LAW SCHOOL APPLICANTS BY DEGREES:
A Per Capita Analysis of the Top Feeder Schools

April 2018

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Background

Each year, the Law School Admission Council (LSAC) publishes its *Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants* list. The colleges and universities appearing on the list produce the most applicants to law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA). These feeder schools often account for the majority of applicants to law school in a given year – about 61 percent in 2016.[1] Thus, the list provides an interesting glimpse into application trends and the popularity of legal education overall. The list also tells us something about the types of students who are interested in earning law degrees.

This report expands upon the feeder school list by exploring "applicant concentration"—the number of law school applicants relative to the size of the institution. We calculate applicant concentration by dividing the number of applicants from a particular institution by the number of bachelor's degree recipients at that institution in the same year. The resulting "per-capita" figures help contextualize the feeder school trends.

Tracking patterns in law school interest has taken on increased importance since 2011, when the numbers of applicants and first-year law students began to decline from historic highs. Between 2011 and 2016, the number of applicants fell 28 percent.[2] First-year enrollments also fell between 2011 and 2016, declining by 23.8 percent[3] - or the equivalent of about 20 average-sized law schools. These declines are reflected in the feeder school data. In 2016, the 240 schools listed by LSAC yielded 34,365 applicants, which was about one-third fewer than the 49,080 they yielded five years earlier.

Measuring the concentration of applicants per institution can be a useful way to contextualize the feeder school list. High placement on the list is often merely a reflection of school size. The 20 universities that produced the most law school applicants in 2016 had undergraduate enrollments ranging from 20,000 to more than 65,000.[4] Contextualizing the data can aid in identifying smaller schools with vibrant legal education pipelines that may be overlooked because their applicant volume appears nominal.

Contextualizing can also be useful in tracking diversity trends. Minority-serving institutions (MSIs) tend to have relatively small enrollments. But these institutions, particularly historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), produce outsized proportions of lawyers and other professionals from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. For example, about half of black lawyers are HBCU undergraduate alumni,[5] though these institutions have enrolled less than 17 percent of black college students over the last four decades.[6] Indeed, our analysis finds that two HBCUs – Morehouse College and Spelman College – had the highest concentrations of law school applicants across all feeder schools when compared to the number of graduates they produced.

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[1] Law School Admission Council (2017). Applicants by race/ethnicity and sex. Retrieved from *https://www.lsac.org/lsacresources/data/ethnicity-sex-applicants*; Law School Admission Council (2017). Top 240 feeder schools for ABA applicants. Retrieved from *https://www.lsac.org/lsacresources/data/top-240-feeder-schools*.

[2] Law School Admission Council (2017). Applicants by race/ethnicity and sex. Retrieved from *https://www.lsac.org/lsacresources/data/ethnicity-sex-applicants*.

[3] American Bar Association (2016). Change in 1L Matriculants, 2016 v. 2015 [Data File]. Retrieved from *https://www.americanbar.org/groups/legal_education/resources/statistics.html*; American Bar Association (2013). Enrollment and degrees awarded 1963–2012 academic years [Data file]. Retrieved from *https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/enrollment_degrees_awarded.authcheckdam.pdf*.

[4] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). (2015-16). 12-Month Enrollment Surveys [Data files].

[5] U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. (2010). The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from *http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/HBCU_webversion2.pdf*.

[6] Pew Research Center (2017). A look at historically black colleges and universities as Howard turns 150. Retrieved from *http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/02/28/a-look-at-historically-black-colleges-and-universities-as-howard-turns-150/*

This report measures the concentration of law school interest among students at colleges and universities appearing on LSAC's *Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants* list.[7] This report builds on the list by measuring applicant volume relative to the number of bachelor's degree recipients from an institution. The resulting per-capita quotient is a useful proxy for the concentration of law school interest at a given institution.

Applicant volume data were retrieved from LSAC.[8] Data on bachelor's degree recipients were retrieved from the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS).[9] Seven institutions appearing on the feeder school list are excluded from the analysis because they are located in Canada or Puerto Rico, or because they were missing data on bachelor's degree recipients. Remaining are 233 of the 240 institutions from the list.

This analysis explores three main questions:

1. How did overall trends in law school applicant concentration shift among the top feeder schools between 2011 and 2016?[10]

2. Which schools had the most concentrated interest in law school among their students and alumni in 2016?

3. How can law school admission officers and others use information presented in this report to help devise recruitment strategies and gain useful insight about law school applicants?

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[7] Law School Admission Council (2017). Top 240 feeder schools for ABA applicants. Retrieved from *https://www.lsac.org/lsacresources/data/top-240-feeder-schools.*

[8] Applicant totals include current students at the time of application as well as alumni who applied for fall admission during the cycle in which they were counted. Applicant data for 2011 includes applicants for the fall term and deferrals. Data for 2012-14 include applicants for all terms and deferrals. Data for 2015 and subsequent years include applicants for all terms and do not include deferrals.

[9] The number of students receiving bachelor's degrees was retrieved from the IPEDS Completions data files. Provisional release data were used for the 2015-16 academic year and final release data were used for all other academic years. Prior to 2011-12, IPEDS reported the total number of bachelor's degrees awarded, but not the number of bachelor's degree recipients. A multiplier was created for each school by calculating the median proportion of bachelor's degree recipients to first-major bachelor's degrees awarded between 2011-12 and 2014-15. An estimate for the number of bachelor's degree recipients in 2010-11 was created for each school by multiplying the number of first-major bachelor's degrees it awarded in 2010-11 by its multiplier. The median multiplier for all schools was 0.994. The number of first-major bachelor's degrees awarded for 2010-11 was retrieved from the IPEDS Completions data files.

[10] These data refer to the academic year which reflects the law school enrollment year.

The concentration of law school interest at the top feeder schools has declined since 2011.

Median applicant concentration declined among the top feeder schools, from 5.5 percent in 2011 to 3.8 percent in 2016 (Figure 1). In 2011, 53 schools had a 10 percent or higher rate of concentration; in 2016, that number declined to 14.

Figure 1: Median law school applicant concentration for top ABA applicant feeder schools, 2011 to 2016
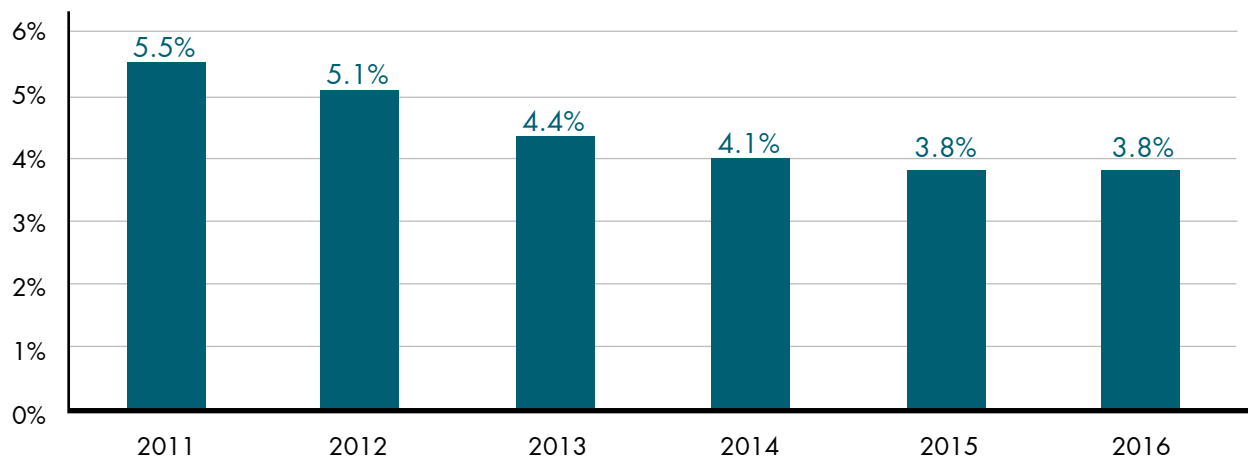
Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2011-2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2011-2016.

Applicant concentration increased at only seven schools between 2011 and 2016. The largest increase occurred at Suffolk University, where applicants per capita increased from 6.3 percent in 2011 to 7.5 percent in 2016.

Table 1: Schools where applicant concentration increased between 2011 and 2016

| School Name	Percentage Point Increase
Suffolk University	1.2
Hampton University*	0.8
American Public University System	0.8
City College-CUNY	0.5
Sam Houston State University	0.4
University of Baltimore	0.4
North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University	0.2

Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2011-2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2011-2016.

At six of these seven schools the increase in applicant concentration is due to an increase in the number of law school applicants. At Hampton University, however, the increase reflects a decline in bachelor's degree holders.

Applicant volume has declined despite an increase in the number of students receiving bachelor's degrees, indicating a lower concentration of law school interest among top feeder schools.

Bachelor's degree recipients from the top feeder schools increased between 2011 and 2016. The median increase in bachelor's degree recipients was 10.9 percent. Among the 233 schools analyzed, 202 graduated a higher number of students in 2016. However, the number of law school applicants decreased at 182 of those institutions and at 213 of the schools overall. The median change in law school applicants was minus 27.8 percent (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Median percent change in applicants, bachelor's degree recipients, and applicants per capita for the top ABA applicant feeder schools, 2011 to 2016
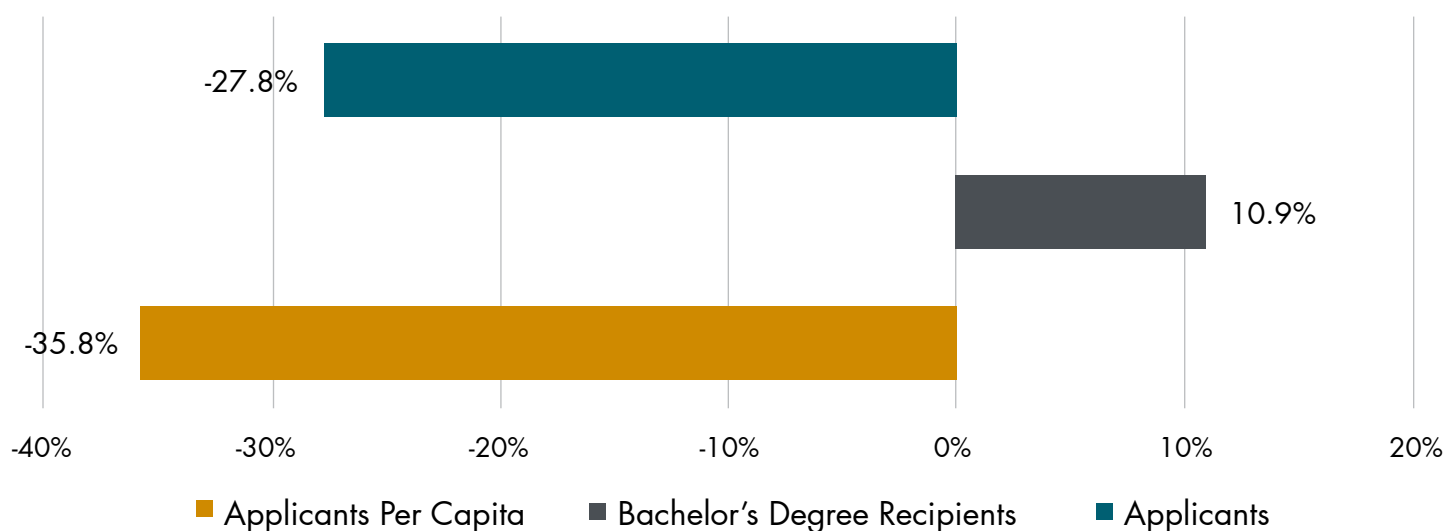
Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2011-2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2011-2016.

Feeder schools with the most law school applicants generally do not have the highest concentration of applicants.

Table 2 lists the top 10 feeder schools in terms of application volume. These schools tend to rank much lower when examined using the per capita quotient. For example, the University of Central Florida ranks 7th for applicants but 125th in applicant concentration, and Texas A&M University ranks 9th for applicants but 118th in applicant concentration.

Table 2: Top 10 ABA applicant feeder schools, 2016

School Name	Rank by Number of Applicants	Rank by Applicants per Capita	Number of Applicants	Applicants per Capita
University of California-Los Angeles	1	30	652	8.1%
The University of Texas at Austin	2	55	610	6.3%
Florida State University	3	48	593	7.1%
University of Florida	3	39	593	7.5%
Florida International University	5	63	529	5.9%
University of California-Berkeley	6	52	483	6.6%
University of Central Florida	7	125	463	3.7%
Arizona State University	8	77	419	5.0%
Texas A&M University-College Station	9	118	396	3.8%
Pennsylvania State University-University Park	10	119	380	3.7%

Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2016.

Table 3 lists the top 10 schools by applicant concentration. These schools tend to rank much lower in applicant volume: Morehouse College ranks 1st in concentration but 229th for applicants; Saint Mary's University, Texas ranks 8th in concentration but 216th for applicant volume.

Table 3: Top 10 ABA applicant per capita feeder schools, 2016

School Name	Rank by Number of Applicants	Rank by Applicants per Capita	Number of Applicants	Applicants per Capita
Morehouse College	229	1	54	16.4%
Spelman College	170	2	68	14.7%
Yale University	48	3	204	14.6%
Amherst College	201	4	62	14.4%
Hampton University	148	5	78	12.3%
Georgetown University	37	6	224	12.3%
Harvard University	40	7	220	12.2%
Saint Mary's University, Texas	216	8	57	11.7%
University of Chicago	69	9	165	11.3%
Princeton University	82	10	144	11.0%

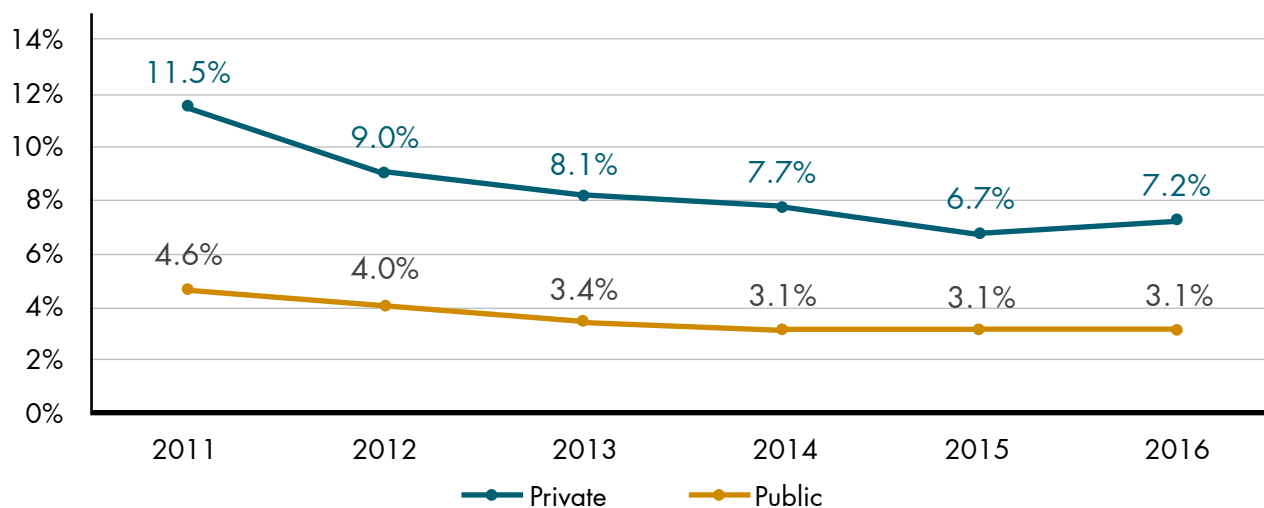Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2016.

Only two schools rank among the top 30 on both lists. University of California-Los Angeles ranks 1st for applicant volume and 30th in applicant concentration. George Washington University ranks 27th for applicant volume and 11th in applicant concentration.

Among the top feeder schools, public schools tend to have higher applicant volume; private schools tend to have higher applicant concentration.

Public schools yield more law school applicants than private schools. In fact, the top 10 feeder schools are all public universities. This finding is unsurprising due to the numeric differences in enrollment between the public and private institutions on the list. The median number of bachelor's degree recipients at public feeder schools was 4,340 in 2016, almost three times the median of 1,677 among private feeder schools.

Private schools had higher concentrations of applicant interest than public schools. The top 10 in applicant concentration are all private colleges and universities. In 2016, the top private feeder schools had a median applicant concentration of 7.2 percent, while public schools had a median rate of 3.1 percent. Private schools outpaced public schools in applicant concentration each cycle during the six-year period of analysis (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Median applicant concentration for top ABA applicant feeder schools by institution type, 2011 to 2016

Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2011-2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2011-2016.

Minority-serving institutions have some of the highest applicant per capita rates.

Despite representing only 21.9 percent of the schools analyzed, four of the ten feeder schools with the most concentrated applicant interest are MSIs.[11] These four schools include three HBCUs – Morehouse College, Spelman College, and Hampton University – and one Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) – Saint Mary's University, Texas.

Since 2011, Morehouse College and Spelman College have ranked among the top 10 in applicant concentration. Saint Mary's University, Texas has been in the top 10 since 2014, and Hampton University has been in the top 10 since 2015. In total, there are 51 MSIs among the 233 feeder schools analyzed. Of these 51 schools, 22 have applicant concentration rates above the median (3.8 percent). Eight of the 22 schools are HBCUs, eight are HSIs, six are Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander serving-institutions (AANAPISI), and one is a predominantly black institution (PBI).

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[11] Minority-serving institutions are comprised of historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), predominantly black institutions (PBI), Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI), tribal colleges or universities (TCU), Alaska Native-serving and Native Hawaiian-serving institutions (ANNH), Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-serving institutions (AANAPISI), and Native American-serving nontribal institutions (NASNTI). Data on minority-serving designations were retrieved from the U.S. Department of Education, College Scorecard. Retrieved from *https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/*.

Table 4: Minority-serving institutions with applicant per capita rate above the median

School Name	MSI Type	Applicants per Capita
Morehouse College	HBCU	16.4%
Spelman College	HBCU	14.7%
Hampton University	HBCU	12.3%
Saint Mary's University, Texas	HSI	11.7%
St. John's University-Queens	AANAPISI	9.9%
Howard University	HBCU	9.4%
John Jay College of Criminal Justice-CUNY	HSI	9.2%
Southern University-Baton Rouge	HBCU	8.7%
Saint Edward's University	HSI	7.7%
Florida International University	HSI	5.9%
North Carolina Central University	HBCU	5.2%
University of California-Riverside	HSI & AANAPISI	4.9%
Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	HBCU	4.9%
University of California-Santa Barbara	HSI	4.7%
University of San Francisco	AANAPISI	4.7%
University of Nevada-Las Vegas	AANAPISI	4.6%
North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University	HBCU	4.6%
University of Maryland-College Park	AANAPISI	4.5%
Georgia State University	PBI	4.4%
University of New Mexico	HSI	4.3%
University of California-Irvine	AANAPISI	4.2%
Nova Southeastern University	HSI	4.1%

Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2016.

Between 2011 and 2016, applicant concentration decreased less at schools with higher proportions of black and Hispanic bachelor's degree recipients.

The overall median percent change in applicant concentration between 2011 and 2016 was minus 35.8 percent. However, feeder schools with higher proportions of black and Hispanic bachelor's degree recipients experienced smaller percent decreases in applicant concentration compared to other schools. Schools where 30 percent or more of bachelor's degree recipients were black experienced a median percent decrease of 24.2 percent (Figure 4). Schools where 30 percent or more of bachelor's degree recipients were Hispanic experienced a median decrease of 19.8 percent (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Median percent change in applicant concentration among top feeder schools by proportion of black and Hispanic bachelor's degree recipients, 2011 to 2016
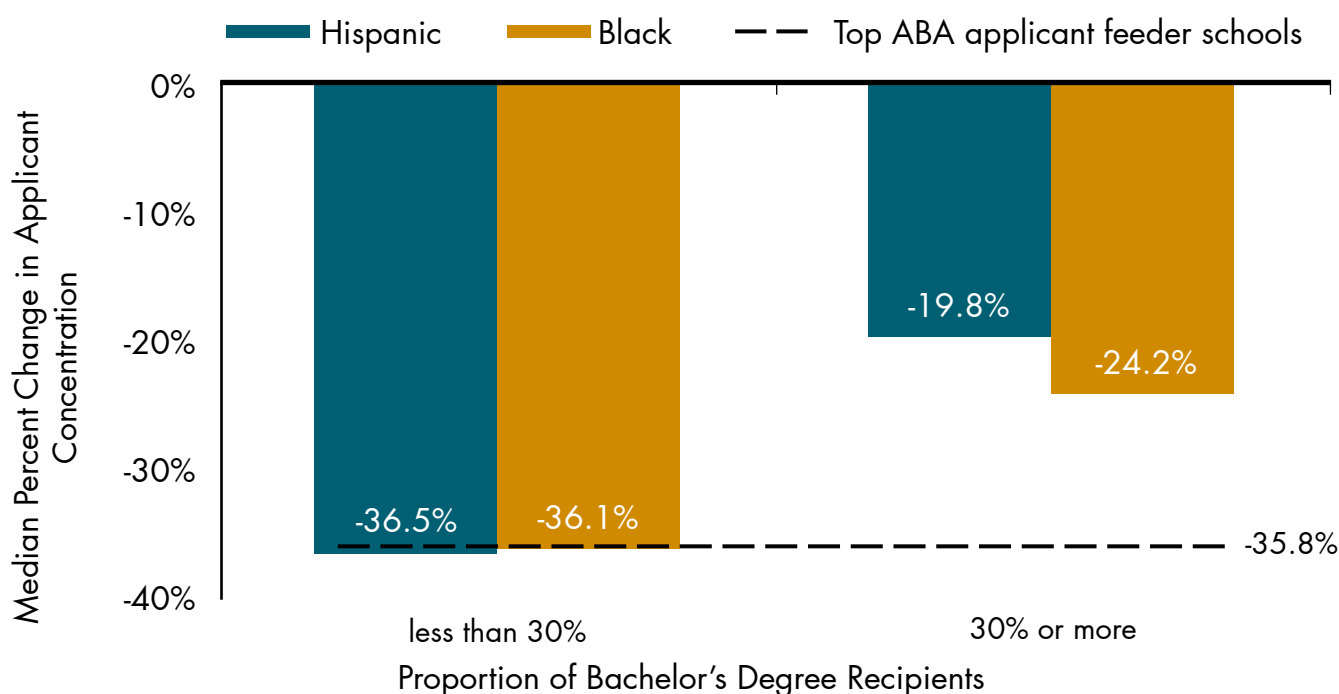
Sources: LSAC, Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants, 2011-2016; NCES, IPEDS Completions data, 2011-2016.

Applicant concentration fell roughly 36 percent among the top feeder schools between 2011 and 2016. This trend is a result of both the well-documented decline in law school applicants and the increase in bachelor's degree recipients. Schools with the highest concentration of law school applicants tend to be private institutions with relatively low applicant volume. Consequently, low applicant volume could mask robust legal education pipelines and fruitful settings for law school recruitment efforts.

Minority-serving institutions had some of the highest levels of applicant concentration. Morehouse College, an HBCU, had the highest applicant concentration of all 233 feeder schools analyzed. Three HBCUs and one HSI were among the top 10. Moreover, the data suggest that applicant concentration has remained more stable at feeder schools serving larger proportions of black and Hispanic students. Although applicant concentration declined at all but seven of the feeder institutions, schools where 30 percent or more of bachelor's degree recipients were black or Hispanic experienced median percent decreases that were substantially less than the overall median.

The decline in law school applicants has made tracking applicant trends more important for law schools seeking to adapt their recruitment efforts to current realities. Core to these considerations are issues of diversity and ensuring that legal education becomes an inclusive pipeline into the legal profession.

The LSAC *Top 240 Feeder Schools for ABA Applicants* list is a useful resource for identifying schools yielding the highest applicant volume. This report adds nuance by analyzing applicant concentration among the schools on the list. Calculating applicant concentration – applicant volume relative to bachelor's degree recipients – provides law schools with another tool in identifying schools whose students may show significant legal education interest.

Students at schools with higher concentrations of applicants may be more engaged with pre-law programming and more receptive to law school recruitment efforts. Therefore, efforts to partner with these schools could prove beneficial. The diversity at these schools provides an additional imperative and great potential to diversify legal education and the legal profession. There may also be opportunities for law schools to increase applicant volume at large feeder schools with low applicant concentration and regain applicant volume lost during the declines experienced since 2011.

In the end, this report is intended to provide nuanced general and school-level insight on law school application trends, while also helping inform law school recruitment efforts – particularly those premised on increasing diversity.

Appendix

Top 100 ABA applicant per capita feeder schools, 2016

Rank	School Name	Applicants per Capita
1	Morehouse College*	16.4%
2	Spelman College*	14.7%
3	Yale University	14.6%
4	Amherst College	14.4%
5	Hampton University*	12.3%
6	Georgetown University	12.3%
7	Harvard University	12.2%
8	Saint Mary's University, Texas*	11.7%
9	University of Chicago	11.3%
10	Princeton University	11.0%
11	George Washington University	10.7%
12	Barnard College-Columbia University	10.6%
13	Dartmouth College	10.4%
14	Colgate University	10.0%
15	St. John's University-Queens*	9.9%
16	Vanderbilt University	9.8%
17	American University	9.6%
18	Howard University*	9.4%
19	Duke University	9.2%
20	John Jay College of Criminal Justice-CUNY*	9.2%
21	Wesleyan University	8.9%
22	Brown University	8.8%
23	SUNY at Buffalo Center	8.8%
24	Southern University-Baton Rouge*	8.7%
25	University of Miami	8.6%
26	Northwestern University	8.3%
27	University of Baltimore	8.3%
28	College of William and Mary	8.3%
29	Emory University	8.1%
30	University of California-Los Angeles	8.1%
31	University of Pennsylvania	8.1%
32	College of the Holy Cross	7.9%

33	Tulane University	7.8%
34	Pepperdine University	7.7%
35	Saint Edward's University*	7.7%
36	Tufts University of Arts & Sciences	7.7%
37	Southern Methodist University	7.6%
38	Catholic University of America	7.6%
39	University of Florida	7.5%
40	University of Notre Dame	7.5%
41	Suffolk University	7.5%
42	Cornell University-NY	7.5%
43	Boston College	7.4%
44	Columbia University-Columbia College	7.3%
45	Loyola University	7.2%
46	Brandeis University	7.2%
47	Loyola Marymount University	7.2%
48	Florida State University	7.1%
49	Wake Forest University	7.0%
50	Rice University	6.9%
51	University of Southern California	6.9%
52	University of California-Berkeley	6.6%
53	Baylor University	6.5%
54	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	6.5%
55	The University of Texas at Austin	6.3%
56	University of Virginia	6.2%
57	Stanford University	6.2%
58	Hofstra University	6.1%
59	Texas Christian University	6.1%
60	Louisiana State University-Baton Rouge	6.0%
61	Washington University	6.0%
62	University of San Diego	5.9%
63	Florida International University*	5.9%
64	Loyola University Chicago	5.9%
65	Villanova University	5.8%
66	Marquette University	5.6%
67	Seton Hall University	5.5%
68	North Carolina Central University*	5.2%
69	University of Denver	5.2%
70	SUNY at Albany	5.2%
71	SUNY College at Geneseo	5.2%
72	University of Oklahoma	5.2%
73	SUNY at Binghamton Center	5.2%
74	Gonzaga University	5.1%

75	Chapman University	5.0%
76	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	5.0%
77	Arizona State University	5.0%
78	Boston University	5.0%
79	University of California-Riverside*	4.9%
80	Santa Clara University	4.9%
81	Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University*	4.9%
82	University of Georgia	4.8%
83	Johns Hopkins University	4.8%
84	University of California-Santa Barbara*	4.7%
85	University of San Francisco*	4.7%
86	University of South Carolina-Columbia	4.7%
87	University of Nevada-Las Vegas*	4.6%
88	North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University*	4.6%
89	Brigham Young University	4.6%
90	University of Maryland-College Park*	4.5%
91	The University of Montana	4.4%
92	Syracuse University	4.4%
93	Georgia State University*	4.4%
94	Fordham University-Fordham College at Rosehill	4.4%
95	University of New Mexico*	4.3%
96	University of Wisconsin-Madison	4.3%
97	University of Mississippi	4.3%
98	The University of Alabama	4.3%
99	University of Pittsburgh	4.2%
100	University of California-San Diego	4.2%

Minority-serving institution (MSI)

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