Legal Education Data Deck

KEY TRENDS ON ACCESS, AFFORDABILITY AND VALUE

June 2021
Foreword

The 2021 Legal Education Data Deck utilizes datasets made publicly available by third parties to offer a snapshot of certain trends organized around the three guiding principles of AccessLex Institute’s research agenda: access, affordability and value in legal education. This is a living document that is updated periodically—AccessLex welcomes comments, criticisms and suggestions in order to make this as useful a tool as possible for all those we serve.

The data contained herein exists thanks to the work of the Law School Admission Council, the National Conference of Bar Examiners, the National Association for Law Placement, the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Labor. We thank these and other organizations for making such data available.

AccessLex Institute uses these data as the basis for the presentation, analysis and commentary contained herein, and takes sole responsibility for the quality and accuracy of such presentation, analysis and commentary.
About AccessLex Institute

AccessLex Institute, in partnership with its nearly 200 nonprofit and state-affiliated ABA-approved member law schools, has been committed to improving access to legal education and to maximizing the affordability and value of a law degree since 1983. The AccessLex Center for Legal Education Excellence® advocates for policies that make legal education work better for students and society alike, and conducts research on the most critical issues facing legal education today. The AccessLex Center for Education and Financial Capability® offers on-campus and online financial education programming and resources to help students confidently manage their finances on their way to achieving personal and professional success. AccessLex Institute is a nonprofit organization headquartered in West Chester, PA.
Law Students in the United States

Fall 2020 J.D. Enrollment, by State.

Note: This map includes the 197 ABA-approved AccessLex Institute member schools reporting enrollment as of 2020.

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Between 2019 and 2020, the number of applicants increased while the number of admitted applicants and matriculants decreased. This marks the third consecutive year of increase in the number of applicants.

**Data Source:** Law School Admission Council, 2021. Data presentation, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
The overall law school admission rate remained unchanged between 2019 and 2020 with 70 percent of applicants receiving offers of admission in both years.

Female applicants make up an increasing share of law school applicants, but admission rates for men continue to outpace those of women.

Prior to 2000, male and female J.D. enrollment primarily moved inversely, with male enrollment falling as female enrollment increased. After 2000 they moved in tandem, until female enrollment surpassed male enrollment for the first time in 2017. Since then, female enrollment has increased while male enrollment has declined.

Note: Since 2014–15, the American Bar Association has included “Other” as a gender category. The enrollment reported for this category is too small to appear in this figure.

Racial and Ethnic Diversity of Law School Applicants, 2020

The racial and ethnic composition of law school applicants has remained relatively stable in recent years. In 2020, White applicants comprised roughly half of the applicant pool, while Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latinx applicants collectively comprised approximately one-third.
Admission rates differ markedly between racial/ethnic categories with 78 percent of White applicants gaining admission compared to 45 percent of Black applicants and 57 percent of Hispanic/Latinx applicants.
The increase in the proportion of underrepresented minority students among first-year law school students mirrors the change in the proportion among bachelor’s degree recipients over the period from 2012–13 to 2018–19.

Recent estimates indicate that students who were the first in their families to go to college are in the minority among students enrolled in graduate programs. In 2015–2016, less than 10 percent of law students had a parent whose educational attainment was a high school diploma or less.

### Data Source:
Data presentation, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.

**Master’s includes:** Master of Science (MS), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Education or Teaching, Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Master of Public Health (MPH), other master’s degree

**Other Doctoral includes:** Doctor of Science or Engineering, Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), Doctor of Business or Public Admin, Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA), Doctor of Theology (ThD), other doctor’s degree

**Other Medicine includes:** Dentistry (DDS, DMD), Chiropractic (DC, DCM), Pharmacy (PharmD), Optometry (OD), Podiatry (DPM, DP, PodD), Veterinary Medicine (DVM)
The proportion of students enrolled in graduate and professional programs who received Pell Grants as undergraduate students varies by discipline. In 2015–2016, over a third of law school students previously received a Pell Grant to help fund their undergraduate studies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master of Public Admin/Policy (MPA/MPP)</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Doctoral</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Medicine</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master of Business Administration (MBA)</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law (LLB or J.D.)</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education (Ed.D.)</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine or Osteopathic Medicine</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Data presented reflects only U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Foreign/international students are excluded from analysis due to differences in financial aid eligibility.


Data presentation, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.

Master’s includes: Master of Science (MS), Master of Arts (MA), Master of Education or Teaching, Master of Social Work (MSW), Master of Fine Arts (MFA), Master of Public Health (MPH), other master’s degree

Other Doctoral includes: Doctor of Science or Engineering, Doctor of Psychology (PsyD), Doctor of Business or Public Admin, Doctor of Fine Arts (DFA), Doctor of Theology (ThD), other doctor’s degree

Other Medicine includes: Dentistry (DDS, DMD), Chiropractic (DC, DCM), Pharmacy (PharmD), Optometry (OD), Podiatry (DPM, DP, PodD), Veterinary Medicine (DVM)
Non-J.D. students make up a greater share of law school enrollment today than observed eight years ago. The percentage of non-J.D. students has more than doubled since 2012.

Minority students are over-represented in the group of students who withdraw between their first and second years of law school. In 2019, minority students comprised 31 percent of enrollment but made up 37 percent of withdrawals. In particular, students identifying as Hispanic/Latino, Black, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, are over-represented relative to their enrollment.

Number of Law Schools Accounting for Half or More Law Students of Each Race/Ethnicity, 2020

The chart displays the minimum number of ABA-approved schools whose combined enrollments make up half or more of each racial/ethnic group. For instance, half of all Asian law students are enrolled at just 33 of the 197 ABA-approved law schools. Overall, this chart indicates that underrepresented minority students are concentrated within a few law schools.

In 2020, White students comprised nearly two-thirds of law school graduates, while Black, Asian, and Hispanic/Latino applicants collectively comprised roughly one-quarter.

Note: “Remaining” includes students who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

The number of J.D. degrees awarded per year increased between 2006 and 2012 but began to decline in 2013. The number of J.D. degrees awarded increased slightly between 2018 and 2019, marking the first increase since 2012. As the number of graduates has declined, the proportion of law degrees awarded to racial and ethnic minorities has increased from roughly 23 percent to 31 percent.

**Data Source:** American Bar Association, 2021a and 2021b. Data presentation, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
AFFORDABILITY
Average tuition and fees for full-time students has increased modestly across all sectors over the last eight years. Since 2013, average full-time resident tuition and fees at public law schools has increased by eight percent; private law school tuition and fees increased nine percent; and public non-resident tuition and fees have increased by one percent.

**Note:** Figures shown are inflation adjusted using the Consumer Price Index for all urban consumers (CPI-U) from July of the year indicated.

**Data Source:** American Bar Association, 2021a and 2021b. Data presentation, including conversion to real dollars, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
The median grant amount awarded to full-time students receiving aid increased by more than 50 percent from 2011 to 2019. In 2011, the median amount law schools awarded to at least half their grant recipients was $13,800. By 2019, that amount increased to $21,000.

Note: The median value displayed here is the median of all school level median grant amounts.

Data Source: American Bar Association, 2021a. Data presentation, including conversion to real dollars, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
Share of Full-Time Students Receiving Institutional Grants, 2011–2019

The share of full-time students who received any grant amount increased from roughly half in 2011 to over three-quarters in 2019. Similarly, the proportion of students who received a grant totaling at least half their tuition and fees increased 16 percentage points over the same period. Combined with the increase in median grant amounts shown on the previous page, these changes indicate schools are providing greater tuition discounting to students.

From 2012 to 2019, the share of schools awarding conditional scholarships decreased from 61 percent to 41 percent, with bulk of that change occurring between 2014 and 2015. During the same period, the proportion of all entering law students who received conditional scholarships remained stable, at or near 25 percent. Of the students who received conditional scholarships, a smaller proportion’s awards were eliminated in 2019 compared to previous years.

**Data Source:** American Bar Association, 2021a. Data presentation, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
Percentage of Law Students Who Still Owe on Undergraduate Loans, 2015–2016

Nearly half of enrolled law school students are carrying undergraduate debt. In 2015–2016, the median amount of debt still owed among those with outstanding undergraduate loans was $25,500.

Note: Minimum reporting standards were not met for law school graduates who attended public institutions in 2016. Data presented reflects only U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Foreign/international students are excluded from analysis due to differences in financial aid eligibility.

Data Source: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS). Data presentation, including conversion to real dollars, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
Percentage of Law Students Who Worked While Enrolled, by Year and Institution Type, 2004–2016

More than half of enrolled law students reported earnings from off-campus employment at both public and private, nonprofit schools. Their median hourly earnings were $15 in 2015–2016.

A majority of law graduates use loans to fund their graduate education. However, the proportion of graduates who borrowed declined by 17 percentage points between 2012 and 2016.

Cumulative Amount Borrowed (in 2019 Dollars) by Law Students While Enrolled, by Year and Institution Type, 2004–2016

As the percentage of law graduates who borrowed declined, the average cumulative amount of graduate debt also decreased between 2012 and 2016.

Note: Minimum reporting standards were not met for law school graduates who attended public institutions in 2016. Data presented reflects only U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Foreign/international students are excluded from analysis due to differences in financial aid eligibility.

Average Amounts Borrowed by Graduate Degree Type (in 2019 Dollars), 2016

Compared to other 2016 graduate degree recipients, law graduates borrowed, on average, less for their undergraduate education, but more for their graduate education. The average amount law students borrowed for undergraduate education was $2,300 less than the overall average of $26,900 (8.5 percent). However, the amount law students borrowed for graduate school exceeded all other graduate and professional degree recipients except medical students.

Note: Data presented reflects only U.S. citizens and permanent residents. Foreign/international students are excluded from analysis due to differences in financial aid eligibility.

VALUE
The latest occupational outlook from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects lawyer positions will have the third largest increase in openings among positions requiring a graduate or professional degree.
Percentage of ABA-Approved Law School Graduates Passing the Bar by Attempt and Administration, 2011–2019

Bar passage rate declines have been most pronounced for February takers in recent years, whose first-time pass rate fell 15 percentage points from 2011 to 2019 and whose repeat pass rate decreased 11 percentage points over the same period. Meanwhile, July first-time takers’ bar passage rates fluctuated within a 9 percentage point range between 83 percent and 74 percent. Similarly, July repeat takers’ pass rates remained relatively stable oscillating around 30 percent.

First-Time Bar Passage Rates for Graduates of ABA-Approved Law Schools by State, 2019

In 2019, 76 percent of all first-time exam takers from ABA-approved law schools passed the bar. However, bar passage rates vary among jurisdictions, generally falling between 60 and 85 percent.

Note: Bar passage is shown by the state of bar administration, not the location of the exam taker’s law school.

Between 2018 and 2019, a majority of states saw increases in first-time bar passage rates among graduates of ABA-approved law schools. Of the 14 jurisdictions where pass rates declined, only five saw decreases of greater than five percentage points.

Recent J.D. Graduates by Employment Status, 2009–2019

The upward trend in the percentage of recent law graduates who obtained employment in jobs requiring bar passage continued for the class of 2019. At the same time, the percent unemployed declined – however, it is important to note that while the unemployment percentage has decreased each year since 2015, the total pool of recent graduates has been shrinking since 2013.

Full-Time and Part-Time Employment of Recent J.D. Graduates, 2009–2019

As the total number of graduates and therefore the number of employed graduates has decreased since 2013, so too has the percentage of recent graduates employed in part-time positions as a greater share of graduates obtain full-time employment each year.

Note: These data are based on law school graduates whose employment status was reported to NALP and may not be fully representative of the total law school graduating class indicated. In 2014, NALP changed the timing of the survey administration from 9 months post-graduation to 10 months post-graduation. Use caution when interpreting data and when comparing from year to year.

**Recent J.D. Graduate Employment by Sector, 2009–2019**

The total number of graduates and therefore number of employed graduates decreased since 2013. During this period, the composition of employment by sector has remained relatively stable. Two notable changes since 2013 are the increase in the proportion of graduates working in private practice and the decrease in the percentage of graduates working in business.

![Bar chart showing employment by sector from 2009 to 2019](chart.png)

**Note:** These data are based on law school graduates whose employment status was reported to NALP and may not be fully representative of the total law school graduating class indicated. In 2014, NALP changed the timing of the survey administration from 9 months post-graduation to 10 months post-graduation. Use caution when interpreting data and when comparing from year to year.

Median Salary (in 2019 Dollars) of Recent J.D. Graduates by Sector, 2009–2019

The median salary for the class of 2019 graduates working in private practice was $125,000, down from the high point of $154,700 for the class of 2009 but continuing to increase from a low of $96,900 for the class of 2011. Other sectors show smaller fluctuations but have been relatively stable throughout this period.

Note: These data are based on law school graduates whose employment status was reported to NALP and may not be fully representative of the total law school graduating class indicated. In 2014, NALP changed the timing of the survey administration from 9 months post-graduation to 10 months post-graduation. Use caution when interpreting data and when comparing from year to year.

Data Source: National Association for Law Placement, 2020. Data presentation, including conversion to real dollars, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
Median Salary (in 2019 Dollars) of Recent J.D. Graduates by Employment Type, 2009–2019

The overall median salary for 2019 graduates was lower than the median for the class of 2009. However, median salaries have been trending upward for almost all employment categories in recent years.

Note: These data are based on law school graduates whose employment status was reported to NALP and may not be fully representative of the total law school graduating class indicated. In 2014, NALP changed the timing of the survey administration from 9 months post-graduation to 10 months post-graduation. Use caution when interpreting data and when comparing from year to year.

Data Source: National Association for Law Placement (2020). Data presentation, including conversion to real dollars, analysis and commentary by AccessLex Institute.
Detailed Data Sources


