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Number of Law School Applicants Surges, Especially Among High Scorers

At the same time, the Law School Admission Council is increasing the number of LSAT test dates from six to 10 and will move to a computerized version of the exam in the spring of 2019.

By Karen Sloan | July 30, 2018



(<https://images.law.com/contrib/content/uploads/sites/292/2018/07/Applicants-Art.jpg>) Photo: Shutterstock

Does legal education have its mojo back?

The number of people applying to law school for the upcoming academic year shot up 8 percent—the only significant annual increase since 2010. The Law School Admission Council (LSAC) reported that 60,401 people applied for admission this fall, up from 55,580 the previous year.

“I’ve heard from a number of schools that this year they are worried about, not under-enrollment, but over-enrollment,” said LSAC president Kellye Testy. “Because the demand was so strong, some schools are finding that they may have had higher yield rates than they had in prior years, and they may have larger classes than they aimed for.”

Yield rates refer to the percentage of admitted applicants who ultimately enroll—a calculation admissions officials generally base on data from previous years.

Early indications also suggest that the applicant pool will expand yet again for the 2019

entering class. The number of people taking the Law School Admission Test in June and July was up 30 percent over the previous year. The June and July exams are considered the beginning of the new admission cycle, when early-bird applicants start the process. The June 2017 LSAT clocked a 20 percent increase in takers, foreshadowing the 8 percent applicant increase for the recently completed 2018 cycle.

“There is kind of a sigh of relief from the schools to see a return both in numbers and in quality [of applicants],” Testy said.

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This year’s applicant pool was not only larger, but also [more qualified \(https://www.law.com/2018/04/06/law-school-applications-are-up-especially-among-high-lsat-scorers/\)](https://www.law.com/2018/04/06/law-school-applications-are-up-especially-among-high-lsat-scorers/), council data shows. The number of applicants with LSAT scores of 175 to 180—the highest score band—increased 60 percent over the previous year. Applicants with scores of 170 to 174 were up 13 percent, while those with scores of 165 to 169 were up 27 percent.

While the surge in applicants overall is a welcome development for schools, Testy cautioned that admissions officials should be mindful of the entry-level employment market when they determine how many new students to admit. National Association for Law Placement executive director James Leipold has warned that a sharp jump in law school enrollment could drive down entry-level employment rates once the incoming class graduates and hits the job market. The employment picture for new law graduates has improved in recent years, but that gain is due primarily to fewer new lawyers vying for jobs rather than an overall increase in jobs.

“The job market is looking good,” Testy said. “But that means we need to hold steady more

than growing wildly. Overall, it's good news. But we want to make sure we're really being thoughtful about matching the enrollment side with the employment opportunity side."

Along with the stabilized job market, Testy said she believes that current events are prompting more people to consider law school.

"There is heightened visibility to law, legal process, and social justice because of all the various things happening in the larger world," she said. "The people coming out of college have a great desire to make the world a better place, in whatever way they define that."

Amid the rise in applicants, the council is moving forward with significant changes in how the LSAT is administered. The exam will be given 10 times a year starting with the 2020 admissions cycle, up from the current six times. And the test will go digital in the spring of 2019—it's currently the only graduate admission test given on paper.

The council [has been testing \(https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/almID/1202784155827/embracing-digital-lsat-loosens-its-grip-on-the-no-2-pencil/\)](https://www.law.com/legaltechnews/almID/1202784155827/embracing-digital-lsat-loosens-its-grip-on-the-no-2-pencil/) a computerized version of the exam for the past year and is ready to move forward, Testy said. LSAT takers will have the option to take the test in either format for a few months during the transition, she said. The tests will be administered on tablets provided by the council, using proprietary software it developed in-house.

Once the new testing schedule is in place, applicants may take the LSAT every month with the exception of May and December, Testy said. The council performed an extensive survey of test takers and learned that there was little interest in sitting for the LSAT the same month college students take final exams.

With the new testing schedule, the council will have [more than doubled \(https://www.law.com/sites/almstaff/2017/05/09/lSAT-maker-gets-new-ceo-eyes-additional-test-dates/\)](https://www.law.com/sites/almstaff/2017/05/09/lSAT-maker-gets-new-ceo-eyes-additional-test-dates/) the number of times the LSAT is given in a year since 2017, when it was offered just four times annually.

Testy said the latest changes are not a direct response to new competition from the GRE,

which she said represents just a small slice of the law school admissions picture. (Twenty-three law schools now accept the GRE alongside the LSAT.) Rather, they are meant to be more responsive to the needs of test takers and accommodate the increasingly year-round nature of law school admissions.

“We just want to make sure its convenient for the candidates and the schools,” Testy said.

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