

Conditional Scholarship Programs: Comparing 2014-15 with 2011-12

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A few years ago, the Council for the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar [approved revisions to Standard 509](#), requiring that law schools post a chart identifying the number of conditional scholarships given to incoming first years and the number of those scholarship recipients whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated at the end of the first year.

As a result of this requirement, there is now a much greater universe of publicly available information about law school scholarship programs. In the summer of 2013, I posted to [SSRN](#) an article entitled *Better Understanding the Scope of Conditional Scholarship Programs among American Law Schools*, summarizing the first year of available data on conditional scholarship programs, covering the 2011-12 academic year.

Law schools have now published this data for four years, with data covering the 2014-15 academic year having just been released as of December 15.

This blog posting highlights the smaller number of law schools with conditional scholarship programs as of 2014-15, summarizes the extent to which the number and percentage of first-year students with conditional scholarships and the number and percentage of rising second-year students whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated has changed since 2011-12, and looks at how the distribution of retention rates by decile has changed since 2011-12. It also analyzes both the prevalence of conditional scholarship programs among law schools across different rankings categories and the extent to which scholarship retention rates differ among law schools across different rankings categories.

1. Number of Law Schools with Conditional Scholarship Programs Declines

Excluding the three law schools in Puerto Rico, there were 140 fully-accredited ABA law schools with conditional scholarship programs in 2011-12. For the 2014-15 academic year, however, the number of fully-accredited ABA law schools with conditional scholarship programs had dropped by 27, to 113, a decline of nearly 20%.

2. Average Conditional Scholarship Retention Rate Increases Modestly

In 2011-12, the average scholarship retention rate across the 140 law schools with conditional scholarship programs was 69%. In total, 12,681 students who entered law school in the fall of 2011 and continued into their second year of law school at the same school entered with conditional scholarships and 4,332 of those students had their scholarships reduced or eliminated, a retention rate across individual students of roughly 66%.

For the 2014-15 academic year, the average retention rate across the 113 law schools with conditional scholarship programs increased to 73.2%. In total, 10,099 students who entered law school in the fall of 2014 and continued into their second year of law school at the same school entered with conditional scholarships and 2,880 of those students had their scholarships reduced or eliminated. Thus, the retention rate across individual students also increased to roughly 71.5%.

3. Percentage of First-Year Students with Conditional Scholarships Stays the Same While the Percentage of Rising Second-Year Students Whose Scholarships were Reduced or Eliminated Declines Slightly

Across the 194 law schools on which I compiled data for the 2011-12 academic year, the fall 2011 entering first-year class totaled 46,388. Thus, roughly 27.3% (12,681/46,388) of the entering first-year students in the fall 2011 entering first-year class were on conditional scholarships. Roughly 9.4% (4,382/46,388) of all the first-year students in the fall 2011 entering first-year class failed to retain their conditional scholarship as they moved into the second year of law school.

Interestingly, of the 37,086 first-years who matriculated at fully-accredited ABA law schools in fall 2014, roughly 27.2% (10,099/37,086) were on conditional scholarships, almost the exact same percentage as in 2011-12. But a smaller percentage, roughly 7.8% (2,880/37,086) of all the first-year students who entered law school in fall 2014 failed to retain their conditional scholarship as they moved into the second year of law school.

Therefore, even though fewer law schools had conditional scholarship programs, those with such programs offered conditional scholarships to a larger percentage of students, such that the overall percentage of students with conditional scholarships remained roughly the same (27.3% in 2011-12 compared with 27.2% in 2014-15). Nonetheless, because there was a modest increase in retention rates, a smaller percentage of the overall population of students (7.8% in 2015 compared with 9.4% in 2012) saw their conditional scholarships reduced or eliminated.

4. Distribution of Retention Rates by Decile Shows Fewer Schools with Lower Retention Rates

The distribution of retention rates by deciles across all 140 law schools reporting conditional scholarship programs for 2011-2012 and all 113 law schools reporting conditional scholarship programs for 2014-2015 is set forth in Table 1. The biggest change reflected Table 1 is the decrease in the number of law schools with retention rates of less than 70%, falling from 73 in 2011-12 to 40 in 2014-15.

Table 1: Number of Law Schools Reporting Retention Rates by Decile Range

Retention Rate	Number		Description	
	2012	2015	2012	2015
Less than 40%	8	6	Four of the eight were ranked alphabetically	Five of the six were ranked 100 or lower
40-49%	12	4	Six of the 12 were law schools ranked between 50 and 99	Two of the four were ranked 51-99
50-59%	23	17	18 of the 23 were law schools ranked 99 or lower	14 of the 17 were ranked 100 or lower
60-69%	30	13	23 the 30 were ranked in 100 or lower	Nine of the 13 were ranked 100 or lower
70-79%	23	23	13 of the 23 were ranked in the top 100	17 of the 23 were ranked 100 or lower

80-90%	19	24	14 of the 19 were ranked between 51 and 145	10 of the 24 were ranked 51-99
90% or better	25	26	12 of the 25 were ranked in the top 50	14 of the 26 were ranked in the top 100, five in the top 50
TOTAL	140	113		

5. Differences in Conditional Scholarship Programs across Law School Rankings Categories

As noted in some of the descriptors in Table 1, there also were some differences based on the rankings of the law schools in U.S. News, using the March 2012 rankings and the March 2015 rankings. These differences are summarized in the Tables 2A and 2B and the discussion that follows.

Table 2A – Changes in Number and Percentage of First-Year Students with Conditional Scholarships across Different Categories of Law Schools Based on U.S. News Rankings for 2012 and 2015

Rank	# of Schools		# of Schools with Cond. Scholar.		% of Schools with Cond. Scholar.		# of 1Ls		# of 1Ls with Conditional Scholarships		.% of 1Ls with Cond. Scholar.	
			12	15	12	15	12	15	12	15	12	15
Top 50	50	51	20	10	40	20	13109	11715	1656	814	12.8	6.9
51/100	50	50	40	31	80	62	11592	8972	4179	3159	36	35.2
101/150	46	52	36	38	78	73	9293	7899	2803	2997	30.1	37.9
Alpha.	48	42	44	34	92	81	12394	8500	4043	3129	32.6	36.8
TOTAL	194	195	140	113	72	58	46388	37086	12681	10099	27.3	27.2

Table 2A shows that the percentage of fully-accredited ABA law schools with conditional scholarship programs increases as you move down the U.S. News Rankings. Indeed, of the 27 law schools that moved away from conditional scholarship programs between 2011-12 and 2014-15, 19 were ranked in the top 100. As a result, only 41 of the top 100 law schools had conditional scholarship programs as of 2014-15, while 72 law schools ranked 101 or lower had conditional scholarship programs.

Table 2A also shows that the percentage of students with conditional scholarships is basically divided into two camps. Within the top 50 law schools, only 10 law schools have conditional scholarship programs, and five of those have retention rates of 100%, such that really only five of the 51 law schools in the top 50 have meaningful conditional scholarship programs. (At these five schools, however, roughly one in three students with conditional scholarships saw their scholarships reduced or eliminated.) Across all 51 law schools in the top 50, only 6.9% of first-year students have

conditional scholarships. Throughout the rest of the law schools, however, roughly 35% to 38% of first-year law students in each rankings category have conditional scholarships.

Even though the percentage of first-year students with conditional scholarships declined among top 50 law schools between 2011-12 and 2014-15, the percentage increased among law schools ranked 101 and below, such that the overall percentage of first-year students with conditional scholarship has remained almost the same between 2011-12 and 2014-15, at slightly more than 27%.

Table 2B – Changes in Retention Rates of Conditional Scholarship Recipients across Different Categories of Law Schools Based on U.S. News and World Report Rankings for 2012 and 2015

Rank	# Scholarships Not Retained		% of Scholarships Not Retained.		% of All 1Ls Who Did Not Retain Scholarship	
	12	15	12	15	12	15
Top 50	186	167	11.2	20.5	1.4	1.4
51/100	1452	672	34.7	21.3	12.5	7.5
101/150	1069	917	38.1	30.6	11.5	11.6
Alpha.	1625	1124	40.2	35.9	13.1	13.2
TOTAL	4332	2880	34.2	28.5	9.4	7.8

Table 2B shows that the percentage of all students whose conditional scholarships were reduced or eliminated in 2014-15 consistently climbs as one moves down the rankings categories – going from 1.4% among law schools ranked in the top 50, to 7.5% for law schools ranked 51-100, to 11.6% for law schools ranked 101-150, to 13.2% for law schools ranked alphabetically.

Table 2B shows that among law schools ranked in the top 50, the average percentage of conditional scholarship recipients whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated increased between 2011-12 and 2014-15 from 11.2% to 20.5%. (But remember, this is across a relatively small sample of 10 schools and 814 students.) By contrast, across each of the other three categories of law schools, the average percentage of conditional scholarship recipients whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated declined between 2011-12 and 2014-15, from 34.7% to 21.3% among schools ranked 51-100, from 38.1% to 30.6% among schools ranked 101-150, and from 40.2% to 35.9% among law schools ranked alphabetically.

Nonetheless, law schools ranked 51-100 were the only category of law schools which saw a decrease in the percentage of all rising second-year students whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated, as the percentage fell from 12.5% to 7.5%. For top 50 law schools, the combination of fewer students with conditional scholarships, but a higher rate at which scholarships were reduced or eliminated, meant that 1.4% of all students saw their scholarships reduced or eliminated, the same percentage as in 2011-12. For law schools ranked 101 and below, the combination of more students with conditional scholarships, but a lower rate at which scholarships were reduced or eliminated, meant that roughly the same percentage of all students saw their scholarships reduced or eliminated in 2014-15 as in 2011-12 (for law schools ranked 101-150, 11.6% in 2014-15 compared with 11.5% in 2011-12; for law schools ranked alphabetically, 13.2% in 2014-15 compared with 13.1% in 2011-12). Because of the decrease in the percentage of students whose scholarships were reduced or eliminated in the category of law schools ranked 51-100, however, the

percentage of all students who saw their scholarships reduced or eliminated fell from 9.4% in 2011-12 to 7.8% in 2014-15.

Conclusion

Even though 27 fewer law schools had conditional scholarship programs in 2014-15 than in 2011-12, the percentage of all first-year students on conditional scholarships in 2014-15 was nearly the same as in 2011-12 because the 113 schools with conditional scholarship programs, on average, gave conditional scholarships to a larger percentage of their students.

Only 20 percent of law schools in the top 50 have conditional scholarship programs and only 10 percent actually reduced or eliminated scholarships for some of their students. Outside the top 50 law schools, however, more than two-thirds of law schools have conditional scholarship programs and roughly 36.5% of all law students have conditional scholarships. This means more than one-third of first-year students in law schools ranked 51 and below in the U.S. News 2015 rankings needed to be concerned about whether they would perform well enough to retain their conditional scholarships.