

2022 First-Year Law School Class: A Focus on Students with Disabilities

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Key Insights

Disproportionate burdens are placed on students with disabilities¹, in life and in law school, as compared to students without disabilities — whether it's the often costly and time-consuming process of having to prove one's disability, difficulties obtaining accommodations, confronting stigmas around the receipt of accommodations, or other aspects of living and learning in a largely non-accessible world.² These processes can be isolating and affect students' sense of belonging. It can be particularly difficult when students have “non-apparent” disabilities — such as mental health disorders, chronic pain, autoimmune disorders, and other types of disabilities — which can result in feeling extra pressure to “perform” one's disability in order to be believed. The multiple identities of law students with disabilities (i.e., the intersectionality of identities) can exacerbate existing inequities; for example, the socioeconomic barriers for students with disabilities are compounded for racially and ethnically minoritized³ students with disabilities.⁴

Through the 2022 LSAC Matriculant Survey, current law students have helped us begin to understand how the law school application and decision-making processes are experienced by individuals with disabilities. **Key insights from the survey sample include:**

- In 2022, 12% of students in their first year of law school (2022 law school matriculants) identified as a person with a disability.
- Students reporting a disability were more likely to be white, continuing-generation college, cisgender, and straight (i.e., heterosexual) students.

¹ LSAC has chosen to use Person-First language in alignment with the National Organization on Disability, the American Association of People with Disabilities, and the American Bar Association. Person-First language is largely recognized as emphasizing the individual over their disability, condition, or diagnosis. We respect and honor an individual's personal preferences when referring to their own disability including the use of Identity-First language.

² Emens, E. F. (2020). Disability admin: the invisible costs of being disabled. *Minn. L. Rev.*, 105, 2329.

³ The use of “minoritized” is intended to refer to the “process [action vs. noun] of student minoritization” that reflects an understanding of “minority” status as that which is socially constructed in specific societal contexts. Benitez, Jr., M. (2010). Resituating culture centers within a social justice framework: Is there room for examining whiteness? In L. D. Patton (Ed.), *Culture centers in higher education: Perspectives on identity, theory, and practice* (pp. 119-134). Stylus Publishing. Stewart, D. L. (2013). Racially minoritized students at U.S. four-year institutions. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 82(2), 184-197. For example, women are not minorities in legal education today, but they are one of many minoritized groups. These are groups that face social, political, economic, and educational barriers that constrict them. Minoritized groups include women, students of color, first-generation college students, students with disabilities, students of low socioeconomic status, and LGBTQIA+, transgender, and gender-nonconforming students, to name a few.

⁴ Payne-Tsoupros, C. (2020). A starting point for disability justice in legal education. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSCORE)*, 6(1), 165-189.

- Over 40% of law students with a disability did not disclose their disability on their law school applications. Those identifying as men were more likely to disclose their disability than were women or gender diverse students⁵ (54%, 43%, and 42%, respectively).
- Students with disabilities entered law school with higher average undergraduate education debt loads than students without disabilities.
- When choosing their law school, students with disabilities generally assigned more importance to a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) — including having faculty from marginalized communities and course offerings that address these communities — than did students without disabilities.
- Law students with disabilities reported assigning more significance to the availability of student supports, including academic support services, disability services, mental health services, DEI programming and services, and the availability of healthcare coverage, than did students without disabilities.
- Compared to college or university students without disabilities, students with disabilities more often rated as "important" or "very important" recruitment activities including 1) open houses where applicants could attend classes and meet with law students and faculty and 2) prelaw fairs on the college or university campus where students could meet with representatives from the law school.

⁵ The category of "gender diverse" includes anyone who identified as transgender, gender nonbinary, or another gender identity (with the option to specify). Due to the small number of individuals identifying as each, those who identified as anything other than man or woman were considered as one group for comparison purposes.

Defining Disability

There are many ways to define disability, and, often, the definition an institution uses can include or exclude specific individuals. While there is a legal definition set by the Americans with Disabilities Act⁶ that most institutions use and is based largely, but not solely, on a medical model of disability (i.e., disability as an individual medical condition causing impairment), it is important to note, especially when considering policy changes, the social-relational and other models of disability. The social-relational model reframes disability as an interplay of social factors, environmental factors, and individual impairment that can together or individually limit the extent of participation in society.⁷ This model takes the onus off an individual to adapt to a society created for non-disabled people and puts more of that responsibility on society or an institution to create an inclusive, accessible, and equitable environment.

Legal definition. “The term disability means, with respect to an individual, a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such an impairment.” (42 USC 12102)

Social-relational model. This is a framework for understanding disability that recognizes an individual’s impairment cannot be separated from the experience of their disability. This model acknowledges personal experiences and an individual’s impairment while considering the environmental and social factors that interact with the personal experience, simultaneously creating barriers to societal participation.

⁶ ADA.gov. (2023). Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act. <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>. As stakeholder noted, to meet the definition of “regarded as” being disabled the person need only show that an action has been taken based on an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment, whether or not that impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity. There is a subtle distinction between “perceived” and “regarded as.” Moreover, the distinction between “one or major life activities” and “one or more major life activities of such individual” is important because a person has to show that they are specifically limited and not just limited in a generic sense. Finally, although the first and arguably second prong of the ADA definition bespeak a medical model to an extent, the third prong (regarded as) more directly implicates a social model of disability.

⁷ Martin, J. J. (2013). Benefits and barriers to physical activity for individuals with disabilities: a social-relational model of disability perspective. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 35(24), 2030-2037. Also, Oliver, M. (2018). Models of disability. *Handbook of Disability Sport and Exercise Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

Adults with Disabilities in the U.S.

In 2021, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that more than 27% of adults in the U.S. had a disability (more than 1 in 4 or nearly 66 million Americans).⁸ Members of racially and ethnically minoritized populations tend to report higher rates of disabilities. For example, among adults over the age of 18 in the U.S., 29.3% of Black or African American, 31.1% of Hispanic, and 40.9% of Native American individuals were disabled as compared to 26.5% of white and 17% of Asian individuals.⁹ In 2018, 26% of all adults with disabilities lived in poverty, 16% more than individuals without disabilities in the U.S.,¹⁰ and only 15.2% had a bachelor's degree or greater as compared to 35.2% of adults without disabilities.¹¹ In 2015-2016, 19.4% of undergraduate students reported having a disability.¹²

Students with Disabilities in Law School

To date, there is limited data about how many students with disabilities enroll in law school each year. Despite the lack of data, we do know that racially and ethnically minoritized students face more obstacles, both socioeconomic and others, to accessing law school than both racially and ethnically minoritized students without disabilities and students with disabilities who are not racially and ethnically minoritized.¹³ To learn more about these students, LSAC and Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) have begun to collect disability information through their respective surveys.

⁸Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities, Division of Human Development and Disability. Disability and Health Data System (DHDS) Data [online]. [accessed Aug 15, 2023]. URL: <https://dhds.cdc.gov>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Individuals without disabilities in the United States had a poverty rate of 10%.

¹¹ Erickson, W., Lee, C., von Schrader, S. (2022). Disability Statistics from the American Community Survey (ACS). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute (YTI). Retrieved from Cornell University Disability Statistics website: www.disabilitystatistics.org

¹² National Center for Education Statistics. (2018, May). Table 311.10. Number and percentage distribution of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, by level, disability status, and selected student characteristics: 2015–16 [Data table]. In *Digest of education statistics*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. Retrieved January 25, 2022, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d20/tables/dt20_311.10.asp.

¹³ Payne-Tsoupros, C. (2020). A starting point for disability justice in legal education. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSCORE)*, 6(1), 165-189.

2022 Law School Matriculants with Disabilities

In October 2022, LSAC distributed a survey to all 2022 law school matriculants to understand who current law school matriculants are and what factors they considered to determine which law school(s) would meet their academic, professional, and personal needs. For the first time, LSAC included questions on disability.¹⁴ Overall, 12% (n=356) of the responding 2022 cohort identified as a person with a disability (Table 1). The fact that this number is lower than the 19% reported by LSSSE for students across all years of law school¹⁵ is consistent with the fact that the proportion of individuals with disabilities increases with age.¹⁶

About 1 in 3 students with disabilities reported being

Table 1: Percent of Students with Disabilities by Demographic Factors and Debt Load

Student Identities	% of Individuals with Disabilities*
First-Generation College Status	
First-generation	30% (106)
Continuing-generation	70% (246)
Gender	
Man	29% (102)
Woman	64% (223)
Gender diverse	7% (24)
Sexual Orientation	
Straight/heterosexual	57% (187)
LGBQ+ (not straight)	43% (143)
Race and Ethnicity	
Native American/Alaska Native or Indigenous Person of Canada	3% (10)
Asian	8% (28)
Black or African American	9% (31)
White	50% (178)
Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x	9% (32)
Middle East or North African/Arab	3% (10)
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	<1% (1)
Two or more races/ethnicities	10% (34)
Not identified	9% (32)
Average Debt	
Students with disabilities	\$38,710
Students without disabilities	\$29,806

*Percent reporting disabilities is based on only those who specifically identified whether they did or did not have a disability in the survey.

¹⁴ These questions were developed with the input of a focus group of current and former law students with disabilities organized by the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy, and Innovation as well as the ABA Council on Disability Rights.

¹⁵ LSSSE results include current students from all years in law school which may account for some of the difference in numbers. Law School Survey of Student Engagement. (2022, September). Blog: New Questions Focusing on Law Students with Disabilities. <https://lssse.indiana.edu/blog/new-questions-focusing-on-law-students-with-disabilities/>

¹⁶ Because the number of respondents with disabilities was low and there is very limited or no data to compare prevalence of disability in each year of law school, we are not drawing a comparison between LSSSE data and this survey data. We are simply identifying the difference in our results and noting one

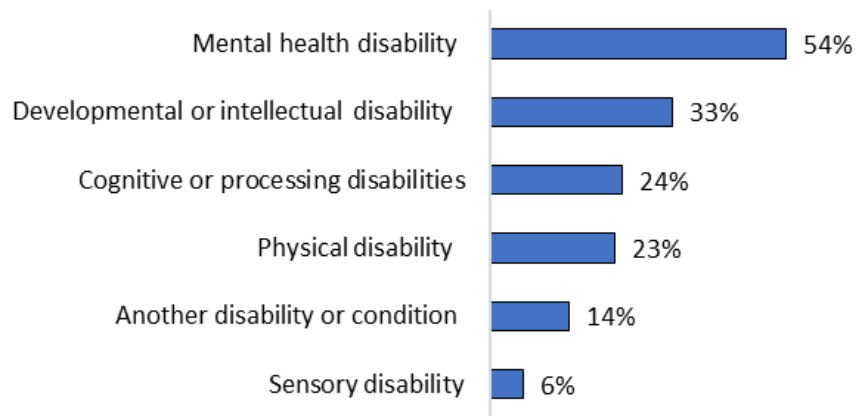
first-generation college graduates, almost half were from racially and ethnically minorized groups, and they reported carrying higher undergraduate debt than their peers who did not identify as having a disability (Table 1). A deeper dive into the data also found that students with disabilities in the LSAC survey were more likely to identify as women, identify as straight, and be white. It is important to note that the actual number of students with disabilities responding to this survey is low. While we are pointing to trends consistent with national-level data throughout this report, we do not have enough data at this time to say that the trends identified are representative of all first-year law students (1Ls) with disabilities. LSAC will continue to administer the matriculant survey on a yearly basis to all 1Ls. As we gather more data, we will be able to make more definitive statements about law students with disabilities and their different intersecting identities. Until that time, these results serve as a starting point for law schools to think about how law school programs and policies can create the most equitable and inclusive environments for all.

Consistent with the LSSSE survey results, most students with disabilities reported a mental health or developmental or intellectual disability (Figure 1).¹⁷ However, unlike the LSSSE survey, the LSAC survey separated mental health disabilities (i.e., anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, or another mental health disability)

from developmental or intellectual disabilities (i.e., those with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD or ADD), who are on the autism spectrum, or who have another developmental or intellectual disorder).

As we continue to collect information from law students with disabilities, these distinctions will be key for law schools in understanding who their law students are and how to enact equitable policies and practices that best meet the needs of all their students.

Figure 1: Percent of All Students with Disabilities by Self-Reported Type of Disability (n=354)



source of difference. This does not imply that if LSAC surveyed all law students that the proportion of law students would be 19%. Erickson, W., Lee, C., & von Schrader, S. (2020). 2018 Disability Status Report: United States. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Yang-Tan Institute on Employment and Disability (YTI).

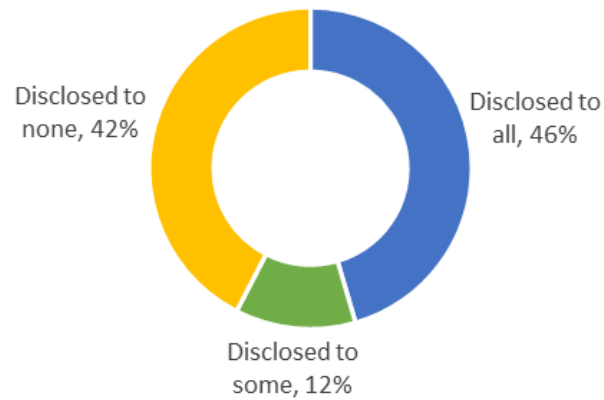
¹⁷ Students were given the option to disclose more than one disability. Therefore, the total percent in Figure 1 does not add up to 100%.

Disclosing Disabilities

Providing reasonable modifications or accommodations under the ADA is intended to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity to succeed on par with law students without disabilities. When requesting modifications or accommodations, students must disclose their disabilities. The first step in the process is deciding whether to disclose. Both the competitive environment of law school in which high achievement is seemingly at odds with the ADA's definition of disability (i.e., substantial limitations to one or more major life activities)¹⁸ and "accommodation discrimination"¹⁹ (or experiencing discrimination or stigma experienced as a result of accommodations being granted) can be strong disincentives for students to disclose. This is consistent with what 2022 matriculants reported with less than half of all students with disabilities reporting they disclosed to all the law schools to which they applied (Figure 2).

Men were more likely to disclose to all schools to which they applied (54%) compared to women (43%) and those identifying as gender diverse (42%). Black and Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x students were less likely to disclose to all schools (32% and 44%, respectively) than Asian or white students (50% and 51% respectively). It was more common among students with disabilities who did not request and receive accommodations on the LSAT to not to disclose to any schools (48%) as compared to those who did request and receive accommodations (37%).

Figure 2: Percent of Students by Disability Disclosure on Law School Applications (n=356)



Students who disclosed to all schools indicated they wanted to be transparent about their needs as a student (65%) or find out about available accommodations (42%). The emphasis on expected need for support during law school is consistent with those with disabilities who did or did not request accommodations. However, it is important to note that students may not disclose a disability on their law school application, but this does not mean they will not disclose later through, for example, their school's disability services office, to receive accommodations. Seventeen percent of students shared other reasons for disclosing, such as the centrality of disability to their identity and motivation for applying to law school and their need to explain undergraduate grades

¹⁸ Hensel, W. F. (2007). Disability Dilemma: A Skeptical Bench & (and) Bar, *The U. Pitt. L. Rev.*, 69, 637.

¹⁹ Macfarlane, Katherine, Accommodation Discrimination (August 15, 2022). 72 *American University Law Review* (Forthcoming 2023), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4190587> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4190587>

and/or LSAT score. As one respondent who is a Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x, straight, continuing generation man who disclosed to all schools explained his ambivalence about disclosing, “[I] needed to disclose in order to tell coherent story about my academic career; would not have disclosed otherwise.” But other respondents expressed the centrality of their identity as a disabled person. As one Black, asexual, continuing generation woman respondent noted, “It’s an essential part of why I wanted to become a lawyer.”

Conversely, those who chose not to disclose to some or all of the law schools to which they applied — over 50% of students with disabilities — were afraid doing so would hurt their chances of being accepted (82%) or did not want to be judged (75%). Twenty-three percent of students cited the irrelevance of their disability to their application, not feeling their disability was severe enough to warrant disclosure, the lack of space to disclose, and confusion around qualifying diagnoses. One Black and Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x, continuing generation woman explained, “Not sure how I would have been able to. If I knew how, I would have done so.” By contrast, a gay, white, first-generation man made a conscious decision not to disclose because of “internal shame, [and] lack of space to [write] about it.” For those who did not disclose, accommodations did not appear to be a consideration, although they may have revisited this once they were in law school.

Important Factors in Choosing Law School

Matriculants were also asked about the importance of various factors in their decision about which law school to attend. There were some notable differences in factors rated as very important or important when choosing their school between students with disabilities and those without.

Students with disabilities were more likely to assign greater importance to factors related to faculty, including a high level of faculty engagement with students (66%), faculty who are leading experts in their fields (43%), and faculty diversity (31%) (Table 2). Learning about the breadth of diverse perspectives that a school’s faculty can offer and the level of their engagement with students can provide prospective students with disabilities a better understanding of, for example, whether they are likely to face biases or discrimination based on

Table 2: Faculty and Academic Support Factors Ranked as Very Important or Important for Students with and Without Disabilities

Factors	% of Students with Disabilities	% of Students Without Disabilities
Faculty who are leading experts in their field	43%	37%
Faculty diversity	31%	26%
High level of faculty engagement with students	66%	60%
Feeling supported to perform well academically	70%	65%
Academic support programs	51%	45%

their accommodations from faculty members or how much support and understanding they can expect from faculty if specific classes or assignments are significantly more burdensome due to their disability.²⁰ As has been noted with students from many minoritized groups, it is also important that there are faculty and other individuals with disabilities who hold positions of power in the law school. This provides them not only with a sense of belonging, but also with concrete examples of successful people who have struggled in similar ways.²¹ This also aligns with the greater importance students with disabilities assigned to feeling supported to perform well academically (70%) and a school's academic support programs (51%; Table 2).

Students with disabilities tended to be more concerned than their peers without disabilities about many aspects of DEI at a school. It is not surprising that proportionally more students with disabilities would find DEI-related factors important or very important, including a school's commitment to DEI (55%); the perception of a supportive environment for diverse identities and affiliations at a school (54%); and the availability of diverse course offerings that incorporate topics like race, ethnicity, gender, economic background, and social topics (42%) since these factors can be indicators of how comfortable a student with disabilities will feel and how committed a school is to not just a diverse student body, but also how their school equitably serves all students and how inclusive the environment is (Table 3). A strong focus on equity and inclusion beyond diversity can signal to a student with disabilities that attending the school will not likely require as much additional "admin" work for them²² or put them in a position to make others understand and/or feel comfortable with their disability or disability in general.²³ Additional factors which were important or very important to students with disabilities,

Table 3. Diversity-Related Factors Ranked as Very Important or Important for Students with and Without Disabilities

Factors	% of Students with Disabilities	% of Students Without Disabilities
School commitment to DEI	55%	45%
Supportive environment for diversity	54%	42%
Diverse course offerings	42%	35%
Student body diversity	42%	34%
Student groups & organizations	38%	31%
DEI programming & services	38%	28%

²⁰ Siegel, L., & Tani, K. M. (2021). Disabled Perspectives on Legal Education: Reckoning and Reform. *J. Legal Educ.*, 71, 3.

²¹ Silvers, A., & Francis, L. P. (2008). No Disability Standpoint Here!: Law School Faculties and the Invisibility Problem. *University of Pittsburgh Law Review*, 69(3).

²² Emens, E. F. (2020). Disability admin: the invisible costs of being disabled. *Minn. L. Rev.*, 105, 2329.

²³ Woolf, E., & de Bie, A. (2022). Politicizing self-advocacy: Disabled students navigating ableist expectations in postsecondary education. *Disability Studies Quarterly*, 42(1).

more so than when compared to students without disabilities, include student body diversity (42%); student interest groups and student-led organizations (42%); and available DEI programming/services offered by the school (38%) speak to the type and number of opportunities available for students with disabilities to find an inclusive environment supportive of group-specific student organizations where students can feel comfortable exploring their many identities beyond being a student with a disability (Table 3).

The services schools offer all students can also be a significant factor in where a student will feel most supported based on their specific needs. It is no surprise that students with disabilities were exponentially more likely to identify disability services as very important or important to their school choice (50%; Table 4). It is also no surprise that mental health services (45%) are important to students with disabilities considering the emotional and psychological burdens that come with navigating a law school

designed for students without disabilities,²⁴ the fact that students with mental health disabilities rely on these services, and the well-documented, persistent high rates of mental health crises and substance use disorders among law students.²⁵

Table 4: Health Services and Financial Factors Ranked as Very Important or Important for Students with and Without Disabilities

Factors	% of students with disabilities	% of students Without disabilities
Disability services	50%	10%
Mental health services	45%	22%
Healthcare coverage	25%	15%
Application fee waiver offered	38%	33%

Availability of healthcare coverage is also much more important to students with disabilities (25%; Table 4). Coverage offered by a school may give students more options or less expensive options for more comprehensive coverage than they could find elsewhere. This may be related to higher cost of living for individuals with disabilities,²⁶ which can also contribute to lack of adequate financial resources for schooling, inferred based on the higher average debt load among students with disabilities (Table 1) and the higher importance they assign to availability of application fee waivers (38%; Table 4).

²⁴ Siegel, L., & Tani, K. M. (2021). Disabled Perspectives on Legal Education: Reckoning and Reform. *J. Legal Educ.*, 71, 3.

²⁵ Jaffe, D., Bender, K. M., & Organ, J. (2021). "It Is Okay to Not Be Okay": The 2021 Survey of Law Student Well-Being. *U. Louisville L. Rev.*, 60, 441.

²⁶ Goodman, N., Morris, Z., Morris, M., & McGarity, S. (2020). The Extra Costs of Living with a Disability in the US—Resetting the Policy Table. Working paper, National Disability Institute. A <https://www.nationaldisabilityinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/extra-costs-working-paper.pdf>

The survey highlighted some of the major differences between students with and without disabilities when it came to recruitment activities of law schools. Meetings with current law students were ranked very important or important by almost 60% of students with disabilities, compared to less than half of their peers without disabilities (Table 5). Meeting with current law students would likely provide the best perspective on what it is like to be a student at the school and what barriers students from minoritized

populations may face. Meetings with faculty (54%), attending classes (51%), and open houses for applicants (50%) were all more important to students with disabilities. Meetings with faculty can give

Table 5: Law School Recruitment Activity Factors Ranked as Very Important or Important for Students with and Without Disabilities

Factors	% of Students with Disabilities	% of Students Without disabilities
Meetings with students	59%	47%
Meetings with faculty	54%	44%
Attending classes	51%	44%
Open houses for applicants	50%	45%
Meetings with law school representatives on your college/university campus	44%	37%
Meetings with law school representatives at prelaw fairs	37%	29%

students with disabilities vital information they need about how faculty members may implement accommodations in their classes and specific challenges that a student with disabilities will have to navigate that others may not. Attending classes may allow a student to assess classroom layout, style of teaching, the use of accommodations by other students, and many other aspects of being a law student that neither meeting with current students nor faculty can fully capture. Attending open houses can be a key experience to assess the general feel of the campus, gauge personal comfort level, and learn about navigating the campus and services available to students.

Additionally, students with disabilities were more likely than students without disabilities to find it important or very important to meet with law school representatives at their undergraduate institutions (44%) and at prelaw fairs (37%; Table 5).²⁷ Meeting on a student’s college campus can lessen anxiety and requires less planning by a student. These meetings and prelaw fairs provide students with disabilities the opportunity to explore schools that they may have otherwise discounted wholly or in part because of their disabilities, with the added convenience of many schools being in one place at one time. Given that the question about prelaw fairs gave specific examples of fairs directed toward minoritized populations, these fairs may include many schools whose representatives focus on what their law schools do to be inclusive.

²⁷ In this context, prelaw fairs do not include LSAC law school forums. Examples given in the survey question included the National Black Pre-Law Conference and Law Fair and National Hispanic Pre-Law Conference and Law Fair. The survey asked about LSAC law school forums separately, but there was no real difference between rankings from students with and without disabilities.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Law Schools

While the results in this brief report are preliminary and do not address all aspects of the legal education journey that law students with disabilities take, they do highlight some important aspects of DEI in law schools that we can learn from. First, just because we cannot always see students with disabilities, often because we don't specifically and systematically count them, does not mean that they do not make up a sizeable portion of the law student population. Second, although there is great diversity within the umbrella term "students with disabilities," similar to students without disabilities, students within the group have heterogeneous experiences, thoughts, and needs in and about many aspects of law school that should not be reduced to one voice representative of all. Unless law schools begin to better understand what those experiences, thoughts, and needs are and take steps toward ensuring equal access to the opportunity for a legal education, law schools will, often unknowingly, perpetuate barriers to an inclusive and equitable legal education for all law students. Lastly, there is still significant stigma around disclosure of a disability. Whether that is internal to the individual due to discriminatory experiences and/or the everyday challenges they encounter moving through a world designed for those without disabilities, law schools have the opportunity to begin addressing this stigma and ensure that our future lawyers will better understand disability issues and be part of increasing access to justice for the millions of people with disabilities in our communities.

The following is not a comprehensive list of recommendations and is not intended to be proscriptive. Each school can and should determine what is appropriate within the constraints of its budget and available human resources. However, it is important to remember that even a small change can have a large impact and that one small change can build momentum for greater change.

- **Encourage your 1L students to complete the LSAC Matriculant Survey every year.** This will allow us to collect more and more complete information about students with disabilities at your school that you can use to make informed and evidence-based decisions about policies and practices that affect your student body.
- **Provide clear information about how your school defines disability and ensure there is a method to share it with applicants, admitted students, and matriculants.** Many students who have disabilities may not realize their specific condition constitutes a protected disability. Providing examples as to what is considered a disability and what services are available, both for those who choose to use accommodations and those who do not, may encourage all students to think about disability differently and help chip away at the stigma often associated with requesting and receiving accommodations.
- **Include recruitment activities that are preferred by students with disabilities.** As you think about equitable recruitment practices that are inclusive of students with disabilities, you may want to do the following:

- Make sure that all students and faculty who may meet with any prospective or admitted student can answer general questions about disability services or other services students with disabilities may need or at least be able to provide a specific contact person at your law school who can answer these questions.
- If your school provides information for students who sit in on classes, include specific mentions of disability services and accommodations. Including the proportion of students with disabilities or the proportion of students who receive accommodations may help destigmatize disability and the use of accommodations. In addition, make sure all classes offered for students to attend are in ADA-accessible spaces.
- Make sure that school open houses include information about disability services and availability of accommodations, as well as a map of facilities that are and are not ADA accessible.
- Law school representatives, whether on the campus of an undergraduate institution or at prelaw fairs, should have literature that includes specific mention of disability services, accommodations, and who to contact with questions about disability services. Since many students are hesitant to disclose their disabilities, providing the information to all students will ensure that everyone, especially those who need it the most, receives it.
- **Evaluate the process a student with disabilities must go through to receive accommodations and identify areas for improvement.** Make sure to consider aspects of the process that will place additional burdens on students such as the cost of a private evaluation to prove disability status. This should include ongoing contact with students with disabilities and their affinity groups to learn how the process for receiving accommodations can be improved as well as getting feedback from those who need to use the process.
- **Evaluate general efforts around DEI to understand where disability fits in at your school. Some questions you can ask include:**
 - How do we characterize diversity?
 - What identities do we focus on when thinking about/talking about/planning programming for diverse populations at the school?
 - What student identities are represented in student organizations, how are those organizations supported, and how active are they? (e.g., your school may have a disability affinity group, but they may not be visible to students if they aren't very active or don't have support from the school, whether that is funding, faculty supervision, or another aspect of a healthy student organization.)

- **Encourage law professors with disabilities to participate in committees and hold leadership positions.** Inclusion of faculty with disabilities in decision-making positions, especially when it comes to policies and practices that can disproportionately affect students with disabilities, will ensure that the voices and needs of individuals with disabilities will be considered.
- **Assess services that students with disabilities use or may use to determine how well the services your school offers meet those needs.** Services can include any and all aspects of being a law school student such as living accommodations, academic support services, specialty health care services, and more. The experience of these services will be different for students based on the type of disabilities they have, so it will be important to include a breadth of disability voices in the conversation assessing current services and planning for the future.
- **Assess curricular and co-curricular offerings to determine whether students interested in disability rights/law or students with disabilities would find coursework that would be relevant to them personally or for their future careers.** Offering courses addressing disability issues in law and hands-on learning opportunities through, for example, a disability legal clinic, will signal to prospective students with disabilities that they will both see personal issues reflected in course content and have the opportunity to be part of disability law in action.
- **Use resources to learn about best practices and find resources for your students and school.** The following is a starting point but should not be viewed as a comprehensive list of all resources. Be proactive in seeking out resources that address specific issues you may identify.
 - **The National Disabled Law Students Association (<https://ndlsa.org/>):** They offer resources for law students (e.g., an internship and externship guide and information to consider when making the choice to disclose or not to disclose), law schools (e.g., tips and information for law school career services offices and ensuring that on-campus interviews are accessible), and information for law students who would like to start their own school organization affiliated with NDLSA.
 - **The National Disabled Legal Professionals Association (<https://twitter.com/NatDisLegal>):** The National Disabled Legal Professionals Association (NDLPA) is a national association of disabled lawyers, judges, policy experts, legislators, academics, and other legal workers, professionals, and organizers. NDPLA was founded in 2022 to organize and unify disabled legal professionals into a force for change, and to advocate for and empower disabled legal professionals. NDPLA strives to promote professional growth and opportunity for disabled attorneys and legal professionals; provide community service; improve access and inclusion in the profession; and ensure access to justice for all.

- **American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights** (<https://ambar.org/disability>): They offer many resources for prospective law students and law students with disabilities (e.g., a state-by-state directory of disability programming at law schools, state-by-state guide of character and fitness questions that ask about mental health, scholarship opportunities, corporate summer internships for 1Ls, free webinars, a mentorship program for law students and recent graduates with disabilities, and more) and law schools (e.g., opportunity to sign Disability Diversity in the Legal Profession: A Pledge for Change; a 21-Day Disability Equity Habit-Building Challenge syllabus, accessibility resources, ABA resolutions addressing the rights of people with disabilities in all aspects of society, free webinars, etc.).
- **Disability Justice** (<https://disabilityjustice.org/law-schools-and-disability-law/>): This site includes a series of interviews with President and Dean of Mitchell Hamline School of Law, Anthony Niedwiecki. While the interviews are aimed at prospective law students, these can help law schools better understand the needs of law students with disabilities and aspects of law school which may impose undue burdens.
- **The Coelho Center for Disability, Law, Policy and Innovation at Loyola Law School** (<https://www.lls.edu/coelhocenter/>): The mission of The Coelho Center is to collaborate with the disability community to cultivate leadership and advocate innovative approaches to advance the lives of people with disabilities. Their Coelho Law Fellowship Program aims to increase the pipeline of disabled law students and legal professionals. The year-long program prepares college students and recent graduates with disabilities to apply and succeed in law school and includes a summer disability rights law course, LSAT prep, and mentorship.
- **American Association of People with Disabilities Summer Internship Program** (<https://www.aapd.com/summer-internship-program/>): The purpose of the internship program is to “develop the next generation of leaders with disabilities.” This paid internship located in the Washington, DC area with placements in congressional offices, federal agencies, non-profits, for-profits, and STEM-focused federal agencies includes accessible housing for in person or a housing stipend for remote participants, participation in a Disability Advocacy Certificate Program, and connection with a mentor for career guidance.

- **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)** (<https://www.ahead.org/home>): The vision of AHEAD is to promote “professional practice that operationalizes an expanded concept of access grounded in civil rights, disability equity, and social justice.” They offer numerous resources for Disability Resource Professionals and institutions including free webinars, consultation to assess Disability Offices and/or approach to access for students with disabilities, and white papers and guiding documents for Disability Resource Professionals, among other resources.

It is important to remember that disability is not a problem to be solved nor is it a distraction from the goals of education, but some institutional structures can make it seem that way to the unknowing administrator or instructor. Thus, using resources like those referenced above and creating programs that universally support students have the potential to positively impact all students in their law school journey. Because of the stigma attached to disabilities, especially the invisible ones that impact cognitive processing or mental health, it can be difficult for individuals to disclose their need for accommodation in spaces like law school where perfection is valorized. However, if most student needs are met in advance through universal design or low-barrier access to needed accommodation, then students and their law schools will have higher chances of successful outcomes long term.

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