

Observations On Enrollment Patterns For The Fall 2018 Entering Class Based On Preliminary Data

By [Jerry Organ](#)

In a [blog posting](#) in August relating to projections for the fall 2018 entering class, I suggested that with applicants up over 60,000 (up over 8% from 2017) the fall 2018 entering class might be over 40,000 (up roughly 8%). I made this prediction based on the strength of the applicant pool and the perception that given the opportunity, law schools would seek to regain revenue lost over the last few years. I also suggested that the distribution might be “lumpy” with some of the increase concentrated in highly-ranked schools (given the growth among applicants with high LSATs of 165 or higher).

We will know more one month from now when the ABA releases data from the Standard 509 reports for all ABA-accredited law schools, but based on preliminary reports from 142 law schools (nearly 72% of the 199 law schools in the 48 contiguous state and Hawai’i), I appear to have over-estimated the growth in matriculants, while correctly predicting significant “lumpiness” in enrollment growth skewed toward law schools with higher median LSATs.

FALL 2018 ENTERING CLASS CLOSER to 38,500

The first-year class across the 199 ABA-accredited law schools in the 48 contiguous states and Hawai’i in 2017 totaled roughly 36,900 students. Across the 142 law schools on which I have available data for 2018, the 2017 first-year enrollment totaled 28,352, or roughly 76.8% of the total across all 199 law schools in the sample. **First-year enrollment at these 142 law schools in 2018 increased by 1,231 to 29,583, an increase of 4.3%.** If the remaining 57 law schools see a comparable increase in enrollment of 4.3%, the 2018 first-year class across these 199 law schools would be roughly 38,500. In all likelihood, however, it will be even smaller than that. As shown in Table 1 below, the 57 law schools for which data is not presently available are disproportionately law schools that had median LSATs of less than 155 in 2017, across which the smallest average gains in enrollment have been seen for the fall 2018 entering class.

My prediction that the first-year class might be over 40,000 appears to have been erroneous for three reasons. First, I failed to account for two law schools that ended up not enrolling classes for fall 2018 (Arizona Summit and Valparaiso). Second, I failed to account for the impact of ABA regulatory efforts on law schools with lower median LSATs, a number of which significantly reduced enrollment to improve the LSAT profile of their entering classes. Third, and perhaps most significantly, however, I believed higher-ranked law schools would take advantage of a larger applicant pool with stronger credentials to welcome more students to enhance revenue. In doing so, I failed to heed one of the [key points highlighted in research](#) I have been working on with Bernie Burk and Emma Rasiel -- that law schools tend to favor profile over revenue. Thus, a number of law schools that could have enrolled more first-years without impacting their first-year class profile chose instead to increase their class profile rather than increasing enrollment as much as they might have.

ENROLLMENT PATTERNS BY LSAT RANGES

The information in Table 1 highlights the enrollment patterns for fall 2018 across the 142 law schools with available data, highlighting the number and percentage of law schools with first-year enrollment increases or decreases of 5% or more overall between 2017 and 2018, and also showing the number and percentage of first-year enrollment increases or decreases across law schools within different LSAT categories based on median LSAT for the 2017 entering class.

There are a couple of things worth noting in Table 1. First, data are available on a much larger percentage of law schools with median LSATs of 155 or higher than law schools with median LSATs of 154 or lower. Second, as I predicted in August, more law schools with median LSATs of 155 or higher showed increases in first-year enrollment of 5% or more compared to law schools with median LSATs of 154 or lower.

Table 1 - Increases or Decreases in First-Year Enrollment of 5% or More

Median LSAT	Up		Down		Flat		Total	Overall Total	% Reporting
Total	57	40%	26	18%	59	42%	142	199	71%
160+	22	45%	8	16%	19	39%	49	51	96%
155-159	17	45%	6	16%	15	39%	38	46	83%
150-154	14	36%	6	15%	19	49%	39	60	65%
<150	4	25%	6	38%	6	38%	16	42	38%

Table 2 shows increases and decreases in first-year enrollment across law schools in different LSAT categories. When one looks at the numbers to see where there were increases or decreases in first-year enrollment between 2017 and 2018 the numbers show a linear relationship between the median LSAT category and change in first-year enrollment. As one moves down from the top category of law schools based on LSAT median, the size of the change in first-year enrollment decreases both numerically and on a percentage basis, becoming negative for those law schools with median LSATs less than 150.

Table 2 - Increases or Decreases in Enrollment by Category of Law School

	Enrollment Change 2017-18	2017 Enrollment	% Change
Total	1231	28352	4.34%
160+	771	11411	6.76%
155-159	358	7559	4.74%
150-154	177	6661	2.66%
<150	-75	2721	-2.76%

SIGNIFICANT “LUMPINESS” IN INCREASES/DECREASES

While Table 1 shows the number of law schools with increases and decreases in first-year enrollment of more than five percent between 2017 and 2018, it fails to show just how many law schools had more extreme changes in first-year enrollment – both positively and negatively. **There were 24 law schools (nearly 17%) that saw increases or decreases in first-year enrollment of 40 or more students.** These 24 law schools with increases or decreases of 40 or more first-year students between 2017 and 2018 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 – Law Schools with Large Increases or Decreases of 40 or More Students in First-Year Enrollment Between 2017 and 2018

George Wash. Univ.	158	Atlanta's John Marshall	-102
Univ. of Wisconsin	124	Charleston	-65
Western New England	92	North Carolina Central	-59
Arizona State Univ.	75	Michigan State Univ.	-57
Univ. of Texas	72	St. Mary's University	-53
Rutgers Univ.	70	Univ. of Florida	-53
Univ. Cal. Irvine	70	Total	-389
Golden Gate Univ.	60		
Univ. Cal. Davis	55		

Univ. of Arizona	54		
Seton Hall Univ.	53		
Univ. of Nevada Las Vegas	49		
Boston Univ.	48		
American Univ.	46		
Pacific McGeorge	44		
Univ. of Cincinnati	42		
Suffolk Univ.	40		
Univ. of Michigan	40		
Total	1192		

There are 18 law schools with increases in first-year enrollment of 40 or more, of which nine (half) had median LSATs in 2017 of 160 or higher. **Those 18 law schools combined saw a total first-year enrollment increase of 1192 – an average of 66 additional students per law school -- comprising nearly the entire first-year enrollment increase across all 142 law schools.** There are six law schools with decreases of first-year enrollment of 40 or more, of which three (half) had median LSATs in 2017 of 145 or 146. Those six law schools combined saw an first-year enrollment decline of 389 – an average of 65 fewer students per law school, with all but Michigan State seeing an increase in their median LSAT. The other 118 law schools combined had a net increase of roughly 430 – less than four students per law school on average.

WIDESPREAD INCREASES IN PROFILE

As noted above, one of the main reasons enrollment appears not to have increased as much as I had anticipated in August is due to the concerted effort of a widespread number of schools to improve their LSAT profile. (I haven't compiled the data on GPA profiles yet.). As I noted in my August blog posting, the most significant aspect of the applicant pool in this cycle was that it was a much stronger pool due to a significant increase in the number of applicants with a high LSAT of 165 or higher.

Of the 426 possible LSAT data points across these 142 law schools, at present there are 389 published data points. (Many law schools have published only their median, but not their 25th or 75th.)

Of these 389 LSAT data points, 241 increased, 124 were flat, and only 24 decreased. That means in this admissions cycle, law schools were able to see increases in nearly 62% of their LSAT data points, while only seeing decreases in roughly 6% of their LSAT data points. Of the 241 LSAT data points that increased, 45 (nearly 19%) increased by two points and six increased by three or more points. **Notably, 85 of the 142 law schools (nearly 60%) saw their median LSAT increase by at least one point.** Only five law schools so far have seen their median LSAT decline between 2017 and 2018 (with enrollment change in parentheses)(Univ. of Buffalo - SUNY – 154 to 153 (+7), Loyola-Chicago – 158 to 157 (+17), UC-Hastings – 159 to 158 (-13), UC-Davis – 163 to 162 (+55), and William and Mary (163 to 162 (+7)).

The largest percentage of LSAT data points increasing was among law schools with median LSATs of less than 150 in 2017. These 16 law schools had 46 available LSAT data points of which 39 increased (nearly 85%). The smallest percentage of LSAT data points increasing was among law schools with median LSATs of 150-154. These 39 law schools had 109 available data points of which only 52 increased (roughly 48%).

It will be interesting to see how things turn out once data are available on all 199 law schools in mid-December.