

Law School Admissions Embrace 'Return to Normalcy' in a Post-Pandemic Era



In recent years, law school admissions experienced a period of relative stability, with annual applicant numbers ranging from 57,000 to 64,000. However, the landscape drastically changed in 2021, when the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted the entry-level job market for college graduates, nationwide protests against racial inequality erupted following the tragic murder of George Floyd, and the presidency of Donald Trump created a unique environment. These factors led to a surge in law school applicants, making it one of the most competitive years on record.

However, this trend has taken a downturn as the frenzy subsides. According to the latest Law School Admission Council data, law school applicants have decreased by 2.4% compared to the previous year. By this time last year, the council had already received 96% of the total applicant pool, indicating that this cycle's national applicant pool is likely to be slightly smaller than the previous year, which itself was 12% smaller than in 2021.

Susan Krinsky, the executive vice president for operations at the Law School Admission Council, describes this decline as a "return to normalcy." She explains that this year's numbers align more closely with the applicant figures observed in the past five years, except for the anomaly of 2021. While the current data suggests a smaller applicant pool, there may still be a slight increase later this month when scores from the June 9 administration of the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) are released. Notably, 3,400 more individuals are registered to take the test compared to the previous year. While most of these test takers are likely those who have already applied for the fall term, aiming to improve their financial aid offers with higher scores, some late applicants for the fall may also be included.

Although the applicant numbers have decreased, the diversity of the law school applicant pool continues to improve. Krinsky highlights that applicants from underrepresented communities now constitute 46.5% of the pool, compared to slightly over 45% the previous year.

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Notably, the competition remains intense for the most prestigious law schools, as the number of applicants with LSAT scores between 170 and 180, the highest possible range, has increased slightly compared to the previous year. This indicates that top-tier institutions are still highly sought-after and continue to attract exceptional candidates. However, below the 170 threshold, the admissions process has been relatively more forgiving, creating a buyer's market for applicants in that range.

Overall, the decline in law school applications signifies a return to a more typical admissions landscape after the exceptional circumstances of 2021. While factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, racial inequality protests, and political dynamics contributed to the surge in applications last year, the situation has now normalized. Law schools are witnessing a more stable applicant pool, though competition remains fierce at the highest levels.

As the legal education sector adjusts to this shift, applicants can now make more informed decisions about their futures, knowing that the recent spike in applications was an anomaly. The evolving landscape of law school admissions continues to present both challenges and opportunities for aspiring lawyers, encouraging them to remain dedicated to their goals while adapting to the changing dynamics of legal education.