

Tuesday, January 6, 2015

The Variable Affordability of Law School – How Geography and LSAT Profile Impact Tuition Costs

By Jerry Organ

I have posted to SSRN the PowerPoint slides I presented yesterday at the AALS Conference session sponsored by the Section on Law School Administration and Finance. The presentation was entitled *The Variable Affordability of Law School – How Geography and LSAT Impact Tuition Cost*. (I am very grateful to my research assistant, Kate Jirik, and her husband, Sam, for awesome work on the spreadsheet that supported the data I presented.)

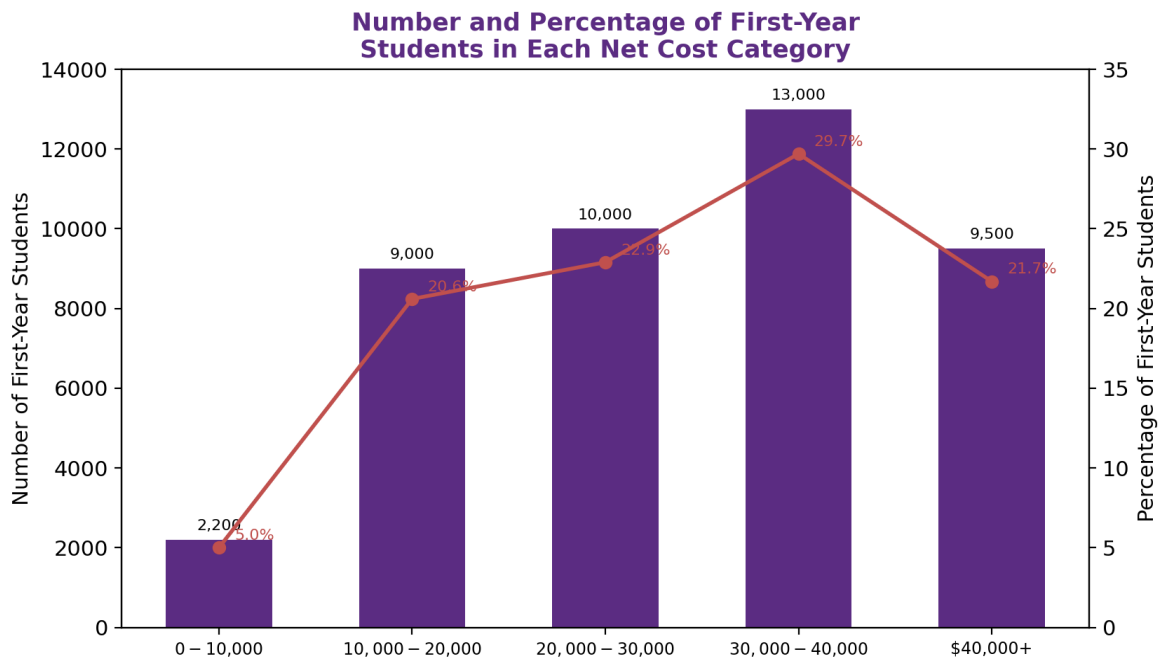
The presentation begins with two slides summarizing data presented in my article *Reflections on the Decreasing Affordability of Legal Education* showing the extent to which average public school and private school tuition increased between 1985 and 2011 relative to law school graduate income. While many have observed that law school has become increasingly expensive over the last few decades, this "macro" discussion fails to highlight the extent to which differences in tuition exist at a "micro" level either based on geography or on LSAT score.

Using 2012 tuition data, the first set of slides focuses on geographic differences – noting some states where legal education generally is very expensive, some states where legal education generally is very affordable and the balance of states in which tuition costs are in the middle or have a mix of affordable and expensive.

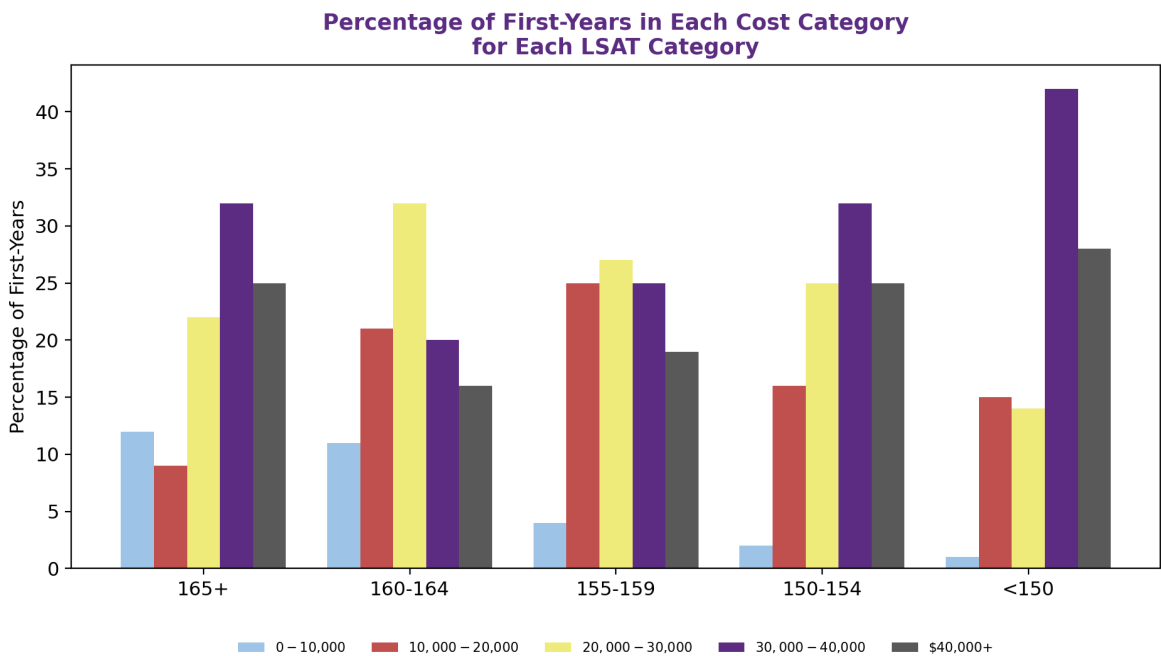
Following those slides, there is a set of slides that describe the process I used to calculate net tuition costs after accounting for scholarships for all entering first-year students at the 195 fully accredited and ranked law schools in fall 2012 in an effort to allocate all students into a five-by-five grid with five LSAT categories (165+, 160-164, 155-159, 150-154 and <150) and five cost categories (\$0-\$10,000, \$10,000-\$20,000, \$20,000-\$30,000, \$30,000-\$40,000, and \$40,000+). There then are a set of slides summarizing this data and trying to explain what we can learn from how students are allocated across the five-by-five grid, which includes a set of slides showing the average rank of the schools at which students in each LSAT/Cost category cell are enrolled.

The concluding slide sets forth a couple of short observations about the data. There was a robust discussion with some great questions following the presentation of this data.

Here are four of the slides to give you a flavor for the presentation on net cost generally and then net cost relative to LSAT categories —



Slide recreated from the source chart's bar heights and gridlines; the percentage line was derived from each bar's share of the five-category total (which sums cleanly to 100%) rather than read independently, since that reading was more reliable than the low-resolution percentage labels.



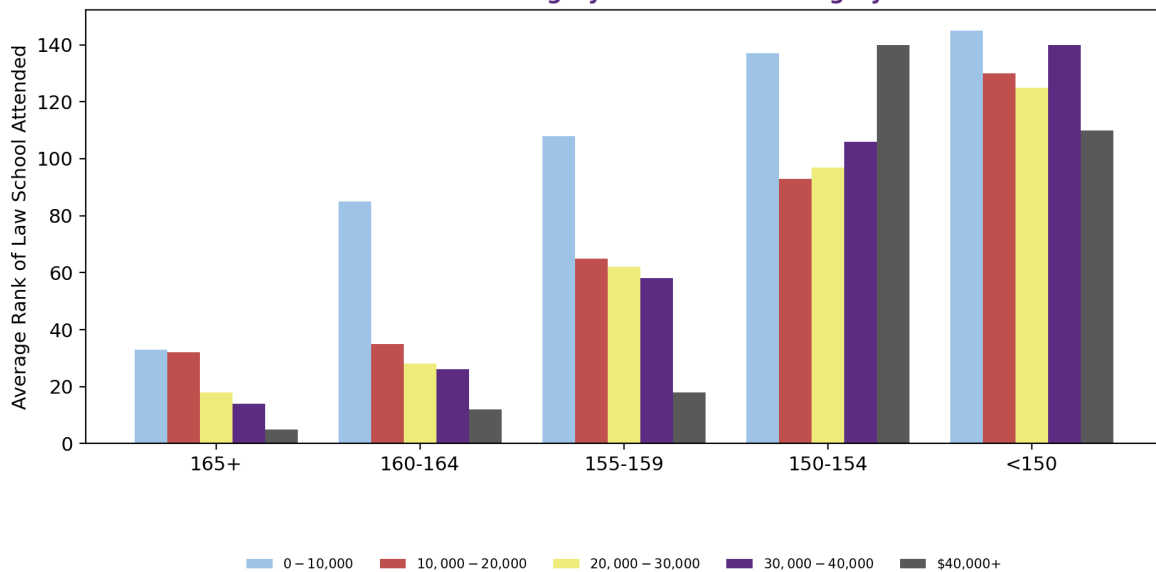
Slide recreated by reading relative bar heights off the source chart (native resolution ~250x150px, well below the other charts in this archive) and normalizing each LSAT category's five bars to sum to 100%, as they represent a full breakdown of that category. Treat these figures as approximate -- no underlying data table accompanies this chart in the original post.

Average Cost and Rank for Each LSAT Category

LSAT RANGE	Average Cost	Average Law School Rank
165+	\$29,600	23
160-164	\$26,100	~62
155-159	\$27,700	97
150-154	\$31,000	122
<150	\$32,000	153

Table recreated from the values printed directly on the source slide -- exact, with one exception: the average rank for the 160-164 category is legible as a number ending in 2 but the tens digit is genuinely ambiguous between 6 and 8 at the source resolution; shown here as ~62, worth double-checking against the original SSRN slides if precision matters.

Average Rank of Law School Attended for Each Cost Category in Each LSAT Category



Slide recreated by reading relative bar heights off the source chart. This is the least certain of the four reconstructions -- the source image is low-resolution, there is no backing data table, and the axis gridlines themselves were not fully legible, so the numbers shown are best-effort estimates of relative scale rather than confirmed figures. If this chart needs to be precise, it's worth pulling the original PowerPoint/SSRN posting.