Beyond the Numbers: An Examination of Diverse Interactions in Law School

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A concerted effort has been devoted to diversifying law schools. However, the focus has been almost exclusively on increasing the structural diversity of the student body rather than increasing diverse interactions. This study investigates the types of activities and experiences in law school that relate with more frequent diverse interactions. Findings illustrate several other factors, in addition to structural diversity, are related with more frequent diverse interactions. These factors include perceptions of a supportive and friendly law school environment, interactions with faculty members, positive relationships with other students, pro bono work, and being a member of a student organization.

Keywords: diversity, diverse interactions, law students, legal education

Throughout its history, legal education has been characterized by a dearth of diversity. White men have tended to make up disproportionate numbers of students, faculty, and administrators (Brown, 2006; Daye, Panter, Allen, & Wightman, 2012; Gottfredson, Panter, Daye, Allen, & Wightman, 2009; Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003; Johnson, 2011; Lindgren, 2015). According to Bhabha (2014), the origins of these trends are in the "systemic and institutional bigotry and prejudice" (p. 78) that undergirded law school admissions well into the 1970s. While law students and faculty are as racially and ethnically diverse as they have ever been (Lindgren, 2015), this level of diversity falls short of being representative of the population at large (see, Table 1 for a comparison of law school enrollment figures and U.S. population statistics). Moreover, while the increased diversity is a favorable trend, the trend alone is not sufficient to counteract the negative effects of racially isolated communities and school systems (Braddock & Gonzalez, 2010; Saenz, 2010).

Meaningful interactions among students from diverse backgrounds foster multifaceted educational and psychological maturation. A large body of research has demonstrated the positive effects of diversity in an educational setting including: reductions in prejudice, appreciation of other's perspectives, improved critical thinking, greater connection to the institution, improved self-confidence, greater civic engagement, and enhancement of leadership and professional skills (Bergerson & Huftalin, 2011; Bowman, 2011, 2013; Nelson Laird, 2005; Nelson Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010; Parker & Pascarella, 2013; Pascarella et al., 2014). Bringing about these interactions requires institutional efforts that are intentional and well-designed; mere structural diversity (i.e., having representative numbers of diverse populations) is typically insufficient. This point is particularly salient in the legal education context, given its competitive nature (Feingold & Souza, 2013; Gilmore, 2013; McClurg, 2010).

Competitive environments may negate the positive benefits of diversity by discouraging intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew, Christ, Wagner, & Stellmacher, 2007, Pettigrew, Tropp, Wagner, & Christ, 2011). Law school competition is fostered in large part by the roles of grades and class rank in the apportionment of sought-after (and limited) opportunities, such as law journal editor positions, prestigious internships and summer jobs, and research assistantships with faculty members (Hess, 2002; Peterson & Peterson, 2009). The postrecession contraction of the legal job market has heightened the competitive stakes for law students (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015; Olson, 2015). Moreover, researchers (e.g., Feingold & Souza, 2013) have argued that law school competition places "uneven" burdens on students, based on their race, ethnicity, or other identifiers, further diminishing any benefits of diversity.

Table 1

Student Demographics and Law School Characteristics

	Analytic sample	All ABA schools[a]	U.S. population[b]
Student demographics			
Female	52%	49%	51%
Male	48%	51%	49%
White	67%	67%	61%
African American/Black	8%	9%	13%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%	7%	6%
Hispanic or Latino/a	9%	12%	18%
Other race/ethnicity or multiracial	5%	4%	4%
Fulltime enrollment	84%	86%	—
Law school characteristics			
Public institution	38%	41%	—
Private institution	62%	59%	—
Enrollment: Fewer than 500 students	47%	51%	—
Enrollment: 500–900 students	38%	36%	—
Enrollment: More than 900 students	14%	13%	—

[a] American Bar Association (ABA) figures based on 2015 enrollment, retrieved from http://www.abarequireddisclosures.org/. [b] U.S. Population figures based on July 1, 2016 population estimates from the US Census Bureau, retrieved from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/US/PST045216. Race/ethnic figures sum to more than 100 since the Census Bureau includes Hispanics in applicable race categories.

Given the history, structure, and role of legal education, law schools must be intentional about fostering student interactions and collaboration. Understanding how the student experience may foster diverse interactions in legal education is especially interesting, given the inherently competitive environment in law school and the diverse array of clients these future lawyers will represent. It is also important given the central role of lawyers in preserving the rule of law and protecting the rights of individuals of diverse backgrounds. As remarked by Justice Sandra Day O'Connor in her majority opinion in Grutter v. Bollinger:

> All members of our heterogeneous society must have confidence in the openness and integrity of the educational institutions that provide [legal] training. As we have recognized, law schools cannot be effective in isolation from the individuals and institutions with which the law interacts. (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003, p. 20)

While there has been abundant research on diverse interactions in postsecondary research, this empirical evidence has mainly focused on undergraduate students whereas research on diverse interactions in legal education is limited. This article aims to fill that void by examining the types of experiences and activities in law school that relate with diverse interactions among students. The concept of student engagement provides a useful frame to explore how student activities and perceptions of the law school environment shape students' contact with diverse others. Student engagement is based on the premise that learning and development are influenced by how students spend their time and energy in both formal and informal learning settings (McCormick, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2013). Understanding these phenomena will help law schools meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations and increasingly diverse societies.

Literature Review

In her opinion in Grutter, Justice O'Connor asserted that the University of Michigan Law School had a "compelling interest in securing the educational benefits of a diverse student body" (Grutter v. Bollinger, 2003, p. 333). Further, she embraced the school's assertion that a "critical mass" of underrepresented students of color was needed for these educational benefits to be attained. Critical mass was not quantified, but was said to represent a "number that encourages underrepresented minority students to participate in the classroom and not feel isolated" (p. 318). A key premise of this argument is that diverse interactions—beyond mere presence—are essential to the educational benefits of diversity (Garces & Jayakumar, 2014).

Researchers of social psychology have long been interested in exploring issues of prejudice and intergroup contact (Allport, 1954; Allport & Kramer, 1946; Williams, 1947). Pettigrew and colleagues (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Pettigrew et al., 2011) analyzed hundreds of studies from a variety of educational and workplace settings and concluded that greater intergroup contact is associated with lower levels of prejudice. In addition, Allport (1954) concluded that contact between different groups of people can also increase trust and empathy between groups. The researcher posited that the positive effects of intergroup contact are facilitated when one or more of the following conditions are met: (a) groups have equal status, (b) shared goals, (c) cooperative interactions, and (d) when intergroup contact was sanctioned by an authority (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011). Opportunities to satisfy these conditions are found in the collegiate experience: students, individually and collectively, have varying levels of status on campus; common goals can be shared in an array of ways, including class projects, for instance; intergroup cooperation is sometimes visible within student organizations; and there are a number of authority figures on campus (Bowman, 2012). Researchers have noted that institutional support is especially important for facilitating positive intergroup contact (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011).

In the higher education context, curricular and co-curricular policies and practices can greatly influence the extent of diverse interactions (Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1999; Nelson Laird & Niskode-Dossett, 2010). Researchers have highlighted the need for intentionality when seeking to promote student learning through diverse interactions (Hall, Cabrera, & Milem, 2011; Mayhew & Engberg, 2010). Simply assembling people of different backgrounds without encouraging positive interactions and without offering a supportive environment can lead to hostile and guarded interactions as well as increased racial tension and conflict (Allport, 1954; Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2013; Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011).

Benefits of Diversity

Students must participate in formal and informal experiences in which diverse perspectives are represented, explored, and challenged to reap the educational benefits of diversity (Gurin, Dey, Gurin, & Hurtado, 2003). In a study from the University of Michigan Law School, Deo (2011) examined how diversity was related to student learning. She demonstrated the cooperative relationship between structural diversity and interactive discussion formats. The vibrancy of the interactive discussions benefited from classroom diversity, and the benefits of diversity were maximized by the interactive formats.

Other research has concluded that greater intergroup contact increases cognitive abilities within racially diverse educational settings (Bowman, 2010; Nelson Laird, 2005; Pascarella et al., 2014; Loes, Pascarella, & Umbach, 2012). In his meta-analysis of 23 studies, Bowman (2010) concluded that college diversity experiences were positively related to cognitive development. Although the magnitude of the effect was small, it was consistent across studies. Similarly, both Pascarella et al. (2014) and Loes, Pascarella, and Umbach (2012) noted the positive relationship between diverse experiences and undergraduate students' critical thinking ability and notably found that the effects of diverse experiences were more pronounced for White students and lower ability students.

Scholars have also documented the positive relationships between diversity and civic engagement, leadership skills, and professional development. Researchers in higher education (e.g., Bowman, 2012; Chang, 1999) and legal education (e.g., Daye et al., 2012; Deo, 2011) specifically, argue that interactions among diverse groups of people create opportunities for students to develop the skills and competencies they need to function effectively in an increasingly diverse workforce and society. For example, Dugan and Komives (2010) found that engaging in sociocultural conversations was positively related to socially responsible leadership.

In a meta-analysis of 27 studies, Bowman (2011) noted that diverse interactions were more effective at promoting civic engagement than structured diversity experiences such as coursework. He concludes that simply teaching about diversity in a course or workshop cannot replace the meaningful interactions among students of different backgrounds. Thus, again, it is prudent upon institutions to not only attain a racially diverse student body but to help facilitate meaningful interactions among students of different backgrounds. In another study, Bowman, Brandenberger, Hill, and Lapsley (2011) tracked students for 13 years after their graduation and found that diverse experiences were positively related to personal growth, purpose in life, and volunteering.

Umbach and Kuh (2006) found that students who engage in diverse interactions more frequently report greater opportunities for active and collaborative learning, more supportive campus environments, and greater satisfaction with their college experiences. Nelson Laird and Niskod-Dossett (2010) similarly concluded that diverse interactions among students fostered more favorable perceptions of campus environments and relationships with other students, faculty, and administrative personnel.

While the majority of research on diversity in higher education has focused on undergraduate students, the benefits of diverse student interactions remain salient for law schools and law students. In Grutter v. Bollinger (2003), the Supreme Court asserts that diversity is "important and laudable" for promoting student learning outcomes and for better preparing law students for the legal profession (p. 330). Daye et al. (2012) note: "Many of the observed racial differences among students contribute to learning because differences foster richer interactions and positive educational outcomes that benefit students, institutions, and society" (p. 2). They argue that the purposeful cultivation of an environment that promotes diverse student interactions serves legal education and the legal profession.

As previously mentioned, student body diversity only creates the opportunity for diverse interactions. Intentional policies and practices foster the positive impacts. However, risks of negative impacts of diversity are increased in the absence of intentionality on the institu-tion's part, a point that is particularly salient in legal education. These negative impacts include hostile and guarded interactions as well as increased racial tension and conflict (Allport, 1954; Park et al., 2013; Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011). In other contexts, negative impacts have been linked to environments where competition exists and the four optimal conditions for intergroup contact are lacking—equal group status, shared goals, cooperation, and support from authority (Allport, 1954; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2011; Pettigrew et al., 2011). Law school is an inherently competitive, hierarchal, and individualistic endeavor (Feingold & Souza, 2013; Gilmore, 2013; McClurg, 2010). Moreover, it has been argued that law school competition places uneven burdens most notably on students of color (Bhabha, 2014; Feingold & Souza, 2013). Scholars have argued that "ranking methods privilege a white male normativity, have differential impacts on non-White, nonmale students, and perpetuate disadvantage and bias" (Bhabha, 2014, p. 80). Given the inherently competitive environment in law school, it is important to examine what impact the law school experience may have on students' interactions with diverse others.

Understanding the extent to which the structure of legal education fosters diverse interactions is important to understanding the impact of diversity on law students. Empirical research on the impact of diverse interactions in legal education is limited. At least one study, however, has concluded that students attending law schools with racially diverse populations and high intergroup contact were more likely to perceive environments of openness and mutual respect (Daye et al., 2012). This article will build on this notion by exploring how students' activities and experiences in law school influence diverse interactions. Understanding how the student experience in law school may shape students' interactions with diverse others is crucial to assist legal educators and administrators in offering the best educational experience for their students.

Purpose and Research Questions

This article addresses the dearth of empirical research on diverse interactions in legal education; specifically, it will explore the types of activities and experiences in law school that are related to diverse interactions. The influence of the campus environment and characteristics of the law school will also be explored. The following questions guided the research:

1. What types of activities in law school relate to increased diverse interactions?

2. What influence does the campus environment have on student interactions with peers of different backgrounds?

3. Are characteristics of law schools related to increased diverse interactions?

The concept of student engagement provides a useful frame through which to view diverse interactions among law students. Numerous studies at both the undergraduate (see, McCormick et al., 2013 for an overview) and law school levels (e.g., Florio & Hoffman, 2012; Silver, Garver, & Watkins, 2011, 2013) have examined the idea of student engagement and how it is related to students' growth and development. Examining the factors related to diverse interaction among law students will help law schools meet the needs of a more diverse student population, which should

have long-term, favorable impacts on students as eventual members of the legal profession.

Method

Data Source and Sample

Data for this study were drawn from the 2014 and 2015 administrations of the Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) and data from the American Bar Association (ABA). LSSSE is an annual survey used to assess the extent to which law school students are exposed to and participate in a variety of effective educational practices (O'Day & Kuh, 2006). The survey asks students about various aspects of their law school experience, including those that pertain to their interactions with their peers and faculty members. LSSSE also asks students about participation in co-curricular activities, such as moot court and law journal. The full survey is available on the LSSSE Web site (lssse.indiana.edu). Each year, an elective cohort of law schools—typically more than one third of all ABA-approved law schools—administers LSSSE. Centralized, standardized sampling and administration procedures ensure the comparability of results among participating law schools.

The analytic sample for this study includes 27,250 students from 95 U.S. law schools. If a law school participated in both 2014 and 2015 only their most recent year of data was included. Response rates for law schools ranged from 29 to 89% with an average response rate of 51%. The demographic makeup of students and institutions is compared with the national profile of ABA approved

law schools (see Table 1). Approximately half of the sample was male and half was female. About two thirds of the sample identified as White, 7% as Asian/Asian American, 9% as Latino/a, 8% as Black/African American, and 6% identified as another race/ethnicity (e.g., Native American) or multiracial. As seen in Table 1, the sample used in this study generally reflects the national profile of law students and law schools.

Variables

The dependent variable—diverse interactions—was a scale derived from three items that asked students about their interactions and discussions with peers in law school. Specifically, the survey asked students how often during the respective school year did the following interactions occur: (a) serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own; (b) serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values; (c) the inclusion of diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments. The α reliability coefficient for this scale was 0.72. The dependent variable, along with three other scales discussed below, was generated through an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring and direct oblimin (oblique) rotation. The individual questions comprising each scale along with their factor loadings are presented in Table 2.

We explored a number of student demographic characteristics that, according to the literature, may be related to interactions

Table 2
Items Comprising Scales, Factor Loadings, and Reliability α

Scale name	Survey item	Loading	α
Diverse interactions (DI)	Had serious conversations with students of a different race or ethnicity than your own	.89	.72
	Had serious conversations with students who are very different from you in terms of their religious beliefs, political opinions, or personal values	.84	
	Included diverse perspectives (different races, religions, sexual orientations, genders, political beliefs, etc.) in class discussions or writing assignments	.60	
Higher-order learning (HOL)	Analyzing the basic elements of an idea, experience, or theory, such as examining a particular case or situation in depth, and considering its components	.81	.86
	Synthesizing and organizing ideas, information, or experiences into new, more complex interpretation and relationships	.86	
	Making judgments about the value of information, arguments, or methods, such as examining how others gathered and interpreted data and assessing the soundness of their conclusions	.81	
	Applying theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations	.83	
Student-faculty interactions (SFI)	Discussed assignments with a faculty member	.81	.80
	Talked about career plans or job search activities with a faculty member or advisor	.77	
	Discussed ideas from your readings or classes with faculty members outside of class	.78	
	Used e-mail to communicate with a faculty member	.70	
	Worked with faculty members on activities other than coursework (committees, orientation, student life activities, etc.)	.63	
	Received prompt feedback (written or oral) from faculty on your academic performance	.66	
Law school environment (LSE)	School emphasized: Providing support you need to thrive socially	.83	.84
	School emphasized: Helping you cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.)	.82	
	School emphasized: Encouraging contact among students from different economic, social, sexual orientation, and racial or ethnic backgrounds	.73	
	School emphasized: Attending campus events and activities (special speakers, cultural events, symposia, etc.)	.68	
	School emphasized: Providing the support you need to help you succeed academically	.76	
	School emphasized: Providing the financial counseling you need to afford your education	.74	

among diverse students. Descriptive statistics for all items are given in Table 3. Demographic characteristics included gender, race-ethnicity (with Whites as the comparison group), age, and enrollment status. In addition to the demographic characteristics, we included a variety of student engagement and co-curricular experiences in law school. We considered how students rated their relationships with other students (a 7-point Likert-scale ranging from *unfriendly, unsupportive, sense of alienation* to *friendly, supportive, sense of belonging*). We also considered whether students had participated in several co-curricular activities: internship, pro bono work, law school journal, moot court, and student organizations.

We included three scales measuring higher-order learning, student-faculty interactions, and students' perceptions of the supportive nature of the law school environment. The higher-order learning scale was based on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives and included four items that focused on the amount students believed their coursework emphasized advanced thinking skills and had an α reliability coefficient of 0.86. The student-faculty interaction scale was comprised of six items that asked students how often they interacted with or sought counsel from professors, and had an α reliability coefficient of 0.80. The law school environment scale included six items that asked students questions about their law school's commitment to their academic and social success and had an α reliability coefficient of 0.84.

Researchers have found that diversity experiences differ at different types of institutions. We account for institutional diversity using a version of Chang's (1999) diversity index. Chang (1999)

argued that more traditional measures of institutional diversity, such as the proportion of minority students at an institution, are flawed because relatively homogeneous minority-serving institutions would be considered racially diverse. The index measures the variation in the student population across five racial/ethnic groups: African American, Asian, Latino/a, White, and other/multiracial. The index rewards heterogeneity in the student population. For instance, law schools with similar proportions of students across the five groups (e.g., 20%, 20%, 30%, 20%, and 10%) would have higher diversity-index scores than law schools with very homogeneous student populations (e.g., 8%, 5%, 5%, 80%, and 2%). In addition to institutional diversity, we included a measure of the normative law school environment. Because items in the "law school environment" scale asked students about their perceptions of their law school's commitment to student success, we aggregated a score for each law school to represent the normative nature of the law school environment. Finally, we controlled for several other law school characteristics that have been shown to influence diversity outcomes such as sector (Pike & Kuh, 2006), enrollment size (Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001), and selectivity (Toutkoushian & Smart, 2001; Williams, 2013). Entering median LSAT score was used to represent the selectivity of the law school.

Data Analysis

Given the nested structure of the data (students within law schools), we used multilevel modeling procedures to explore the relationship student demographics, activities and experi-

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean[a]	*SD*	Min	Max	% Missing
Diverse interactions (DI)	30.44	12.82	0	50	1
Student demographics					
Female	.52	.50	0	1	0
Asian/Asian-American	.07	.26	0	1	0
Black/African America	.08	.27	0	1	0
Latino/a	.09	.29	0	1	0
White[b]	.67	.47	0	1	0
Other race/ethnicity	.05	.21	0	1	0
Multiracial	.04	.19	0	1	0
Age	27.39	6.16	19	75	9
Full-time	.84	.37	0	1	0
Activities in law school					
Law school environment (LSE)	25.24	12.59	0	50	7
Student-faculty interactions (SFI)	24.77	10.65	0	50	1
Higher-order learning (HOL)	39.04	10.63	0	50	3
Quality of relations with other students	5.58	1.48	1	7	7
Participated in internship	.43	.51	0	1	4
Done pro bono work	.50	.51	0	1	4
Member of law journal	.26	.46	0	1	4
Participated in moot court	.15	.37	0	1	5
Member of a law student organization	.64	.49	0	1	4
Law school characteristics					
Private institution	.62	.49	0	1	0
Enrollment size	613.61	318.93	149	1742	0
Diversity index[c]	.76	.05	.67	.86	0
Median LSAT score	153.95	5.98	142	167	0
Aggregate law school environment	25.27	2.72	16.9	32.35	7

[a] Mean for dichotomous items represent proportions. [b] Reference group. [c] Diversity index $= 1 - \sqrt{\dfrac{(\%Asian-\mu)^2 + (\%Black-\mu)^2 + (\%Latino-\mu)^2 + (\%White-\mu)^2 + (\%Other-\mu)^2}{5}}$.

ences in law school, and characteristics of the law school may have on students' diverse interactions. First, missing data issues were addressed. For students who did not indicate their gender, race-ethnicity, or enrollment status, we substituted the gender, race-ethnicity, or enrollment status reported to LSSSE by their law school. Missing values for other variables were imputed using multiple imputation via chained equations (Allison, 2002; Cox, McIntosh, Reason, & Terenzini, 2014). The percentage missing for each variable is presented in Table 3. A total of 20 imputations were created for each missing value. Continuous variables were imputed using predicted mean matching, while binary, categorical, and ordinal variables were imputed using logistic, multinomial logistic, and ordered logistic regression, respectively. Next, we estimated a base model, with no predictors at either level, to calculate the intraclass correlation coefficient (ICC), which represents the variability in diverse interactions that is due to differences between law schools. These results demonstrated an ICC of .03, indicating that 3% of the variability in diverse interactions can be attributed to differences between law school differences. While most of the variability in diverse interactions was between students, we decided to continue with the multilevel model because it allows us to more accurately account for nesting effects in the data, to protect against inflated *SE*s, and to model the effect of law school environment at both the student and law school-level (Hox, 2010; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

We then estimated a model that included student characteristics at Level 1 and law school characteristics at Level 2 (see Equation 1). All variables were entered into the model centered on its grand mean, except students' perceptions of the law school environment at Level 1. We group-mean centered law school environment at Level 1 because we were interested in examining this predictors' influence at both levels (i.e., both the individual's perception of the supportive nature of the law school and the normative environment of the law school), and group-mean centering allows us to decompose perceptions of the law school environment into a within- and between-law school components (Enders & Tofighi, 2007). Finally, we compared model-based *SE*s and robust *SE*s to identify possible misspecification of the distribution of random effects (Hox, 2010; Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002).

Equation 1. Multilevel equations.

Level 1 equation:

$$Diverse\ Interactions_{ij} = \beta_{0j} + \beta_{1j}(Female) + \beta_{2j}(Asian)$$
$$+ \beta_{3j}(Black) + \beta_{4j}(Latino/a)$$
$$+ \beta_{5j}(Other\ race) + \beta_{6j}(Multiracial)$$
$$+ \beta_{7j}(Age) + \beta_{8j}(Full\ time) + \beta_{9j}(LSE)$$
$$+ \beta_{10j}(SFI) + \beta_{11j}(HOL) + \beta_{12j}(Intern)$$
$$+ \beta_{13j}(Pro\ bono) + \beta_{14j}(Journal)$$
$$+ \beta_{15j}(Moot\ court) + \beta_{16j}(Organization)$$
$$+ \beta_{17j}(Relations\ with\ students) + r_{ij}$$

where $i = 1, 2 \ldots, n_j$ students in law school j, and $j = 1, 2, \ldots, 95$ law schools.

Level 2 equations:

$$\beta_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + \gamma_{01}(AGG:LSE) + \gamma_{02}(Private) + \gamma_{03}(Enrollment\ size)$$
$$+ \gamma_{04}(Dversity\ index) + \gamma_{05}(Median\ LSAT) + u_{0j}$$
$$\beta_{1j} = \gamma_{10}$$
$$.$$
$$.$$
$$.$$
$$\beta_{17j} = \gamma_{170}$$

Limitations

As with any piece of research, ours is not without its limitations. Care should be taken not to overgeneralize the results of this study. While the sample included a wide cross-section of law schools, our sample is a convenience sample of 95 law schools in which institutions self-selected to participate in LSSSE. Law schools elect to participate in LSSSE for a variety of reasons, mainly for self-examination and improvement, which may affect the context of the student experience. Furthermore, fewer top ranked law schools (according to *U.S. News*) participate in LSSSE, and as such, we have less representation from that group in our study. The generalizability of the results is also limited by the diversity and engagement measures used in the study. For instance, the items in the diverse interactions scale deal with the frequency of interactions and not the quality of those interactions, which some studies (e.g., Nelson Laird, 2005) have found to be an important predictor of student outcomes. Participating law schools also exert varying amounts of effort to recruit students to participate in the survey. Although the average response rate was over 50%, as evident in the range of response rates across law schools (29 to 89%), some law schools exert a large amount of effort to recruit students to participate while some are passive about participation. Although our sample of law schools exhibited a wide range of response rates, the vast majority of law schools ($n = 80$, 84%) achieved response rates greater than 40% and around three-fifths (58%) had response rates over 50%. In fact, the minimum response rate (29%) is on par with the average response rate for other large, national collegiate surveys. For instance, the average response rate for the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) is 29% (NSSE, 2016). Furthermore, a recent study from NSSE (Fosnacht, Sarraf, Howe, & Peck, 2017) indicates that even relatively low response rates can provide accurate and reliable estimates. Another limitation is the cross-sectional nature of the research. LSSSE is a snapshot in time, and as such, it cannot fully depict students' experience in law school. A longitudinal study that follows students throughout their law school careers could provide a more complete description of students' diverse interactions in law school. With these limitations in mind, we believe this study still provides valuable insight into the relationship the student experience in law school might have on students' diverse interactions.

Results

In this section, we present results from the full multilevel model (see Table 4) along with the standardized coefficients. First, we examine the results for the student demographic characteristics. These results demonstrated that, controlling for the other variables in the model, male students ($\gamma = -.02$) reported more frequent diverse interactions than their female counterparts. In regards to racial-ethnic differences, we found that White students reported

Table 4
Estimation of Multilevel Model Examining Law Students' Diverse Interactions

Fixed effects	Unstandardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients	*SE*	Sig.
Intercept	30.51			
Student demographics				
Female	−.57	−.02	.144	***
Asian	−.78	−.02	.280	**
African American/Black	−.39	−.01	.270	
Latino/a	−.22	−.01	.253	
Other-race ethnicity	.98	.02	.327	**
Multiracial	1.97	.03	.365	***
Age	.02	.01	.013	
Full-time	.42	.01	.223	
Activities in law school				
Law school environment	.12	.12	.007	***
Student-faculty interaction	.36	.30	.008	***
Higher-order learning	.16	.13	.008	***
Relationships with other students	.90	.10	.054	***
Internship	.18	.01	.162	
Pro bono work	.81	.03	.167	***
Law journal	−1.15	−.04	.179	***
Moot court	.24	.01	.209	
Student organization	1.15	.04	.166	***
Law school characteristics				
Aggregate: Law school environment	.00	.01	.013	
Private institution	−.39	−.03	.381	*
Law school enrollment (in hundreds)	.11	.01	.048	
Diversity index	.09	.10	3.70	***
Median LSAT score	.07	−.01	.028	

Random effects	Variance
Between law schools (σ^2)	1.69
Within law schools (τ)	119.73

Note. Proportion of variance explained at the student-level: 23.7%; Proportion of variance explained at the institution-level: 64.6%; Intercept (γ_0) reliability: .78.
* $p < .05$.   ** $p < .01$.   *** $p < .001$.

more diverse interactions than their Asian counterparts ($\gamma = -.02$), while students who identified as multiracial ($\gamma = .03$) or another racial-ethnic category ($\gamma = .02$) reported more diverse interactions than their White counterparts.

A number of experiences and activities in law school had a statistically significant relationship with diverse interactions after controlling for the other variables in the model. The largest effect we found was related to student-faculty interaction. Students who reported more frequent interaction with faculty members also reported greater diverse interactions ($\gamma = .30$). This was consistent with research at the undergraduate level (e.g., Kim & Sax, 2009; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005), which demonstrates the positive impact students' interactions with faculty members have with students' development in college. We also found a positive relationship between students' perceptions of higher-order learning and diverse interactions. The more students believed their coursework emphasized higher-order learning skills the more frequent diverse interactions they reported ($\gamma = .13$). Additionally, students who had done pro bono work ($\gamma = .03$) or were members of a student organization ($\gamma = .04$) reported more frequent diverse interactions with their peers. On the other hand, students who were members of the law school journal ($\gamma = -.04$) reported less frequent diverse interactions. We did not find a statistically sig-

nificant relationship between diverse interactions and participation in an internship or moot court.

In regards to the law school environment, our findings indicated that the greater students perceive their law school as a supportive and friendly environment, the greater diverse interactions they reported ($\gamma = .12$). While individual perceptions of the law school environment were related to increased diverse interactions, the aggregate measure of the law school environment was not statistically related to increased diverse interactions, indicating that individual's perceptions of the law school were more important to increasing diverse interactions than the normative environment of the law school. Similarly, the more friendly and supportive students rated their relationships with other students, the more frequently they reported interacting with students different from themselves ($\gamma = .10$). These results indicated that positive perceptions of the law school and positive relationships with other students were related to increased diverse interactions.

In regards to the law school characteristics, a more heterogeneous student population (i.e., a higher diversity index score; $\gamma = .10$) was associated with greater diverse interactions. Thus, greater diversity in the student population contributed to increased diverse interactions among law students even after controlling for student background characteristics, student activities and experiences, and

other law school characteristics. In addition, students attending public law schools ($\gamma = -.03$) reported more frequent diverse interactions than students attending private law schools. None of the other law school characteristics (aggregate law school environment, enrollment size, and selectivity) were statistically related to diverse interactions.

Discussion and Implications

Much of the discussion pertaining to training law students who will be culturally aware members of the legal profession centers on increasing student diversity (see, Orfield & Whitla, 2001). The research presented in this article, however, highlights that the focus must extend beyond structural diversity. The frequency and quality of interactions among students from diverse backgrounds are also important considerations. While higher levels of student diversity were associated with more frequent diverse interactions, other factors—including favorable perceptions of the law school environment, favorable relationships with peers, and more frequent interactions with faculty members—were also associated with more frequent diverse interactions.

These findings are consistent with others concluding that structural diversity alone does not fully explain how the educational benefits of diversity are conferred or ensured (Allport, 1954; Chang, 1999; Gurin et al., 2003; Hurtado et al., 1999). However, to be clear, structural diversity should not minimized; it is a necessary first step. Structural diversity increases the chances of incidental contact among students from different backgrounds. This contact can take many forms and have a range of impacts: positive, negative, and presumably insignificant. For law schools to optimize the benefits of structural diversity (and minimize the negative outcomes), they must provide opportunities for diverse interactions in a supportive or collaborative environment (Chang, 1999).

Our findings illustrate increased diverse interactions were related with students' perceptions of a supportive law school environment. Adequate academic and personal support are important to forming favorable perceptions of the environment. Students who feel comfortable, accepted, and supported are more likely to be successful. A supportive environment is especially crucial in light of the naturally competitive and individualistic nature of law school (Hess, 2002; Peterson & Peterson, 2009). Law school faculty and administrators can assist in creating a supportive law school environment by providing students with the academic and personal support they need to be successful in law school. For example, law schools could enact policies that encourage out-of-class contact between faculty and students because more frequent student-faculty contact has been shown to increase perceptions of the educational environment (e.g., Cole, 2007; Cress, 2008). Law schools could also implement strategies aimed at students' nonacademic responsibilities (e.g., family, work). For example, law schools could provide financial counseling services to help students manage their financial obligations. Furthermore, intentionally engaging students with others from different backgrounds through curricular and co-curricular activities can help build a supportive and nurturing environment and foster the type of interactions that harness the educational benefits of diversity. Understanding the need to create environments that are welcoming,

supportive, and open to dialog is important to reduce prejudice and promote student learning (Mayhew & Engberg, 2010).

The content of the curriculum is central to maximizing the educational benefits of diversity (Bhabha, 2014; Gurin et al., 2003). Valuing and encouraging diverse perspectives in the classroom is essential to this process (Deo, 2011). Our research shows that greater perceptions of higher-order learning, or coursework that requires students to critically examine issues from multiple perspectives and synthesize information across sources, helps foster diverse interactions. Perhaps coursework that emphases higher-order learning requires students to work collaboratively to master challenging materials, therefore, increasing the opportunities to interact with diverse peers. Further, these higher-order learning experiences, in turn, foster higher cognitive growth (Bowman, 2010).

Given the positive benefits of high-order learning, faculty should reflect on the ways in which they incorporate these advanced thinking skills in their classrooms. Our higher-order learning scale was based on Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives and includes activities such as analyzing an idea or particular case in depth by examining its parts, evaluating a point of view, forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information, and applying theories or concepts to practical problems. Utilizing case studies, which require students to work through the stages of actual or mock cases, can help build and reinforce many of the principals of Bloom's taxonomy. These hands-on experiences can help students better appreciate legal theory and better prepare them for real-world practice. Knowing that higher-order learning plays a role in shaping diverse interactions can also inform policies related to faculty development. For example, administrators who want to promote diverse interaction may support faculty development programs (e.g., faculty learning communities) that support faculty in emphasizing higher-order learning techniques. Many law schools are undertaking major curricular assessments efforts over the last few years (Bhabha, 2014; Yates, 2011). An assessment of the extent to which the curriculum encourages diverse perspectives, collaboration, and diverse learning should be central to curriculum design and assessment.

Our research demonstrates that creating opportunities for students to interact with faculty and peers in collaborative ways, including participating in student organizations and pro bono services, were related with increased diverse interactions. Participating in student organizations and pro bono services exposes students to different people and allows students to work with others in a variety of settings. These activities can provide opportunities for positive interactions to occur. Given the positive benefits associated with participation, students should be encouraged to take part in organizations, clinics, and opportunities to provide pro bono legal services. Pro bono work allows students to give back to the larger community while working with legal professionals in real-world situations. These activities also set the stage for students to build relationships with faculty, peers, and other members of the local and legal community.

While participation pro bono work and student organizations demonstrated positive benefits in terms of increased diverse interactions, other student activities did not, including participating in the law journal, moot court, or an internship. Although participating in moot court, an internship, or the law journal creates oppor-

tunities for students to work together or work with others in the legal profession, the same positive benefit in terms of diverse interactions was not shown for these activities. In fact, our research did not reveal a relationship between diverse interactions and either participating in moot court or an internship. We also found that participating in the law journal negatively affected diverse interactions. One reason for these findings may be because of the competition for coveted internships or law journal positions. This notion is consistent with the idea that competitive environments can discourage intergroup contact and minimize or eliminating the benefits of diverse interactions (Pettigrew et al., 2007, 2011). As a result, law school faculty members and administrators must ensure that students have equal status and are able to work collaboratively toward shared goals. Law journal membership provides an example of how competition may depress the benefits of diversity. In this study, law journal membership was associated with lower levels of diverse interactions. The dearth of diversity among law journal staff has been explored in other research (Peralta, 2015). This lack of structural diversity is likely a major driver of the trends we uncovered. The insulated nature of journal membership and work may be a contributing factor as well. To forestall these trends, law schools should audit student journals to assess the amount of bias inherent in the selection process. Many law journals have plans for encouraging membership diversity (Peralta, 2015). The effectiveness of these plans should be assessed.

Intentionality regarding student-faculty interactions is also important. Interactions and experiences with faculty members were associated with greater diverse interactions during law school. This finding is consistent with research at the undergraduate level (e.g., Cole, 2007; Cress, 2008; Hurtado, Alvarez, Guillermo-Wann, Cuellar, & Arellano, 2012; Kim & Sax, 2009) that, as shown, interactions with faculty not only foster diverse student interactions but also help create a supportive and nurturing campus environment. As Cole (2007), Cress (2008), and Hurtado et al. (2012) all assert developing strong student-faculty relationships helps create a welcoming campus environment and support student success in college. Law schools can exert some influence over certain aspects of student-faculty interaction by identifying it as a priority. Schools can facilitate increased interactions between students and faculty through policies that encourage student and faculty involvement both in and out of the classroom. Law schools can also implement advising or mentorship programs that encourage interactions with faculty (Silver, Rocconi, Haeger, & Watkins, 2013). These implementations may lead to opportunities for learning both inside and outside the classroom. Given the importance of student-faculty interactions in not only fostering diverse interactions but in helping to create a supportive and nurturing environment, it is important for law schools to help foster relationships between faculty and students and among students.

Direction for Future Research

Our study is a first look into diverse interaction in legal education. More research is needed to confirm and further investigate our findings. For instance, our results indicate students at public law schools report more frequent diverse interactions. In our sample, public and private law schools had similar levels of structural diversity, so why do students at public law schools report diverse interactions at a higher rate? Future research should further

explore the ways in which law schools can promote and enhance diverse interactions. A longitudinal study that tracks students throughout law school would provide an opportunity to examine diverse interactions over time and provide a more complete picture of diverse interaction in law school. Qualitative studies about law school structure, learning, and engagement may reveal nuances in the ways in which aspects of legal education promotes or inhibits diverse interaction. For example, what specific aspects of a pro bono experience, or participating in student organizations, encourage students to interact more frequently with individuals different than themselves? Our research helped to identify opportunities that encourage diverse interaction, but how do the benefits of experiences with this aspect manifest? Are law students who interact more frequently with a diverse set of peers better able to apply what they have learned in class? Are these students better prepared to work with a diverse set of clientele? More research is also needed to delve deeper into law school specific co-curricular activities such as pro bono work, moot court, and law journal to investigate how these activities promote, hinder, or may have no effect on diverse interactions. For instance, legal educators and researchers should continue to explore what factors make law journal participants less likely to report diverse interactions.

Conclusions

In this article, we explored the types of activities and experiences that foster interactions among diverse students in the context of competitive law school environments. Our findings indicated that along with increasing structural diversity, interactions with faculty, positive relationships with other students, participating in co-curricular activities, challenging academic coursework, and a supportive law school environment were all related with law students' diverse interactions. In this study, we identified factors related to diverse interactions, but more needs to be done. Considerable effort has been devoted to studying diversity; however, more research is needed to better understand the particular ways in which these factors operate in the law school context. Indeed, recent rulings from the U.S. Supreme Court, Fisher v. The University of Texas at Austin (2013, 2016), point to the issues of diversity and suggest an urgent need for educational institutions to evaluate the opportunities they offer for diverse interactions. Findings from this study are encouraging in that increased diverse interactions are not only related to increased structural diversity in the student population but programmatic factors in which the law school can exert influence, such as a creating a supportive law school environment, increasing student-faculty interaction, promoting higher-order learning in courses, and encouraging student participation in student organizations and pro bono work. Fostering these opportunities would better prepare law students for the essential roles lawyers play in an increasingly diverse and globalized society.

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