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February Bar Exam by the Numbers: How Schools Fared

Cheryl Miller, The Recorder

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SACRAMENTO—Newly released figures for California’s February bar exam show a wide disparity in pass rates among American Bar Association-accredited law schools.

Sixty-five percent of test-takers from Loyola and UCLA law schools passed the exam, according to [documents released Wednesday by the state bar](#). That’s the highest rate for any school where at least 11 graduates took the test. The state bar does not disclose figures for schools with fewer test-takers to help shield their identities.

At the ABA-approved University of the Pacific McGeorge School of Law, just 32 percent of the 81 graduates—about 25 students—who took the February exam received passing scores. That’s below [the test’s overall pass rate of 34.5 percent](#) and lower than the success rates of graduates from two non-ABA-accredited schools, San Joaquin College of Law (36 percent) and Santa Barbara College of Law (40 percent).

Scores on the February exam typically run lower than those on the July exam because of the higher number of repeat test-takers in the spring. First-time test-takers traditionally fare better.

The range of success by school and relatively low pass rates on the February test will [add to the debate over California’s exam](#), which is now under scrutiny by law school deans, lawmakers and state bar officials.

“It’s the right direction to be going in,” said UC Hastings Dean David Faigman, whose graduates beat the average success rate with 48 percent earning a passing score. After the school’s students logged [disappointing scores on the July 2016 test](#), Hastings paid for exam preparation programs for graduates and linked test-takers with alumni for additional help. The school is building more bar exam prep work into the curriculum for current students, a move Faigman has mixed feelings about.

“It presents the danger of taking time away from teaching students how to be good lawyers so they can be better test-takers,” he said.

Faigman and other deans are pressing state bar leaders to study the exam's validity and to lower the pass score in the meantime. The state Supreme Court has [refused to temporarily lower the score](#), although justices asked the bar to return with recommendations for possible changes by the end of the year. Bar officials are currently conducting several studies on the exam.

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