

Attachment A

Summary – Psychological Intervention Project and Initial Design Phase

Law School Transition Collaborative:
Stanford University, University of Southern California, and Indiana University

Overview of the Proposed Productive Mindset Intervention

Challenge: The July 2016 California bar exam pass rate was forty-three percent—the lowest in three decades. Wide racial and ethnic disparities also existed. These troubling outcomes suggest a need for research that (1) investigates the factors that shape bar exam performance and (2) designs, implements, and evaluates interventions that improve exam performance for all bar exam takers.

Potential benefits from a productive mindset intervention are large. Greater bar passage motivates prospective law school applicants, thereby increasing access. It also fulfills a promise to law students who expend considerable effort and resources to join the profession, thereby expanding the value of legal education.

Proposal: In collaboration with the State Bar of California, we aim to develop, implement, and evaluate a productive mindset intervention for final-semester law students and recent law school graduates who are preparing, and sitting, for the July 2018 California bar exam. This productive mindset intervention will intervene on two key psychological factors: students' concerns about belonging in the legal profession and their potential to excel on the bar exam.

Goals: We anticipate that the productive mindset intervention will diminish negative psychological experiences that are commonly encountered when law students prepare and sit for the bar exam. These experiences include negative performance expectations, anxiety, belonging uncertainty, evaluation apprehensiveness, and stress physiology (e.g., Murphy et al., 2007). We predict that reductions in these negative psychological processes will increase motivation while preparing for the bar exam and also improve bar exam passage rates.

Psychological Science: A productive mindset intervention that targets students' concerns about belonging and potential will help bar exam test-takers interpret challenges and obstacles associated with preparing and studying for the bar exam in more productive ways. For instance, a law student may have challenges memorizing relevant concepts and thus perform poorly on bar exam practice tests. The student may construe this negative feedback as a sign that he/she has reached the limits of his/her ability. He/She may begin to question whether he/she has what it takes to succeed on the bar exam. A productive mindset intervention helps students reframe these challenges as common and surmountable. The intervention helps students reinterpret struggles as signs of learning (not failure) that indicate where effort and attention are needed. After communicating to students that intelligence and ability "grows like a muscle" when effort and new strategies are applied after setbacks, Aronson and colleagues (2002) found in an analogous study that the message raised academic performance (GPA) among students and increased students' enjoyment, and valuing, of school.

Qualifications: Our research team is highly qualified to create the productive mindset intervention proposed. The Law School Transition Collaborative (our group) is an initiative modeled from the College Transition Collaborative

(<http://collegetransitioncollaborative.org>)—a partnership between researchers and institutions of higher education aimed at improving student success in college. The investigators have been leaders in the field—creating, implementing, and evaluating large-scale productive mindset interventions—and have worked together for over 2 years.

Designing Process in the Greater Los Angeles Area, Summer 2017:

This summer, we will begin the iterative design process of the productive mindset interventions. This will entail conducting a brief survey with recent law school graduates in the greater Los Angeles area who are preparing for the July 2017 California bar exam.

(1) Initial Survey: The initial survey will gather information from recent graduates about their aspirations, concerns, and hopes when preparing for the bar exam. The survey will also inquire about their study strategies. Survey takers will have the opportunity to opt-in to participating in a focus group and a second survey both of which would take place after the bar exam. The initial survey will generate discussion themes that will be used in the focus groups and second survey.

We seek for law schools in the greater Los Angeles area to send an invitation, containing a link to the initial survey, to their recent graduates by Thursday, June 22, 2017. We will provide this invitation no later than Friday, June 15, 2017. Everyone who completes the initial survey will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card.

(2) Second Survey: After the bar exam, a second survey will seek to confirm the themes generated by the first survey. A journaling exercise will generate additional content for the materials that will make up the productive mindset intervention.

The second survey will be sent to students who opted in on the initial survey. We anticipate that the second survey will be sent approximately two weeks after the bar exam to those who opted in. Everyone who completes the second survey will receive a \$10 Amazon gift card.

(3) Focus Groups: After the bar exam, we will also seek to conduct focus groups that will gather live, in-person insights from a subset of survey takers about their aspirations, concerns, and hopes when preparing for the bar exam and about their study strategies. The focus groups will discuss themes generated within the initial surveys and help to generate additional themes to be used in the productive mindset intervention.

We will convene three focus groups on dates yet to be determined after the bar exam at the University of Southern California, Gould School of Law, and the University of California, Los Angeles, and online. The initial survey will gather contact information from recent graduates who opt-in to the focus groups. All students who attend the focus groups will receive lunch and/or a \$25 Amazon gift card.