"If You're On Time, You're Late":

Law School Application Timing Among Historically Underrepresented Applicants

AccessLex
INSTITUTE®

Sherrie K. Godette, Ph.D., K. L. Risman,
Tiffane Cochran, Baylee Jenkins

INTRODUCTION:

The "not so big" secret of college and graduate school admissions is that applicants who apply early are more likely to receive an offer of admission than those who apply closer to the final deadline.[1] The same is true for law school applicants. Most law schools employ rolling admission strategies, which means they review and make decisions on applications as soon as they are completed. Consequently, fewer and fewer admission slots are available as the application deadline approaches. Whether law school applicants simply apply early or participate in a formal early admission program (i.e., early action or early decision), the early application environment is generally less crowded, and therefore less competitive, than later in the application cycle.[2]

Prior research suggests that the rate of admission for early applicants is at least 30 percent higher than regular applicants at the most selective colleges and at least five to 10 percentage points higher at other early decision schools.[3] Higher education institutions may use early application programs and deadlines as strategies to select an academically strong student body early on and increase their competitive edge in the regular application pool season.[4] In the case of early application programs, early decision applicants tend to rely less on financial aid, so institutions may leverage these binding decision programs early in the cycle to hedge demand on their budgets later.[5]

Who Applies Early vs. Late?

Applicants who identify as underrepresented people of color (uPOC) or socioeconomically disadvantaged are less likely to apply early to law school or utilize formal early decision programs.[6] Research also shows that applicants who grew up in low-income households, have financial need, come from less affluent high schools and communities, or are first-generation college students are also less likely to apply early.[7] When participants submit applications later, their admission chances may be lower simply due to the timing of their application rather than their qualifications. In other words, applicants who identify as uPOC or low-socioeconomic status (SES) may inadvertently self-select into a more competitive admission environment which ultimately reduces their likelihood of receiving an admission offer.[8]

Multiple authors have discussed the reasons why applicants who identify as uPOC or low-SES apply later in the admission cycle. Early applicants have been described as those "less subject to the inconveniences of applying early."[9] Inconveniences of applying early include having less time to retake admission tests to improve a low score, requesting and receiving letters of recommendation in a timely manner, and completing unfamiliar application components on a compressed timeline. Applicants who identify as uPOC or low-SES are also less likely to have access to the social and navigational capital that bring ease to completing these components of the application cycle and allow them to be completed quickly.

Applicants who identify as uPOC or low-SES are also more likely to be a first-generation college student or graduate, and attend a high school within less affluent, under-resourced communities.[10] First-generation students do not have a family legacy of college or law school attendance and may lack access to active and knowledgeable pre-law advisors — which both contribute to an applicant's likelihood to apply early.[11]

Law school applicants who identify as uPOC or low-SES are also more likely to experience financial constraints that delay cost-dependent components of the admission process (e.g., application and exam fees) and influence application strategy. Students who need to consider financial aid in their higher education decisions are inconvenienced by early deadlines (whether formal or informal) and risk limiting their capacity to maximize financial aid offers.[12] Applicants who apply through early decision programs are less likely to be offered any meaningful amount of financial support, if offered any at all.[13] Students from low-income households have higher demand and need for financial aid, and thus benefit from the opportunity to compare admission and scholarship offers, which is less likely achieved via early decision programs.

Study Purpose

The purpose of this brief is to further explore the relationship between application timing and law school admission outcomes, and factors associated with application timing decisions among law school applicants who identify as uPOC and low-SES. Our analyses address the following research questions:

1. To what extent is the timing of applicants' first law school application associated with receipt of a law school admission?

2. To what extent is the timing of applicants' first law school application associated with receipt of a law school scholarship?

3. What, if any, applicant characteristics (e.g., knowledge of the application cycle, prior experience applying to law school) are associated with early/on-time application to law school?

4. What application process engagement strategies (e.g., timing of first Law School Admission Test (LSAT), scope of applications submitted) are associated with early/on-time application to law school?

5. To what extent are programmatic interventions associated with early/on-time application to law school?

Data and Methods

The current brief draws on multiple data sources[14] to explore application timing among a subset of LexPreLaw participants who sought law school admission in Fall 2022 and Fall 2023. LexPreLaw is a pathway program, created by AccessLex Institute®, designed to support law school applicants with potential for law school success but based on their past academic performance, are not likely to gain admission without intervention. The program employs a cohort-based approach[15] to participant selection, targeting applicants who identify as a member of a minoritized racial/ethnic or socioeconomically disadvantaged group and score at or below the 25th percentile on the LSAT. Programming begins in June annually, roughly 15 months before participants aim to matriculate into law school. Participants receive multiple interventions during the program including a free LSAT prep course from Kaplan, access to exclusive networking and informational events, and financial assistance to offset the cost of applying. Some participants receive individualized admission counseling during the application cycle.

This study employs a mixed methods approach, using both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate our research questions. Quantitative data is sourced from the LexPreLaw application, a pre-intervention assessment of existing knowledge of the law school admissions process administered to LexPreLaw participants, and a monthly survey of participants' law school application activities. Our analysis explores research questions among LexPreLaw participants in the 2021 and 2022 program cycles who reported submitting at least one law school application. Of the 481 total participants in 2021 and 2022, 186 (39%) reported submitting a law school application. Our analysis exclusively examines these 186 law school applicants.

We use descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyze quantitative data. Descriptive statistics provide a snapshot of applicants' demographic background and other characteristics. Logistic regression models are used to examine the extent to which applicant characteristics predict the timing of a participant's first application to law school. We report the results as differences in an applicant's predicted probability of applying to law school late versus early or on-time. Additionally, we explore the extent to which application timing explains application outcomes (i.e., received an offer of admission to law school and received a scholarship offer from a law school).

We generated qualitative data from two rounds of semi-structured interviews with 20 purposefully selected LexPreLaw participants. Our interview sample includes 10 participants who applied early or on-time and 10 participants who applied late. We derive major themes from the interview responses after completing a thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Appendix A provides a full description of each data source and Appendix B describes participants selected for an interview.

Sample Demographics and Characteristics

Sample demographics and characteristics are summarized in Table 1. All LexPreLaw participants self-identified as a member of a racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic group that is underrepresented in the legal profession. This means that 100% of LexPreLaw participants, and every participant included in our analyses, identified as: Black or African American, Hispanic or Latine, or Multiracial; a Pell Grant recipient; a child of a parent who immigrated to the U.S.; or a first-generation college graduate. The sample is predominantly comprised of people who self-identified as women and most are age 25 or older. Most applicants had some prior engagement with the law school application process, having either taken the LSAT or previously applied to law school before participating in the LexPreLaw program. Most applicants were also employed full-time when they entered the program.

Table 1. *Sample Demographics and Characteristics (n = 186)*

	2021	2022	Total
Underrepresented Person of Color	100 (93%)	67 (87%)	167 (90%)
Received Pell Grant/Parents Immigrated/First-Gen College Grad	96 (88%)	68 (88%)	164 (88%)
Identified as a Woman	81 (74%)	60 (78%)	141 (75%)
Age – 25 or older	70 (64%)	47 (61%)	117 (63%)
Employed Full-Time*		44 (64%)	44 (64%)
Took LSAT and/or Previously Applied to Law School	90 (83%)	62 (81%)	152 (82%)
Application Timing Intervention	58 (53%)	51 (66%)	109 (59%)
n	**109**	**77**	**186**

*Only asked in Year Three.

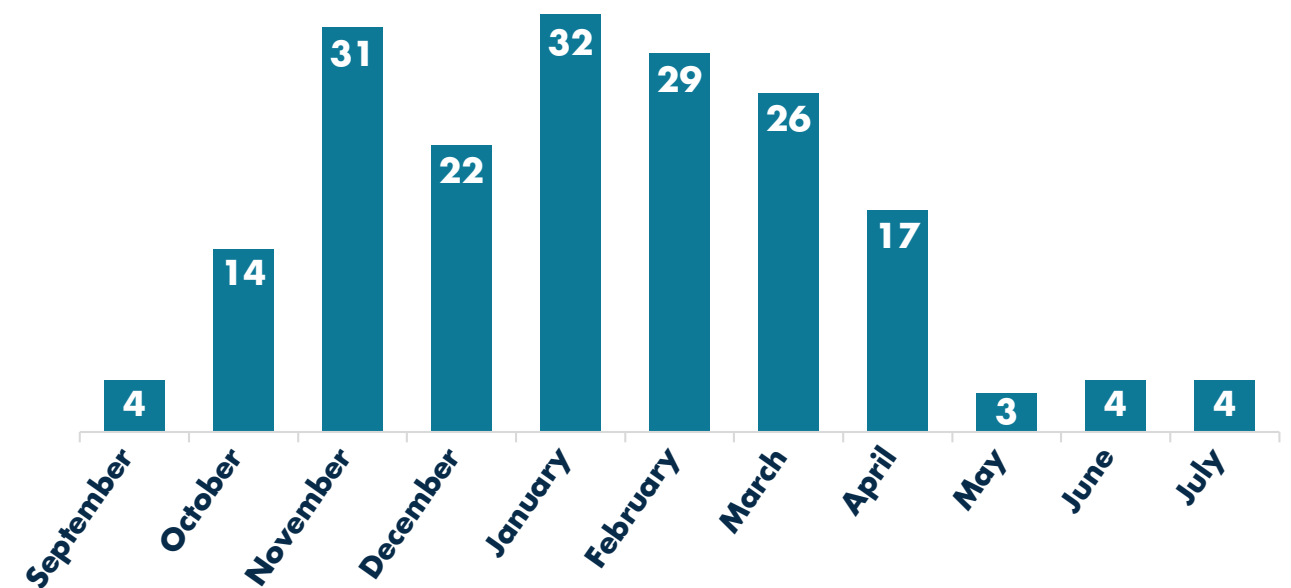Figure 1. *Number of First Applications Submitted by Month*

Study Findings

A summary description of application timing is provided in Table 2. Most participants (68%) completed their application for admission early or on-time.[16] Figure 1 shows the number of applicants who submitted their first application over the course of the application cycle by month. Application volume peaked each cycle in November and January and diminished through April before almost completely dropping off in May.

Table 2. *Summary of Application Timing*

	Total
Early/On-Time	127 (68%)
Late	59 (32%)
n	186

Application Timing and Admission and Scholarship Offers

Prior research suggests a clear link between early application and likelihood of receiving an offer of admission.[17] Our findings affirm that applicants who apply early or on-time (before February 1) are more likely to receive an offer of admission than those who apply late (on or after February 1). The observed relationship is statistically significant.[18] The predicted likelihood of a late applicant receiving a law school admission offer is 24% compared to 40% for early/on-time applicants (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. **Predicted Probability of Law School Admission by Application Timing (n =186).**

Early/On-Time Applicants 40%

Late Applicants 24%

On the other hand, this analysis does not find a meaningful relationship between application timing and receipt of a law school scholarship. The difference in the predicted probability of receiving a scholarship given the timing of the application is just 2% (see Figure 3). Late applicants who are admitted to a law school have a 69% likelihood of receiving a scholarship offer and early/on-time applicants who are admitted have a 71% likelihood.

Additional exploration of the relationship between application timing and scholarships is displayed in Table 3. On-time applicants were most likely to receive a scholarship alongside their admission, followed by late applicants. Very early applicants (applied before December 1) were least likely to receive a law school scholarship. It's important to recognize the limitations of this small sample of admitted students. Small sample sizes do not allow us to fully examine the relationship between application time and scholarship awards. Our findings may suggest that while the strategy of applying early could increase an applicant's likelihood of receiving an admission offer, it does not necessarily increase their likelihood of receiving a scholarship.

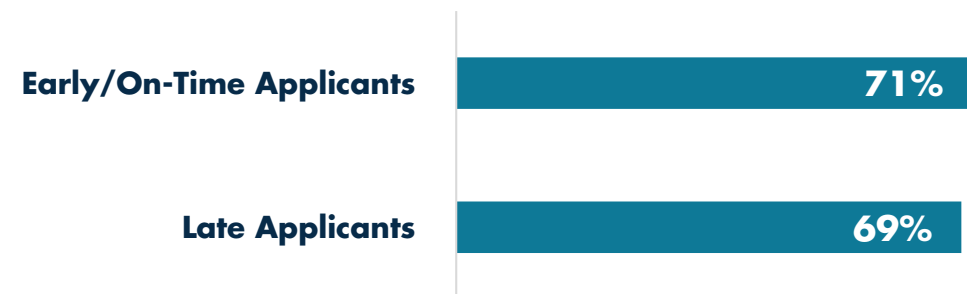## Figure 3. Predicted Probability of Law School Scholarship Based on Application Timing

Early/On-Time Applicants — 71%

Late Applicants — 69%

Table 3. Description of Scholarship Award by Application Timing

	Early	On-Time	Late
Received Scholarship	64%	74%	71%
Did Not Receive Scholarship	36%	26%	29%
n	28	23	14

Timing of the LSAT

The timing of participants' first LSAT after joining LexPreLaw is significantly associated with law school application timing. Figure 4 shows the predicted probability of applying late given the timing of an applicant's first LSAT exam during the program. The predicted likelihood of applying late is 63% for applicants who sat for the LSAT late (after January 1) compared to only 26% for early or on-time (before January 1) applicants. This relationship is intuitive — applicants who take the LSAT later are also likely to submit their applications later in the admission cycle.

Figure 4. Predicted Probability of Applying Late Based on LSAT Timing

Early/On-Time LSAT	26%
Late LSAT	63%
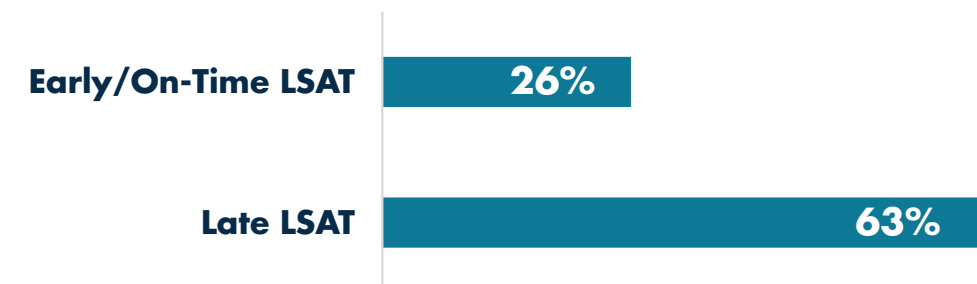
Findings from interviews with LexPreLaw participants provide additional nuance for understanding this relationship. Of the 10 applicants interviewed who applied late, seven attributed their delayed application, at least in part, to the timing of their LSAT. Participants described "wanting to study more to get a better score" or "feeling like [they] needed to get a better score to apply." One participant described having severe test anxiety her first time taking the exam and had to "buckle down and focus on weaknesses, and re-test in February." One participant shared, *"I kept pushing it back and pushing it back ... I was scared and it was self-sabotage."* One late applicant mentioned that they delayed taking the LSAT because they could not pay the test fee at the time of registration.
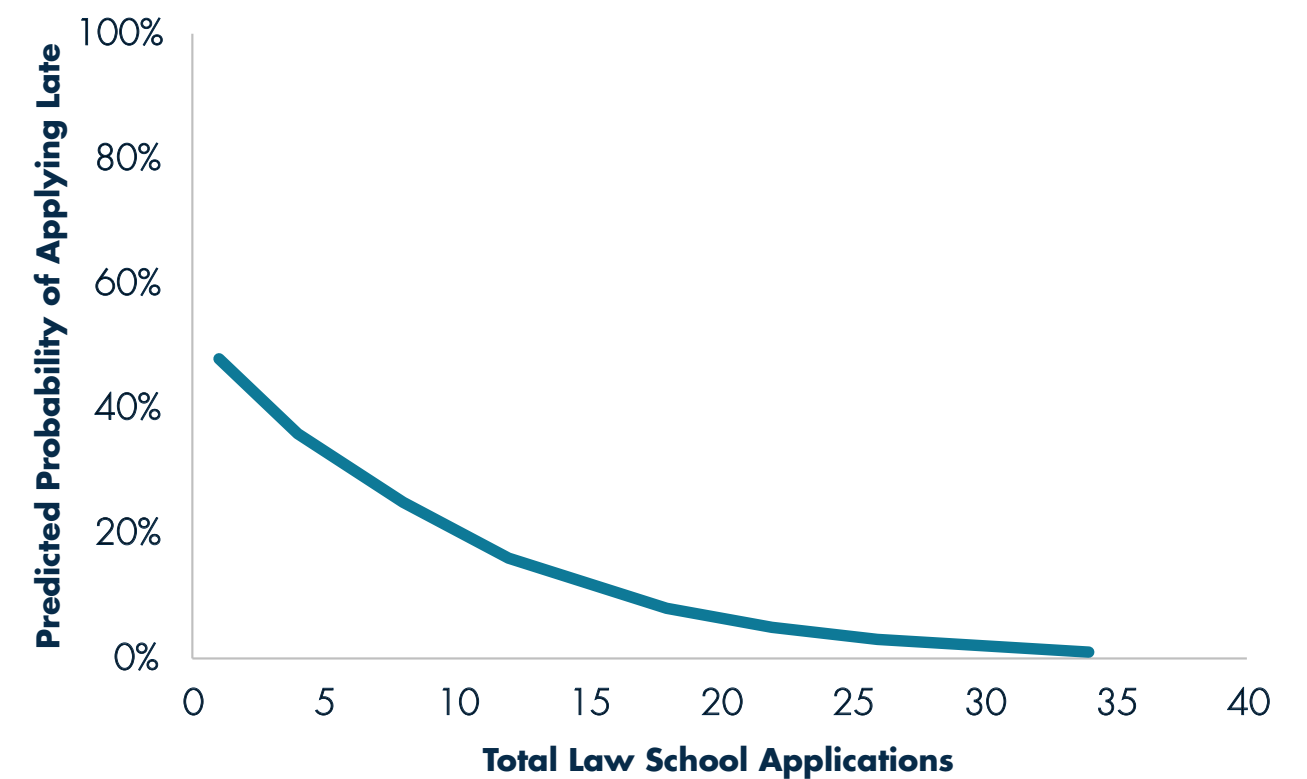
Factors Associated with Early/On-Time Application

Our research explored what, if any, applicant characteristics (including prior achievement, existing knowledge of the law school application cycle, or prior experience applying to law school), process engagement strategies (e.g., timing of first LSAT, scope of applications submitted), or programmatic interventions are associated with law school application timing. Our findings indicate that the timing of a participant's first LSAT during the program, total number of applications submitted, and exposure to an intervention designed to encourage early/on-time application are associated with the timing of law school application submission. Additionally, embodiment of navigational capital and how applicants respond to "headwinds" in the application cycle also appear to explain early/on-time application to law school.

Breadth of Application Submissions and Application Strategy

Application timing is also associated with the total number of applications submitted. Applying late has a negative, statistically significant relationship with the number of law school applications submitted. On average, late applicants submitted two fewer applications than early/on-time applicants. As shown in Figure 5, the predicted probability of an applicant applying late decreases with more applications submitted.

Figure 5. Predicted Probability of Applying Late Based on Total Applications Submitted

By comparison, among the 10 applicants interviewed who applied early or on-time, just three mentioned LSAT-related delays. One on-time taker noted needing to retake the LSAT to improve their score, another shared they retook the exam due to an issue with an on-site proctor, and the third said their score report was delivered later than expected. However, each of these participants planned to take the LSAT very early (in August or September) and, despite delays, still submitted their applications on-time. These findings highlight the importance of advanced planning and allowing for potential LSAT delays when devising an application strategy.

Again, interviews with late applicants provide further insight into this quantitative finding. Among the 10 late applicants interviewed, two participants submitted just two applications and four submitted just one application; the other four submitted three or more. Some of those who submitted two or fewer applications did so intentionally. For instance, one applicant was geographically bound to a particular city/region. This participant shared: *"I only had two schools in mind. One is five minutes from my job and the other is one and a half hours away."* In this instance, the applicant based the timing of their applications solely on the published deadlines for the two schools in their area, demonstrating an incomplete understanding of the importance of applying earlier in the admission cycle.[19] Unfortunately, they were not admitted to either school.

Other late applicants shared they intended to apply to additional schools but ran out of time to submit more applications. For example: *"… I tested again in June and didn't receive my score in time to apply everywhere I wanted to."* This participant reported first taking the LSAT in March of their anticipated matriculation year — several months beyond the recommended timing when seeking fall admission.

Just two early/on-time applicants discussed the number of applications they submitted and both contextualized their experience as stressful and difficult. One participant said, *"It was stressful applying to so many schools. Different applications had different essays and specific aspects … it was a lot of work. I didn't have a life for a couple months."* This participant went on to describe how essential time management and prioritization were to their overall application strategy.
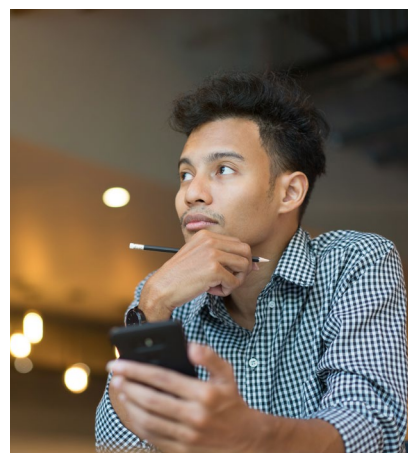
Navigational Capital and Headwinds

Additional content from the interviews provided more insight into participants' decisions around application timing. Early applicants more frequently demonstrated knowledge of the key tactics underlying an effective law school application strategy. Those who applied late more frequently cited incomplete or inaccurate understanding of sound application strategy, including ideal timelines and submission processes. For example, prospective students are not always aware that they may submit their application before taking the LSAT or receiving their score report. In the interviews, one late applicant shared, *"The LSAT held me up this year … I didn't know I could submit my application without the LSAT. It would have been earlier if I knew that."*

By comparison, an early applicant shared, *"I made sure I got everything [in as] early as possible … because I know that the earlier you apply the better your chances, but the later you apply, you worsen your chances."* Another early applicant said, *"I had heard that earlier is better, especially if you're a little under the medians, from people who had gone to law school and from admission recruiters."* The latter quote especially highlights the advantages of having social and navigational capital when applying to law school.

Our discussions with interview participants revealed several differences in mindsets in late applicants compared to those of early/on-time applicants. Participants who applied early or on-time identified factors such as time management skills and intrinsic motivation as primary drivers of their optimal application timing. Among late applicants, four out of 10 attributed their poorly timed applications to stress, anxiety, or fear that one or more of their application components was not strong enough.

Although early applicants also discussed experiencing stress during the application process, they tended to qualify their experiences with a positive outlook or overall confidence in their capabilities. For example, one participant who applied early and was denied said, *"If you are motivated, you'll go for it."* In contrast, a late applicant who was denied during the program said, *"I didn't get in the first time, so I was discouraged and felt like I needed to keep improving and keep having people look at my materials."* This applicant described waiting until their materials were as perfect as possible before submitting. After extra studying and taking the LSAT in January, their materials were ultimately submitted in February. These two quotes highlight attitudinal differences in how early/on-time and late applicants approached the process, which could partially explain why those who applied on-time were more likely to receive an admission offer.

When asked whether they personally set a deadline for applying to law school, four out of five early/on-time applicants reported doing so compared to only two out of five late applicants. One late applicant stated, *"The schools I applied to have rolling deadlines, so no [I did not have a personal deadline]."* This applicant demonstrated the same lack of understanding of how deadlines function in the application cycle as described above. Further, they did not indicate an awareness of the importance of applying early during their interview.

Returning to the notion of "headwinds" during the application cycle, six late applicants noted the impact of work, family, or health circumstances during the application cycle compared to four early/on-time applicants. Again, contrasting responses to life challenges were observed between late and early/on-time applicants. One late applicant shared, *"Last year, I pretty much gave up on it. There was too much family stuff going on and the cost was challenging."* Another late applicant explained, *"I wanted to complete [my applications] by November, but I was late because I had to work during the LSAT prep course."* The latter quote recalls the role of the LSAT in overall application timing. It is in stark contrast to this explanation from an on-time applicant: *"The LSAT prep course gave us everything to be successful, we just had to commit the time. I take care of my grandparents, so I would just log on there."* All people — and all law school applicants — face competing demands for their time. Early applicants were not exceptionally insulated from headwinds such as work, family, or health demands. However, their responses and explanations suggest they found ways to manage these demands so that they had minimal impact on their ability to execute a sound law school application strategy. They tended to downplay negative influences and emphasize their own time management skills, dedication to their path, and persistence in the face of headwinds.

Targeted Interventions

As part of the LexPreLaw program, some participants in our sample were exposed to interventions specifically designed to encourage early or on-time application submission. Some participants received admission counseling, wherein they were coached to follow a timeline of tasks that, if completed on-time, would result in early or on-time application submission. Some participants received a financial incentive to apply early. Eligible participants were awarded an Amazon e-gift card if they took the LSAT and submitted five applications by one of two specified deadlines.[20] Some LexPreLaw participants received both timing interventions while others received neither.

Our findings suggest that participants who received one or both interventions were significantly less likely to apply late. Applicants who received no timing intervention have a 21% greater probability of applying late versus early/on-time (see Figure 6). This suggests that receiving at least one of either intervention was successful at encouraging on-time application to law school. Due to our small sample size, we are unable to run an analysis to evaluate each intervention separately. However, our findings provide firm support for the effectiveness of bolstering the capacities of applicants who identify as uPOC or low-SES backgrounds with financial, social, and cultural resources to apply earlier in the admission cycle.

Figure 6. Predicted Probability of Applying Late Based on Timing Intervention Received

Received Timing Intervention 23%

Did Not Receive Timing Intervention 44%
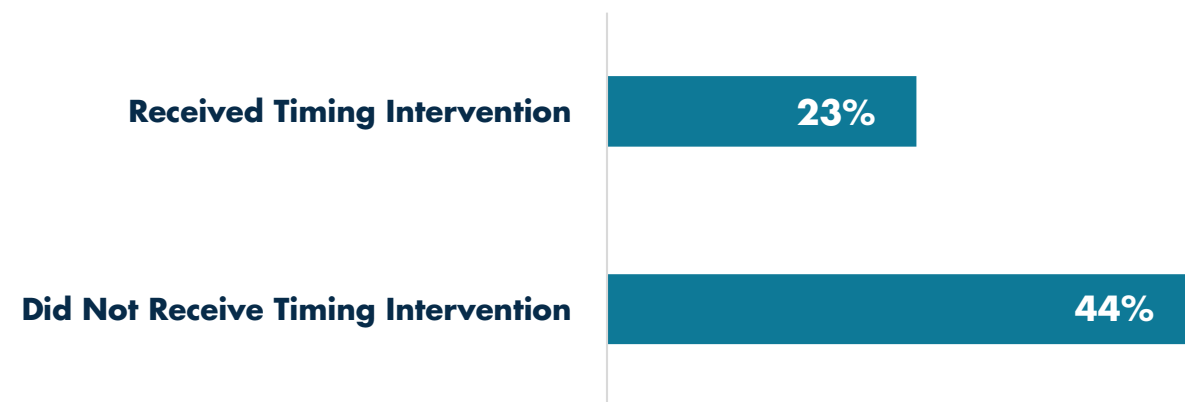
Factors Not Associated with Late Application to Law School

Our findings indicate that prior experience in the law school application process, highest LSAT score percentile, and pre-existing knowledge of the application cycle are not statistically associated with timing of first law school application. Participants who entered the program with some demonstrated prior interest in law school admission — either an existing LSAT score or a previous admission attempt — were as likely as those without prior experience to apply late or early/on-time.

Participants' highest LSAT score percentile and pre-existing knowledge of the application process were also not associated with application timing. Given the relationship between LSAT timing and application timing, it is surprising that a similar relationship is not observed for highest LSAT score percentile and application timing. However, it could be that due to the relatively low LSAT scores observed among the LexScholars participants, there was not sufficient variation to observe a meaningful relationship. Likewise, the latter finding may seem counterintuitive, as participants who entered the program with greater knowledge may be expected to be more successful in devising and executing an effective application strategy. However, it may be the case that the individual items included in the knowledge scale used to measure knowledge of the application process (see Appendix A) simply do not capture participants' ability to *implement* an effective application strategy. We discuss this and other findings below.
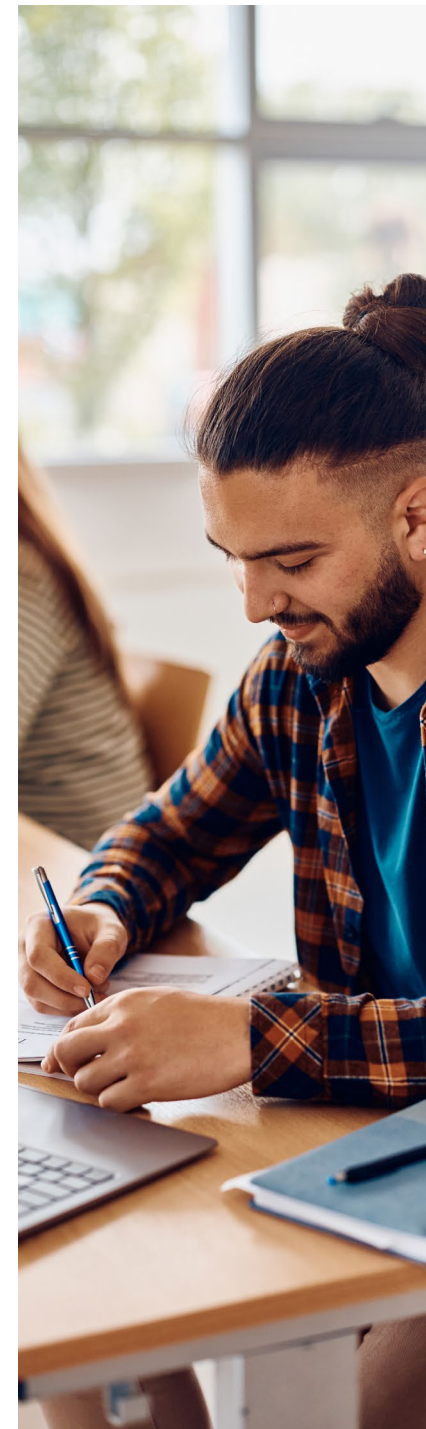
Discussion

Our findings underscore the importance of executing an effective application strategy and submitting applications early in the process to increase one's likelihood of law school admission. This is particularly important for historically marginalized applicants and those with relatively low standardized test scores. Prior research and findings from multiple years of LexPreLaw suggest late applicants are less likely to receive a law school admission offer even when their prior achievement is comparable to those who applied earlier in the cycle.

The most prominent finding to emerge from our analysis of application timing among LexPreLaw participants — who are all from underrepresented racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic backgrounds — is the primacy of LSAT timing as a key determinant of overall application timing. This is the strongest relationship observed in our quantitative analyses and was the most frequent theme to emerge from our interviews with participants. Even early/on-time applicants noted their LSAT timing was a key factor in their application timing. These findings are consistent with other prior research which notes that standardized exams are the primary barrier to graduate school application submission among applicants who identify as uPOC.[21] More research is needed to fully understand the LSAT timing decisions of applicants represented in the current sample. Our findings suggest that applicants' study habits, test readiness, test anxiety, financial resources, and general knowledge of admission policies and procedures each play a role in when they decide to take the LSAT.

We also find that differential mindsets and access to navigational capital distinguish early/on-time and late applicants. Early/on-time applicants were more likely to reference their own internal resources, such as motivation or persistence, as positively impacting their application process while late applicants were more likely to reference debilitating impacts of "headwinds" in the domains of work, health, and family. Early/on-time applicants were also more likely to recall behaviors or influences which suggest embodiment of navigational capital while late applicants were more likely to assert misguided information about the application process or otherwise demonstrate incomplete understanding of the law school admission ecosystem.

These observations are of nuance in how individuals arrive at the application process. Even in our relatively homogenous sample of law school applicants, different life circumstances and resource capacities result in different behaviors and outcomes. No law school or pathway program can completely resolve headwinds, nor can these entities substantially address major personality or dispositional traits. Our findings do suggest, however, that targeted intervention is effective in encouraging sound, well-informed application tactics among uPOC and low-SES law school applicants. Active intervention is key, as findings also indicate that simply having prior experience with the application process or having some knowledge of key parts of the application cycle do not necessarily translate to implementing an effective application strategy.

Early application timing is just one component of a well-designed application strategy; optimizing the number of applications submitted or positioning oneself for the best odds of admission when limited to one or few law schools is another component, among others. Participants who applied late also applied to fewer schools overall, further diminishing their admission odds.[22] Overall, our research highlights how an ineffective application strategy is the outcome of multiple ill-informed decisions made along the way — when to take the LSAT, when to apply, where to apply, and how many applications to submit.

Recommendations

To better equip law school applicants from uPOC or low-SES communities with the knowledge to execute an effective law school application strategy, law schools and other legal education stakeholders should consider the following actions:

- Create and promote resources and tools that describe and encourage effective application strategies.

    Our findings highlight how knowledge, or lack thereof, precedes and determines applicant behaviors. Knowing this, we were encouraged to find that the LexPreLaw program interventions worked to encourage early application submission. Beyond efforts to increase applicants' LSAT scores, endeavoring to optimize application timing may be the next best option to improve applicants' odds of receiving an offer of law school admission and a scholarship award. Effective mentoring and interventions will emphasize the importance of each step that culminates in applying to law school on-time, including engaging with recommenders early; preparing and sitting early for the LSAT; understanding unique requirements of each law school; drafting and revising application materials; and applying to as many schools as possible.

    There are several resources and tools from reputable organizations, including AccessLex Institute, that are available to support aspiring lawyers in submitting their law school applications early or on-time. These include Ask EDNA!® — The Education Network at AccessLex — and the Law School Admission Council's (LSAC) LawHub. Academic, career, and pre-law advisors can provide or direct students to such resources, keeping in mind that simply having knowledge of the law school application process does not necessarily translate into someone's ability to actualize effective navigation of that process. This study and our experience in the larger evaluation of LexPreLaw[23] affirm the particular importance of and preference for resources that provide timelines, "to-do" lists, and related tools offering a clear structure for seeking law school admission.

- Remove barriers to timely LSAT testing and score submission.

    Currently, law schools are required to admit applicants via an admission test or other ABA-approved means. As a result, taking the LSAT[24] is a critical component of the law school admission process for most law school applicants. Although LSAC, the creator and administrator of the test, significantly expanded accessibility of the LSAT by providing more frequent test dates, remote and in-person proctoring options, fee waivers, and free LSAT prep, our research indicates that uPOC and low-SES applicants continue to face hurdles when attempting to register for and take the LSAT in a timely manner. These hurdles include exam fees, reaching the maximum number of allowable LSAT attempts[25], and financing the number of attempts necessary to earn a favorable score. To further address these barriers, individuals and organizations supporting and advising uPOC and socioeconomically disadvantaged applicants should ensure they are aware of the financial supports available to help cover or subsidize exam fees, as well as the appeals process for seeking an exemption to the LSAT test-taking limit policy.

    Law firms, bar associates, and other well-resourced stakeholders in the legal profession can help reduce barriers associated with taking the LSAT and other admission tests by supporting pathway programs and other ventures focused on providing test prep and fee support to applicants from low-SES backgrounds.

- Enhance information sharing and outreach.

Law school admission offices should demonstrate an overall pivot in their orientation toward information sharing and candidate recruitment. Websites and other promotional and informational outlets should aim to make the application process as clear and accessible as possible.[26] For instance, law schools can set priority deadlines that better signal the advantages of applying early. Resources and explanations aimed at clarifying the process should be plentiful on law school websites. Along those lines, law schools that require application fees could offer application fee waivers and make the information on how to access the fee waivers visible on their admission webpages. Law schools could also actively promote these financial supports to pre-law advisors, undergraduate campuses, and others serving a high percentage of prospective law students who identify as uPOC or come from low-SES communities.

Law school websites can and should be improved. As part of the current project, we explored hundreds of webpages across all 199 ABA-approved law schools to explore and document the information provided to aspiring law students regarding application timing, application deadlines, and formal early admission programming. Our preliminary impression is that websites rarely communicate exhaustive information related to application requirements and deadlines, and only a handful provide comprehensive information on application strategy.

- Actively intervene to support applicants from marginalized communities.

uPOC and low-SES applicants are more likely to reside in underserved and under-resourced communities and may not be privy to insider knowledge about institutions that have historically excluded these groups. Supporting these applicants requires anticipatory and persistent actions that bolster the trajectories and experiences of historically marginalized communities.

Considering the recent Supreme Court ruling in *Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) v. Harvard* restricting race-based admission decisions, law schools, universities, and stakeholder organizations should proactively engage prospective students from underserved communities using allowable means, such as recruiting at historically Black colleges and universities and other minority-serving institutions, hosting diversity-themed open houses, and leveraging affinity groups to offer mentorship and support to racially-underrepresented students.

- Reconsider the use of rolling admissions.

While rolling admission practices may have advantages that enable admission officers to better manage application volume and capture the most competitive applicants early in the admission cycle, they demonstrably disadvantage students from communities most underrepresented in law school and the legal profession. To advance equity in the admission process, particularly given the *SFFA v. Harvard* decision, law schools currently relying on rolling admissions to fill their entering classes could consider other strategies that are less punitive for applicants who apply later in the admission cycle. For example, reviewing applications in batches based on a priority, regular, and late deadline schedule could help admission professionals maintain a manageable review season while leveling admission odds for students who apply at similar times. This approach also clearly conveys to prospective students when an application is considered late.

Facilitating greater equity in the law school admission process is a group effort that does not fall solely on any specific group. All legal education stakeholders have a role to play in meeting the challenge to increase diversity in the legal profession, starting with access to law school. As we recommend above, investing in efforts to equip uPOC and low-SES applicants with the knowledge and tools necessary to apply early or on-time will help increase their likelihood of admission, while contributing to a more equitable law school admission environment overall.
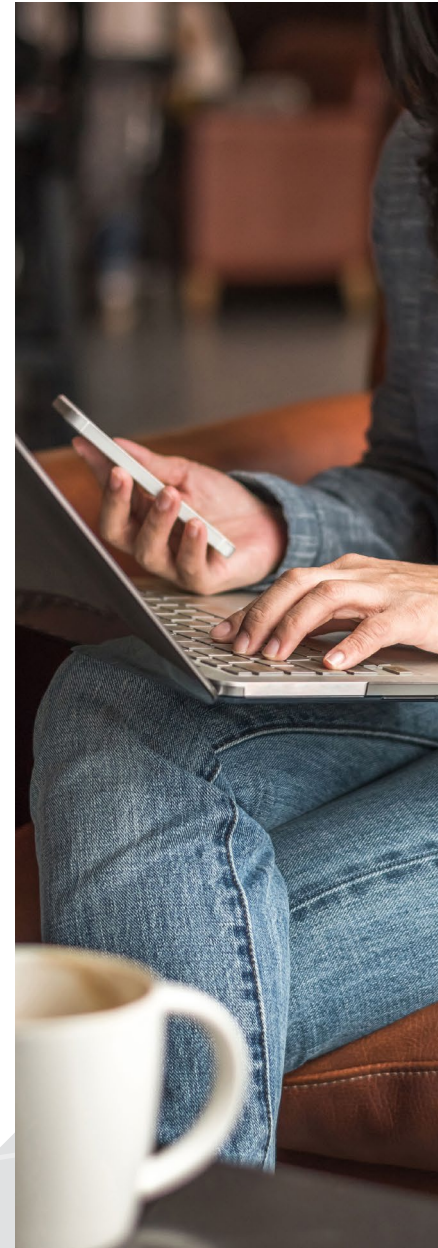
Study Limitations

Our relatively small sample size limits our ability to test more robust models of application timing. A larger sample size would have allowed inclusion of additional variables to account for other confounding and control factors that can influence application timing. Additionally, this study employs a sample comprised entirely of applicants who identified as uPOC and/or low-SES. Our research presents an opportunity to explore variation in experiences that exist among a relatively homogenous population that is understudied. Our analyses also do not link law school admission and scholarship outcomes with the timing of specific law school applications. Future iterations of this research will 1) expand sample size as more LexPreLaw participants matriculate to law school and 2) link the timing of specific law school applications with admission outcomes.

Appendix A: Data Sources

In each program year, applicants to the program complete an online application which gathers demographic information, prior academic achievement (i.e., UGPA, existing LSAT score, and LSAT score percentile), and prior history applying to law school. We also prompt selected applicants to complete a pre-program assessment capturing their knowledge of the law school admission process which we hypothesize to be predictive of application process engagement.

Each month during the program, we ask all LexPreLaw participants to describe their participation in the law school application process using an online reporting form. We collect data including whether the participant sits for the LSAT or submits any law school applications in the survey month, and if the participant receives any admission offers, admission denials, waitlist opportunities, or scholarship awards. We also ask participants to describe their engagement with additional resources related to their pursuit of law school; whether they still intend to seek admission within their program cohort; and general reflection on their participation in the program and application cycle. This brief employs data collected from each of these data sources.

Data Source	Variable(s)	Items/ Description
LexPreLaw Application	Demographic Information	1. Year of Birth 2. Gender 3. What is your race? 4. What is your ethnicity? 5. Did you receive a Pell Grant? 6. What was the highest education level attained by your parent(s)? 7. Did your parents immigrate to the U.S.?
	Previous Experience	1. Did you take the LSAT previously (prior to participating in program)? 2. Have you previously applied to law school?
	Application Timing Intervention	Whether a participant received admission counseling or was offered an incentive to submit five law school applications before January 1.
Post-Intervention Assessment	Knowledge of the Application Cycle Scale Post-Program Intervention	Rated on a five-point Likert scale from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree* 1. I know the required steps to be considered for law school admission. 2. I am aware of the characteristics and qualities that are most attractive to law schools in selecting students. 3. I have a good idea of what law schools are the best fit for me. 4. I know how to find up-to-date data on the demographics of a specific law school's student population and overall school community. 5. I know how to find information to help me make decisions as I seek law school admission.
Phone Interviews	Qualitative Data	Interviews were conducted in the summer of 2022 and 2023 at the conclusion of the traditional law school application cycle associated with each program year. To select interview participants, all LexPreLaw participants who applied to law school that year were distinguished as having first engaged in the application cycle early/on-time (on or before January 30) or having first engaged late (on or after February 1). Each year, five early/on-time applicants and five late applicants were randomly selected to participate in a 30-minute interview. The interview allowed applicants to elaborate on the factors which most influenced the timing of their first engagement in the cycle in addition to their experiences with specific program components and overall satisfaction with the program. See Appendix B for an excerpt of questions administered to interview participants.

Data Source (continued)	Variable(s) (continued)	Items/ Description (continued)
Monthly Survey	LSAT Timing	Based on the first month participants responded 'Yes' to the following question: Did you receive an LSAT score in the month of [survey month]?
	Application Timing	Based on the month participants first responded 'Yes' to the following question: Did you submit any law school applications in the month of [survey month]?
	Number of Applications Submitted	Total count of applications to law schools reported.
	Received Admission	Based on if participants ever answered 'Yes' to the following question: Did you receive any of the following decisions [offer of admission or offer of conditional admission] during the month of [survey month]?
	Received a Scholarship	Based on if participants ever answer 'Yes' to the following question: Did you receive any scholarship/grant offers from a law school this month?

Appendix B: Interview Sample and Protocol

Table 4. Summary of Interview Subsample (n = 20)

	Early/On-Time	Late
Underrepresented Person of Color	100%	80%
Received Pell Grant/Parents Immigrated/First-Gen College Grad	90%	70%
Identified as a Woman	80%	80%
Age – 25+	50%	50%
Employed Full-Time*	60%	80%
Took LSAT and/or Previously Applied to Law School	70%	70%
Received Application Timing Intervention	50%	40%
n	**10**	**10**

Only asked in Year Three (n = 10).

Selected Phone Interview Questions

Describe your overall experience with the admission counseling from Grow By Three. Consider factors such as the admission task schedule, your interactions with individual counselors, and program content.

Describe your overall experience with the LSAT prep course provided by Kaplan. Consider factors such as the online format, your interactions with course instructors, and the course schedule and content.

Describe your experience completing application tasks, such as taking the LSAT and submitting your applications, in a timely matter.

    a.   How did you approach the process?

    b.   Did you have a specific deadline in mind for completing all your applications?

    c.   Was anything particularly helpful to you in completing these tasks on-time?

    d.   Was anything particularly challenging that impacted your ability to complete these tasks on-time?

Please share any additional feedback regarding your experience participating in the program.

Appendix C: Logistic Regression Model Statistics

Table 5. Determinants of Late Timing of First Application to Law School

	B	Sig.	Exp(β)	95% C.I. for Exp(β)
Timing of First LSAT	1.60	<.001	6.45	[3.05, 14.082]
Total Applications Submitted	-0.132	.003	0.876	[.758, .951]
Received Timing Intervention	-0.977	.003	0.376	[.198, .706]
n	**186**			

Table 6. Factors Not Associated with Timing of First Application to Law School

	B	Sig.	Exp(β)	95% C.I. for Exp(β)
Prior Experience	-0.197	.621	0.82	[.379, 1.84]
Highest LSAT Score Percentile	-0.271	.119	0.763	[.534, 1.057]
Knowledge of Application Process	-0.172	.400	0.842	[.562, 1.262]
n	**186**			

Endnotes

1   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter,1 (rev. 2004).

2   See Aaron N. Taylor, The Marginalization of Black Aspiring Lawyers, 13 FIU L. Rev. 489, 497-98 (2019); Ilana Kowarski, How Applying to Law School Early Could Pay Off, U.S. News & World Rep. (Nov. 16, 2018, 10:26 AM), https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/top-law-schools/articles/2018-11-16/how-submitting-your-law-school-application-early-could-pay-off; Gabriel Kuris, Pros and Cons of Applying Early Decision to Law School, U.S. News & World Rep. (May 24, 2021, 10:22 AM), https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/articles/pros-cons-of-applying-early-decision-to-law-school.

3   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 146-148 (rev. 2004).

4   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter, 9 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 YALE L.J. 880, 891 (2006).

5   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter, 9,13 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 880, 891 (2006).

6   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 59 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 897 (2006).

7   See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 59 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 882 (2006). Aaron N. Taylor, The Marginalization of Black Aspiring Lawyers, 13 FIU L. Rev. 489, 498 (2019).

8   See Aaron N. Taylor, The Marginalization of Black Aspiring Lawyers, 13 FIU L. Rev. 497 (2019).

9   Paul R. Dorasil & C. Chad Henson, On Time: An Empirical Analysis of U.S. Law School Admissions Deadlines 9-10 (2009), https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1099481. Harold O. Levy, Colleges Should Abandon Early Admissions, Inside Higher Ed (Jan. 11, 2017), https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/01/12/discrimination-inherent-early-admissions-programs-essay.

10 See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 12, 59 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 882-83 (2006).

11 See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 13, 59-60 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 898 (2006) Harold O. Levy, Colleges Should Abandon Early Admissions, Inside Higher Ed (Jan. 11, 2017), https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/01/12/discrimination-inherent-early-admissions-programs-essay; Aaron N. Taylor, The Marginalization of Black Aspiring Lawyers, 13 FIU L. Rev. 498 (2019).

12 See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 116 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 897 (2006); Paul R. Dorasil & C. Chad Henson, On Time: An Empirical Analysis of U.S. Law School Admissions Deadlines 9-10 (2009), https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1099481.; Harold O. Levy, Colleges Should Abandon Early Admissions, Inside Higher Ed (Jan. 11, 2017), https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/01/12/discrimination-inherent-early-admissions-programs-essay

13 See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 116, 174 (rev. 2004); Ruby Z. Afram, Civil Rights, Antitrust, and Early Decision Programs, 115 Yale L.J. 897-98 (2006); (2006); Gabriel Kuris, Pros and Cons of Applying Early Decision to Law School, U.S. News & World Rep. (May 24, 2021, 10:22 AM), https://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/law-admissions-lowdown/articles/pros-cons-of-applying-early-decision-to-law-school.

14 Appendix A provides a full description of each data source.

15 In 2021, all participants sought Fall 2022 law school admission; in 2022, all participants sought Fall 2023 law school admission),

16 Early/on-time applicants are defined as those who submitted a law school application before February 1, while late applicants are those who submitted a law application on or after February 1.

17 See Christopher Avery et al., The Early Admissions Game: Joining the Elite, With a New Chapter 146-148 (rev. 2004).; Harold O. Levy, Colleges Should Abandon Early Admissions, Inside Higher Ed (Jan. 11, 2017), https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/01/12/discrimination-inherent-early-admissions-programs-essay.

18 Table data for this and all other relationships tested are presented in Appendix C.

19 "There are aspects of the [application] process that may not be intuitive to uninformed applicants. An example is the way application deadlines function at most schools. In most contexts, completing a task just before the deadline is a harmless action … But given that most law schools review applications on a "rolling" basis (continuously as applications are deemed eligible for review), earlier applicants tend to have the best odds of gaining admission." Aaron N. Taylor et al., LexScholars by AccessLex Program Evaluation: Year 1 (2020–21) Pilot Cycle 11 (2021), https://www.accesslex.org/sites/default/files/event-uploads/2022-03/LexScholars_AnnualReport_031422.pdf.

20 Applicants who met conditions by November 30 received a $300 Amazon.com e-gift card; applicants who met conditions by January 31 received a $100 Amazon.com e-gift card.

21 See Geraldine L. Cochran et al., Identifying Barriers to Ethnic/Racial Minority Students' Participation in Graduate Physics, 2017 Physics Educ. Rsch. Conf. Proc. 92, https://doi.org/10.1119/perc.2017.pr.018; Julie R. Katz et al., The Graduate Record Examination: Help or Hindrance in Nursing Graduate School Admissions?, 25 J. Pro. Nursing 369 (2009).

22 Participants who submitted more applications were more likely to receive an admission (r = .23, p = .002) and a scholarship (r = .24, p = .001).

23 See more information on the LexPreLaw webpage: https://www.accesslex.org/lexprelaw-program-design-and-eligibility.

24 While several law schools accept the GRE as well, all accept the LSAT. As a result, LexPreLaw programming and the analyses we present here focus on LSAT preparation.

25 Limits on Repeating the Test, LSAC, https://www.lsac.org/about/lsac-policies/limits-on-repeating-lsat.

26 See Mary-Ann Winkelmes et al., Transparent Design in Higher Education Teaching and Leadership: A Guide to Implementing the Transparency Framework Institution-Wide to Improve Learning and Retention (2019).

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.

AccessLex.org
Financial education resources from a nonprofit you can trust.