

PROJECTIONS FOR LAW SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FOR FALL 2015

By [Jerry Organ](#)

This blog posting is designed to do three things. First, following up on recent discussions regarding trends in applicants by Al Brophy at [The Faculty Lounge](#) and Derek Muller at [Excess of Democracy](#), I provide a detailed analysis to project the likely total applicant pool we can expect at the end of the cycle based on trends from March through the end of the cycle in 2013 and 2014. Second, using the likely total pool of applicants, I estimate the number of admitted students and matriculants, but also question whether the estimates might be too high given the decline in quality of the applicant pool in this cycle. Third, building on the second point, I suggest that law schools in the lower half of the top tier are likely to see unusual enrollment/profile pressure that may then have a ripple effect down through the rankings.

1. ESTIMATES OF THE TOTAL NUMBER OF APPLICANTS

Reviewing the 2013 and 2014 Cycles to Inform the 2015 Cycle

2013 Current Volume Summary Date	Applicants	% of Cycle	Projected Total Applicant Pool
Jan. 25, 2013	30,098	56%	53,750
Mar. 8, 2013	46,587	84%	55,460
May 17, 2013	55,764	95%	58,700
End of Cycle			59,400

2014 Current Volume Summary Date	Applicants	% of Cycle	Projected Total Applicant Pool
Jan. 31, 2014	29,638	58%	51,110
Mar. 7, 2014	42,068	79%	53,250
April 25, 2014	48,698	89%	54,720
End of Cycle			55,700

2015 Current Volume Summary Date	Applicants	% of Cycle	Projected Total Applicant Pool
Jan. 30, 2015	26,702	54%	49,450
Mar. 6, 2015	39,646	76%	52,160
April 3, 2015	45,978	87%	52,848
End of Cycle			54,000 (Estimate)

In each of the last two years, a modest surge in late applicants meant the final count exceeded the March/April projections by a couple thousand. That would suggest that the current projection (for just under 53,000) likely understates the end of cycle applicant pool, which I am now estimating conservatively at 54,000 (down about 3% from 2014). (In 2014, the amount by which the final pool total exceeded the early March projection was nearly 2,500. With an estimated pool of 54,000 applicants, I am estimating that the final pool in 2015 will exceed the early March projection by roughly 2,000.) (That said, if the employment results for 2014 graduates, which will be released shortly, show modest improvement over 2013, I anticipate that even more

people might come off the fence and perhaps apply late for the fall 2015 class.)

2. ESTIMATES FOR ADMITTED APPLICANTS AND MATRICULANTS

The chart below shows the number of applicants, admitted students and matriculants over the last three years along with an estimate for fall 2015 based on the assumption above that we have a total of 54,000 applicants this cycle. With 1,700 fewer applicants, I am assuming 1,000 fewer admitted students (a slight increase in the percentage admitted from 2014), and then assuming the number of matriculants will reflect the three-year average for the percentage of admitted students who matriculate – 87%. This would yield a first-year entering class of 36,975, down about 2.5% from 2014.

Estimates of Admitted Students and Matriculants for 2015 Based on Trends in 2012-2014

	Applicants	Admitted Students	Percent of Applicants	Matriculants	Percent of Admitted
2012	67,900	50,600	74.5%	44,481	87.9%
2013	59,400	45,700	76.9%	39,675	86.8%
2014	55,700	43,500	78.1%	37,924	87.2%
2015 (est.)	54,000	42,500	78.7%	36,975	87%

Why These Estimates for Admitted Students and Matriculants Might be Too High

a. Significant Decline in Applicants with LSATs of 165+

Because of changes in the nature of the applicant pool in 2015, however, the estimates of the number of admitted students and number of matriculants in the chart above may be too high. In 2014, almost all of the decrease in applicants came among those with LSATs of <165. The pool of applicants with LSATs of 165+ in 2014 was only slightly smaller than in 2013 (7,477 compared with 7,496). Indeed, as a percentage of the applicant pool, those with LSATs of 165+ increased from 12.6% in 2013 to 13.4% in 2014. This resulted in a slight increase in the number of matriculants with LSATs of 165+ in 2014 compared to 2013 (6,189 compared with 6,154).

In the current cycle, however, the number of applicants with LSATs of 165+ was only 6,320 as of March 6, 2015. In 2013, there were 7,228 on March 8, 2013 (of a final total of 7,496). In 2014, there were 7,150 on March 7 (of a final total of 7,477). Thus, the average increase in applicants with LSATs of 165+ between early March and the end of the cycle is only about 4%. That would suggest that we could anticipate having roughly 6,585 applicants with LSATs of 165+ at the end of the cycle – down nearly 900 from 2014 – over 12%.

Estimate of Number of Total Applicants for 2015 with LSATs of 165+ Based on Trends in 2013 and 2014

	Applicants at 165+		Applicants at 165+	# Increase to end of Cycle	% Increase to end of Cycle
March 8, 2013	7228	End of Cycle 2013	7496	268	3.7%
March 7, 2014	7150	End of Cycle 2014	7477	327	4.6%
March 6, 2015	6320	End of Cycle 2015 (est.)	6585	265	4.2%

On a longer term basis, if the estimates in the preceding paragraphs are accurate, the entering class in fall of 2015 will again extend the slide in the number and percentage of first-year students with LSATs of 165+ that has been underway since the class that entered in fall of 2010.

Five-Year Trend in Applicants and Matriculants with LSATs of 165+ and Estimates for 2015

	Applicants with LSATs of 165+	Matriculants with LSATs of 165+	Percent of Applicants Matriculating
2010	12,177	9,477	77.8%

2011	11,190	8,952	80%
2012	9,196	7,571	82.3%
2013	7,496	6,154	82.1%
2014	7,477	6,189	82.8%
2015 (est.)	6,585	5,420	82.4%

Given that on average over the last three years roughly 82.4% of admitted students with LSATs of 165+ actually matriculated, one could expect that the 6,585 applicants would translate into 5,420 matriculants with LSATs of 165+ for fall 2015, a decline of nearly 770 from 2014. Notably, this would represent a 45.9% drop in applicants with LSATs of 165+ since 2010 and a 42.8% drop in matriculants with LSATs of 165+ since 2010.

b. Modest Decrease Among Applicants with LSATs <150

On the other end of the LSAT distribution, it is a completely different story. Although the number of applicants with LSATs <150 also has declined, the decline has been more modest than among those with LSATs of 165+. Moreover, those with LSATs of <150 are much more likely to apply late in the cycle. In the last two years there has been significant growth among applicants with LSATs of <150 between early March and the end of the cycle. As a result, I would estimate that we would have 18,350 applicants with LSATs of <150 by the end of this cycle, a decline of only about 4.5%.

Estimate of Number of Total Applicants for 2015 with LSATs of <150 Based on Trends in 2013 and 2014

	Applicants with LSATs of <150		Applicants with LSATs of <150	# Increase	% Increase
March 8, 2013	13,364	End of Cycle 2013	20,706	6,642	49.7%
March 7, 2014	11,662	End of Cycle 2014	19,239	7,577	65%
March 6, 2015	11,467	End of Cycle 2015 (est.)	18,350	6,880	60%

With applicants with LSATs <150 making up a larger percentage of the declining applicant pool, the number of matriculants with LSATs of <150 actually had grown each year up until 2014, when the slight increase in matriculants with LSATs of 165+ was mirrored by a slight decrease in matriculants with LSATs <150.

Five-Year Trend in Applicants and Matriculants with LSATs of <150 and Estimates for 2015

	Applicants with LSATs of <150	Matriculants with LSATs of <150	Percent of Applicants Matriculating
2010	26,548	7,013	26.4%
2011	24,192	7,101	29.4%
2012	22,089	7,906	35.8%
2013	20,706	8,482	41%
2014	19,239	8,361	43.5%
2015 (est.)	18,350	8,700	47.4%

Given that the percentage of applicants with LSATs <150 matriculating has increased each of the last five years, it seems reasonable to expect another increase – to 47.4% -- resulting in roughly 8,700 matriculants with LSATs of <150, particularly given the decrease in the number of applicants with LSATs of 165+. Even so, it seems unlikely to make up for the drop of nearly 770 matriculants among those with LSATs of 165+. Notably, while the pool of applicants with LSATs <150 has decreased by of 30.9% since 2010, the number of matriculants has increased by 24.2%.

Thus, while the smaller decline in applicants that is expected this year might suggest a correspondingly smaller decline in matriculants, with the weaker profile of the applicant pool in 2015 compared to 2014, it is quite possible that the total number of admitted students will be lower than the chart above suggests and that the corresponding number of matriculants also will be lower than the chart above suggests.

Phrased differently, if there really is going to be a decline of roughly 770 matriculants just in the group with LSATs of 165+, then the total decline in matriculants may well be greater than the 950 estimated in the chart above. Between 2013 and 2014, a decline in applicants of 3,700, almost all with LSATs of 164 and below, resulted in a decline in matriculants of 1,750, all with LSATs of 164 and below. If the decline in applicants is 1,700 this cycle, with over half the decline among those with LSATs of 165+, with a decline of perhaps several hundred with LSATs between 150-164, and with a modest decrease (or possibly a slight increase) among those with LSATs <150, we may well see that the decline in admitted students and in matriculants is slightly larger than estimated in the chart above.

3. PROFILE CHALLENGES AMONG ELITE SCHOOLS

One interesting side note is that the significant decrease in the number of applicants with LSATs of 165+ is likely to put significant pressure on a number of top-50 law schools as they try to hold their enrollment and their LSAT profiles. Simply put, there are not enough applicants with LSATs of 165+ to allow all the law schools in the top-50 or so to maintain their profiles and their enrollment.

If the estimates above are correct – that there will be roughly 5420 matriculants with LSATs of 165+ – and if we assume that at least a few hundred of these matriculants are going to be going to law schools ranked 50 or below either due to geography or scholarships or both – and if we assume that the top 15 law schools are likely to leverage rankings prestige (and perhaps scholarships) to hold enrollment and profile -- then the decrease of roughly 770 matriculants with LSATs of 165+ is going to be felt mostly among the law schools ranked 16-50 or so.

In 2014, the top 15 law schools probably had roughly 3,800 first-year matriculants with LSATs of 165+. The schools ranked 16-50 likely had another 1,900 or so. The remaining 500 plus matriculants with LSATs of 165 and above likely were scattered among other law schools lower in the rankings. Let's assume the top-15 law schools manage to keep roughly 3,700 of the 3,800 they had in 2014. Let's assume law schools ranked 50 and below keep roughly 500 or so. That means the law schools ranked between 16 and 50 have to get by with 1,220 matriculants with LSATs of 165+ rather than 1,900 last year. While many schools will be dealing with the challenges of maintaining enrollment (and revenue) while trying to hold profile, this likely will be a particularly challenging year for law schools ranked between 16 and 50 that are trying to navigate concerns about enrollment (and revenue) with concerns about profile. To the extent that those schools look toward applicants with lower LSAT profiles to maintain enrollment, that will then have a ripple effect through the law schools lower in the rankings.