

LSAT Profiles Of Matriculants And Law Schools, 2010-2019

By Jerry Organ

The decade from 2010 to 2019 has been a challenging decade in terms of enrollment in law schools. I have written previously about the changing composition of the cohort of matriculants at ABA-accredited law schools. This blog post updates the analysis of enrollment trends to look at how the composition of the entering class of matriculants based on LSAT scores evolved between 2010 and 2019.

Table 1 shows the trend lines for the applicant pool and matriculants from 2010 to 2019 based on data maintained by the ABA. The applicant pool started at 87,900 for fall 2010 and bottomed with 54,500 for fall 2016. Since then it has increased gradually to 63,000 in 2019. The current cycle suggests another modest increase in applicants, perhaps close to 64,000. The number of matriculants fell from a high of 52,000 in 2010 to a low of 37,100 in 2016 and 2017 and has increased modestly to 38,400 in 2019. My best guess is that we will end up in about the same place this fall, somewhere between 38,000 and 38,500 in terms of the number of matriculants.

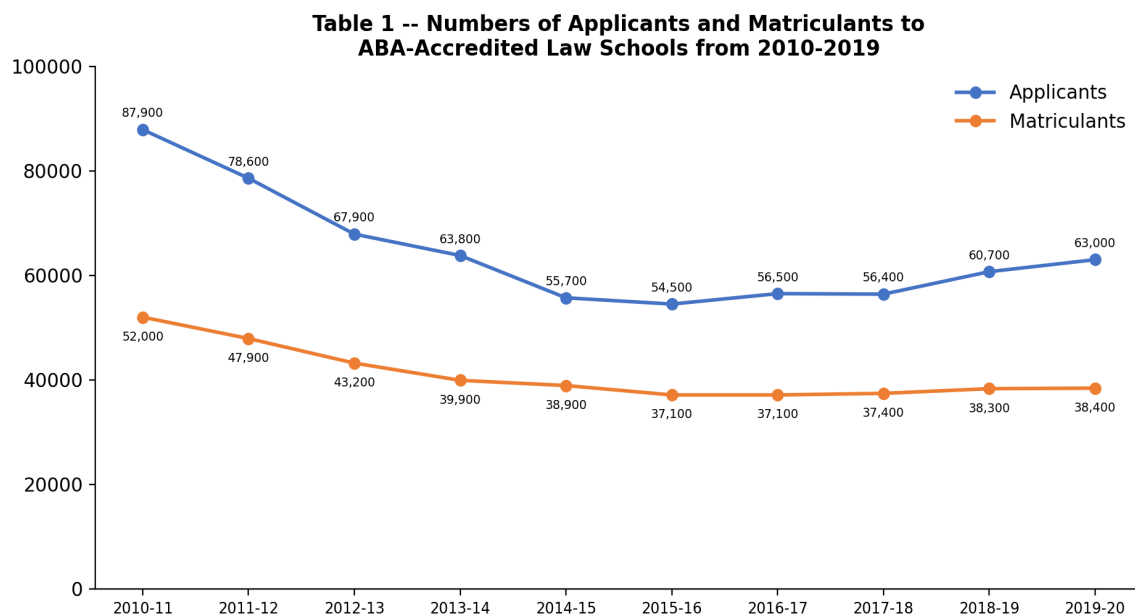


Chart recreated from the data labels in the source chart, which match the figures cited in the text exactly.

While the applicant pool and the cohort of matriculants shrank in size between 2010 and 2016, the applicant pool and cohort of matriculants also saw a general weakening in terms of LSAT profile from 2010 to 2016, but has since seen a strengthening over the last three years. Table 2 highlights the growth in the number of matriculants with a high LSAT below 150 (from 7,000 in 2010 to 8,620 in 2016), while the number of matriculants in all other LSAT categories fell from 2010 to 2015. Indeed, among those with a high LSAT of 160 or higher, the number of matriculants fell from roughly 20,100 in 2010 to roughly 11,200 in 2015. Starting with fall 2016 through fall 2019, all LSAT categories from 150 and above have seen increases in terms of the number of matriculants, while the number of matriculants with a high LSAT less than 150 has fallen from 8,620 in 2016 to less than 6,400 in 2019.

Table 2 -- Matriculants across Five LSAT Categories between 2010 and 2019

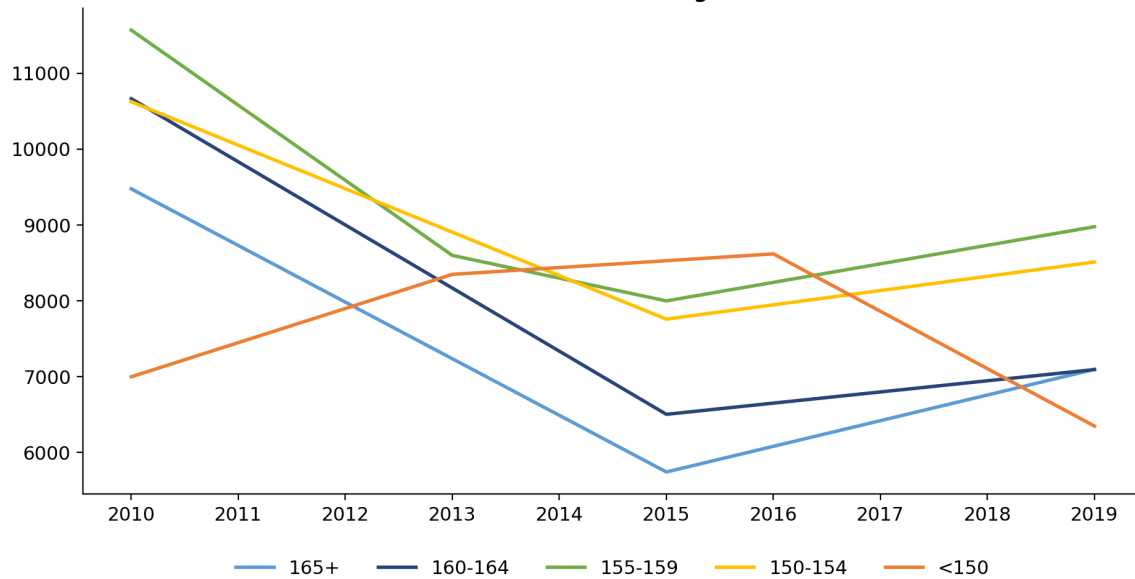


Chart recreated using the 2010 and 2019 endpoints and text-stated values as exact anchors (2010 figures, and the 8,620 figure for <150 in 2016); interior years are interpolated to approximate the original chart's shape.

Table 3 highlights the composition of the matriculants on a percentage basis segregated into three LSAT categories — 160+, 150-159 and <150 — between 2010 at the top and 2019 at the bottom. The 160+ category drops from 40.8 percent of the class in 2010 to 32 percent of the class in 2015, while the <150 category increases from 14.2 percent of the class in 2010 to 23.8 percent of the class in 2015. By 2018 and 2019, however, the percentage at 160+ had increased back to 36.1 percent in 2018 and 36.7 percent in 2019, while the percentage at <150 had declined back to 19.1 percent in 2018 and 16.8 percent in 2019. Interestingly, the percentage between 150 and 159 is relatively stable throughout the decade, dropping from 45 percent in 2010 to 43.6 percent in 2014 and then climbing to 46.5 percent in 2019.

Table 3 -- Percentage of Matriculants in Three LSAT Categories from 2010 to 2019

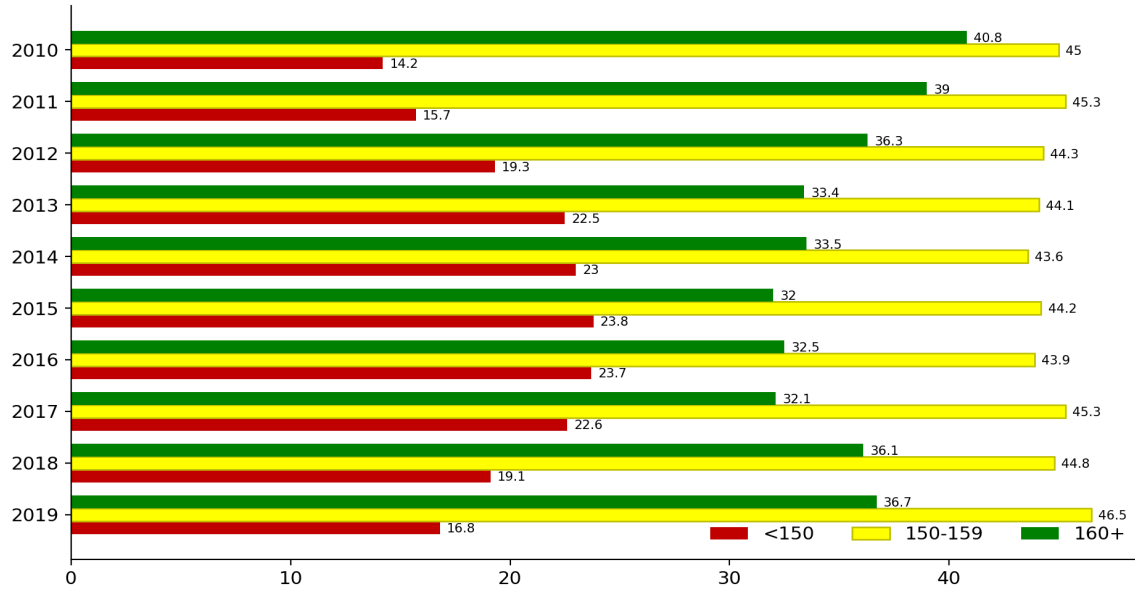


Chart recreated from the data labels printed directly on the original chart -- exact figures.

Table 4 looks at this from a slightly different perspective, but with a similar lesson. Table 4 focuses on law schools — looking at the trends with respect to the number of law schools with a median LSAT in each of six LSAT categories. During the first part of the decade the three highest LSAT categories — 165+, 160-164, and 155-159 — see declines, while the three lowest LSAT categories — 150-154, 145-149, and <145 — all see increases. Starting in 2017, this trend reverses.

Table 4 -- Number of Law Schools with a Median LSAT in Each of Six LSAT Categories -- 2010-2019

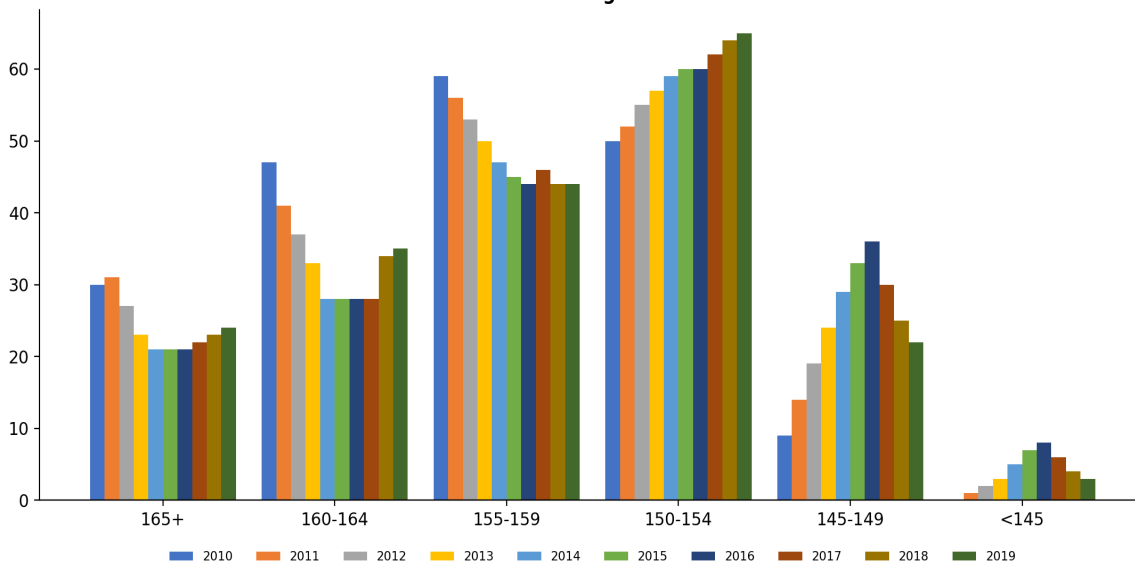
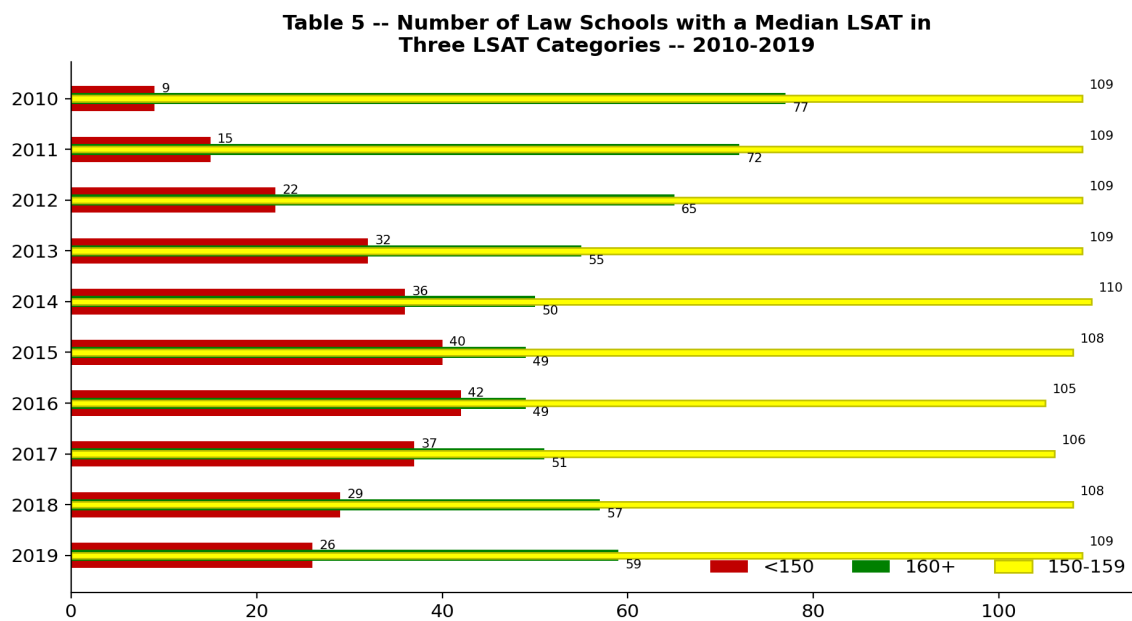


Chart recreated from the year-by-year figures cited in the text for each category, cross-checked against Table 5's combined totals; interior years are interpolated.

Finally, Table 5, much like Table 3, looks at law schools with a median LSAT in each of three LSAT categories — 160+, 150-159, and <150. This image looks remarkably similar to Table 3. The number of law schools with a median LSAT between 150-159 is remarkably stable, ranging between 105 and 110, with eight of the ten years being between 108 and 110. But from 2010 through 2016, the number of law schools with a median LSAT of 160+ drops from 77 to 49, while the number of law schools with a median LSAT less than 150 increases from 9 to 42. But starting in 2017, that trend reverses and there is a growth in law schools with a median LSAT of 160+ and a decrease in law schools with a median LSAT of <150.



The current admissions cycle is likely to see these trends continue, as there has been growth in the number of applicants with an LSAT of 165+ (up about 700, or about 8%) and a decline in the number of applicants with an LSAT of <155 (down about 1000, or about 3%).

While the bar results this year will be impossible to compare with prior years because of the varied approaches to the bar exam across multiple jurisdictions, these data suggest that bar passage results in 2021 and beyond should be better than they have been in recent years because the cohort of graduates is getting stronger based on entering class LSAT profiles in 2018 and 2019 and 2020.

Analyzing Enrollment And Profile Patterns Across Different Tiers Of Law Schools For Fall 2018

By Jerry Organ

The ABA recently reported that law schools saw a 3% increase in first-year enrollment for Fall 2018. A variety of people have unpacked some of this data in a variety of ways, with Karen Sloan highlighting the law schools with the largest increases in first-year enrollment and the largest decreases in first-year

enrollment between 2017 and 2018 and Keith Lee and Mike Spivey also providing some analysis of the enrollment data. In this blog posting I want to take a closer look at some patterns across tiers of schools, focusing on both changes in enrollment and changes in entering class profile between 2017 and 2018. There are three quick-takeaways from this analysis.

First, there was a linear relationship between tier of law school and growth in enrollment, with law schools with a 2017 median LSAT of 160 or higher seeing an increase of 6.4% and law schools with a 2017 median LSAT of 149 or lower seeing a decrease 5.9%. All of the growth in enrollment functionally occurred among law schools with a median LSAT of 155 or higher in 2017.

Second, the vast majority of law schools, with a focus on improving entering class profile, chose to take fewer students than they might have. Across 194 fully-accredited law schools that welcomed entering classes in both 2017 and 2018 (excluding the three law schools in Puerto Rico), there are 582 reported data points for LSAT and for UGPA. For the LSAT, 332 of the 582 increased (57%); for UGPA 352 of the 582 increased (60.5%). This is a remarkable change from recent years.

Third, looking at the overall "strength" of the class from the standpoint of distribution of law schools based on median LSAT, this would appear to be the strongest entering class since 2012.

ENROLLMENT GAINS DECREASE WITH DECREASING MEDIAN LSAT

Across the 194 law schools in the database with which I am working, enrollment increased by 3.1% or 1,143, from 36,491 to 37,634 in Fall 2018. But these gains were not uniform across law schools. As shown in Table 1, enrollment grew the most among the 51 law schools that had a median LSAT of 160 or higher in 2017, grew less on a numerical and percentage basis among the 46 law schools with a median LSAT of 155-159 in 2017, grew even less on a numerical and percentage basis among the 59 law schools with a median LSAT of 150-154 in 2017, and actually declined among the 38 law schools with a median LSAT of less than 150 in 2017.

Indeed, if you make the break point law schools with a median LSAT of 155 or higher and those with a median LSAT less than 155 in 2017, then all of the growth in first-year enrollment took place among the 97 law schools with a median LSAT of 155 or higher in 2017 (increase of 1173) while the 97 law schools with a median LSAT of less than 155 saw a decline in first-year enrollment (decrease of 30).

TABLE 1: ENROLLMENT GAINS ACROSS LAW SCHOOLS BY CATEGORY BASED ON MEDIAN LSAT IN 2017

Median LSAT	# Law Schools	# Increasing Enrollment	% Increasing	Increase in Enrollment	% Increase	Range
160+	51	34	67%	753	6.4%	-53 to +157
155-159	46	30	65%	420	4.9%	-34 to +62
150-154	59	36	61%	349	3.6%	-58 to +41
<150	38	13	34%	-379	-5.9%	-156 to +83
Total	194	113	58%	1143	3.1%	

LAW SCHOOLS COULD HAVE INCREASED ENROLLMENT MORE, BUT CHOSE TO INCREASE PROFILE

Given the increase in applicants in the 2018 admissions cycle and the increase particularly among applicants with high LSATs of 165 or higher (which included more than 1600 additional applicants in 2018 compared with 2017), one might have expected more growth in first-year enrollment among law schools with median LSATs of 160 or higher. Indeed, using a high LSAT of 160 as the demarcation point, there were over 2,700 more applicants in 2018 than in 2017 for law schools to choose from. Yet, among the 51 law schools with median LSATs in 2017 that were 160 or higher, the growth in enrollment totaled only 753, roughly 28% of this additional pool of applicants with a high LSAT of 160 or higher, with only 34 of the 51 law schools with a median LSAT of 160 or higher in 2017 showing any increase in first-year enrollment in 2018. That means law schools with median LSATs of 160 or higher individually and collectively "left money on the table" -- they could have admitted and enrolled more students while maintaining their LSAT profile from 2017 but chose not to do so. (As noted below, however, the increase in LSAT profile at many law schools suggests that more than 753 of these students with a high LSAT of 160 or higher actually enrolled at the 51 law schools with median LSATs in 2017 of 160 or higher as these schools likely took a larger number of these students in 2018 in lieu of students with slightly lower LSATs in 2017).

Why would these law schools with median LSATs of 160 or higher forego the added revenue from additional students? For some law schools it might have been because they had "right-sized" their law school human capital to a smaller population of students and it didn't make sense to grow first-year enrollment any more than they might have been doing already. Some law schools might have been conscious of an employment market that has not rebounded significantly and might have refrained from adding too many students in an effort to avoid having less than stellar employment outcomes three years from now. But for some, as the data below suggest, it would appear to be to increase (or at least maintain) their LSAT and UGPA profile that is reported to USNews for its annual rankings (comprising 22.5% of the rankings score combined). (It also is possible that among this larger group of applicants with high LSATs of 160 or higher there was a certain selectivity in terms of whether and where to enroll. It could be that a larger percentage of these applicants than in past years chose not to enroll if they did not get into their school(s) of choice or chose to enroll in a law school with a lower LSAT profile in response to a generous scholarship offer.)

Table 2 shows that 28 of the 51 law schools with a median LSAT of 160 or higher in 2017 saw an increase in their 50th LSAT while only 2 saw a decrease in their 50th LSAT. Interestingly, this pattern largely continues across all categories of law schools, with even slightly larger percentages of law schools with a median LSAT between 155-159 in 2017 and with a median LSAT of less than 150 in 2017 showing increases in the 50th LSAT (58.7% and 60.5%, respectively). Only law schools with a median LSAT of 150-154 saw less than 50% of law schools increase their 50th LSAT (45.8%), but over 50% of these law schools saw the 50th LSAT stay flat. Across all law schools, over 54% saw an increase in their 50th LSAT and over 95% saw their 50th LSAT remain flat or increase. Less than 5% saw a decrease in 50th LSAT.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF LAW SCHOOLS WITH INCREASES IN 50th PERCENTILE LSAT IN 2018 BY CATEGORY

Median LSAT	# Law Schools	Increase	%	Flat	%	Decrease	%
160+	51	28	54.9%	21	41.2%	2	3.9%
155-159	46	27	58.7%	15	32.6%	4	8.7%

150-154	59	27	45.8%	30	50.8%	2	3.4%
<150	38	23	60.5%	14	36.8%	1	2.6%
Total	194	105	54.1%	80	41.2%	9	4.6%

Table 3 shows similar trends with respect to 50th UGPA with some variations. An even larger percentage of law schools with a median LSAT of 160 or higher in 2017 saw an increase in their 50th UGPA (33 out of 51, or 64.7%), but a larger percentage also saw a decrease in their 50th UGPA (12 out of 51 or 23.5%). Interestingly, this pattern largely continues across all categories of law schools, except that among law schools with a median LSAT of 150-154 or less than 150 in 2017, smaller percentages saw an increase in 50th UGPA (55.9% and 52.6%, respectively) and larger percentages saw decreases in 50th UGPA (35.6% and 39.5%, respectively). Across all law schools, over 60% saw an increase in their 50th UGPA and over 30% saw their 50th UGPA decrease. Less than 10% had the same 50th UGPA in 2018 as in 2017. (This is somewhat understandable given that UGPA is reported to the hundredths decimal, so change is more likely than with LSAT which is reported in ordinal numbers.)

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF LAW SCHOOLS WITH INCREASES IN 50th PERCENTILE UGPA IN 2018 BY CATEGORY

Median LSAT	# Law Schools	Increase	%	Flat	%	Decrease	%
160+	51	33	64.7%	6	11.8%	12	23.5%
155-159	46	31	67.4%	4	8.7%	11	23.9%
150-154	59	33	55.9%	5	8.5%	21	35.6%
<150	38	20	52.6%	3	7.9%	15	39.5%
Total	194	117	60.3%	18	9.3%	59	30.4%

When one looks across all three data points for LSAT and UGPA, similar trends appear. Of the 582 possible LSAT data points across the 194 law schools, 332 or 57%, increased. Of the 582 UGPA data points across the 194 law schools, 352 or 60.5%, increased. Only 46 LSAT data points decreased (7.9%), while 188 UGPA data points decreased (32.3%). As shown in Chart 1 below, this is a remarkable change from the last several years, at least with respect to LSAT data points. (I have not done the analysis yet for UGPA.)

**Chart 1: Number of LSAT Data Points Increasing or Decreasing
Year Over Year From 2011-2018**

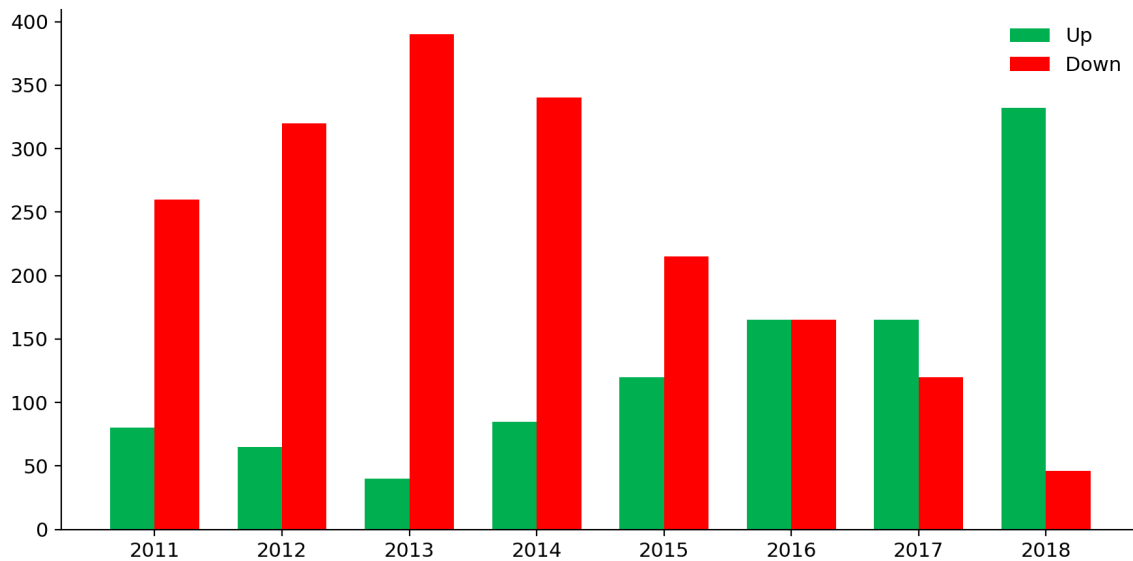


Chart recreated using the exact 2018 figures stated in the text (332 up / 46 down); earlier years are approximate readings of the original chart's bar heights, which had no printed data labels.

Table 4 looks at the average increase in each LSAT or UGPA data points across categories of law school based on median LSAT in 2017. Interestingly, the largest average increase for the 50th LSAT (1.05) and the 25th LSAT (1.34) occurred among law schools with an average median LSAT of less than 150 in 2017. Given that these law schools are not really playing the "rankings game," this effort to increase LSAT profile would appear to be a concerted effort to improve the quality of the entering class for many of these law schools with an eye toward improving bar passage upon graduation. This may well be a response to the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar paying increasing attention to law schools with poor bar passage performance and employment outcomes which are seen as being related to lower entering class profiles in recent years.

TABLE 4: AVERAGE INCREASES IN LSAT AND UGPA PROFILE BY CATEGORY OF LAW SCHOOL

Median LSAT	75th LSAT	50th LSAT	25th LSAT	75th UGPA	50th UGPA	25th UGPA
160+	.57	.55	.8	.018	.012	.016
155-159	.7	.57	.8	.01	.027	.024
150-154	.41	.49	.53	.025	.022	.039
<150	.63	1.05	1.34	.025	.008	.032
Overall Avg	0.56	0.63	0.82	0.02	0.018	0.028

On the whole, this stronger applicant pool combined with increasing selectivity among law schools, has meant that the Fall 2018 entering class might be the strongest entering class in terms of LSAT credentials since 2012. This is shown in the following charts.

Chart 2 shows the number of law school with LSAT medians in each of six LSAT categories since 2010.

One can see that the top LSAT category -- 165+ -- went from 30 in 2010, to 31 in 2011, down to 21 in 2014, 2015, and 2016, but has rebounded to 22 in 2017 and 23 in 2018.

The second LSAT category -- 160-164 -- went from 47 in 2010 down to low of 28 in 2015 and 2016 but has now increased to 34 as of 2018.

The third LSAT category -- 155-159 -- started with 59 in 2010 and has largely been in a steady decline since with the exception of 2017, when it increased slightly, before falling again to 44. For several years this was because it was losing more schools to the 150-154 category than it was gaining from the 160-164 category. This year it is because it lost more schools to the 160-164 category than it gained from the 150-154 category.

The fourth LSAT category -- 150-154 -- started with 50 in 2010 and steadily increased until it levelled off in 2015 and 2016 with 60, but has now increased again to 64 as of the 2018 entering class. For several years this was because it gained more from the 155-159 category than it lost to the 145-149 category, but this year it gained more from the 145-149 category than it lost to the 155-159 category.

The fifth LSAT category -- 145-149 -- increased steadily from 2010-2016, going from 9 to 36, but has decreased in both 2017 and more dramatically in 2018, back down to 25.

The sixth LSAT category -- less than 145 -- went from 0 in 2010 to a high of 8 in 2016, but has decreased in both 2017 and in 2018 back down to 4.

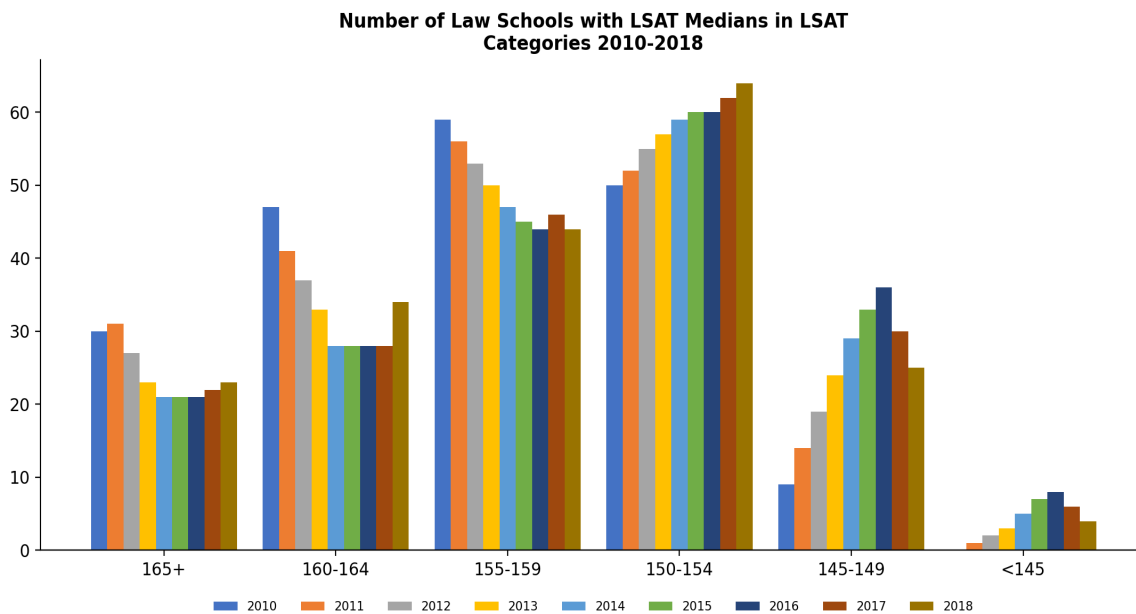


Chart recreated from the year-by-year figures cited in the text for each category (2010-2018 subset of Table 4 above).

(Please note that these tallies are based on the number of fully ABA-accredited law schools outside of Puerto Rico that welcomed a first-year class in each year listed. The tallies started at 195, went to 196 in 2011 with the addition of UC-Irvine, went to 198 in 2012 with the addition of LaVerne and U-Mass Dartmouth, and peaked in 2013 at 199 with the addition of Belmont. In 2016 the number dropped back to 198 following Hamline's merger with William Mitchell. It then fell further to 196 in 2017 after Charlotte and

Whittier did not welcome a first-year class, and has now fallen to 194 as of 2018, with Arizona Summit and Valparaiso not welcoming a first-year class.)

Chart 3 shows this slightly more dramatically by compressing the six LSAT categories into three LSAT categories -- 160+, 150-159, and less than 150. Chart 3 shows that there was little overall change in the middle category 150-159 between 2010 and 2018 (even though there was a shift from the upper end of that range to the lower end of that range as shown in Chart 2). Rather, the biggest changes were the erosion in the top LSAT category (160+) from 77 to 49 between 2010 and 2015 and a growth in the bottom LSAT category (less than 150) from 9 to 44 as of 2016. Since 2016, however, those trends have reversed, with the top LSAT category (160+) increasing to 57 as of 2018 and the bottom LSAT category (less than 150) dropping back to 29 as of 2018. This suggests that the Fall 2018 entering class of first-year students may be the strongest overall class since Fall 2012 (with the caveat being that the middle LSAT category (150-159) is weaker than in 2012 as shown in Chart 2 given the shift from the upper end of that range to the lower end of that range).

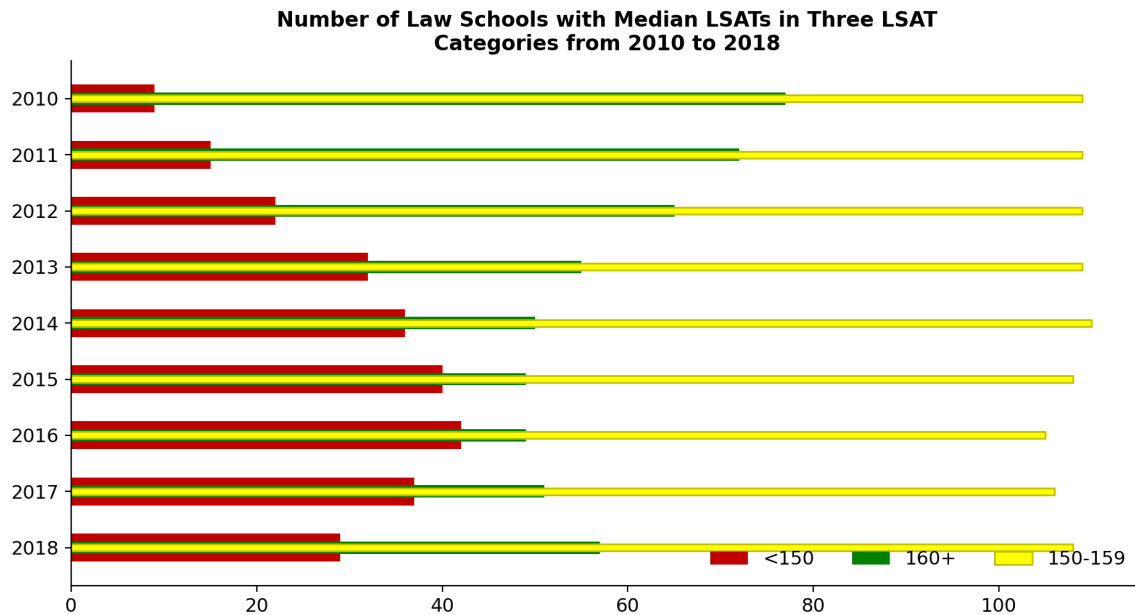


Chart recreated from the data labels printed on the original chart -- exact figures (2010-2018 subset of Table 5 above).