Raising the Bar:
An analysis of African American and Hispanic/Latino diversity in the legal profession
The Importance of Diversity

A diverse legal profession will strengthen the quality of social justice and democracy.

Diverse law firms make good business sense.
The United States becomes more diverse every year. The legal profession does not.

The gap between diversity in the law profession and diversity in the U.S. has worsened over the past 9 years.

Yet there exists today a profound lack of research into the diversity of individuals entering law in comparison to other professions and a critical lack of focus on the issue.

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics
To better understand the diversity gap within the legal profession, Microsoft commissioned a study to compare rates of diversity in comparable professions.
Under Represented Minorities (URM) Growth by Comparable Professions 2003-2012 in the U.S.

*URM defined as African American and Hispanic/Latino

None of the comparable professions have been able to match the overall percentage of URM employment across all U.S. jobs.

Between 2003 and 2012, the percentage of URMs employed in the legal profession grew only 0.8%.
The Takeaways

Although careers in medicine, business, and law are similar, why do these careers have less of a diversity gap than law?

License passage rates are significantly higher in medical fields

Loan forgiveness is more available and better established

No national law scholarships on the scale of medical and business

Minority employment in the legal profession grew just .8% to 8.4%

Similar professions do a better job reflecting U.S. diversity
Prime the Pipeline

We have barely scratched the surface of understanding the diversity gap in the legal profession.

To continue moving forward, we need stakeholders from all aspects of the profession to come to the table, discuss solutions, and develop a pipeline of diverse law students at all stages of their education.
A critical first step to address the worsening diversity gap in the legal profession is improving bar passage.

The only national study of bar passage rates by race and ethnicity (LSAC, 1998) showed that a significant proportion of under-represented minorities who graduate from law school do not pass the bar.

We need continued research into bar passage rates. For instance, the only state to report bar admissions based on ethnicity is California. More needs to be done to track the gap.
Strategies to Improve URM Bar Passage

Make bar prep part of standard law school curriculums

If under-represented minorities passed the bar at the same rate as whites (96.7%), this would have the same impact as increasing the number of under-represented minorities in law school by 18%.

Florida International University College of Law has made bar prep a standard part of its last semester curriculum. Its class is 55.9% URMs, first-time bar pass rate is 89.3%.

Provide financial support to enable all students to adequately prepare for the bar exam

Highly rated bar preparation courses are expensive and time consuming, often putting them out of reach for some.
Other Strategies from Similar Professions

Expand holistic or full file admissions that consider attributes and experiences in addition to test metrics.

Make alternative degrees available that are more flexible than lengthy full time programs.

Build a more connected pre-law curriculum that prepares and builds law school capabilities.

Leverage law school alumni, faculty and other partnerships to build critical mass.

Tap into the pipeline of URM undergrads who aim to apply to law school by involving them early.

Increase scholarships and loan forgiveness in the pipeline of URM law students.
In order to implement effective strategies for improving diversity within the legal profession, further research is needed to identify the factors creating the diversity gap.

Additional Resources
• www.lcldnet.org
• www.lsac.org
• www.microsoft.com/en-us/legal/LCADiversity

*Summary of research findings from Microsoft commissioned report.*