

KEY FINDINGS



Value-added scores offer an empirically rigorous means of assessing institutional quality that allows for a fairer comparison of institutional bar passage and job placement outcomes.



Law schools cited for ABA Standard 316 noncompliance can use value-added scores as supporting evidence to demonstrate their efforts and contributions to student learning.



Value-added scores could be incorporated into evaluations of J.D. programs to align with upcoming changes to ABA Standards regarding program-level assessment which begin at the start of the 2026–2027 academic year.

The Benefits of Our Approach

Value-added modeling allows us to measure and quantify a law school's contributions to its students' odds of bar passage and employment, while accounting for variables that are not typically considered in traditional rankings.

Rankings of law schools, such as U.S. News and World Report, base those calculations on factors that are often unrelated to that school's instructional quality, curriculum, and/or pedagogy. Instead, rankings rely on variables like raw bar passage or employment rate, or even institutional prestige, without accounting for their students' entering credentials (i.e., LSAT score and undergraduate GPA).

Our approach offers an alternative to rankings that takes contextual factors – such as a students' entering credentials, a school's resources, and job market conditions – into account when calculating that school's contributions to student success on bar passage and employment.

In 2022, we released our paper **What Is Quality? Advancing Value-Added Approaches to Assessing Law School Bar Exam Performance**¹. This project updates our prior work by using fixed-effects coefficients for law schools' value-added scores, including additional covariates, and adding value-added scores for employment rate in bar passage required and J.D. advantage positions.

COMPARISON OF VALUE-ADDED SCORES AMONG SCHOOLS WITHIN U.S. NEWS LAW SCHOOL RANKING TIERS

	U.S. News Ranking Tier (2024)	Ultimate Bar Passage Rate (2024)	Employment Rate (2023)	Bar Passage Value-Added: 9-year	Bar Passage Value-Added: 3-year	Employment Value-Added: 9-year	Employment Value-Added: 3-year
School A (LSAT 172, UGPA 3.82)	1-25	97%	96%	-0.06	-0.15	0.09	-0.17
School B (LSAT 165, UGPA 3.83)	26-50	96%	89%	-0.08	0.21	-0.06	-0.54
School C (LSAT 162, UGPA 3.65)	51-75	91%	88%	-0.01	0.35	0.00	0.15
School D (LSAT 156, UGPA 3.60)	76-100	96%	88%	0.05	0.21	-0.08	0.13
School E (LSAT 154, UGPA 3.40)	101-125	90%	92%	0.03	-0.03	0.00	0.17
School F (LSAT 155, UGPA 3.41)	126-150	78%	78%	0.03	0.15	-0.01	-0.35
School G (LSAT 151, UGPA 3.37)	151+	81%	77%	0.08	0.21	0.03	0.33

Note: Colors range from dark blue to dark orange, representing both the direction and magnitude of the scores. LSAT and UGPA values indicate the median values at matriculation for the graduating cohort of 2023 (ABA, 2020). Ultimate Bar Passage Rates indicate the rate for the graduating cohort of 2021 (ABA, 2023). This table was created with Datawrapper.

See **Table A.6** in the Appendix of our paper for a list of all law schools, their bar passage and employment value-added scores, their bar passage differential and rank based on differential, their employment rate and rank based on employment rate, and their *U.S. News* ranking.

If we look across a range of schools, as we do in the table to the left, we find that value-added scores diverge from a traditional view of law school impact based on *U.S. News* rankings, bar passage, and employment rates. Under the conventional paradigm of measuring law school impact, one might conclude that the school at the top is the “best”, with “quality” diminishing further down the list. However, examining the value-added for each of these schools reveals that these determinations are more nuanced.

As the table shows, there is remarkable variation in law school impact between schools, with darker orange indicating a more negative value-added and darker blue indicating a more positive value-added. School G, for instance, attains consistently positive value-added scores, despite having a *U.S. News* ranking below 151, the second lowest ultimate bar passage rate, and the lowest employment rate. Notably, value-added also varies within schools, with some schools attaining a mix of positive and negative scores.

1. Scott, J. M. & Jackson, J. (2022). What Is Quality? Advancing Value-Added Approaches to Assessing Law School Bar Exam Performance. AccessLex Institute Research.