Bar Exam Data Don’t Support Affirmative Action

To the Editor:

A recent study purporting to find “high” bar-exam passage rates for minority students (news article, May 20) is being touted as support for affirmative action. But what it shows is that the pass rate of white first-time test takers is 50 percent higher than that of black first-timers.

The study also indicates that scores on the Law School Admissions Test are, like law school grades, the strongest predictors of passing the bar for all racial groups. Yet many affirmative-action supporters argue that the test is biased and shouldn’t play such a big role in admissions.

Your article doesn’t note that some states increased overall pass rates to get minority rates to an acceptable level. The public might question whether tests passed by very high numbers perform their gatekeeping function. Yet most law schools no longer flunk many students, relying instead on the bar exam to weed out the unfit.

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