

Features and Information

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WILLIAM WALSTAD, Section Editor

LSAT Scores of Economics Majors: The 2003–2004 Class Update

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Abstract: Using 1994–1995 data, Nieswiadomy (1998) found that economics majors scored well on the Law School Admissions Test. These results are frequently posted on university Web sites by economics departments. However, because the results are nearly 10 years old, it may be interesting to determine if economics majors still perform as well. The author, using current data for the 2003–2004 class of students entering law school, finds that economics majors still performed at or near the top of all majors taking the test. Economics majors rank first (156.6) of the 12 largest disciplines (those with more than 2,200 students entering law school). Economics ranks third behind physics/math (158.9) and philosophy/religion (157.4) in a set of 29 discipline groupings that are created to yield at least 700 students with similar majors.

Key words: economics majors, law school, LSAT scores
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Using 1994–1995 data, Nieswiadomy (1998) found in an earlier study that economics majors scored well on the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT). In this article, using data for the 2002–2003 test takers entering law school in 2003–2004, I investigate whether economics majors still performed at or near the top of all majors taking the test.

The LSAT score is a prime component in determining admission into most law schools. The test is scaled from a low of 120 to a high of 180. The Law School Admission Council's (LSAC) Web site gives statistics on the acceptance rates

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TABLE 1. LSAT Percentiles for Selected Scores

LSAT score	Percentile
172	99.0
166	94.6
163	89.7
159	79.1
158	76.5
157	72.6
156	68.7
155	66.7
154	61.5
153	57.3
152	53.2
151	49.1
150	44.9
149	41.0
148	37.0
147	33.4
146	29.6
145	26.4

Note: Based on June 2001–February 2004 test scores. LSAT = Law School Admissions Test.

into various law schools based on the undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and the LSAT score. The top nationally ranked law schools require extremely high LSAT scores. For example, a student with an LSAT score of 169 would be in the 25th percentile of students admitted to Harvard Law School, whereas the student would be in the 98th percentile among all students in the nation. Table 1 shows the percentiles for the range of average scores (145–159) by discipline that I examined in this study as well as the 90th, 95th and 99th percentiles. These percentiles are the most current used by the LSAC and are based on tests taken from June 2001 though February 2004.

The test scores of students who applied to at least one American Bar Association-approved law school are compiled by the LSAC (2004). Only the first major provided by the applicants is listed. The number of test takers has increased 15 percent in the past decade, from 82,067 in 1994–1995 to 94,391 in 2002–2003. Approximately 151 majors are now categorized (compared with 120 majors in 1994–1995) by the LSAC. However, many of the majors are really sub-disciplines and have very few students taking the test. Thus I summarized the 2002–2003 data in two ways, in a similar fashion to the previous study (Nieswiadomy 1998). First, disciplines were ranked by the average LSAT scores of those disciplines with over 2,200 applicants. Second, to analyze all 151 disciplines, groups of similar disciplines were created to generate groups of at least 700 students with similar majors, and then these groups were ranked.

TABLE 2. Average 2002–2003 LSAT Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	No. of students
1	Economics	156.6	4,163
2	Engineering	155.4	3,367
3	History	155.0	4,716
4	English	154.3	6,265
5	Finance	152.6	3,492
6	Political science	152.1	15,023
7	Psychology	152.1	5,164
8	Accounting	151.1	2,232
9	Communications	150.5	2,893
10	Sociology	150.2	2,293
11	Business administration	149.6	2,598
12	Criminal justice	144.7	3,433

Notes: At least 2,200 students took the exam. LSAT = Law School Admissions Test.

Table 2 shows the average LSAT scores of disciplines with more than 2,200 students. The results were very similar to the 1994–1995 results. As in 1994–1995, economics majors ranked first (156.6) among these 12 largest disciplines. Engineering placed second (155.4). As before, the most popular major for law school, political science, ranked (152.1) near the average score for all students (152.2). And as before, criminal justice ranked last (144.7).

All students taking the test and applying for admission are divided into disciplines (or groups of disciplines) in Table 3 to construct 29 categories containing at least 700 students. The results are similar to the 1994–1995 results. The top three majors have remained the same, with economics (156.6) placing third behind physics/math (158.9) and philosophy/religion (157.4) in a group of 29 disciplines.

The 2002–2003 data clearly indicate that economics majors performed well on the LSAT. As with the 1994–1995 data, caution should be used in advising students. Economics majors (in fact, all majors) are a self-selected lot. Thus, we cannot determine the separate effect of the student's unobservable characteristics from the effect of the economics curriculum because the data are provided only in summary form from the LSAC. Furthermore, because standard deviations by majors are not provided, no multiple comparisons of means can be made. Nonetheless, economics instructors should continue to take some measure of pride in the success of their majors on the LSAT.

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TABLE 3. Average 2002–2003 LSAT Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	No. of students
1	Physics/math	158.9	723
2	Philosophy/religion	157.4	2,410
3	Economics	156.6	4,163
4	Government/service	155.5	811
5	Engineering	155.4	3,367
6	Anthropology/geography	155.2	1,103
7	International relations	155.1	1,557
8	History	155.0	4,716
9	Computer science	154.8	1,115
10	Chemistry	154.5	1,000
11	English	154.5	6,736
12	Biology	154.4	3,110
13	Arts	154.2	2,534
14	Foreign languages	154.0	1,174
15	Finance	152.6	3,492
16	Political science	152.1	15,023
17	Psychology	152.1	5,164
18	Accounting	151.1	2,232
19	Sociology/social work	151.1	4,337
20	Journalism/communication	150.9	4,281
21	Health profession	150.4	1,120
22	Marketing	150.2	2,068
23	Liberal arts	149.9	1,447
24	Management	149.7	4,189
25	Business administration	149.6	2,615
26	Education	148.9	728
27	No major/other	148.1	8,197
28	Prelaw	147.4	856
29	Criminology	145.1	4,123
	Weighted mean	152.2	94,391

Notes: Grouped by major field with at least 700 students taking exam. LSAT = Law School Admissions Test.