

2018 Applicant Pool Projection Update: Good News For Highly-Ranked Law Schools

By Jerry Organ

Applicant Pool Projection Remains at 61,000 to 63,000

Two months ago, I posted a blog with projections for the 2018 application cycle based on the initial Current Volume Report from the LSAC. I am writing now to update the applicant pool projection and provide some further analysis regarding the composition of the applicant pool.

The applicant pool remains up nearly 10% over last year as of late January. As of January 19, there were 29,287 applicants at a point in time when 48% of the final applicant count had been received last year. That extrapolates to approximately 61,000 applicants. As of February 3, there were 35,974 applicants at a point in time when 58% of the final applicant count had been received last year. That extrapolates to approximately 62,000 applicants. So, at the moment, we probably still can anticipate a total applicant pool for the year in a range from 61,000 to perhaps 63,000, depending upon exactly how things unfold over the coming months.

A total applicant pool of 61,000-63,000 would be the largest applicant volume since the 2011-2012 admissions cycle, which saw a total applicant pool of roughly 67,900. For the last four years, the applicant pool has hovered around 55,000-56,000. (Note that due to changes in LSAC reporting on total applicant pool starting in 2016, the comparisons with prior years are not exactly apples to apples.)

Fall 2018 First-Year Class May Be 40,000-41,000

If the percentage of applicants who become matriculants remains around 66% for the current admissions cycle (roughly the average over the last several years as show in Table 1), the entering class in fall 2018 would be between 40,000 and 41,000 first-year students (up roughly 10%).

Improvement in Strength of Applicant Pool (and Matriculants)

While the increasing size of the applicant pool is certainly good news for law schools, for highly-ranked law schools there is some even better news buried in the details of the Current Volume Report. From 2010 to 2017, while the overall applicant volume declined from roughly 87,900 to roughly 56,000, the "composition" of the entering class profile also shifted. During this period, the percentage of applicants and matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher declined, with the percentage of applicants dropping from over 14% to less than 12%, and the percentage of matriculants dropping from just over 18% to just over 15%.

TABLE 1 -- Percentage of Applicants and Matriculants with a High LSAT Score of 165 or Higher from 2010-2017 Based on National Decision Profile Data

Admis. Cycle	Total Apps.	Apps. at 165 and Higher	% of Apps. at 165 or Higher	Total Matrics	Matrics as % of Apps.	Matrics at 165 and Higher	Matrics at 165 or Higher as % of Apps. at 165 or Higher	% of Matrics at 165 or Higher
2009-10	87900	12177	13.9%	52500	59.7%	9477	77.8%	18.1%
2010-11	78500	11190	14.3%	48700	62%	8952	80%	18.4%
2011-12	67900	9226	13.6%	44500	65.5%	7571	82%	17%
2012-13	59400	7532	12.7%	39700	66.8%	6054	80.4%	15.2%

2013-14	55700	7577	13.6%	37900	68%	6189	81.7%	16.3%
2014-15	54500	6667	12.2%	37100	68.1%	5505	82.6%	14.8%
2015-16	56500	7240	12.8%	37100	65.7%	5780	79.8%	15.5%
2016-17	56200	6546	11.6%	37400	66.5%	5688	86.9%	15.2%

The late January Current Volume Summary for this cycle continues to show a significant increase in the number of applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher compared to the five most recent admission cycles. This likely will translate into a significant increase in the total pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher and a corresponding increase in the number (and percentage) of matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher.

As noted above, when the late January Current Volume Summary was released, it corresponded with the point in time in the last admissions cycle at which 48% of the final applicant pool had applied. But at comparable points in the applicant cycle over the last several years, nearly 80% of the applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher had already applied. Thus, we should expect slower growth in the pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher over the remainder of the admissions cycle compared to applicants with lower LSAT scores.

Nonetheless, as shown in Table 2, if one assumes we presently have roughly 77% of the final pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher, we can anticipate having over 8,100 applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher (roughly 1,600 more this year compared to the 2016-17 admissions cycle (an increase of nearly 25%)). And if we continue to see roughly 83% of the applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher turn into matriculants, the number of matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher also may increase to roughly 6,750 (roughly 1,000 more this year compared to the 2016-17 admissions cycle (an increase of over 18%)).

TABLE 2 — Estimates of Total Applicants and Matriculants with a High LSAT of 165 or Higher for the 2017-18 Admissions Cycle (with Comparisons for 2012-13 through 2016-17)

Year	Number of Applicants with LSAT of 165 or Higher in Late January Current Volume Summary	Final Number of Applicants with LSAT of 165 or Higher	% of Final Number in Late January Current Volume Summary	Number of Matriculants with LSAT of 165 or Higher	Matriculants with LSAT of 165 or Higher as Percentage of Applicants with LSAT of 165 or Higher
2012-2013	6114	7532	81.2%	6054	80.4%
2013-2014	5,848	7577	77.2%	6189	81.7%
2014-2015	5,007	6667	75.1%	5505	82.6%
2015-2016	5,559	7240	76.8%	5780	79.8%
2016-2017	4,915	6546	75.1%	5688	86.9%

2017-2018	6,263	8134 (Est.)	77% (Est.)	6750 (Est.)	83% (Est.)
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If the number of matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher is roughly 6,750 as shown in Table 2, and if the Fall 2018 first-year entering class comes in at roughly 40,000-41,000 (as noted above), then the percentage of matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher will rebound to nearly 17%, the highest percentage in five years.

Trickle Down Effect

This projected increase of 1,000 matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher would roughly mirror the total decline in matriculants among top-25 law schools over the last several years. While I don't think it would make sense to assume that all of these additional matriculants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher would be absorbed by top-25 law schools, a significant percentage likely will be, possibly resulting in some top-25 law schools seeing modest rebounds in enrollment. This also may mean that top-25 law schools will not be admitting as many students with LSATs of less than 165 (155-164), which should mean more of these students will be available to help fill out the entering classes at law schools ranked from 25-100. This may mean that some of these law schools ranked from 25-100 will be able to strengthen their entering class profile a little bit and/or increase enrollment a little bit.

8. Initial Fall 2018 Enrollment Projections Reflect Increases in Applicant Volume and Strength, TaxProf Blog, December 7, 2017 (2.5K Shares – Dec. 2019)

Initial Fall 2018 Enrollment Projections Reflect Increases In Applicant Volume And Strength

By Jerry Organ

Applicant Pool Projection – 61,000 to 63,000

With the first release of this admission cycle's Current Volume Summary from the LSAC, we have the opportunity to compare the current applicant cycle data with that in prior years.

The good news reported by LSAC and posted here on TaxProf Blog by Paul Caron yesterday is that applicant volume is 15,083, up over 14% compared to this point in the cycle last year. The Current Volume Summary states that at this point in the cycle last year, applicants represented roughly 24% of the final applicant pool. (In past years, the applicant volume in the first Current Volume Summary has averaged roughly one-quarter of the total applicant volume for the given admissions cycle.) This means that, at the moment, as shown in the chart below, we can anticipate a total applicant pool for the year in a range from 61,000 to perhaps 63,000, depending upon exactly how things unfold over the coming months. Given that this is only the first of several data points, there remains a large margin of error. By mid-January, after a few more current volume reports, and with a larger percentage of the applicants accounted for, one can have a little more confidence in the estimate for total applicant volume.

A total applicant pool of 61,000-63,000 would be the largest applicant volume since the 2011-2012 admissions cycle, which saw a total applicant pool of roughly 67,900. (Note that due to changes in LSAC reporting on total applicant pool starting in 2016, the comparisons with prior years are not exactly apples to apples.)

Comparison of Applicant Volume Between Initial Current Volume Summary and Total Applicant Pool for 2014-15 Cycle to 2017-18 Cycle (Estimated)

Admissions Cycle	Initial Current Volume Summary Total (Date)	Final Applicant Count for Cycle	% of Total Applicant Count for Cycle
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2014-2015	11,415 (11/28/2014)	54,500	21%
2015-2016	13,881 (11/25/2015)	56,500	25%
2016-2017	14,892 (12/2/2016)	56,500	26%
2017-2018	15,083 (11/24/2017)	61,000-63,000 (EST.)	24-25% (EST.)

Improvement in Strength of Applicant Pool (and Matriculants)

The really good news, however, is buried in the details of the Current Volume Report. From 2010 to 2016, while the overall applicant volume declined from roughly 87,900 to roughly 56,500, the “composition” of the entering class profile also has shifted, with a smaller percentage of applicants/matriculants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher. As shown in the chart below, the percentage of applicants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher fell from 29.7% to roughly 25% between 2010 and 2016 while the percentage of matriculants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher fell from 38.3% to roughly 32% over the same period.

Percentage of Applicants and Matriculants with a High LSAT Score of 160 or Higher from 2010-2016

Admissions Cycle	Total Apps.	Apps. at 160 and Higher	% of Apps. at 160 or Higher	Total Matrics.	Matrics. as % of Apps.	Matrics. at 160 and Higher	Matrics. at 160 or Higher as Percentage of Apps. at 160 or Higher	% of Matrics. at 160 or Higher
2009-10	87900	26076	29.7%	52500	59.7%	20143	77.2%	38.3%
2010-11	78500	22376	28.5%	48700	62%	17630	78.8%	36.2%
2011-12	67900	18410	26.7%	44500	65.5%	14852	80.7%	33.4%
2012-13	59400	15409	25.9%	39700	66.8%	12596	81.7%	31.7%
2013-14	55700	14850	26.7%	37900	68%	12199	82.1%	32.2%
2014-15	54500	13503	24.8%	37100	68.1%	11248	83.3%	30.3%
2015-16	56500	14274	25.3%	37100	65.7%	11807	82.7%	31.8%

The initial Current Volume Summary for this cycle shows a significant increase in the number of applicants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher compared to the three most recent cycles. This likely will translate into a significant increase in the total pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher and a corresponding increase in the number (and percentage) of matriculants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher. The pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher may be more than 2000 larger than in the 2016-17 admissions cycle and the number of matriculants also may increase by nearly 2000.

Estimates of Total Applicants and Matriculants with a High LSAT of 160 or Higher for the 2017-18 Admissions Cycle (with Comparisons for 2014-15 through 2016-17)

Year	Number of Applicants with LSAT of 160 or Higher in Initial Current Volume Summary	Final Number of Applicants with LSAT of 160 or Higher	% of Final Number in Initial Current Volume Summary	Number of Matriculants with LSAT of 160 or Higher	Matriculants with LSAT of 160 or Higher as Percentage of Applicants with LSAT of 160 or Higher
2014-2015	5,095	13,503	37.7%	11248	83.3%
2015-2016	5,374	14,274	37.6%	11807	82.7%
2016-2017	5,404	13,613	39.7%	11,298 (EST.)	83% (EST.)
2017-2018	6,029	15,865 (EST.)	38% (EST.)	13,167 (EST.)	83% (EST.)

If the percentage applicants who become matriculants remains around 66% for the current admissions cycle (roughly the same as in the 2015-16 cycle), the entering class in fall 2018 would be roughly 40,000 first-year students. If the number of matriculants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher is slightly more than 13,000, then the percentage of matriculants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher will rebound to nearly 32.5%, the highest percentage in five years.