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The Value of Legal Education as a Continuum of Personal & Collective Gains: Insights from
Administrators & Latinx Students across Differently-Ranked Law Schools

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on Latinx law students' valuation of their legal education across differently-ranked institutions to understand how law students navigate the uneasy waters of a deeply hierarchical field that also verbalizes a commitment to ethnoracial equity. Drawing from 96 interviews with law students as administrators from eight different institutions, we find that administrators and students within higher-ranked institutions express distinct patterns of valuation than their counterparts at lower ranked institutions. For those at lower-ranked institutions, their valuation of their education is contingent on their prospective goals to serve their local communities. In contrast, students at higher-ranked institutions rely on rankings to articulate prospects of a prestigious future. Across all tiers, however, we show the significant toll that narrowly normative accounts of value propositions have for both students and administrators.

Keywords: Latinx, Rankings, Valuation, Prestige, Hispanic Serving Institution, Diversity, Equity.

Introduction

A robust cadre of legal and social science scholars lament the pace at which law schools address issues of access, persistence, and successful licensing for students of color. Alongside this troubling trend, scholars frame the pursuit of a legal degree as an endeavor mired with diminishing affordability and hampered by institutions' willful participation in a perennial pursuit of prestige that further entrenches competition amongst students (Espeland & Sauder, 2016; Sturn & Guinier, 2007). These structural issues notwithstanding, both national law organizations—like the American Bar Association—and law schools rightly sustain a vocal commitment to the value of wider ethnoracial representation within the legal profession (Deo, 2009). Law schools embody an enduring tension of inequitable stratification within the broader landscape of graduate education in the United States (Cassuto, 2015). They illustrate how institutions pursue greater ethnoracial diversity within a perceptual context of degrees' diminishing affordability and non-financial value (Taylor, 2017). Despite institutions' efforts to increase ethnoracial representation to advance a more equitable profession, the legal field remains a space where employers' perceptions of law schools' prestige correlates with students' future employment opportunities and students' class ranking determines the types of extracurricular opportunities they can access (such as their selection into law journal editorial boards) (Cotton, 2006; Sanders & Baumbauer, 2012). Succinctly: the field of legal education is no closer than the rest of the educational landscape in the United States in achieving its hope of educational equity across ethnoracial differences.

The structural issues of affordability and degrees' perceived value have not resulted in decreased enrollments across all ethnoracial groups. Latinx students have had a disproportionately larger enrollment in law schools since the 2008 Great Recession. Li, Yao & Liu (2020) observed that “the rise in Hispanic enrollment over the past decade is wholly attributable to increasing numbers of Hispanic women, the only subgroup whose enrollment is higher now than before the Great Recession” (p. 10). Increases in Latinx enrollment could foreseeably address chronic underrepresentation within the legal profession. In the United States, current estimates project that 1 in 5 adults will identify as Latinx within the next decade, yet account for less than 4% of lawyers in the nation (Cepeda, 2016). These strides in advancing ethnoracial diversity within the legal profession, however, are not without cause for concern. The institutions that have been most successful at increasing their proportion of Latinx students, and students of color more broadly, are the same institutions ranked in lower tiers by widely used ranking schemes like U.S. News (Sloan, 2015; Taylor, 2015). These rankings often coincide with institutions' ability to

survive in a competitive market. For example, Whittier College, a Hispanic Serving Institution in California, announced its official sundown of its law school in Fall 2017 (Seltzer, 2017).

In this paper, we focus on Latinx law students' valuation of their legal education across differently-ranked institutions to understand how law students navigate the uneasy waters of a deeply hierarchical field that also verbalizes a commitment to ethnoracial equity. Understanding the current landscape of legal education without robust insights into the agency of students' choices to enroll at institutions across the entire ranking hierarchy undermines our collective ability to understand contemporary articulations of a law degree's value. Our contribution extends prior literature in two important ways. First, we contribute to scholarship on ethnoracial differences in graduate education by demonstrating how participants' identities can be represented in scholarly literature to foreground their complexities. Secondly, drawing from 96 interviews with law students as administrators from eight different institutions, we find that administrators and students within higher-ranked institutions express distinct patterns of valuation than their counterparts at lower ranked institutions. For those at lower-ranked institutions, their valuation of their education is contingent on their prospective goals to serve their local communities. In contrast, students at higher-ranked institutions rely on rankings to articulate prospects of a prestigious future. Across all tiers, however, we show the significant toll that narrowly normative accounts of value propositions have for both students and administrators.

Literature Review

Our study draws from prior empirical work focused on organizational identities within the field of higher education, with a primary focus on the body of work that has examined the educational context within Minority Serving Institutions. Higher education researchers in the United States focus on a subset of over 600 colleges and universities serving a disproportionate number of undergraduate students of color to examine how institutions can reorganize to address enduring racial disparities (Castro Samayoa & Gasman, 2018). Collectively named Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs), these universities and colleges contribute to a more ethnoracially equitable future in postsecondary education in the United States.

Through amendments to the Higher Education Act of 1965, special federal appropriations are available for institutions meeting eligibility criteria for Historically Black Colleges & Universities, Tribal Colleges & Universities, Asian American Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions and Hispanic Serving Institutions (Castro Samayoa, 2018). Recently, scholars of MSIs have underscored two opportunities for future scholarship: (1) clarifying how institutions' ethnoracial composition informs their organizational identities, (2) extending the domain of inquiry of MSIs beyond the purview of institutions' undergraduate activities (Alcántar, Bordoloi Pazich & Teranishi, 2019; García, 2019; García & Guzmán-Alvarez, 2019; Wooten, 2015; Wooten, 2019).

Within the subset of MSI researchers, scholarship specific to Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) notes the paucity of studies advancing the HSI organizational framework to examine how institutions respond to ensure Latinx students are supported in their graduate education (García & Guzmán-Alvarez, 2019; Marín & Pereschica, 2018).

The absence of scholarship focused on HSIs at the graduate level is unsurprising: most of the prior research HSIs operationalizes HSIs as an organizational framework by focusing on institutions that meet the federal eligibility criteria; namely, those institutions enrolling at least 25% Latinx-identifying students at the undergraduate level (Núñez, Crisp & Elizondo, 2016; Núñez, Hurtado & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). However, organizations like Excelencia in Education have asserted the need to expand the scholarly focus to also include “emerging Hispanic Serving Institutions (eHSIs)”, that is, institutions within a few percentage points of meeting the eligibility threshold for federal eligibility for appropriations designated for HSIs (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). Indeed, scholarship on eHSIs has grown within the past few years and extend the purview of how researchers operationalize eHSI as a meaningful unit of analysis (Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2020; Hu & Blanco, 2020). Thus, the growth of a more expansive understanding of HSIs has enabled researchers to examine how institutions engage in a spectrum of organizational actions that respond to the shifting demography of its student body. More broadly, scholarship on MSIs can be framed as responsive to the imperative for a more focused understanding of the way organizational practices evidence the fabric of racialized stratification. As sociologist Victor Ray notes, the opportunity for focusing on the racialized identities of colleges and universities Our study, then, addresses this call by specifically focusing on institutions enrolling proportions

Much like rankings’ deleterious effects for law schools who serve disproportionate numbers of students of color, ranking mechanisms also undermine MSIs’ perceived value at the undergraduate level (Conrad & Gasman, 2015). Yet, prior evidence empirically shows how each type of Minority Serving Institution disproportionately contributes to the successful credentialing of low-income students of color despite diminished fiscal support from state appropriations and endowments (Espinosa, Kelchen & Taylor, 2018; Gasman, Castro Samayoa & Nettles, 2017; Hardy *et al.*, 2019).

Extant scholarship on graduate legal education has yet to formalize contributions that focus on organizational change through the lens of ethnoracialized institutions (Ray, 2018). Scholars in the legal field have demonstrated how law schools’ increase in ethnoracial diversity are also positioned within lower rungs of the prestige hierarchy (e.g. Taylor, 2015). Within the legal profession, we have an opportunity to contribute scholarship with a committed focus on the diversification of its student body to understand how distinct organizational actors make meaning of these shifts.

Conceptual Framework and Research Questions

Our conceptual framework draws from scholarship on HSIs. Colleges and universities become eligible for Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) as a federal designation when they enroll at least 25% Latinx-identifying students at the undergraduate level (Núñez, Crisp & Elizondo, 2016). Given the undergraduate focus for this designation, few scholars have used this framing to explore graduate education (Marin & Pereschica, 2018). By leveraging the insights from HSI scholarship, we seek to understand how institutions enact their mission to serve Latinx student from a systems perspective (García, 2017) while also considering scholarship specific to legal education's efforts to diversify the profession.

Taylor's (2015) examination of enrollment trends across law schools empirically demonstrated the increase of students of color in the legal field, yet cautioned that this trend also revealed an increase in the racial stratification within law schools. Taylor cautioned that researchers should be attentive to the "increasing racial and ethnic stratification among law schools" (2015, p. 354).

In this study, we heed Taylor's concerns by framing our own approach through Tejani's conceptualization of legal education's professional apartheid (2017). Tejani's work considers the racialization of law schools in the United States following the 2008 financial crisis by documenting how fourth-tier institutions employed market-driven logics to recruit students of color and increase schools' financial stability. Tejani's framing describes how broader economic forces affect law schools' enrollments and contrasts institutional agents' decisions to diversify their student population as responsive to economic forces. These decisions operate in tandem with social justice framings focusing on the moral value of diversifying the legal profession. The extant scholarship examining the value of legal education traditionally frames these inquiries in terms of graduates' work placement success (Gallup, 2018; Redding, 2003). Yet, this research has left unanswered how students of color navigate the process of choosing to pursue a legal degree at institutions that have lower rankings. Similarly, research has yet to address how institutions that may be regarded as lower in rankings, in fact, have succeeded in the charge of diversifying the legal profession.

We offer a more nuanced conceptualization of law schools' value proposition by incorporating Tejani's notion of the law's professional apartheid alongside organizational theories proposed by scholars of Hispanic Serving Institutions examining how institutional stakeholders (students and administrators, for example) experience an institution's responsiveness to the value of ethnoracial diversity. In the context of HSIs, García (2017) has proposed a typology that classifies institutions on a matrix that places institutions as Latinx-enrolling, Latinx-producing, Latinx-serving, or Latinx-enhancing. In this typology, institutions are considered Latinx-enhancing when both organizational outcomes and organizational cultures are supportive of Latinx students. Conversely, when organizational outcomes and culture are unresponsive to the specific needs of Latinx students, they are classified as Latinx-enrolling.

Our conceptualization for this study draws from Tejani and García by exploring how various institutional stakeholders navigate the competing discourses of a law degree's value within a macro (contextual) level that values efforts to increase ethnoracial representation alongside the legal field's emphasis on institutional rankings and prestige. At the meso (institutional) level, we consider how these discourses are manifested within the everyday experiences of students' and administrators' understanding of the institutions they inhabit and, from a micro (individual) level, we examine how respondents' own social locations (e.g. ethnoracial identities) inform how they navigate these competing discourses that attribute different values to the pursuit of a law degree.

Research Questions

In this manuscript, we answer four research questions across two domains of interest: (a) perceptions on the value of legal education across institutional hierarchies; (b) accounts on the role of ethnoracial diversity in legal education. Across our sample, we seek to yield insights from institutional actors that inhabit distinct spheres to inform their experiences. By interviewing both administrators and institutional representatives, our study yields insights from institutional actors that inhabit distinct organizational locations and who, nonetheless, must negotiate the external rhetorics of institutional ranking as an inescapable influence to their own valuation of legal education. Specifically, we answer:

- (a) How do Latinx students articulate the value of their legal education in the context of their institutions' ranking?
- (b) How do Latinx students articulate the institution they chose for their law degree and the field's interest in increasing ethnoracial diversity?
- (c) How do institutional representatives articulate the value proposition of their degree in the context of their institutions' ranking?
- (d) How do institutional representatives identify and articulate institutional actions supporting greater ethnoracial diversity amongst students?

Study Context and Methods

Selecting Institutions

The eight institutions included in this study were selected by sorting according to the proportion of enrollment of Latinx-identifying students within three adjacent cohorts of law school students.

To select institutions for this study from the over 200 ABA-accredited law schools within the United States, we began by creating a database merging the publicly available Standard 509 Disclosure Forms from 2011-2017¹. These data were cross-referenced with rankings reported

¹ An updated repository (2011-2020) of these merged data are available at <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/ABRFZ4>

by U.S. News & World Report (2019) and Ryan and Frye's (2017) revealed preference rankings. In using these rankings to select institutions, our analytic strategy did not seek to legitimate the validity of these metrics, but rather, ensure that we had a breadth of institutional representation across tiers of ranking to explore how individual actors (micro-level) operationalize the institutional dynamics (meso-level) responding to the influence of ranking prestige (macro-level).

We synthesized these three distinct ranking systems to produce an averaged position for each institution and divide institutions across roughly equal quartiles. Across each of the four tiers (T1 through T4), we selected the two institutions enrolling the largest proportion of Latinx-identifying students. *Table 1* shows the overview of descriptive attributes for each institution. We noted which of these institutions crossed the enrollment threshold (25% of Latinx-students) that would, in theory, make these law schools eligible for a designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institutions if the federal eligibility criteria for the undergraduate student body were to be applied to law schools' enrollments.

To abide by the assurances of anonymity and confidentiality of information for participants in this study, we have redacted the specific information that may easily identify any of these institutions. As such, we refer to the general region of the country for each institution, and use the nomenclature TYX where referencing a given institution, where *Y* is an integer between 1 and 4 to denote the given institution's tier (e.g. Tier 1 for the two institutions in the sample which are highest in ranking), and where *X* is either A or B, to distinguish between the two institutions in the same tier within our sample of eight institutions. For example, the two lower-tiered institutions in our sample are labeled as T4A and T4B, respectively, throughout this manuscript.

[Insert Table 1 Here {Institutional Overview}]

Recruiting Participants.

Student Participants. To identify student participants, we circulated recruitment messages to student leaders of the National Latino/a Law Student Association and the Latino Law Students' Associations (or equivalents) at each of the eight institutions. Our recruitment message noted our eligibility criteria: students in their second year of law school who self-identified as Hispanic, Latino/a, Latinx, or of Latin American heritage. Given that we were only focused on eight institutions and prospective participants could share the digital flyer with peers at other institutions, we confirmed where they were enrolled prior to determining their eligibility and only proceeded with the interview if they named one of the eight eligible institutions. Prospective participants were not told the list of eight eligible institutions. All students received a gift card for their voluntary participation.

We recalibrated our eligibility criteria to include any student who had at least completed the first part of their 2L year. This modification enabled 3L and those who had recently completed their degree to also participate in the study. To widen the reach of our recruitment message, we encouraged participants to disseminate the digital flyer to supplement our recruitment from social networking platforms and emails through respondent-driven sampling (Heckathorn, 2011).

Institutional Representatives. For institutional representatives, we proceeded with a purposive sampling approach (Robinson, 2014). Given the role of specific institutional agents in promoting the vision for an institution (Tejani, 2017), we sought to recruit the participation of individuals within the following functional areas: Dean of Law School, Admissions Director (or equivalent), Career Services (with designated emphasis on law students), Dean of Student Life for Law School (or equivalent). Though representatives expressed interest in their study, the attrition rate for their participation was substantially higher than prospective student participants. Future continuations to this study can enhance the depth of analysis across administrators' hierarchies, which we are unable to explore within the present manuscript given the larger proportion of institutional representatives in mid-level positions.

Participant Overview

Student Participants. Tables 2-A and 2-B offer a descriptive overview of salient demographic markers for the 81 law students in this study. Twenty-three participants attended the two institutions identified within Tier 1 (T1). Tiers 2 (T2) and 3 (T3) yielded comparable samples, with 23 students and 24 participants, respectively. Tier 4 (T4), had a lower participant yield, with 11 students.

Across all Tiers, the vast majority of participants (85%) had completed their bachelor's at the time when they participated in their interview. A small number of participants, however, had recently completed their J.D. given that their interviews took place over the summer. Participants had entered their legal education from over 21 distinct majors, with the largest proportion (74%) housed within the social sciences (e.g. Political Science, Psychology, Criminal Justice, and Criminology). For 68% of participants across all tiers, both their undergraduate institutions from which they graduated and their law schools were within the same state.

Pursuing a graduate legal degree stood in stark contrast to participants' guardians' educational trajectories. For 49% of participants, their guardians had achieved no more than a high school diploma (or equivalent) in the United States or elsewhere. As participants discussed, many of these interrupted pathways to completing high school or postsecondary degrees were often the consequence of their guardians' migration to the United States prior to participants' birth or in their early childhood. However, for 30% of participants, at least one parent had achieved a graduate degree (master's or doctorate), though only a small percentage within these participants had direct relatives who had pursued a legal degree.

Participants' narratives of their guardians' migration into the United States was often their referent to identify their self-description within a specific immigrant generation. Broadly, 79% of participants claimed to be first generation, as a way of describing themselves as the first members of their immediate families to reside in the United States. One participant claimed affiliation within the "1.5 generation," to describe their immigration into the United States during their early childhood. For others, like a few Puerto Rican participants, their sense of affiliation with immigrant generations was loaded with racialized assumptions of foreignness often ascribed to U.S. citizens hailing from territories. As a participant succinctly explained: "despite being born in the United States, I'm treated as a second class citizen."

Unlike traditional social scientists' approaches to describe participants' demographic information using the "5 races + 1 ethnicity" reporting model guideline from the Office of Management and Budget's Statistical Directive 15 from the 1990s (Anderson, 2016), we opted for a different way of representing participants' ethnoracial identities. To learn about participants' demographic self-identification, we included an open-ended questionnaire to which participants responded verbally at the end of their interviews (or via a digital questionnaire if there were time constraints, as was the case with two administrators). Participants' responses to open-ended questions about their racial and ethnic identities evidenced the complex terrain that Latinx individuals navigate within the United States. On the one hand, *Table 2-B* suggests that 42% of student participants described themselves as white at some moment in their response to these questions. Five percent of respondents also self-identified as Black (for which we also included participants who described themselves as Afro-Latinos). Yet 43% of participants identified as Latino, Latina, or Latinx; 41% as Hispanic, and 38% claimed a sense of affinity for an ethnonational marker (e.g. Guatemalan, Mexican, Colombian, Salvadoran).

The panoply of identifiers invoked to signal an affinity with *latinidad* and hispanicity are at the heart of our study's focus. The kaleidoscopic representation of *latinidad* across participants is testament to the plurality of experiences undermined by traditional ways of tabulating and representing identities. At the same time, almost a third of participants expressed confusion or hesitation when responding to these questions. One participant requested to altogether skip them, Another one called it a "loaded question," that she often chooses to not answer because it doesn't quite capture who she is as a dark-skinned Dominican person. Despite the open-ended prompt where participants were invited to self-identify in whichever manner they saw most appropriate, one participant responded by adding: "I hate it that they don't have other options beyond white." Though this comment speaks to the broader constraints around racial and ethnic identities experienced by Latinx lawyers in training, they also evidence a collective dissonance with respect to the histories of ethnoracial constructs within the United States. As we explore in a subsequent manuscript, participants' disclosures, hesitations around their ethnoracial identities offer fruitful insights into the ongoing need to ensure that Latinx students can develop further competencies to articulate their identifies in ways that are not only less restrictive, but also

responsive to the particularities to the terrain of animus of racialized difference in the United States.

To a lesser extent, participants' gender markers also give visibility to experiences amongst law students that stretch beyond traditional binaries (Spade, 2011) given one participant who expressed a gender fluid identity. The vast majority of participants (78%) self-identified as women. Twenty-one percent of the overall sample of student participants identified as men; notably, a disproportionate number of the 23 participants within T1 were men (39%, or 9 participants).

[Insert Tables 2-A & 2-B Here {Student}]

Administrator Participants. For Administrators, *Table 3* summarizes broad characteristics for the 15 respondents in our study. The vast majority of our participants had received a J.D., with some of the participants at T4 institutions having a master's degree in social sciences. A third of the administrators had received their degrees from the law schools where they currently worked. In the same way that students' demographic responses spoke to the complexities of the ethnoracial and gender identities of our participants, administrators also spoke at length about their own ways of understanding their identities. Like in our student sample, one administrator identified beyond the gender binary, though used "gender nonconforming" in their description. We have retained this participant's description, and also distinguish it from the (student) participant's use of "gender fluid" as their gender marker. Importantly, we note that 40% of our sample of administrators identified as Black (including Afro-Latinx). In our conversations with administrators and students, many of them spoke about anti-Blackness in relation to diversity efforts within the institution. A forthcoming manuscript explores these issues in depth given the limited scope of the present study.

[Insert Table 3 Here {Administrators}]

Approach to Data Analysis

Our analytic strategy was preceded by the verbatim transcription of 96 interviews (duration of interviews ranged from 27 minutes to 180 minutes), interviewers completed a debrief form via Qualtrics within 24 hours of each interview (see *Appendix A*). Ravitch & Carl (2016) note that trustworthiness in qualitative studies requires attending to data's dependability, that is, aligning the phenomenon of interest and the protocols employed to collect the necessary information to answer the guiding research questions (pp. 189-190). In response to this guidance, the research team met throughout the data collection process to ensure compliance with the interview protocol and highlighted emergent themes to include in subsequent coding. During weekly meetings, the team of five research assistants and PIs met to discuss the preceding week's interviews and annotate emergent patterns and observations for discussion based on each form.

with the research teams. These were discussed during weekly meetings between the PIs and the research team to develop notes of emergent patterns across interviews.

All audio files were processed for transcription through NVivoTranscription, a secure service that leverages natural language processing techniques to expedite the transcription of audio files. Each interview transcript was reviewed by the research team member who conducted the interview to assess the quality of the transcription quality assurance. Reviewers manually tagged text attributed to the reviewer and parsed transcripts to ensure that all text was properly attributed to either the interviewer or the participant.

Transcript files were ingested into NVivo for PC 12. The primary researchers reviewed the entirety of each transcript. Following an initial wave of coding by the lead PI, findings were reviewed by the co-PIs and discussed to refine the coding strategies and address discrepancies across emerging codes as critical thought partners (Bhattacharya, 2017; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Additionally, we triangulated participants' responses with the contextual database of institutional policies specific, and media coverage of each institution (see *Table 4* for overview of data)

[Insert Table 4 {Data Overview}]

Our goal analytic goal was to contribute to the emergent evidence that a recent increase in the interest in law schools may be attributed to the current political climate in the United States (Randazzo, 2017). This shifting context, which has also included an increased visibility of violence against Latinx individuals and hostility towards those of Latin American heritage, offers an opportunity to understand how Latinx students choose to pursue law degrees at differently-ranked institutions.

Study Limitations

We note that a limitation of this study is the prospect of social desirability responses when discussing value-based topics, such as institutional reputation and prestige (Moorman & Podsakoff, 1992). One strategy to minimize social desirability bias, as well as recall bias, among participants' discussing issues of oppression in organizational settings is using multiple data sources to compare individual participants' responses. We triangulated participants' transcripts with institutional documents, as well as within institutional participants to corroborate broad thematic findings between them.

Findings

Institutions' Rankings & the Value of Legal Education for Students & Administrators.

Across all eight institutions, students and administrators expressed their understanding of the value of their legal degree in the context of national rankings. Two non-overlapping patterns

emerged in students' framing the value of their respective institution's legal education. Students from the four institutions with the higher ranks (T1 and T2) spoke about their institutions' benefits as a prospective gain for themselves. In contrast, students enrolled at both unranked and lowlier ranked institutions (T3 and T4) spoke about their legal education as a clarification and reaffirmation of their purpose in the law. Across all tiers, students often answered our questions underscoring the emotional toll of thinking about both their individual (student) rankings, as well as their institution's standing.

Administrators from all institutions echoed their students' responses: they, too, have concerns about the restrictive scope by which the (mis)use of normative institutional rankings limits how legal professionals understand the value of legal education. Administrators from T1 and T2 institutions manifested this concern by discussing the reallocation of institutional resources to ensure a consistent ascent in rankings as a strategy to shorthand perceptions of their degrees' value. T3 and T4 administrators, conversely, reframed the value of their education in spite of their unranked status. For these administrators, the value of their education most readily translated into their ability to speak about their institutions' preparation of lawyers willing to serve the region.

As the narrative below illustrates, students and administrators across these law schools demonstrate how technologies of institutional differentiation (i.e. rankings), not just stratify opportunity, but also reorient perspectives between individualized gains and collective service, often with the burden of emotional taxation.

Students' Valuation of Legal Education as a Proxy for Future Gains.

Despite their misgivings about the utility of institutional rankings as a meaningful measurement of their education's quality, almost all of the students from T1 and T2 showed a positive disposition when discussing the prospect of having their institutions' improved ranking. As Guillermo² expressed, "I'm hoping we'll be able to break top 20 by the time I graduate. That would be huge," later adding on that the administration was "definitively working towards getting better." Guillermo took his institution's effort to reduce class sizes as a way of helping out with the rankings, concluding that "the dean is obsessed with that, but as a dean, that's the main thing that reflects on her job, I guess." Guillermo was not the only student to name his institution's leader as the driver of T1A's efforts to ascend in their ranks.

Myriam, a first-generation student at T2A, echoed Guillermo's hopes for her own institution's accelerated improvement within the U.S. News rankings: "just the fact that we bumped like 10, I think we jumped 10 spots," within her time as a student at T2A, which she regarded as "impressive in and of itself."

² All names are pseudonyms

Why would students at these higher ranked institutions want to see their institution accelerate its status within these rankings as a way of signaling the value of their preparation? Laura's response captures the general sentiment amongst these prospective lawyers: "I feel like T1B has the ability to break you into high, high ranking prestigious jobs. But I think that it's limited to only the top of the class—so I think that everyone's just kind of trying to get to that top so it impacts everything." Laura's response communicates the hope that their institution's ascension into the higher echelons of prestige can translate into their own individual gains through placements that signal the accrual of particular prestige. As we argue later in this section, students' responses also suggest that their hopes for a future job facilitated by a higher institutional rank also comes at a troubling cost: their present wellbeing.

Students' Valuation of Legal Education as an Affirmation of their Present Purpose.

Students at T3 and T4 institutions, like their peers at T1 and T2, discussed the value of their education in terms of their future employment prospects. However, as they explained their initial responses to our question, these students offered a distinct reframing to the value of their education as a primarily future gain for themselves. Rafael's response captures the ethos of our claim by describing how his experience at T3B led him to reappraise how he thought about his academic preparation:

During my first year, I kind of struggled with the school ranking. Like it really kind of got to me. At one point and I was like, maybe I should just transfer to a better ranked school because I thought it would afford me better opportunities. But then I reached to the school office or something like that—I don't know—And they kind of just put everything in perspective and kind of explained to me how the public interest and big law thing was different and how the rankings, you know, could seem one way, but not that way. Because I didn't know. I didn't know big law and public interest were different parts of the law.

For Rafael, the concern over better opportunities in the future was not only rooted in the aspirations for a "better future," but also in implied belief that these aspirations were restricted to the pursuit of chasing job prospects within big law. Big law featured prominently across students' responses, irrespective of their institution. In fact, big law was the way in which Laura at T1B had described her understanding of "high, high ranking prestigious jobs," as she explained the types of opportunities that T1B could afford. Unlike Laura, however, Rafael's answer both acknowledged the nagging concern that so many of the students at T3 and T4 had discussed, but also reframed it by drawing attention to the opportunities that more closely aligned with an opportunity to cultivate his purpose of serving others. Another student at T3B, Sandy, summarized it by drawing attention to the institution's distinct culture given its focus on "public interest and social justice law."

For Lorena, at T4A, the value of her education was also contingent on others' regard for her institution. To understand the value of her own legal preparation, she expressed a preference on those whom she knew rather than the information from national rankings: "For me, T4A is well known. They have a good reputation, like, in my community at least. So [the institution's ranking] doesn't affect me." Elaborating on why she thought that institutional rankings did not define how she valued her legal education, Lorena further commented: "the ranking isn't as important because I don't see myself at a high-tier law firm. I don't see myself with the crazy billable hours. Like, I see myself as a solo type of person, like a smaller firm—more personal firm. So I feel like when it's trying to get that big position, like it becomes more important versus when you want to do our own thing, it's not as important."

For students at T3 and T4 institutions, attending these law schools reaffirmed their interest in serving others, in spite of their personal concerns of how enrolling at these institutions might constrain future opportunities. In describing these concerns, Anne shared: "I knew T3A wasn't super high ranked, but I used to work at a law firm where there were really amazing attorneys that went to T3A. And now with the fact that [T3A] is diverse, I decided to go here." Anne affirmed what many other students experienced: attending a lower ranked institution also meant that she had to work hard in order to stand out: "I knew going into T3A, because it's like a lower ranked institution, that I really had to show out with my grades and stand out. Because if I'm going to be taken seriously—like in the real world—that's the only way I would be." Anne's concern about working assiduously to stand out was not unique amongst her peers at lower ranked institutions. In fact, the toll of worrying about their performance in order to stand out was the undercurrent tethering students across all institutions.

The toll of rankings on students' wellbeing.

For Dayana, pursuing her degree at T1B was a logical choice after becoming the first in her family to complete her bachelor's in English at a public institution in the same state as T1B. Describing herself as a working class Latina, Dayana, spoke of her middle school and high school years as the time that introduced her interest in the legal profession. Describing visits from lawyers who came to speak to youth of color to motivate them to advocate for their communities' wellbeing. As Dayana shared why she had opted to pursue a degree in law, she echoed this sentiment by simply stating: "I want to empower my community." After completing her bachelor's she accrued additional experience in the legal field as an intern before enrolling at T1B. When asked to describe the institution's mission, Dayana's response unexpectedly illustrated how her commitment to the law in the hopes of empowering others conflicted with the toll of institutional prestige-seeking: "I think T1B is very focused on getting their numbers up in terms of their rankings. Having passed the bar at higher levels and, like, I respect that they're doing a lot of things to get those numbers up, but sometimes it feels like that's all they care for. And not that much of our mental health."

To illustrate her point, Dayana spoke about her experience from her prior term, illustrating how the pursuit of increasing the value of her legal education through higher rankings was, in her view, in disequilibrium with the broader effort to cultivate students' overall wellbeing:

During finals, when I walked out, I saw someone overdose and die. Like, literally, like, as I walked out. It's like (pause) That sort of thing does have some sort of mental impact on you. On top of like trying to be a law student. So I really feel like the school is trying their best to boost their numbers, but they really need to focus on our environment [...] So it's, like, there's a major disconnect between our well-being and our mental health and the overall goal. And I think, like, don't get me wrong, I think it's obviously super important to get us to pass the bar. But I think a big component of that is making sure that we're mentally healthy and that we feel supported by the school.

Dayana's comments captured a common sentiment across students amongst the four institutions that were more highly ranked. Many of these students understood their institutions' efforts to increase in their rankings as an institutional strategy that could benefit students' future prospects given the prospect of a better return for their current investment. Yet, the distribution of efforts to pursue this goal created tensions that, for many of these students, were altogether at odds with their institutions' missions.

As Isabela shared in her response describing T1A's mission, she defined the institution through her perception of the current dean's efforts to enhance their law degree's value by improving their U.S. News ranking:

The current Dean—I think her mission is really just increase the rankings no matter what—even if it costs students' valuable opportunities and maintaining their mental health. We will rise in the rankings and we're gonna build all these student spaces even if the money would be better elsewhere, you know—I just—I think that law schools in general are all about that. But there are ways that you can achieve both the listening to your students and valuing your students. And, you know, making the law school—your degree—marketable.

Isabela's critique of her institution's disinvestment in valuing students' mental health, however, was not born from her own experiences. On the contrary, she described herself as the institution's model student; despite her personal gains, she lamented how the institution's responsiveness to her own personal aspirations devalued her peers' interests:

I am speaking from a place where, like, I'm T1A's ideal student. I have done well in law school: I have [awards], I got summer associate jobs, I made law review. I get to be touted as a diversity member of the law school—so, like, the school works in my favor. The school really wants students to be pushed into big law because it makes it rises in the ranks by the law. So like the law school really does

work in my favor, but it doesn't make me feel good because I have a lot of friends that have completely different goals and they aren't supported as much.

Isabela's investment in her peers' wellbeing resonated across students from all institutions. For those at higher-ranked institutions, however, her disappointment at others' success contrasted with the personal gains that she received from her institution's actions reaffirming normative understandings of value embedded in the processes by which U.S. News and other ranking mechanisms differentiate institutions. Administrators, as we document in the following section, also displayed conflicting perspectives in their process of articulating how their institutions' contributed to their students' preparation to enter the legal profession.

Administrators' Burden of Valuing Degrees through Prestige.

Administrators at T1 and T2 institutions used a similar rhetoric to their students to articulate the value of their institution's educational offerings. Students' concerns over mental health and wellbeing were familiar to them; some even expressed similar concerns. Jordan at T1A echoed Isabela's earlier assessment when discussing the value of her institution's ranking: "My issue with rankings ins they don't take into account other things that are of value to the legal education [...] and so that can allow schools to ignore other things that are important or not put as much emphasis on them." The impact of these institutional actions, for Jordan, was most noticeable in students and their future choices:

It is very much the culture of law schools and the legal field just to be like: 'Are you top 10 percent,? Are you or on law review? Are you on moot court, mock trial or are you doing things, you know? Did you get X job? It is very much a place that fosters like that type of. thought process for students and I, personally, I don't think that's the most healthy or the best approach. And so I think of a student that gets caught up in that—and it's very easy to do—I mean, I have friends that are working big law jobs. And they just felt like they had to be on law review and they had to be top of the class and get those jobs. And they got them and they were miserable. And then, you know, I think that if you're really caught up in that, I think that it can have a very negative effect on your experience, particularly if you think that's all that matters and you don't succeed.

Jordan's observations of his own peers with whom he attended law school resonate with current students' concerns. Colleagues at other institutions, despite sympathizing with students' concerns, contextualized institutions' investment in better rankings by depicting the broader ecosystem of law schools' stakeholders. Marcos, a mestizo man who had worked at T1B for several years, explained how, in his view, U.S. News was important because it communicated the institution's value to audiences that extended beyond prospective and current students:

U.S. news is important to us because, you know, our alumni want our school ranking to go up because they've invested money to a degree. I want my degree to go up and get out. You can't ignore the reality of the rankings. I think what is most tough in my role, right, is U.S. News cares more about a GPA or an LSAT than they do about how diverse the school is or, you know, what's your number of first generation law students, and so they ask you to give more opportunities to folks, but they don't reward you for that. That's where, I think, again—I'm not against ranks, I just don't think the rankings capture the real value of our schools.

Marcos describes both a narrowed definition of value through the reliance on institutional rankings, while also calling attention to a more expansive way of understanding how an institution's legal degree offers a value to its students. It also manifests a dangerous false binary: excellence in GPA and LSAT necessarily implies an inability to support a diverse student population. Unfortunately, such a dyadic construction was a familiar framing for this issue and spoke to the heart of our study's central interest. It asserts an understanding that positions enrolling high proportions of low-income students of color as diametrically opposed to a rigorous educational experience. Becca, an administrator at T2B, offered her own description of this belief by sharing how colleagues in the field might describe it: "if you're going to have a high level of nonwhite students, you're going to have a hard time considering your school strong academically." In her assessment, this presumption extended beyond the context of the institutions' enrollment and spoke of the way others may perceive the broader demography of the city where her institution is located. She added: "I definitely know people kind of look at [the city] as a whole and kind like, well, there are some great [Hispanic Ethnonationalism] people running the show down there." Becca's account suggests that institutions' location mediates perceptions of its value. Her comments describe how these frameworks can be mobilized to undermine an institution's value not solely on the basis of limited national recognition due to its ranking, but *because of* its dwelling in regions with a high proportion of Latinx individuals. Administrators at institutions within T3 and T4 tiers employed the value of their institution's location as an asset rather than a hindrance to the institution's value. Indeed, as we describe below, this reframing of their institutions offers a prominent way by which administrators narrated how their institutions offered unique opportunities for their students.

Administrators' Valuation of Degrees through Opportunities to Serve.

For Kimberly at T4B, explaining the value of her institution's degree had to begin with an acknowledgement of what understood could be a potential deal-breaker for some prospective students:

We are not a high ranked school and we're honest with people about that. There's nothing we hide in terms of saying, you know, we are a regional small school. You have to make a list of what's important to you when you're looking at law schools and decide if rank and getting into a top, top law firm is your goal. Then T4B probably isn't the place for you. But if at the end of the day you want to practice in [Southern State where

T4B is located], you want to work for a small to medium sized firm, we have a great network [...] We're the only law school in [City] and that's one of the big things that we often talk about: we have tons of opportunity for students to find jobs and internships and things like that.

For both Kimberly and her colleague, Giselle, T4B's roots within its region offered an unparalleled opportunity for prospective lawyers who saw themselves as committed to serving in the area. Echoing Kimberly's comments, Giselle added: "If you want to practice in [City, Southern State], you are immediately part of an alumni network that is incredibly supportive and expansive. And, of course, we do have alumni outside of [City] and even outside of [Southern State]. But I see tremendous value for students in choosing T4B if they want to stay in [City, Southern State]."

At T3B, the opportunity to serve the region was a strong distinguishing value for the institution given students' opportunities to interact with local government through its multiple clinics. In the same way that students' spoke about a commitment to a more just legal system as the backbone of the institution's focus, Rel, a gender nonconforming administrator, added how the institution's focus on issues of social justice in legal training also extended into the collaborative ethos that defined the school. In their words: "Another thing that you get at T3B with your law degree is a camaraderie with your classmates and a sense of everybody working toward a common goal." Rel's overtly optimistic description of an unwavering collaborative spirit is one that we understood as germane to the genre of institutional viewbooks geared at prospective students (Hartley & Morphew, 2011).

But in our synthesis of respondents' accounts across T3B, what emerged was a consistent pattern of both administrators and students asserting the importance of collaboration as a way of heeding the institution's commitment to serving the public. Its commitment to serving its city was, in their view, rendered visible through the various clinics specializing in services for individuals in especially vulnerable life circumstances. In describing the institution's focus on public interest, Natalie, a mixed Latinx student at T3B summarized it thusly: "Public interest law is supposed to be a very collaborative field. You work on a team. The idea is not to try and do better or outperform your coworkers like it might be in big law. Like here [at T3B], you're supposed to be working with other people and not trying to cut them down."

As these institutions suggest, law schools in the lower rungs of current ranking hierarchies like U.S. News have mobilized asset-based rhetorics that underscore their contributions to their region and commitment to specializing into particular areas of the law. Yet, like their T1 and T2 counterparts, their legitimacy as institutions is inextricable from their participation in ranking processes that underscore traditionally restrictive understandings of value.

Summary and Implications for Future Research on Legal Education

As our synthesis of narratives across students at these eight institutions show, the value of legal education for Latinx students is not only contingent on their social positioning, but also mediated by the broader (macro) influence of normative constructions of value and prestige. For those students who have the greatest proximity to a higher status, their prospective gains are tempered by enduring institutional efforts to both maintain and consistently improve institutional rankings. These students, then, offer a picture where rather than understanding the accrual of value as a given status, they clarify the extractive (and exhaustive) properties of a process that has no clear end; for even if an institution achieves their intended rank, the choices by which they can maintain such standing are equally deleterious for students' wellbeing. These insights offer important avenues for the legal profession, much like the rest of the education profession, to examine the ultimate tradeoff in their pursuit of accruing greater value. Importantly, the focus on Latinx students also demonstrates how the narratives of diversity and inclusion invoked by the legal profession are stymied by an unwillingness to reframe academic rigor with ethnoracial inclusion. For Latinx students in this study, the stakes of this compromise is, ultimately, their wellbeing.

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Tables

Table 1. Institutions Selected for Inquiry

Table XX: Institutions Selected for Inquiry

Region	Institution	% Latinx (1L-3L students)	% Minority (1L-3L students)	Over 500 Students?	Over 25% Latinx?	Over 50% ethnoracial minorities?
South	T1A	18%	33%	Yes	No	No
West	T1B	16%	35%	Yes	No	No
South	T2A	52%	63%	No	Yes	Yes
South	T2B	32%	44%	Yes	Yes	No
South	T3A	25%	55%	No	Yes	Yes
East	T3B	21%	48%	No	No	No
South	T4A	66%	80%	Yes	Yes	Yes
South	T4B	49%	58%	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 2-A. Demographic Overview - Educational Background (Students Only)

Table. Demographic Overview (Students only)

	<i>Tier</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	
<i>n=</i>	23	23	24	11	<i>SI</i>
<i>Highest Degree Achieved at Time of Interview</i>					
B.A.	78%	91%	79%	100%	85%
Master's	4%	4%	8%	-	5%
J.D.	17%	4%	13%	-	10%
<i>Law School in same state as undergraduate institution</i>					
Yes	83%	57%	50%	100%	68%
<i>Undergraduate Degree's General Field</i>					
Business	0%	9%	0%	9%	4%
Humanities	17%	9%	25%	18%	17%
Social Sciences	78%	78%	67%	73%	74%
STEM	4%	4%	8%	0%	5%

Table 2-B. Demographic Overview - Social Identities (Students Only)

Table. Demographic Overview (Students only)					
	<i>Tier</i>				<i>Total</i>
<i>n=</i>	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	<i>SI</i>
<i>Immigration Generation</i>					
First	91%	65%	79%	82%	79%
Second	9%	26%	13%	9%	15%
Third	0%	4%	8%	9%	5%
International Student	0%	4%	0%	0%	1%
<i>Guardians' Highest Level of Education</i>					
Less than High School	43%	0%	8%	0%	15%
Some High School	0%	0%	4%	0%	1%
High School or GED	26%	30%	46%	27%	33%
Some College	9%	0%	8%	18%	7%
Associate's	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%
Bachelor's	0%	22%	13%	18%	12%
Graduate Degree	17%	48%	21%	36%	30%
<i>Identifies as white</i>	17%	74%	21%	73%	42%
<i>Identifies as Black</i>	0%	4%	8%	9%	5%
<i>Identifies as Asian</i>	4%	0%	4%	0%	1%
<i>Identifies as Indigenous</i>	0%	0%	8%	0%	2%
<i>Identifies as Chicana(x)</i>	9%	0%	17%	0%	7%
<i>Identifies as Latin(x)</i>	52%	26%	46%	55%	43%
<i>Identifies as Hispanic</i>	22%	74%	17%	64%	41%
<i>Identifies with Ethnonationality</i>	52%	22%	38%	45%	38%
<i>Gender Identity</i>					
Woman	57%	87%	88%	82%	78%
Man	39%	13%	13%	18%	21%
Gender Fluid	4%	0%	0%	0%	1%

Table 3. Demographic Overview (Administrators Only)

	<i>Tier</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>T1</i>	<i>T2</i>	<i>T3</i>	<i>T4</i>	
<i>n=</i>	3	3	3	6	15
<i>Highest Degree Achieved at Time of Interview</i>					
J.D.	100%	100%	67%	83%	87%
Master's	0%	0%	33%	17%	13%
<i>Received Degree from Current Institution</i>					
	67%	0%	0%	50%	33%
<i>Identifies as white</i>	0%	33%	33%	50%	33%
<i>Identifies as Black</i>	67%	0%	67%	33%	40%
<i>Identifies as Mestiz(x)</i>	33%	0%	33%	0%	13%
<i>Identifies as Chicana(x)</i>	0%	0%	0%	17%	7%
<i>Identifies as Latin(x)</i>	33%	67%	33%	17%	33%
<i>Identifies as Hispanic</i>	33%	33%	33%	17%	27%
<i>Identifies with Ethnonationality</i>	0%	0%	33%	17%	13%
<i>Gender Identity</i>					
Gender Nonconforming	0%	0%	33%	0%	7%
Man	67%	0%	0%	0%	13%
Woman	33%	100%	67%	100%	80%

Table 4 - Overview of Qualitative Data

Table. Overview of qualitative data

	<i>Interviews</i>		<i>Supplementary Information</i>		
	<i>Number Conducted</i>	<i>Total hours recorded</i>	<i>Newspaper Articles</i>	<i>Institutional Documents (e.g. webpages)</i>	<i>Total</i>
T1	26	26h 20min	14	32	46
T2	26	20h 54min	60	33	93
T3	27	29h 27min	211	77	288
T4	17	19h 15min	109	85	194
<i>Total</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>95h 56min</i>	<i>394</i>	<i>227</i>	<i>621</i>

Appendices

Appendix A - Sample Debrief Form for Interviewer & Interview Protocols for Administrators & Students

Team,

Thanks for taking the time to enter your thoughts and impressions for each of your interviewees. This digital questionnaire has two purposes:

- (1) Serve as a back-up should there be issues with the audio files for your interview.
- (2) Offer a brief memo with thoughts/impressions to be used during the coding stage of the process.

If you have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to [redacted]

Interviewee Code

(see Row S of the 'Recruitment Tab' in the Institutional Contacts Spreadsheet)

Report it as: TXZ-SYY, where 'X' is the tier of the institution, Z is either A or B, and YY is the two-digit integer for the student, e.g. T2A-S06)

[Text Entry Field]

Date of Interview (MM/DD/YYYY):

[Text Entry Field]

Interviewer (First name only)

[Text Entry Field]

Interviewee's Institutional Affiliation:

[Redacted single answer multiple choice question]

Please use the space below to share any impressions or thoughts about this interview. You can enter notes on any impressions of the interviewee, any notable or recurring patterns from the conversation, or any unexpected/unusual requests (e.g. interest in seeing the articles published from this study).

[Text Entry Field]

Please use this space to enter any observations on the interview protocol (e.g. issues eliciting answers to specific questions) or other questions that you'd like to note for the rest of the research team.

[Text Entry Field]

Please enter any notes about the interviewee's answers to questions in Part 1: Interviewee's Choice to Enroll in Law School.

[Text Entry Field]

These notes will be reviewed during the coding process, so if there are particular ideas or comments that you'd like to highlight about this interviewee's responses for this section, this would be a suitable space.

(If you've had issues with the audio, then please use this space to try to include information for as many of the questions for Part 1 that you can recall).

[Text Entry Field]

Please enter any notes about the interviewee's answers to questions in Part 2: Interviewee's Perspective on Value of Law Degree at their Institution & Nationally

[Text Entry Field]

These notes will be reviewed during the coding process, so if there are particular ideas or comments that you'd like to highlight about this interviewee's responses for this section, this would be a suitable space.

(If you've had issues with the audio, then please use this space to try to include information for as many of the questions for Part 1 that you can recall).

[Text Entry Field]

Please enter any notes about the interviewee's answers to questions in Part 3: Interviewee's Perspective on Students' Experiences

[Text Entry Field]

These notes will be reviewed during the coding process, so if there are particular ideas or comments that you'd like to highlight about this interviewee's responses for this section, this would be a suitable space.

(If you've had issues with the audio, then please use this space to try to include information for as many of the questions for Part 1 that you can recall).

[Text Entry Field]

Please enter any notes about the interviewee's answers to questions in Part 4: Interviewee's Perspectives on Law School Rankings

[Text Entry Field]

These notes will be reviewed during the coding process, so if there are particular ideas or comments that you'd like to highlight about this interviewee's responses for this section, this would be a suitable space.

(If you've had issues with the audio, then please use this space to try to include information for as many of the questions for Part 1 that you can recall).

[Text Entry Field]

Please enter any notes about the interviewee's answers to questions in Part 5: Wrap-Up

[Text Entry Field]

These notes will be reviewed during the coding process, so if there are particular ideas or comments that you'd like to highlight about this interviewee's responses for this section, this would be a suitable space.

(If you've had issues with the audio, then please use this space to try to include information for as many of the questions for Part 1 that you can recall).

[Text Entry Field]

Demographic Questions

This section is to tabulate the responses that interviewees offered for their demographic questions. You don't need to include information verbatim, as we will corroborate these in the transcriptions. Rather, it's to expedite this process by having this in a tabular format from interviewers' responses:

Hometown(s)

[Text Entry Field]

Highest level of education completed to date

[Text Entry Field]

Undergraduate Institution

[Text Entry Field]

Major

[Text Entry Field]

Would you describe yourself as first, second, third generation in terms of your family's immigration to the US?

[Text Entry Field]

What is the highest degree of education each of your primary guardians completed?

[Text Entry Field]

Do you have any close contacts who have law degrees?

- Yes
- Maybe/Unsure
- No

Display This Question:

If Do you have any close contacts who have law degrees? = Yes

Or Do you have any close contacts who have law degrees? = Maybe

Who are the close contacts who have law degrees?

[Text Entry Field]

What racial identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

[Text Entry Field]

What ethnic identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

[Text Entry Field]

What gender identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

[Text Entry Field]

Are there other salient identities that you think would be important to share for the purposes of this conversation?

[Text Entry Field]

Interview Protocol for Students (with covid-19 modifications)

Introduction

[Interviewer: Prior to starting the script, ensure that all questions re: consent form & study have been thoroughly addressed]

Thank you for sharing your time so I can learn more about your experiences at [*Name of Institution*]. As a quick reminder, I'm anticipating that this conversation will last between 50-60 minutes. Please let me know if you have any questions during our conversation.

We recognize that due to covid-19 many changes have occurred in your academic, professional, and personal life. At any point in the interview, we welcome you to talk about how your responses to the questions we ask are different due to covid-19 and related changes. At different points during the interview, we may ask follow up questions specific to covid-19.

*[Interviewer: please ensure that you are recording the conversation (*9 and 1 if using freeconferencerecall.com before proceeding with the script. Please notify the participant when the recording has started]*

Part 1: Interviewee's Choice to Enroll in Law School

*In this first part of the interview, we'd like to ask you a few questions about what led you to pursue a law degree [*Name of Institution*].*

1. Can you tell me about how you decided to **pursue a law degree**?

Probes: (a) what other options were you considering?

2. What led you to **apply and then enroll at [*Name of Institution*]**?

Probes: (a) Did you apply to other schools? If so, be sure to ask which ones. And, follow-up with question that clarifies why they opted for [*Name of Institution*] in the end.

3. I'd like to get a sense of what it's like to be a student at [*Name of Institution*]. Could you walk me through a **typical day (or week)** for you as a law student before and after covid-19 and university closures?

4. As you're in your second year (if interview takes place in early summer, please say 'As you've just finished your second year'), what **future opportunities** would you like to explore after finishing law school?

Part 2: Interviewee's Perspective on Value of Law Degree at their Institution & Nationally

*Next, I'd like to get your perspective on the law school and the value of a law degree from [*Name of Institution*].*

5. How would you describe the **mission of the law school** at [*Name of Institution*]?

Probes: (a) specifically, what is the stated mission? (b) what else do you think is important about the law school that may be missing in this stated mission? (c) how does the broader institutional mission inform the mission of the law school?

7. If a prospective law student were to ask you, what are the **benefits and challenges of a law degree** from [*Name of Institution*], what would you tell them?

7b. [*Follow-up*] Personally, what have you found to be the **greatest benefits and challenges** of obtaining a law degree in general?

How, if at all, has your perspective on the value of a law degree from [*Name of Institution*] **changed since covid-19**?

Part 3: Interviewee's Perspective on Students' Experiences

In the next part of the interview, I'd like to ask you about students' experiences at [*Name of Institution*].

8. How would you **describe a typical law student** at [*Name of Institution*]?

8b. Can you share one experience that illustrates what it means to be a [*Latinx*] law student at [*Name of Institution*]?

9. One of the reasons that we are interested in learning from [*Name of Institution*] is because of its high proportion of enrolling Latinx students. From your perspective, could you tell me **specifically about the experiences of Latinx students** at your institution?

10. In particular, we'd like to better understand the support you receive or wish you received as a law student at [*Name of Institution*].

- a. How do your **peers support** you or you wished they'd support you?
- b. What **academic supports** does the institution provide or you wish they'd provide?
- c. How does your **family support** you or you wished they'd support you?
- d. What **professional support or mentoring does the institution offer to you** or you wish they'd provide?
- e. Are there **other supports** that you find helpful? What are other ways do you wish the institution would support you?

11. Do you think **other aspects of your personal identity** (gender, class, parental status, sexuality, etc.) shape your experience as a law student? If so, which ones and how so?

12. If there **anything else** you'd like to share about Latinx students or students more generally at [*Name of Institution*]?

Part 4: Interviewee's Perspectives on Law School Rankings

In this final portion of the interview, we'd like to better understand how you think about law schools' rankings.

13. Are you aware of [*Name of Institution*] **current ranking**?

Probe: and what ranking is that one? (e.g. U.S. News). Are there other rankings of which you are aware?

14. Based on your perception of the legal education you are getting here, do you think the ranking should be lower, higher, or right on? Why?

15. In your view, how, if at all, do these **rankings influence your day to day experiences as a student at** the law school and any future decision making?

16. Now, we're aware that as an individual student you have a ranking within the class. How have student **rankings influenced your experience as a law student inside or outside the classroom?**

17. What do you see as the **value of student rankings?**

18. **Anything else** you'd like to share about your perspectives on or experiences with law school rankings.

Part 5: Wrap-Up

19. Being mindful of time, I want to make sure you also have a moment to share anything you may have thought about during our conversation but perhaps haven't had a moment to share with me yet. Is there **anything else** that you wanted to add?

20. Are there **other students** within [*Name of Institution*] who you think we should contact to participate in this study? (Clarify that they will not be told who recommended them).

Part 6: Demographic Questionnaire

21. I'd like to close by asking some brief questions about your background and identity. These questions help our research team better understand our interviewees. As always, each question is voluntary and you may choose not to answer:

a.1. What place(s) would you consider to be your hometown(s)?

a. What is the highest degree of education you have completed?

b. Where did you go to undergraduate? What major?

c. Would you describe yourself as first, second, third generation in terms of your family's immigration to the US?

d. What is the highest degree of education each of your primary guardians completed?

e. Do you have any close contacts who have law degrees? If so, who?

f. (Please let the interviewee know that there is a consistent standard language applied to each of forthcoming questions. The focus of these questions is to better understand various social identities)

i. What racial identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

ii. What ethnic identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

iii. What gender identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.

iv. Are there other salient identities that you think would be important to share for the purposes of this conversation?

Closing

Thank you, again for the time you have offered to share these insights. Upon completing the transcript for our interview, I would like to share it with you for your review. Would that be okay with you?

Lastly, as an appreciation for your time, I'd like to make sure I have your preferred email address so we can mail you the \$40 Amazon gift card. From my records, I have [*confirm address that participant offered in e-mail response*]. Is this correct?

Interview Protocol for Administrators (with covid-19 modifications)

Introduction

[Interviewer: Prior to starting the script, ensure that all questions re: consent form & study have been thoroughly addressed]

Thank you for sharing your time so I can learn more about your experiences at [*Name of Institution*]. As a reminder, I'm anticipating that this conversation will last between 50-60 minutes. Please let me know if you have any questions during our conversation.

We recognize that due to covid-19 many changes have occurred in your professional, and personal life. At any point in the interview, we welcome you to talk about how your responses to the questions we ask are different due to covid-19 and related changes. At different points during the interview, we may ask follow up questions specific to covid-19.

*[Interviewer: please ensure that you are recording the conversation (*9 and 1 if using freeconferencecall.com before proceeding with script. Please notify the participant when the recording has started]*

Part 1: Interviewee's Organizational Position & Context

*In this first part of the interview, we'd like to ask you a few questions about your professional background and current role at [*Name of Institution*].*

1. Can you tell me about your **background in law and/or legal education**?
2. What led you to **work at [*name of institution*]**?
3. What's your **current role** and how long you've been in that position?

Probes: (a) Had you been in a different role at [*Name of Institution*] before your current position? (b) Had you worked at other law schools prior to joining [*Name of Institution*]?

4. Could you describe what a **typical day** for you looked like in your role before and after covid-19 and university closures?

Probes: (a) Specifically, what is within your professional portfolio of duties at [*Name of Institution*]?

Part 2: Interviewee's Perspective on Value of Law Degree at their Institution & Nationally

*Next, I'd like to get your perspective on the law school and the value of a law degree from [*Name of Institution*].*

5. How would you describe the **mission of the law school** at [*Name of Institution*]?

Probes: (a) specifically, what is the stated mission? (b) what else do you think is important about the law school that may be missing in this stated mission?

6. If a prospective student from *[Name of Institution]* were to ask you, what are the **benefits and challenges of pursuing a law degree** from *[Name of Institution]*, how might you respond to them?

7. Thinking about the state of the broader legal field in the United States, how would you **describe the value that *[Name of Institution]* brings to the legal field?**

8. When students' graduate from *[Name of Institution]* with a law degree, what are your **aspirations for law students and their futures?**

How, if at all, has your perspective on the value of a law degree from *[Name of Institution]* **changed since covid-19?**

Part 3: Interviewee's Perspective on Students' Experiences

In this next part of the interview, I'd like to ask you about students at *[Name of Institution]*.

9. How would you **describe students** at *[Name of Institution]*?

10. One of the reasons that our research team is interested in learning from *[Name of Institution]* is because of its high proportion of enrolling students who identify as Latinx. Are there parts of your position's portfolio/duties that focus on direct work with Latinx Students?

Note: If the respondent answers 'no', please ask the respondent to describe how their position interacts with students, if at all.

11. From your perspective, what is it about *[Name of Institution]* or the broader educational context that is leading Latinx students to **pursue a law degree** at *[Name of Institution]*?

12. What do you see as the **greatest opportunities** for Latinx students in pursuing a law degree at *[Name of Institution]*?

13. What do you see as the **greatest challenges for Latinx students** in pursuing a law degree at *[Name of Institution]*?

14. Is there anything else you'd like to share about students' experiences, in general, at *[Name of Institution]*?

Part 4: Interviewee's Perspectives on Law School Rankings

In this next portion of the interview, we'd like to better understand how representatives within law schools navigate schools' rankings.

15. Are you aware of your **current institutional ranking**?

Probe: and what ranking is that one? (e.g. U.S. News). Are there other rankings of which you are aware?

16. Based on your perception of the legal education from your institution, do you think the **ranking should be lower, higher, or the same**? Why?

17. In your view, how, if at all, do these **institutional rankings influence the work** of the law school?

17.b. What **forms of support do you think** [*name of institution*] offers students throughout their studies at the law school?

18. Now, could you tell me about how **student rankings** work at your institution?

19. Do you see **student rankings** as accurate reflection of their relative academic standing within the class?

20. In your view, how, if at all, do **student rankings influence students' experiences**?

21. **Anything else** you'd like to share about institutional and/or student rankings?

Part 5: Wrap-Up

21. Being mindful of time, I want to make sure you also have a moment to share anything you may have thought about during our conversation but perhaps haven't had a moment to share with me yet. Is there **anything else** that you wanted to add?

22. Are there **other individuals** within [*Name of Institution*] who you think we should contact to participate in this study? (Clarify that they will not be told who recommended them).

Part 6: Demographic Questionnaire

23. I'd like to close by asking some brief questions about you. Perhaps you may have already answered some of these in the course of the conversation, but I'd like to ensure I have these properly recorded. If there's something you'd prefer to not disclose, please do let me know:

a. What is the highest degree of education you have completed?

a.2. Where did you complete this degree?

c. What area(s) of law do you specialize in? (only if relevant, else enter "N/A" in qualtrics debrief)

- d. (Please let the interviewee know that there is a consistent standard language applied to each of the forthcoming questions. The focus of these questions is to better understand various social identities)
- i. What racial identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.
 - ii. What ethnic identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.
 - iii. What gender identity best represents you? You may choose as many as you wish.
 - iv. Are there other salient identities that you think would be important to share for the purposes of this conversation?

Closing

Thank you, again for the time you have offered to share these insights. Upon completing the transcript for our interview, I would like to share it with you for your review. Would that be okay with you?

Lastly, as an appreciation for your time, I'd like to make sure I have your preferred mailing address so we can mail you the \$40 Amazon gift card. From my records, I have [*confirm address that participant offered in e-mail response*]. Is this correct?