National Conference of Bar Examiners

Building a competent, ethical, and diverse legal profession.

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The National Conference of Bar Examiners (NCBE) Validity and Fairness Research Award 2027 Call for Proposals

The National Conference of Bar Examiners Validity and Fairness Research Award was conceived by the Hon. Phyllis D. Thompson, a judge on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals since 2006. Judge Thompson is a former member of the NCBE Board of Trustees and of the Council of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Her work in bar admissions and interest in licensure examinations served as the basis for her idea to provide research awards to students and faculty.

This award is intended to provide support for graduate students and faculty in any discipline doing research germane to testing and measurement, particularly in a high-stakes licensure setting. The proposed research should identify aspects of validity evidence including, but not limited to, scoring, response processes, and the impact of use of licensure and certification testing.

The topics under consideration should focus on issues of validity and fairness in assessment. The proposed project need not center on licensure testing, but relevance to licensure and certification will be a consideration in final selection.

Funding will be awarded on an objective and nondiscriminatory basis and will be given for proposals that address topics relevant to validity and/or fairness, can be completed in 6–12 months, and add to the literature on licensing and certification testing and accumulation of validity evidence.

This year we are especially interested in the following topics:
- Contrasting group studies (for example, studies contrasting the performance of 1L and 3L law students on bar exam materials)

- Predictive validity studies and/or literature reviews on predictive validity in a credentialing context
- Studies targeting response processes via cognitive lab methodologies
- Use of AI or other natural language processing models to inform rubric development and/or validation for essays or short-answer questions

The student conducting the research must be enrolled in a graduate program and have completed at least one year of study towards the graduate degree. Students who have just completed a terminal degree (e.g., PhD, SJD/JSD) are also eligible. The faculty advisor must be willing to work with the student on the project and supervise their progress. Each student recipient will be awarded a stipend of $6,000, and the advisor will be awarded a stipend of $1,000.

Given the rough time frame of 6–12 months, we expect most studies to be fairly modest in scope or to be a part of a larger study. The application should include (1) the student's curriculum vita; (2) a letter of intent from the student's faculty advisor; (3) a brief proposal of up to four pages (this component may be very brief for those proposing a literature review); (4) a recent scholarly writing sample; and (5) a cover letter. Email submissions must be received by Monday, December 21, 2026. The award committee will review all applications and announce the award(s) by January 29, 2027.

Submissions and questions should be addressed to:
Dr. Daphne Mills
Email: dmills@ncbex.org

Dr. Bob Schwartz
Email: bschwartz@ncbex.org

NCBE reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to withhold the award for any year in which the Validity and Fairness Award Committee determines that no submissions merit the award. More than one award may be made in a given year.
The National Conference of Bar Examiners is a not-for-profit corporation founded in 1931. The mission of the Conference is to work with other institutions to develop, maintain, and apply reasonable and uniform standards of education and character for eligibility for admission to the practice of law; and to assist bar admission authorities by providing standardized examinations of uniform and high quality for the testing of applicants for admission to the practice of law, disseminating relevant information concerning admission standards and practices, conducting educational programs for the members and staffs of such authorities, and providing other services such as character and fitness investigations and research.