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Making sense of year-end statistics for Canadian law schools

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North American statistics show applications to law schools are down and tuition is rising at some schools, but the appetite for legal education is still strong, say educators.

According to the Law School Admission Council, as of October 2015, law school applicants have decreased by 1.8 per cent, with applications down by 4.5 per cent over last year (applicants often apply to more than one law school).

A challenge for many students is the competitive grade point average needed to apply to law school, says Omar Ha-Redeye, lawyer with Fleet Street Law, who teaches law at three Toronto-based post-secondary institutions.

The Law School Admission Test is also a hurdle, he adds. Despite practice exams and prep courses, many students are unable to achieve a competitive score.

However, Alexis Archbold, assistant dean at the University of Toronto Faculty of Law, says LSAC statistics focus on U.S.-based law school applications, which have been decreasing since the start of the 2008 recession, while Canadian law school applications have remained fairly steady.

“LSAC reports on all North American schools, and, of course, that number is heavily skewed by the U.S. experience,” she explains. There are 17 Canadian law schools that require LSAC services listed on its web site, while there are about 250 law schools in the U.S. Besides North America, there are also two schools in Australia, one in China, India, and Armenia represented by LSAC.

Archbold argues that from her vantage point, law school student enrolment in Canada is steady. For the past few years, U of T’s law school has had enrolment of between 200 and 208 new 1L students per year.

“We hold our enrolment rates steady; i.e., we set an enrolment target and stick to it. Our application numbers are up,” she says.

Archbold says, “95 per cent of U of T law students get jobs at graduation. We take that as an indication that there is a demand in the market for our graduates.”

She notes that law school’s enrolment numbers are carefully controlled and she is only aware of two Canadian law schools that may have increased enrolment.



“Single parents and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds rightly find the prospect of an additional \$100,000 of law school debt to be daunting,” says legal educator Omar Ha-Redeye.

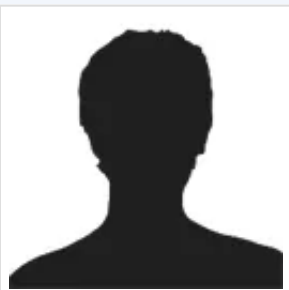
Many students “simply cannot get into a Canadian law school based on how competitive it is,” says Ha-Redeye. The contemporary trend of thousands of Canadians studying law abroad certainly speaks to that, he says.

“The rising cost of law school tuition poses a significant hurdle to many students who have competitive GPAs and LSAT scores but simply do not have the money or have other financial responsibilities. Single parents and individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds rightly find the prospect of an additional \$100,000 of law school debt to be daunting,” he adds.

The U of T law degree, for example, is the most expensive in Canada, with fees for the 2015-2016 academic year amounting to \$33,105. Law dean Edward Iacobucci has recently recommended that administration and tuition fees be increased by five per cent next year. The increase to the maximum legally allowable limit would mean that incoming law students would pay almost \$1,600 more per annum, according to [Ultra Vires](#), the faculty’s student newspaper.

Archbold says that “all Ontario law schools increase their respective tuitions each year.”

Overall tuition does tend to rise each academic year, according to Statistics Canada. Preliminary tuition hikes for the past academic year compared to the year prior in the area of law and legal studies is \$469. The tuition boost is more or less consistent with that of previous academic years, dating five years back.



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