

The LSAT Meets Binary Thinking: How the Pipeline Course Works

What does binary thinking have to do with the LSAT? Everything, according to Associate Dean Mary Lu Bilek, who co-teaches the Pipeline to Justice course.

Binary thinking involves exercising the “left brain,” the analytical part of the mind that governs much of legal reasoning. Bilek’s hypothesis is that left-brain performance can be improved with learning and exercise and that improving left-brain skills and the speed at which they are performed leads to improvements in LSAT scores, as well as improved performance on law school exams and on the bar exam.

And that’s the part that anchors the Pipeline Program. The course is geared to improving the LSAT scores of denied applicants to CUNY School of Law, and it includes everything from games that help students master critical reasoning and logic, to breathing exercises for test anxiety, to the use of Webinar technology that allows students to enter virtual classrooms to focus on problem areas. Peer counseling also helps students build relationships with classmates. Enhancing self-esteem is another critical piece of the course.



Pipeline participant and first-year student Thaddecia Andrews.

many commercial programs. Kaplan Test Prep, for instance, charges \$1,299 for its LSAT preparation course.

The course runs in two parts. In Part I, students meet for three hours on Tuesday and Thursday nights, from October to February, at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in Manhattan. Monday nights are optional for students who want additional one-on-one help.

In addition, students must attend six, all-day Saturday sessions during the term, taking a practice LSAT exam on each of the mornings, then grading and reviewing the exam, item by item, in the afternoon. All told, during the course, students must take 15 practice LSAT exams. And that’s just the in-class time. Pipeline students spend virtually every minute they’re not at work or sleeping meeting in groups or with the instructors, working through examples, discovering logic patterns, and sharpening their skills.

Some, such as Dustin Smith, now a first-year student who boosted his score 13 points, says he took 35 tests and participated in a six-student study group that also met on additional weekends, before class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and on all Monday nights.

The first part of the course is taught by Eva Lana, a Harvard University graduate and an Intel winner for biochemical research. Her past experience also includes working for one of the largest prep test companies. She began closely studying and deconstructing the LSAT exam in 1991. “Eva’s approach is unique and inspired,” Bilek said.

In early February, students take a real LSAT. If they reach a threshold score, they are invited to take the second half of the course. Part II lasts six weeks and is designed to build critical reading, analytic thinking, and post-graduate level analytic writing skills, Bilek said. Students write a five-page paper each week, on which they receive detailed feedback. Each student meets at least once in an hour-long conference with Bilek, but most meet far more often than that.

Part II of the course concludes with a test designed to evaluate each student’s ability to apply the knowledge acquired during Pipeline in a linear, analytic format and to produce a post-graduate level, timed rhetorical essay.

If students achieve in both portions of the course, they are invited to join CUNY Law. “This course requires a huge investment on all sides – from the students, the teachers, and the Law School,” Bilek says. “But the return on that investment is more than worth it.”