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On: 29 October 2011, At: 13:08

Publisher: Routledge

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The Journal of Economic Education

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vece20>

LSAT® Scores of Economics Majors: The 2008-9 Class Update

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Available online: 08 Aug 2010

To cite this article: Michael Nieswiadomy (2010): LSAT® Scores of Economics Majors: The 2008-9 Class Update, The Journal of Economic Education, 41:3, 331-333

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00220485.2010.486739>

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FEATURES AND INFORMATION

LSAT[®] Scores of Economics Majors: The 2008–9 Class Update

Michael Nieswiadomy

Using 1994–95 and 2002–3 data, the author (1998, 2006) has found that economics majors scored well on the LSAT[®]. These results are frequently posted on university Web sites by economics (and other) departments. The author, who updates the previous studies by using current 2007–8 law school applicants for the 2008–9 class of students entering law school, finds that economics majors still perform at or near the top of all majors applying for law school. Economics majors (LSAT[®] score of 157.4; LSAC 2009) are tied for first (with philosophy) of the 12 largest disciplines (those with more than 1,900 students entering law school). Economics is tied for second (with philosophy/religion [157.4]) behind physics/math (160.0) in a set of 29 discipline groupings that the author created to yield groups of at least 450 students with similar majors.

Keywords *economics majors, law school, LSAT[®] scores*

JEL code *A20*

Using 1994–95 and 2002–3 data, I (1998, 2006) have found that economics majors scored well on the LSAT[®]. In the present article, using current data for the 2007–8 applicants entering law school in 2008–9, I investigate whether economics majors still perform at or near the top of all majors applying for law school.

The LSAT[®] score plays a pivotal role for entrance 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 2009) Web site (<http://officialguide.lsac.org>) gives statistics on the acceptance rates into various law schools based on the undergraduate 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 176 would be in the 75th percentile of students admitted to Harvard Law School, whereas a student with a 157.3 is the average of the 75th percentiles among all law schools in the nation.

The test scores of students who applied to at least one American Bar Association–approved law school are compiled by the LSAC (2009). Only the first major provided by the applicants is

TABLE 1
Average 2007–8 LSAT[®] Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	<i>n</i> students
1	Economics	157.4	3,047
1	Philosophy	157.4	2,184
3	Engineering	156.2	2,197
4	History	155.9	4,166
5	English	154.7	5,120
6	Finance	153.4	2,267
7	Political science	153.0	14,964
8	Psychology	152.5	4,355
9	Sociology	150.7	1,902
10	Communications	150.5	2,230
11	Business administration	149.1	1,971
12	Criminal justice	145.5	3,306

Note. These data were for major fields with at least 1,900 students applying with LSAT[®] scores.

Source: Law School Admissions Council, "Data Services Group," 2009, <http://officialguide.lsac.org>.

listed. The number of applicants has decreased significantly in the past five years from 99,504 in 2002–3 to 83,371 in 2007–8. Approximately 162 majors are now categorized (compared to 120 majors in 1994–1995 and 151 in 2002–3) by the LSAC. However, many of the majors are really subdisciplines and have very few students applying for law school. Thus the 2007–8 applicants' data are summarized in two ways, much as in the previous Nieswiadomy (1998, 2006) studies. First, disciplines with more than 1,900 applicants are ranked by the average LSAT[®] scores. Second, to analyze all 162 disciplines, 29 groups of similar disciplines are created to generate groups of at least 450 students with similar majors, and then these groups are ranked.

In table 1, the average LSAT[®] scores of disciplines with more than 1,900 students applying for law school are shown. (Note that most law school applicants take the LSAT[®] in the academic year in which they apply. But some have taken the test in a previous year.) The results are very similar to the previous results. Economics is tied for first (157.4) with philosophy among these 12 largest disciplines (LSAC 2009). More philosophy majors are applying to law school, so much so that philosophy now ranks in the top 12 in terms of number of applicants. In 1998–99, 1,491 philosophy majors applied for law school. By 2004–5, 2,404 philosophy majors applied for law school. By 2007–8, the number had declined to 2,201. Although there has been a recent decline in the number of philosophy majors applying for law school, as has occurred for all majors, the overall increase in the number of philosophy majors applying for law school and taking the LSAT[®] has been quite remarkable. Although there is not statistical evidence presented in this study, it can be speculated that more philosophy majors are applying for law school because news of their success on the exam has spread. Engineering places third (156.2). As before, the most popular major for law school, political science, ranks (153.0) near the average score for all students of 152.8. And as before, criminal justice ranks last (145.5).

In table 2, all students applying for admission are divided into disciplines (or groups of disciplines) to construct 29 categories containing at least 450 students. The results are similar to previous results. The top three majors have remained the same, with economics in a tie for second (with philosophy/religion [157.4]) behind physics/math (160.0) in a group of 29 disciplines.

The 2007–8 applicant data for the class of 2008–9 clearly indicate that economics majors perform well on the LSAT[®] (LSAC 2009). As was noted in the previous Nieswiadomy (1998,

TABLE 2
Average 2007–8 LSAT® Scores

Rank	Major field	Average score	<i>n</i> students
1	Physics/math	160.0	577
2	Economics	157.4	3,047
3	Philosophy/theology	157.4	2,581
4	International relations	156.5	1,520
5	Engineering	156.2	2,197
6	Government/service	156.1	578
7	Chemistry	156.1	632
8	History	155.9	4,169
9	Interdisciplinary studies	155.5	652
10	Foreign languages	155.3	1,084
11	English	155.2	5,899
12	Biology/natural sciences	154.8	2,201
13	Arts	154.2	1,438
14	Computer science	154.0	682
15	Finance	153.4	2,267
16	Political science	153.1	15,181
17	Psychology	152.5	4,355
18	Liberal arts	152.4	3,892
19	Anthropology/geography	152.2	808
20	Accounting	151.7	1,439
21	Journalism	151.5	3,408
22	Sociology/social work	151.2	3,123
23	Marketing	150.8	1,574
24	Business management	149.7	4,629
25	Education	149.4	484
26	Business administration	149.1	1,984
27	Health professions	148.4	703
28	Prelaw	148.3	1,078
29	Criminal justice	146.0	4,016

Note. These data were grouped by major field with at least 450 students applying with LSAT® scores.

Sources: LSAT® averages; author's calculations of the LSAT® averages, weighted by the number of students in these majors for combined majors.

2006) studies, caution should be used in advising students. Economics majors (in fact, all majors) form a self-selected group. It is not possible to differentiate the effect of the student's unobservable characteristics from the effect of the economics coursework because the data are provided only in summary form from the LSAC (2009). Also, because standard deviations by majors are not provided by the LSAC, no multiple comparisons of means can be made. Nonetheless, economics faculty should continue to have some modicum of pride in the continued success of economics majors on the LSAT®.

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