brought to a committee meeting in Toronto.

Alex M. Johnson Jr.: I began as a member of the Minority Affairs Committee in 1989, then was elected to the Board of Trustees. I then became the chair in 2001 to 2003, of course, became past chair in 2004.

Kellye Testy: I think, like a lot of people, I was first introduced to LSAC as the maker of the LSAT. I was a law school dean for 15 years, but I really didn't know all that LSAC did. And now, as president of LSAC, I really see the enormous breadth of services we provide to law schools and their candidates, and how important that is for law schools.

[Video of attendees at a conference.]

Kent: The Law School Admission Council is unique in that it's of, by, and for law schools.

Marcilynn: I think what makes me excited about LSAC and its role in diversifying the profession is the history of LSAC.

Susan: You know, there was a time when only people with the right last name or the right gender or the right something even thought of pursuing law school.

[Black and white images fade in of the following lawyers and judges: NAACP Chief Counsel Thurgood Marshall, Judge Jane Bolin, Attorney E. Melvin Porter, Congresswoman Barbara Jordan, Chief Counsel Charles H. Houston and Constance Baker Motley.]

I mean, there were some extraordinary individuals who went ahead anyway, but LSAC, I think, has really encouraged and made it normal for everybody to become interested in a law degree and pursuing legal education.

John: The LSAT has been a critical component of ensuring that people are positioned to succeed in legal education, and then go on and pass the bar and be brilliant attorneys.

[Video of a Black lawyer collaborating with colleagues in a law firm.]

Alex: And I'm happy to say that the bar is clearly more diverse than it was when I joined the bar in 1978. I think we've done some groundbreaking research that has elevated the profession. I can show you two things that I have in front of me, "Legal Education at the Close of the 20th Century," "Women in Legal Education," both of which were produced by the LSAC.

[Video of a blue graph animation showing the LSAC National Longitudinal Bar Passage Study document.]

And then, of course, the pathbreaking Bar Passage Study, and that is the only, to my knowledge, longitudinal study of bar passage, and it debunks a lot of the misconceptions about minority pass rates in the United States.

Marcilynn: The LSAT helps to level the playing field, so that law schools can assess candidates across backgrounds.

Philip: At a reception in Washington, D.C., I met the attorney general, Janet Reno, and when I introduced myself as president of LSAC, her first response was: "I love the LSAT. Without the LSAT, I would not be where I am today."

Marcilynn: Part of the issue is that, over time, people have misused the test.

[Videos of diverse people studying in a library and participating in a class in a lecture hall.]

It is one piece of information, combined with a prospective student's undergraduate record, that can tell us something about how well they will do in law school. And so, as I learned more and more about the test, and more and more about what LSAC, as a member organization, is doing for law schools and doing for the profession, I became a real fan.

Susan: LSAC has innovated as long as I've been involved, things like the Forums.

[Videos of diverse people attending an LSAC Forum.]

I mean, that was innovative. Nobody had done that before. Individual schools would have law fairs, but to be able to go to one place and welcome prospective candidates from any school, from people who weren't even in school, that was a big deal.

Alex: The tools that we had to assess student performance and possible success in law school, it wasn't guesswork, but it wasn't exactly a science.

[Video of law school admission professionals in a meeting around a table.]

LSAC has made tremendous strides in providing information, providing the right tools to the deans of admissions, and assessing the quality of the applicant pool.

Philip: The Law School Data Assembly Service report, which incorporated transcripts into the materials that we sent to the schools, and then, many years later, we started adding things like the letter of recommendation service.

Kent: LSAC innovated so letters of recommendation are easy to do for multiple law schools, and others copied that method.

Susan: Being able to deliver the LSAT in different ways — at one time, I'm sure most of us remember it was paper and pencil, and that was it.

[Video of a Black male student on a laptop.]

Now we are delivering it online and remotely. I never thought we would get to that point this quickly.

[Video of a diverse group of professionals in a business meeting.]

John: Legal education is changing dramatically, and LSAC's mission is designed to anticipate and help to structure those changes.

Susan: It's always been LSAC's mission to encourage individuals who are interested in law to take the steps on that journey, from prelaw all the way through practice.

[Black and white image of the first Law School Admission Test.]

Philip: I think that mission is very similar to the purpose for which it was created back in 1948, when the first tests were developed. It's designed to give more people an opportunity, and different people an opportunity, than they had before.

[Video portraits of diverse people.]

Susan: It could well be that middle school students and high school students are thinking about law as a career. We want to encourage them. It could well be, and it is the case, that people who may have finished undergraduate school some years ago maybe kind of always wanted to think about law school, and we are encouraging them to do that. I think we've shown and we continue to encourage individuals with disabilities, individuals of all sexual orientations, that there absolutely is a place in law for you.

Kellye: I love that our theme this year is the theme of "Elevate," and when I think of that word, I don't think about rankings, for instance. I know that's a big factor that many think about all the time in legal education, but what I think about is elevating justice to a priority in our world, and to helping us all understand the ecosystem that we have to take care of if we're going to really move the needle on justice like we want to.

[Videos of a professor instructing a diverse group of students in a library, and a close-up of a young woman looking up.]

And together with our schools and together with the aspiring law school candidates out there, LSAC is always trying to elevate the conversation about the imperative of justice and how we have to all work together to get there.

Kent: For everybody working at LSAC, it was a labor of love, and a lot of that labor was invisible but has had impressive effects.

Alex: The LSAC gave me an opportunity to do something meaningful outside of the classroom to assist in diversifying law schools and then the bar. And I take great pride in the work that I did and hope that it made a difference and is still making a difference in that capacity.

Marcilynn: This is an exciting time for LSAC, for legal education, for the legal profession. It's hard to believe that 75 years ago, a few law schools came together with this idea that they needed a test that better served the needs of law schools, and that they, back then even, were concerned about the lack of diversity in the profession. Fast forward 75 years, and these are still our concerns. And so, while LSAC has endured, it still has a sort of startup spirit about it, in that it's always looking for ways to innovate, it's always in touch with its members, making sure that it's serving the needs of the members, and it's thinking about the prospective student, the law student, and beyond.

Susan: And that, really, is what we're passionate about at LSAC, and that's why I'm passionate about LSAC. We make it possible for individuals to embark on a journey that is not only going to be satisfying to them, but is going to help the rest of the world. And that is, it's a glorious thing, and I'm so proud to be a part of it.

Kellye: One question I get asked a lot as we celebrate 75 years is what's the next 75 look like for LSAC?

[Videos of a group of men and women raising their hands in solidarity, and diverse male and female students sitting in a lecture hall and chatting.]

The world will continue to need a focus on justice, and anytime there's a focus on justice, we're going to need to educate people in how to work in the legal system. And as long as there's a need to educate lawyers, there's a need to make sure we are providing the access and the opportunity and the fairness at the very beginning of that journey, so that the profession can really, truly mirror society and have the respect that it needs to do the work of justice.

[Video of a large and diverse crowd walking on the street in soft focus and slow motion, fading to a portrait of diverse professionals masked by the letters L-S-A-C. Fade to end screen of a blue background on the left and mountain image on the right with the word ELEVATE. White text animates with the voiceover.]

Voiceover: Educate. Celebrate. Elevate. The future of legal education is ours to shape together. Visit LSAC.org.

[Music Fades Out]