

Changes in Composition of the LSAT Profiles of Matriculants and Law Schools Between 2010 and 2015

By Jerry Organ

In late December 2014, I posted a blog analyzing how the distribution of matriculants across LSAT categories had changed since 2010 based on the LSAC's National Decision Profiles and on law school 50th percentile LSATs and 25th percentile LSATs across ranges of LSAT scores. With the LSAC's recent release of the 2014-15 National Decision Profile and the ABA's recent release of Standard 509 data, I am posting this blog to provide an update with the 2015 data.

At one level, this is a story that has already become well understood over the last year since my blog posting, with much discussion of the relationship between declining LSAT profiles and declining median MBE scores and bar passage rates. This 2015 information indicates that the decline in the LSAT profiles of matriculants and of law schools has continued, although with some moderation.

Given that the LSAT profiles of matriculants and of law schools for fall 2013, fall 2014 and fall 2015 are less robust than those for fall 2011 and fall 2012 (the classes that graduated in 2014 and 2015, respectively), one can anticipate that the declines in median MBE scaled scores and corresponding bar passage rates in 2014 and 2015 will continue in July 2016, 2017 and 2018 absent increases in attrition (I discussed attrition rates in a blog posting in October), significant improvement in academic support programs at law schools, or improved bar preparation efforts on the part of graduates.

Tracking Changes Based on LSAC's National Decision Profiles – 2010-2015

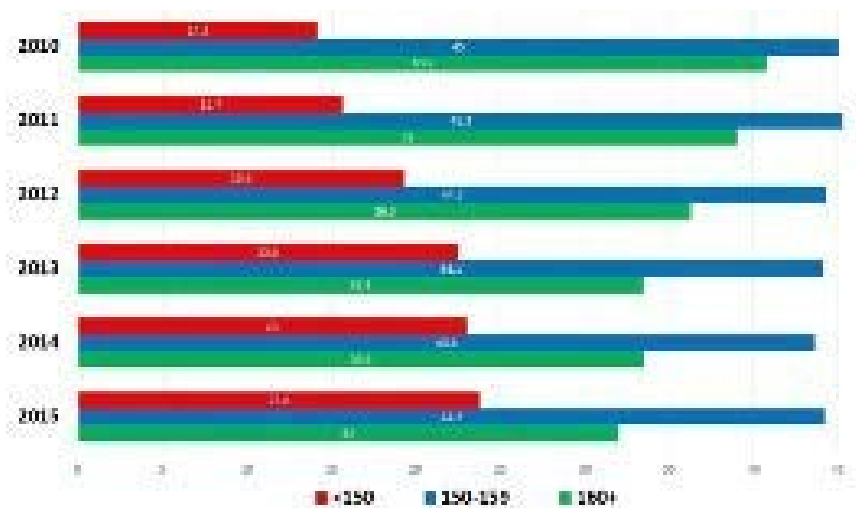
The following discussion summarizes data in the LSAC's National Decision Profiles from the 2009-10 admission cycle (fall 2010) through the 2014-15 admission cycle (fall 2015).

Let's start with the big picture. If you take the matriculants each year and break them into three broad LSAT categories – 160+, 150-159, and <150 – the following chart and graph show the changes in percentages of matriculants in each of these categories over the last six years.

Change in Percentage of Matriculants in LSAT Categories – 2010-2015

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<150	14.2	15.7	19.3	22.5	23	23.8
150-159	45	45.3	44.3	44.1	43.6	44.2
160+	40.8	39	36.3	33.4	33.5	32

Change in Percentage of Matriculants in LSAT Categories – 2010-2015 (Visual)



Notably, this chart and graph show almost no change in the “middle” -- 150-159 – (blue – dropping from 45% to 44.2%), with most of the change at 160+ (green -- decreasing from 40.8% to 32%) and at <150 (red -- increasing from 14.2% to 23.8%). This chart and graph also show some stabilization between 2013 and 2014, followed by a modest decline in 2015 in the percentage of students with LSATs of 160+ and a modest increase in the percentage of students with LSATs of <150.

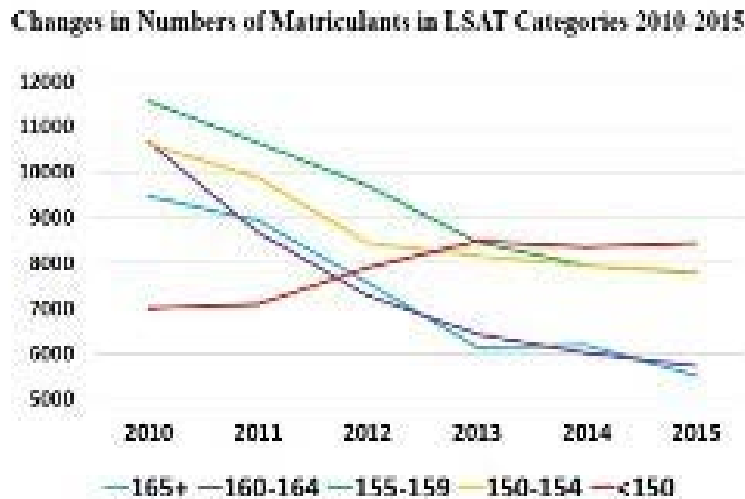
While I think this tells the story pretty clearly, for those interested in more detail, the following charts provide a more granular analysis.

Changes in LSAT Distributions of Matriculants – 2010-2013

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	Change in #	% Change in #	
170+	3635	3330	2788	2072	2248	2022	(1613)	-44.4%	
165-169	5842	5622	4783	4082	3941	3483	(2359)	-40.4%	
160-164	10666	8678	7281	6442	6010	5743	(3923)	-36.8%	
155-159	11570	10657	9700	8459	7935	7780	(3790)	-32.8%	
150-154	10626	9885	8444	8163	7934	7805	(1821)	-17.1%	
145-149	5131	5196	5334	5541	5158	5274	143	2.8%	
<145	1869	1888	2564	2930	3203	3084	1215	65%	
	49339	45256	40894	37689	36429	35191			

Note that in terms of the percentage change in the number of matriculants in each LSAT category, the four highest LSAT categories are all down at least 30% since 2010, with 165-169 and 170+ down over 40%,

while the two lowest LSAT categories are up, with <145 being up over 60%.



Note that in the line graph above, the top two LSAT categories have been combined into 165+ while the bottom two LSAT categories have been combined into <150. Perhaps most significantly, in 2010, the <150 group, with 7,000 students, was over 2,400 students smaller than the next smallest category (165+ with 9,477) and more than 4,500 students smaller than the largest category (155-159 with 11,570). By 2015, however, the <150 category had become the largest category, with 8,358, more than 500 larger than the second category (150-154, with 7,805) and more than 2,800 larger than the smallest category, 165+ with only 5,505. Moreover, 88% of the growth in the <150 category was in the <145 category (1,215 of the 1,358 more people in the <150 category were in the <145 category).

Changes in Percentage of Matriculants in LSAT Ranges – 2010-2015

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	% Chg in %
>169	7.4	7.4	6.8	5.5	6.2	5.7	-23%
165-169	11.8	12.4	11.7	10.8	10.8	9.9	-16.1%
160-164	21.6	19.2	17.8	17.1	16.5	16.3	-24.5%
155-159	23.5	23.5	23.7	22.4	21.8	22.1	-6%
150-154	21.5	21.8	20.6	21.7	21.8	22.2	3.2%
145-149	10.4	11.5	13	14.7	14.2	15	44.2%
<145	3.8	4.2	6.3	7.8	8.8	8.8	132%

In terms of the “composition” of the class, i.e., the percentage of matriculants in each LSAT category, we see significant declines of 20% or more at 160-164 and 170+ and significant increases of 40% at 145-149 and over 100% at <145.

Tracking Changes in Law Schools by Looking at the Distribution of 50th Percentile LSAT Scores Across Six LSAT Categories

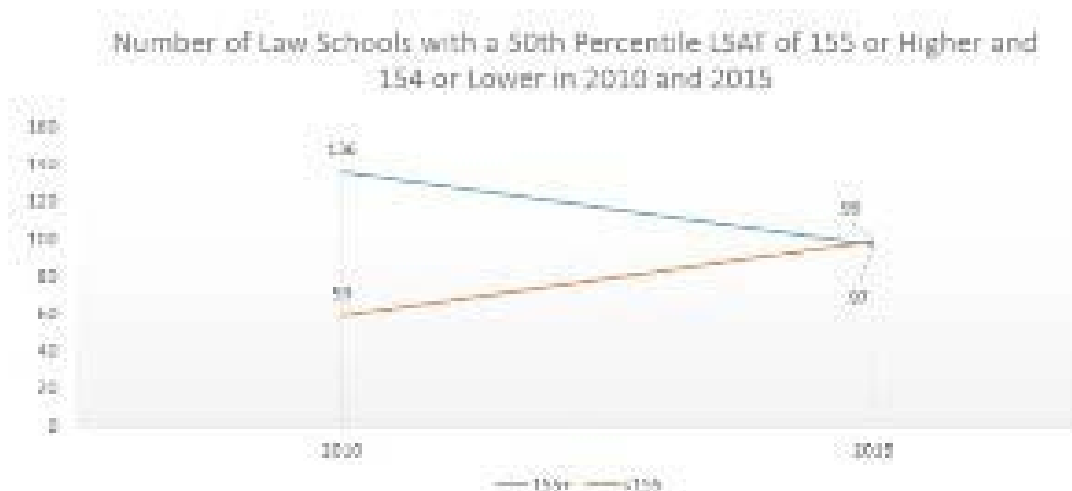
Obviously, this change in the composition of the entering class has resulted in corresponding changes in the LSAT profiles of law schools. Based on the data law schools reported in their Standard 509 Reports from

2010 to 2015, the chart below lists the numbers of law schools reporting a 50th percentile LSAT within certain LSAT ranges. (This chart excludes law schools in Puerto Rico and provisionally-approved law schools.)

Number of Law Schools with a 50th Percentile LSAT in Six LSAT Categories – 2010-2015

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
165+	30	31	26	23	21	21
160-164	47	41	39	31	29	28
155-159	59	57	56	53	51	48
150-154	50	52	53	56	59	59
145-149	9	14	22	28	29	33
<145	0	1	0	5	7	7
Total	195	196	196	196	196	196

The table above pretty clearly demonstrates the changes that have taken place since 2010, with declines in the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT in higher LSAT categories and increases in the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT in the lower LSAT categories, although 2015 saw only modest changes from 2014 at 160-164 (down 1), at 155-159 (down 3) and at 145-149 (up 4).

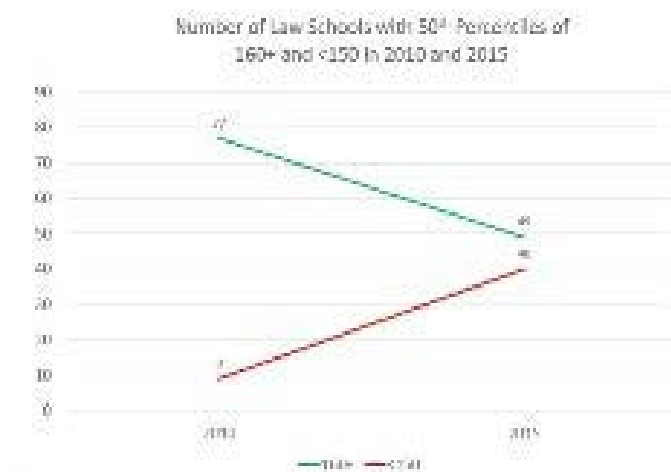


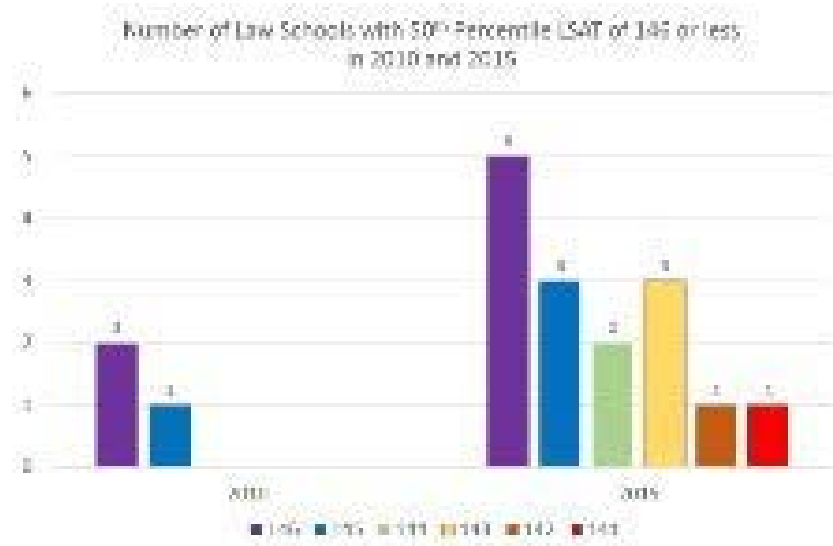
As shown in the chart above, the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 155 or higher has declined from 136 to 97. By contrast, the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 154 or lower has increased from 59 to 99. In 2010, therefore, there were more than twice as many law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 155 or higher as compared with the number with a 50th percentile LSAT of 154 or lower (136 and 59, respectively), but as of 2015, those numbers were nearly identical (97 and 99, respectively).

The “mode” in 2010 was in the 155-159 category, with nearly 60 law schools, but by 2014, the “mode” had shifted to the 150-154 category with nearly 60 law schools.

Perhaps most pronounced is the shift in the upper and lower ranges. As shown in the chart below, the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 160 or higher has dropped by more than one-third, from 77 to 49, while the number of law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 149 or lower has more than quadrupled from 9 to 40. In 2010, there were only three law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 145 or 146; as of 2015, there were 15 law schools with a 50th percentile LSAT of 146 or lower, of which five were at

143 or lower, with the two lowest being 142 and 141.





Tracking Changes in Law Schools by Looking at the Distribution of 25th Percentile LSAT Scores Across Six LSAT Categories

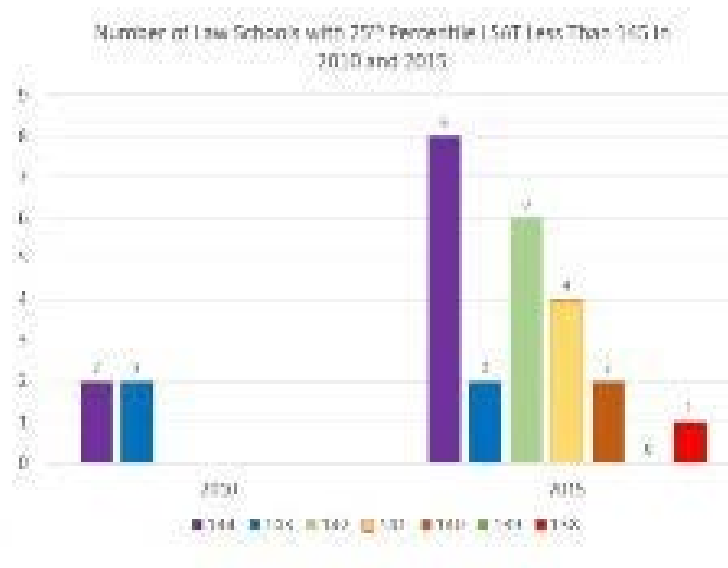
For those who want to focus on the bottom 25th percentile of LSAT profile among law schools, the table below shows changes in distribution of the bottom 25th percentile LSAT among law schools across six LSAT categories between 2010 and 2015.

Number of Law Schools with a 25th Percentile LSAT in Six LSAT Categories – 2010-2015

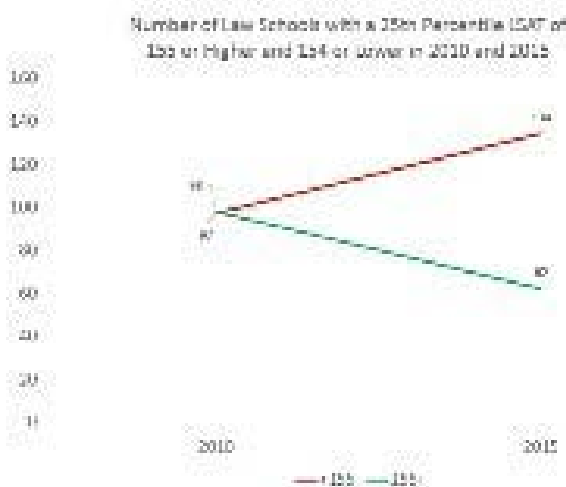
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
165+	17	16	11	10	10	7
160-164	26	20	21	17	15	17
155-159	55	54	49	42	41	38
150-154	67	69	59	65	57	59
145-149	26	33	46	48	48	52
<145	4	4	10	14	25	23
Total	195	196	196	196	196	196

With respect to changes between 2014 and 2015, this table shows a little more variability, with decreases in three categories -- 165+ (down 3), 155-159 (down 3) and less than 145 (down 2) -- and with increases in three categories -- 160-164 (up 2), 150-154 (up 2), and 145-149 (up 4).

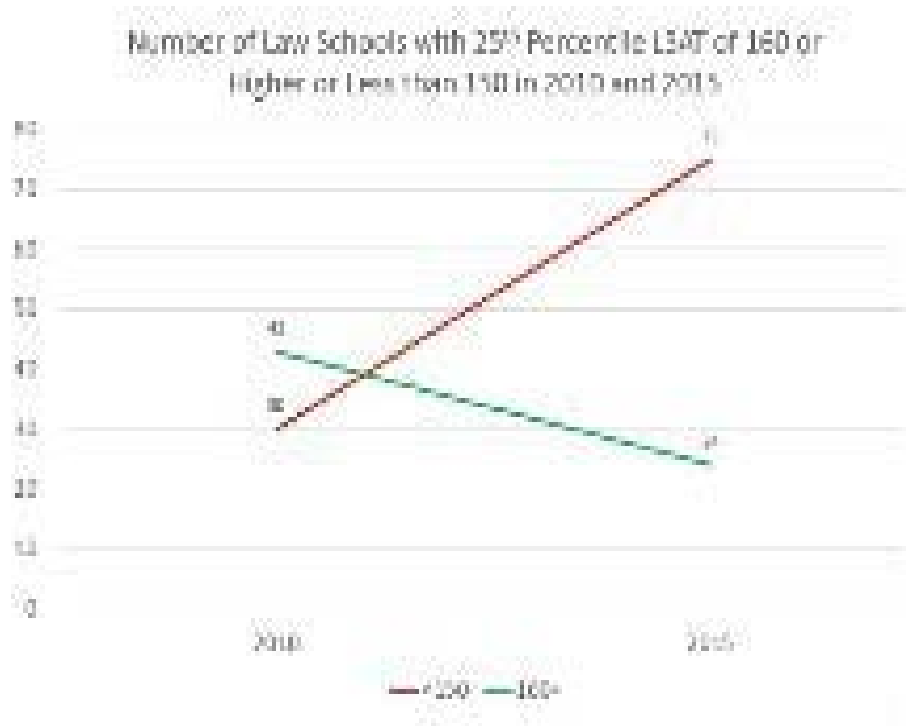
Looking at changes between 2010 and 2015, note that the four top categories have all declined, while the number of law schools with a 25th percentile LSAT of 145-149 has doubled and the number of law schools with a 25th percentile LSAT of <145 has more than quintupled from four in 2010 (two at 144 and two at 143), to 23 in 2015, with 13 of them at 142 and below.



As shown in the chart below, in 2010, the number of law schools with a 25th percentile LSAT of 155 or higher and the number with a 25th percentile LSATs of 154 or lower were nearly identical (98 and 97, respectively). As of 2015, however, there were more than twice as many law schools with a 25th percentile LSAT of 154 or lower when compared with those with a 25th percentile LSAT of 155 or higher (134 and 62, respectively).



Moreover, between 2010 and 2015, the number of law schools with a 25th percentile LSAT of 160 or higher has fallen more than 40% from 43 to 24, while the number with a 25th percentile LSAT of 149 or lower has more than doubled from 30 to 75.



Changes in Average 75th, 50th and 25th Percentile LSATs Across Fully-Accredited ABA Law Schools

One other way of looking at this is just to see how the average first-year LSAT and UGPA profiles have changed over the last six years.

Average LSATs of Matriculants at Fully-Accredited ABA Law Schools

	75 th Percentile	50 th Percentile	25 th Percentile
2010	160.5	158.1	155.2
2011	160.1	157.8	154.5
2012	159.6	157	153.6
2013	158.7	156	152.6
2014	158.2	155.4	151.8
2015	157.9	155.3	151.8
Overall Drop	-2.6	-2.8	-3.4

(Note that these are not weighted averages based on the number of matriculants at each school, but are simply averages across law schools.)

Notably, over this same period of time the average UGPAs have fallen modestly as well from a 75th/50th/25th profile of 3.63 – 3.41 – 3.14 in 2010 to 3.6 – 3.37 – 3.09 in 2015.

Conclusion

If one focuses on the LSAT scores and UGPAs as measures of “quality” of the entering class of law students each year, then the period from 2010-2015 not only has seen a significant decline in enrollment, it also has seen a significant decline in “quality.”

The LSAC’s most recent Current Volume Report (January 8, 2016) suggests that the pool of applicants to law schools is rebounding slightly in this current cycle. With 22,662 applicants at a point in the cycle at which 40% of applicants had been received last year, one can project an applicant pool of roughly 56,600. The “quality” of applicants also appears to be stronger, with double digit percentage increases in applicants to date in LSAT categories of 165 and higher. If these trends continue in the applicant pool for the current cycle, then the fall 2015 entering class may represent the “bottom” both in terms of the number of matriculants and in terms of the “quality” of the matriculants as measured by LSAT and UGPA. Of course, we won’t know for sure about that until next December when the 2016 Standard 509 Reports are published.

(I am grateful for the helpful comments of Scott Norberg on an earlier draft of this blog.)