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## EFP Takeaways

Effects of Demographic (Mis)Match in Professional School Settings

### *Background*

There is an extensive body of research that examines the effects of demographic (mis)match between students and teachers. In particular, the most frequently observed demographic match is by gender and race. The majority of this research is at the K-12 level, with some focused on undergraduate education. However, there is a scarcity of research that examines the effects of demographic (mis)match in the postgraduate or professional school level. Chris Birdsall, Seth Gershenson, and Raymond Zuniga examine the effects of demographic (mis)match in law schools in *EFP* volume 15, issue 3.

### *The Study*

The authors utilized ten years of administrative data from a diverse, private, top-100 law school to examine the effects of exposure to demographically similar faculty for female and non-White students in required, first-year law courses. The authors focused their analysis on first-year, required law courses for three reasons: a) to account for semester effects, b) most of these courses utilize a blind grading system, and c) instructors are randomly assigned to students in these courses. In their analysis, the authors examined how course outcomes (grades) were affected by demographic (mis)match, while also accounting for prior student achievement and other demographic characteristics. Overall, their analysis examines over 36,000 student course observations across more than 1,000 different course sections.

### *Findings*

The authors found compelling evidence for the benefits of demographic match on student achievement. Female students assigned to first-year required law classes taught by female instructors were 10% more likely to receive an A than female cohort mates in classes taught by male faculty. This effect was further magnified in racial match. Non-white students assigned to first-year required law classes taught by same-race instructors were 20% more likely to receive an A than their cohort mates in classes taught by White faculty.

Small changes in GPA and class rank can have long lasting effects on law students' careers. This study's findings suggest that increasing the diversity of law school faculty may help diversify and raise the status of women and people of color within the legal profession.

#### **For more details:**

- View the [full issue](#).
- See the [full article in Education Finance and Policy](#).
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- Summary of:  
Birdsall, C., Gershenson, S., & Zuniga, R. (2020). The effects of demographic mismatch in an elite professional school setting. *Education Finance & Policy*, 15(3), 457-486.