



 **LSSE**
UNDERSTANDING LEGAL EDUCATION

How a Decade of Debt Changed the Law Student Experience

2015 Annual Survey Results

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The Law School Survey of Student Engagement (LSSSE) documents dimensions of quality in legal education and provides information about law student participation in effective educational activities that law schools and other organizations can use to improve legal education.



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The Law School Survey of Student Engagement is part of Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, a research center in the School of Education devoted to studying the student experience. In addition to LSSSE, CPR houses the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and the NSSE Institute, the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE), the Strategic National Arts Alumni Project (SNAAP), and the Beginning College Survey of Student Engagement (BCSSE).

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Table of Contents

Quick Facts	3
Foreword: Christopher P. Chapman	4
Director's Message: Aaron N. Taylor	6
How a Decade of Debt Changed the Law Student Experience	8
Debt Trends	10
Debt Trends by Survey Year and Institutional Sector	11
Debt Trends by Race	12
Debt Trends by LSAT Scores	13
Debt and the Student Experience	14
Debt and Law Student Stress	16
Participating Law Schools: 2004–2015	20



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CREDITS

Many thanks to the following for contributing photos for use in this report.

Front Cover

Southwestern Law School

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Charlotte School of Law

Page 1

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Page 2

Northwestern University School of Law
University of Maryland
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Page 4

Northwestern University School of Law
University of Idaho College of Law
Texas A&M University School of Law

Pages 6-7

DePaul University College of Law
Charlotte School of Law

Pages 8-9

Loyola University Chicago School of Law
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Pages 10-11

University of Arkansas School of Law
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Page 12

Northwestern University School of Law

Pages 14-15

SUNY Buffalo Law School
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Pages 16-17

University of Washington School of Law
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Back Cover

Northwestern University School of Law

Quick Facts

OBJECTIVES

To provide data to law schools to improve legal education and inform decision-making and compliance efforts, enhance student success, facilitate internal assessment and analysis, and support research on legal education.

SURVEY

Administered to all students at participating law schools via the Internet. Survey completion time is approximately 15-20 minutes.

SUPPORT

LSSSE is housed at Indiana University's Center for Postsecondary Research, and is supported by law school participation fees. Since its inception, LSSSE has benefited from close working relationships with the Association of American Law Schools and The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching.

PARTICIPATING LAW SCHOOLS

One hundred and ninety different law schools in the United States, Canada, and Australia have participated in LSSSE since 2004.

RESPONDENTS AND RESPONSE RATES

In 2015, 21,849 students at 80 law schools [in the U.S. and Canada] responded to the LSSSE survey. The average institutional response rate was 54%.

AUDIENCES

Law school administrators and faculty, current and prospective law students, alumni, advisory boards, trustees, institutional researchers, accrediting organizations, and researchers studying legal education.

DATA SOURCES

Survey responses and comments from JD/LLB students enrolled at participating law schools. Supplemental information used in analysis and reporting is obtained from the American Bar Association and the Law School Admission Council.

COST

Participation fees range from \$3,000 to \$5,000, based upon student enrollment.

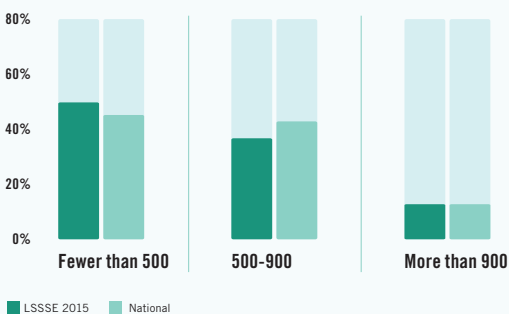
PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

Results specific to a law school and identified as such will not be made public by LSSSE without the explicit agreement of the school. Participating law schools agree that LSSSE may use the aggregated data for national reporting purposes and other legal education initiatives, including research conducted by LSSSE staff or independent scholars.

Figure 1

Size of LSSSE 2015 Schools

Compared to National Profile of ABA Approved Law Schools^a

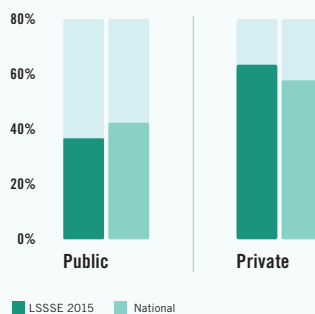


a. National percentages are based on data from the ABA and the LSAC.

Figure 2

Affiliation of LSSSE 2015 Schools

Compared to National Profile of ABA Approved Law Schools^a



a. National percentages are based on data from the ABA and the LSAC.

Foreword



I am a card-carrying member of the club that believes that the pursuit of a J.D. offers training and education that is unmatched in its quality, portability and flexibility, creating the potential for a lifetime of personal and professional success for anyone with the motivation to achieve. This club has served legal education well over the years and helps to ensure that each new generation of aspiring professionals views the attainment of a J.D. as a worthwhile academic and career pursuit.

However, as is well-understood by the legal education community, the reaction by prospective law students to the effects of the Great Recession on the legal employment market and the subsequent public questioning of the value of law school has been stunning and severe, laying bare the fragility of the customary qualitative rationale offered to “prove” value.

The striking negativity infecting the public debate about the value of law school has been exacerbated by the paucity of broadly available data to supplement these qualitative arguments. Further, this scarcity has hindered a more rigorous and granular study and understanding on the question of value, as well as other strategic

inquiries that could help law schools to better serve students and society alike.

Without such data, and in the face of continuous strong demand from highly qualified undergraduates before 2010, legal education’s collective explanation when queried about the value of a J.D. might best be exemplified by a somewhat farcical and hyperbolic declaration that I will assign to a composite, fictional law school dean (with due apologies to Emma Lazarus):

*Give me your swooning hemophobics,
your literary arithmophobics,
Your huddled baccalaureates,
The wretched refuse (so says the
marketplace) of a frivolous and
impractical undergraduate education.
Send these justice-seeking, value-
driven souls to me for six semesters,
Where they will learn to think like a lawyer
and be released to the four winds,
Providing a beacon of light to
all whose path they cross.*

In such a world, why would any such comprehensive data store exist? But in today’s world, the time has come to ask, how can it NOT exist?





It is more common than not that a crisis is often required before an individual, an organization or even an entire industry is sufficiently motivated to deeply question and reset its underlying premises in a manner consistent with the expected, and often evident, future state of affairs. Legal education provides no exception to this general principle. Of course, when one's predictable world is overturned, the well-known "stages of grief" must be navigated before many meaningful and productive steps can be taken. Luckily for legal education, lawyers tend to be proactive, problem solvers with a palpable disdain for failure in all of its incarnations, so although perhaps slow to come, the time of acceptance has arrived.

To its credit, LSSSE has been "lifting its lamp" in this wilderness over the past decade to further data-driven understanding and actions at the law school level in ways large and small. Although other data relating to

critical issues surrounding legal education are also being collected and available in limited ways, and there remains a small group of researchers dedicated to legal education, there is much more to be done. The summer 2015 report of the American Bar Association Task Force on Financing Legal Education, on which I served, illustrates this problem in commenting that "the scarcity of systematic, reliable, and detailed information needed to address the issues at hand is a particular frustration... [A]t best only a partial picture of the current state of affairs is possible..."

The consistency and professionalism of the LSSSE survey instrument, coupled with LSSSE's commitment to rigorous analysis and user-friendly presentation of results stands as a model for broader efforts among the legal education community. And as valuable as LSSSE's annual results are to participating schools, the longitudinal trends it can offer, both at a macro and institutional

level, add value in an exponential manner.

The organization that I lead, Access Group, spent more than 25 years working tirelessly to ensure that aspiring lawyers were not frustrated in their pursuit due to unavailable or unaffordable financing. As Access Group evolves, we are committing our resources to working with LSSSE and other organizations that care deeply about the value of legal education to aggregate available data and create new data that can be used to expand the understanding and benefits offered through legal education. Congratulations to LSSSE on another successful year as a leading source of such informative and actionable intelligence. ■



Christopher P. Chapman
President and Chief
Executive Officer
Access Group



Director's Message



Like all of higher education, law school tuition has increased greatly over the last few decades. Between 1985 and 2013, median tuition increased almost 6-fold at private law schools and more than 12-fold at public law schools.¹ These increases vastly outpaced overall inflation during the same period. Of course, tuition is only part of what it costs to attend law school. Living expenses, books, and other expenses can increase the costs of attendance considerably. Average living and book expenses alone increased almost 3-fold between 1990 and 2012.²

The vast majority of law students—almost 90%, according to LSSSE Survey data and estimates by the American Bar Association—

rely on student loans to finance their education. This places student loans at the center of the law school funding calculus.

Outstanding student loan debt now tops \$1 trillion overall, second only to mortgage debt. Most student loan debtors owe less than \$25,000;³ but the typical law school graduate is part of a relatively rarefied group of debtors with student loan balances approaching, if not exceeding, \$100,000. In 2012, the average debt for graduates of private law schools was \$127,000; \$88,000 for public law school graduates.⁴ These amounts represented inflation-adjusted increases of one-quarter and one-third respectively over a seven-year period. Amounts are surely higher today.



There are few topics in legal education that are more consequential than our students' ever-rising debt loads. Therefore, student loans are a topic of interest at LSSSE. We are particularly interested in exploring how reliance on student loans may affect the law student experience.

Debt trends presented in this Annual Report were analyzed over three survey years: 2006, 2011, and 2015. The outer years—2006 and 2015—provide a useful 10-year period over which to chart trends. The interstitial year—2011—is noteworthy as a rough midpoint of the 10-year period, and also as the year U.S. law schools enrolled a record number of students. Since 2011, first-year law student enrollments have declined 29%, currently at levels not seen in more than 40 years.⁵

In many ways, respondents in each of the three survey years attended law school in fundamentally different environments. The 2006 cohort attended in an environment of relatively low costs; the 2011 cohort attended in an environment of unprecedented enrollments (and, therefore, competition) and then-unprecedented costs; the 2015 cohort attended in an environment of declining enrollments, broad curricular reform, and unprecedented, though leveling costs.

Some of the findings from our analyses are predictable. Many are worrying. As always, we hope this Report contributes to larger discussions of the state of legal education and how law schools can best contribute to student success in both the short and long terms. ■



Aaron N. Taylor
LSSSE Director
Assistant Professor, Saint Louis
University School of Law

¹ Source: American Bar Association

² Source: American Bar Association: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_a...

³ Source: New York Fed: https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/staff_reports/sr668...

⁴ Source: American Bar Association

⁵ http://www.americanbar.org/news/abanews/aba-news-archives/2014/12/aba_secti...

How a Decade of Debt Changed the Law Student Experience



INTRODUCTION

This Annual Report will provide a retrospective glimpse into law student debt trends over a 10-year period, using survey years 2006 and 2015 as bookends. Survey year 2011 will be used as a midpoint in much of the analyses—2011 is noteworthy because a record number of students—157,298—enrolled in U.S. law schools that year.⁶ Since 2011, law schools have been buffeted by declining application volume and student enrollments. This Report also draws on responses to a set of questions on law student stress that was administered to a subset of 2015 respondents.

Like all of higher education, law school tuition has increased greatly over the last few decades. Between 1985 and 2013, median

tuition increased almost 6-fold at private law schools and more than 12-fold at public law schools.⁷ These increases vastly outpaced overall inflation during the same period. The other costs associated with attending law school have increased as well. Average living and book expenses alone increased almost 3-fold between 1990 and 2012.⁸

The vast majority of law students—almost 90%, according to LSSSE Survey data and estimates by the American Bar Association—rely on student loans to finance their education. The typical law school graduate is part of a relatively rarefied group of debtors with student loan balances approaching, if not exceeding \$100,000. In 2012, the average debt for graduates of private law schools was





\$127,000; \$88,000 for public law school graduates.⁹ These amounts represented inflation-adjusted increases of one-quarter and one-third respectively in just seven years.

This Report explores possible associations between the law school experience and reliance on student loans. A useful starting point in this analysis is with the following question that appears on the LSSSE Survey:

“How much educational debt from attending law school do you expect to have upon your graduation?”

In order to account for the inherent imprecision of speculating about the future, the response options appearing on the survey are presented mostly as ranges in \$20,000 intervals, with two outer options:

- \$0
- \$1- \$20,000
- \$20,001 - \$40,000
- \$40,001 - \$60,000
- \$60,001 - \$80,000
- \$80,001 - \$100,000
- \$100,001 - \$120,000
- More than \$120,000

For much of the analyses presented in the Report, the six intermediate ranges are compressed into three \$40,000 ranges, with the outer options remaining the same:

- \$0
- \$1- \$40,000
- \$40,001 - \$80,000
- \$80,001 - \$120,000
- More than \$120,000

The expected debt question provides a compelling frame through which to view other survey data related to the student experience. Do the law school experiences of respondents who expected high levels of debt differ from other respondents? Do law school scholarship policies contribute to debt disparities? Do debt expectations influence employment expectations (or vice versa)? These are just some of the questions that are explored in this Report.

Because the survey results from each year are drawn from a different pool of schools and respondents, the comparisons presented in this Report are mostly illustrative, though they align with much of what we know about actual trends that have taken place.

⁶Source: American Bar Association: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/enrollment_degrees_awarded.authcheckdam.pdf

⁷Source: American Bar Association

⁸Source: American Bar Association: http://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/statistics/average_living_book_expenses.authcheckdam.pdf

⁹Source: American Bar Association



DEBT TRENDS

Unsurprisingly, over the 10-year timeframe, increasing proportions of LSSSE respondents reported expecting high law school debt. In 2006, 32% of respondents expected to incur more than \$100,000 in debt during their law school matriculation. By 2011, that proportion had increased to 44%, a level at which it remained in 2015 (Figure 1). The differences in expected debt were particularly acute at the highest level—more than \$120,000. Roughly 30% of respondents in both 2011 and 2015 expected debt above \$120,000, compared to 16% in 2006. (Figure 2)

An analysis of the subgroups of “high-debt” respondents really highlights the prevailing trends. We measured the proportional split between respondents who expected to owe \$100,001-\$120,000 and those who expected to owe more than \$120,000. In 2006, 51% of respondents in this high-debt subgroup expected to owe more than \$120,000. In 2006, 51% of respondents in this high-debt subgroup expected to owe more than \$120,000 (leaving 49% expecting to owe \$100,001-\$120,000). By 2015, 67% of this high-debt subgroup expected to owe more than \$120,000. (Figure 3)

Overall, the trends illustrate how higher costs of attendance have driven larger proportions of LSSSE respondents to expect larger debts. Notably on the opposite end, the proportion of LSSSE respondents who expected no law school debt was highest in 2015. This trend—and the proportional stability of such respondents in each survey year—may reflect the relative affluence of law students and the manner in which affluent students tend to benefit from LSAT-driven law school scholarship policies.

Figure 1

Proportion of respondents who expected to owe more than \$100K

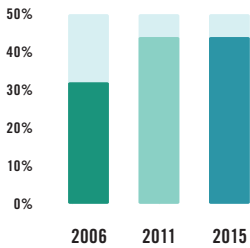


Figure 2

Proportion of expected debt at each level

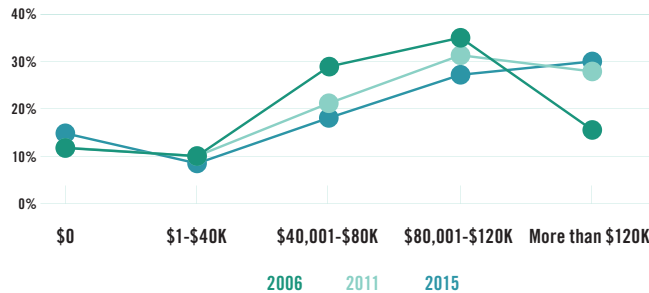
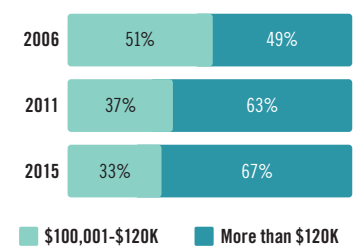


Figure 3

Proportional split among high-debt respondents



DEBT TRENDS BY SURVEY YEAR AND INSTITUTIONAL SECTOR

In each of the three survey years, higher proportions of respondents attending private law schools expected debt above \$100,000. Throughout higher education, private school tuitions tend to be higher than those at public schools—a reflection of the relative absence of public subsidies to private schools. In both realms, the proportions of respondents who expected debt above \$100,000 increased between 2006 and 2015.

In 2006, 38% of private school respondents expected to owe more than \$100,000; in 2011 and 2015, that proportion exceeded 50%. Tuition and, therefore, debt is growing dramatically at public college and universities, due in large part to declines in the aforementioned state subsidies. While

the high-debt expectations were lower among respondents attending public law schools, the increases over the survey years were more dramatic. In 2006, only 11% of LSSSE respondents expected debt of more than \$100,000; by 2015, this proportion had almost tripled to 31%. (Figure 4)

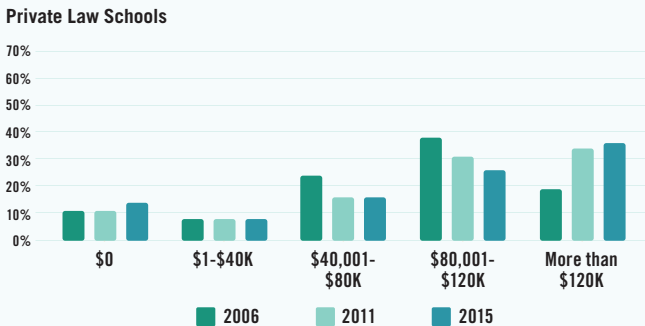
The increases were even more compelling among respondents who expected more than \$120,000 in debt. In 2006, only 4% of public school respondents expected debt at this level; by 2015, that proportion had more than quadrupled to 17%. The same proportions almost doubled among private law school respondents—19% in 2006 and 36% in 2015. (Figure 5)

Focusing once again on the subset of respondents who expected to owe more than \$100,000, in 2015 a whopping 71% of those respondents who attended private schools expected to owe more than \$120,000. Fifty-six percent of this high-debt subset at public schools expected to owe more than \$120,000 in 2015—the first year this proportion crossed the 50% threshold. (Figure 6)

At the other end of the spectrum, the proportions of respondents expecting no debt were highest in 2015, among both private and public schools. Unsurprisingly, the proportions of no-debt respondents were higher among those attending public law schools, but not by much—only one percentage point in 2006 and 2011 and three points in 2015.

Figure 4

Proportion of expected debt at each level, by institutional sector



Public Law Schools

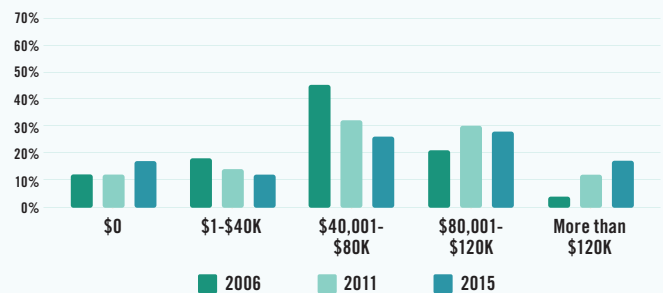


Figure 5

Respondents who expected to owe more than \$120K, by institutional sector

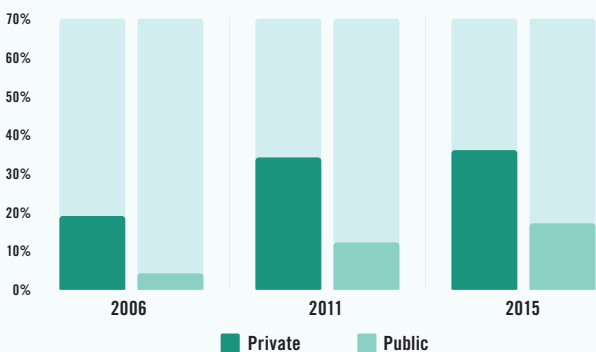
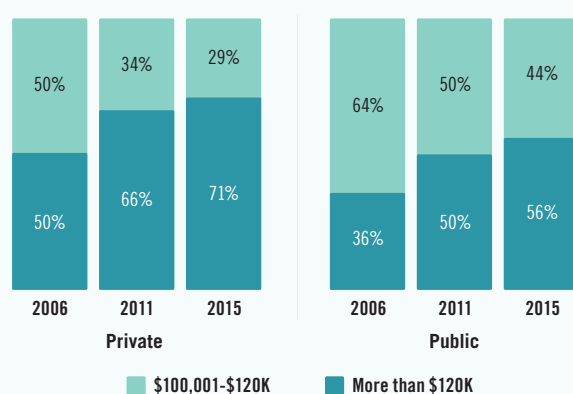


Figure 6

Proportional split among high-debt respondents, by institutional sector



DEBT TRENDS BY RACE



Reliance on student loans is largely a reflection of wealth and access to alternative sources of funds. Students from less affluent backgrounds tend to rely on student loans to greater extents than their more affluent peers. This means that the large racial and ethnic wealth disparities in the U.S. have broad implications on student debt trends. According to 2013 Pew Research Center data, the median white household has a net worth of \$141,900, more than ten times the median among Latino households (\$13,700) and thirteen times the median among black households (\$11,000).¹⁰ These trends, along with income inequality, disparities in employment rates, and other divergent economic outcomes, explain in large part the racial and ethnic trends in expected debt among LSSSE respondents.

In each of the survey years, white and Asian respondents were more likely than black and Latino respondents to expect no debt. Regarding high debt, a telling trend was observed. In 2006, there were only marginal racial and ethnic differences in expectations

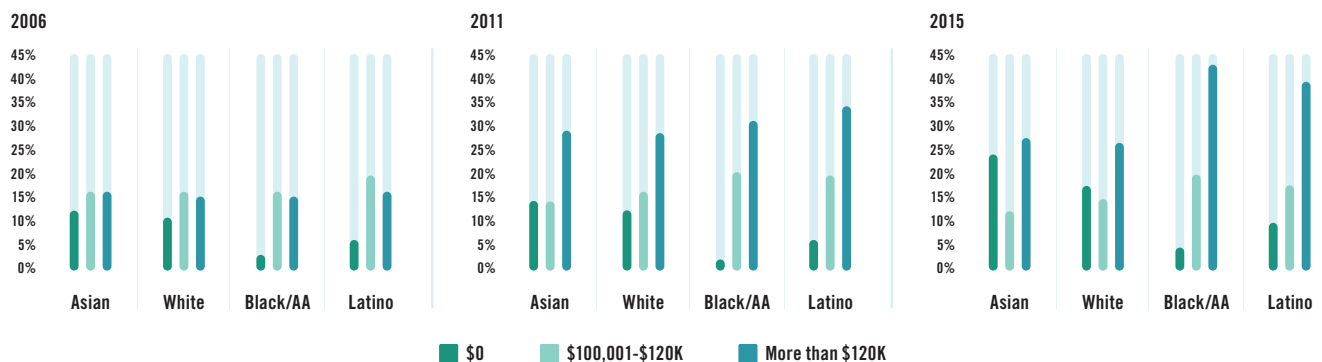
of more than \$100,000 in debt. By 2011, however, clear disparities emerged, with black and Latino respondents more likely to expect debt at this level. By 2015, the disparities became more intense, with 61% of black respondents and 56% of Latino respondents expecting debt at this level, compared to about 40% of white and Asian respondents. That year, 43% of black respondents expected to owe more than \$120,000—the first time a racial or ethnic group crossed the 40% threshold on any LSSSE debt category. (Figure 7)

It seems apparent that increased costs of attending law school have placed undue pressures on students from less affluent backgrounds to rely on student loans to finance their education. This burden falls disproportionately on black and Latino students, who are more likely to come from low-wealth backgrounds. ■

¹⁰<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>

Figure 7

Proportion of expected debt at various levels, by race



DEBT TRENDS BY LSAT SCORES

The Law School Admission Test (LSAT) looms large in the law school admissions process. Applicants with high scores tend to have the best chances of being offered both admission and lucrative scholarships. The latter trend has potential implications on student debt trends. The more that a student’s costs of attendance are discounted, the less that student has to borrow. And across the entire system of legal education, it seems logical that student debt trends would share some relationship with trends pertaining to the awarding of scholarships and grants.

Using LSSSE data, we explored respondent debt trends through the lens of respondent LSAT scores. We constructed the following seven LSAT groupings, which span the range of possible scores on the exam:

- 120-139
- 140-145
- 146-150
- 151-155
- 156-160
- 161-165
- 166-180

We reasoned that respondents within each grouping had comparable chances of being offered a scholarship, and the relative size of those scholarships would also be comparable.

This hypothesis, of course, is imperfect. The LSAT score is just one factor, albeit a prominent one, that schools consider in awarding scholarships. Other factors, such as where an applicant chooses to apply, also play roles. Nonetheless, clear associations between respondent LSAT scores and expected debt were observed. For purposes of simplicity, much of the analysis below is presented through a higher-LSAT (156 or above)/lower-LSAT (155 or below) binary.

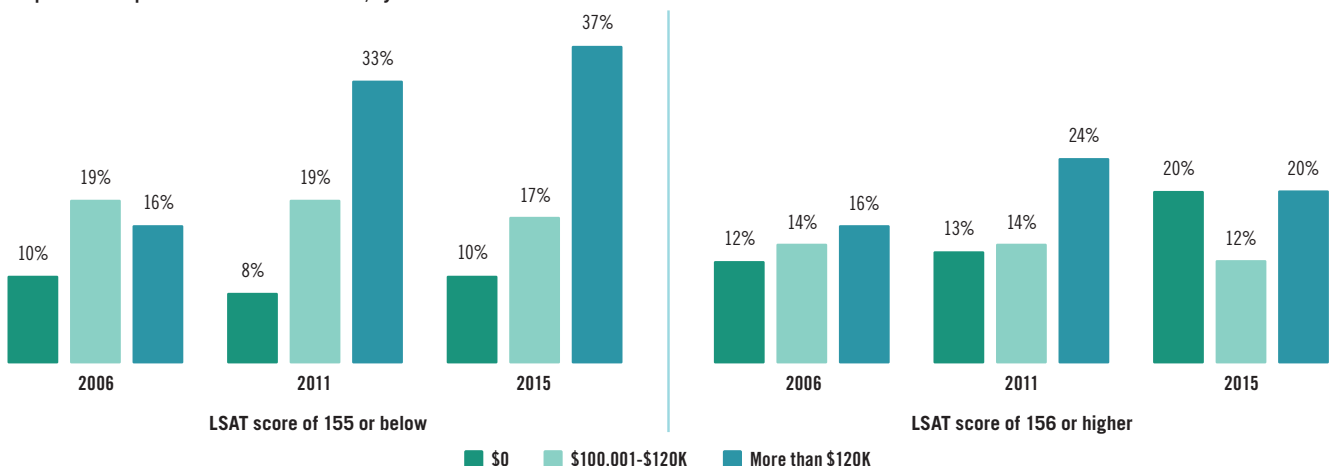
For each LSAT grouping, the proportion of respondents who expected to owe more than \$120,000 was higher in 2015 than in 2006. But the intensity of these increases was greater for respondents with LSAT scores of 155 or below. In 2006, the proportion of these “lower-LSAT” respondents who expected to owe more than \$120,000 was 16%—the same proportion as their “higher-LSAT” peers. By 2015, however, the proportion for the lower-LSAT group was 37%, almost double the 20% proportion of the higher-LSAT group. The trends were even starker for respondents with LSAT scores of 145 or below. In 2006, 15% of these respondents expected to owe more than \$120,000; in 2015, that proportion was 52%. (Figure 8)

At the other end, in each survey year, respondents in the higher-LSAT groupings were more likely to expect no debt than other respondents; but these trends became more apparent in 2015. In 2006, 12% of respondents with LSAT scores of 156 or above expected no debt, compared to 10% of respondents with lower scores. In 2015, the proportion of no-debt expectations within the higher-LSAT group increased to 20%, while the proportion within the lower-median group remained at 10%.

Associations between standardized tests, including the LSAT, and family income and wealth are well-documented. Therefore, students from more affluent backgrounds are not only more likely to have access to family and personal funds for law school, they are also more likely to score highly on the LSAT. This latter trend, of course, increases their chances of being awarded the most generous scholarships. Therefore, students arguably with the least financial need tend to get the most financial assistance from law schools, exacerbating the extent of student loan reliance by those with the most financial need. The LSSSE data appears to illustrate these trends.

Figure 8

Proportion of expected debt at various levels, by LSAT Scores





DEBT AND THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

The LSSSE Survey is designed to measure the effects of legal education on law students. Student satisfaction is related to those effects; therefore, respondents are asked:

How would you evaluate your entire educational experience at your law school?

The purpose of this question is to prompt respondents to consider and assess their law school experiences. This is, in essence, a question regarding satisfaction, a perceptual concept. As such, respondents are given the following four answer choices:

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

In the analyses below, the favorable responses (Excellent and Good) are combined, as are the unfavorable responses (Fair and Poor).

Building on the satisfaction question, the LSSSE Survey also poses the following question:

If you could start over again, would you go to the same law school you are now attending?

The purpose of this question is to, again, prompt respondents to consider and assess their law school experiences, but this time in the context of the opportunity costs. Respondents are given the following four answer choices:

- Definitely yes
- Probably yes
- Probably no
- Definitely no

In the analyses below, the favorable responses (Definitely yes and Probably yes) are combined, as are the unfavorable responses (Probably no and Definitely no).

The prominence of student debt renders it an interesting frame through which to view student satisfaction. We hypothesized that higher levels of debt would be associated with less chance of a favorable response to the satisfaction questions. The data confirms our supposition.

As a general proposition, LSSSE respondents reported high levels of satisfaction with their law school experience in each of the survey years. In 2015, 84% of respondents rated their law school experiences “excellent” or “good” (Figure 9). Eighty-one percent stated that they would definitely or probably attend their same law school again. (Figure 10) Interestingly, these proportions were higher than in both 2011 and 2006. This is noteworthy, given the increased costs of legal education and the handwringing about whether the endeavor is worth those costs.

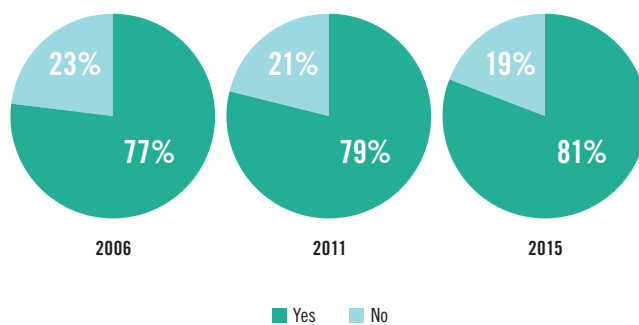
Figure 9

Overall satisfaction with “Entire Law School Experience” response proportions



Figure 10

Overall “Same Law School” response proportions

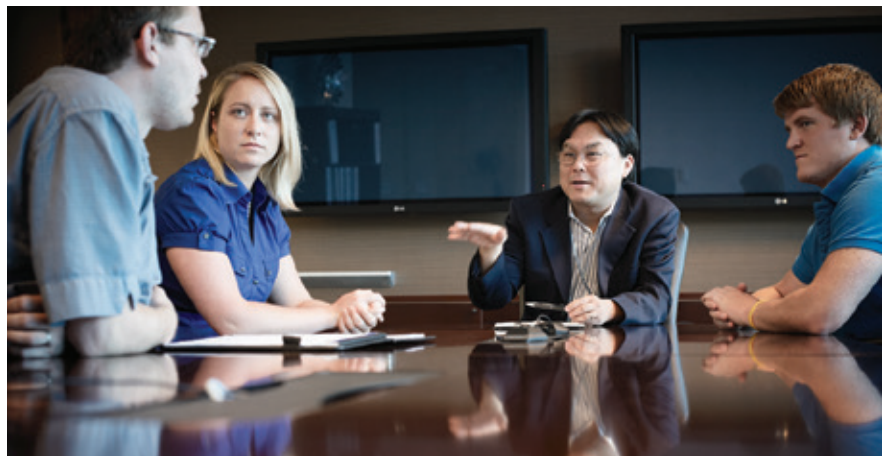


➤ A possible theory for these higher expressions of satisfaction might be that those who have opted to attend law school in spite of the unflattering scrutiny of late are more likely to have an affinity for the endeavor that transcends some of the most common practical considerations. Put simply, current law students may be more apt to be satisfied with the experience compared to past cohorts. Another theory could be that law schools have adapted to changing student needs and demands in ways that have increased satisfaction. In any case, the trend was somewhat surprising to us.

But in each survey year, respondents who expected to owe more than \$120,000 were noticeably less likely to respond favorably to the satisfaction questions. In 2006, 75% of these respondents had favorable views of their law school experiences, compared to the overall rate of 80%. Similar differences were observed in 2011 and 2015. (Figure 11)

The effects of debt seemed even more apparent in the responses to the “same law school” question. With a few slight exceptions, in every survey year, respondents were less likely to state that they would attend the same law school as expected debt increased. At the level of more than \$120,000 in expected the debt, 70% of respondents in 2006 said they would attend the same law school, compared to 82% of those who expected no debt.

In 2011, the favorable response rate among these high-debt respondents was 74%, compared to 83% of those who expected no debt. And lastly, in 2015, 74% of these high-debt respondents stated they would attend the same school, compared to 87% of those expecting no debt. This 13-percentage point difference was the largest among the three survey years. (Figure 12)



¹⁰<http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2014/12/12/racial-wealth-gaps-great-recession/>

Figure 11

Satisfaction with “Entire Law School Experience” response, by debt

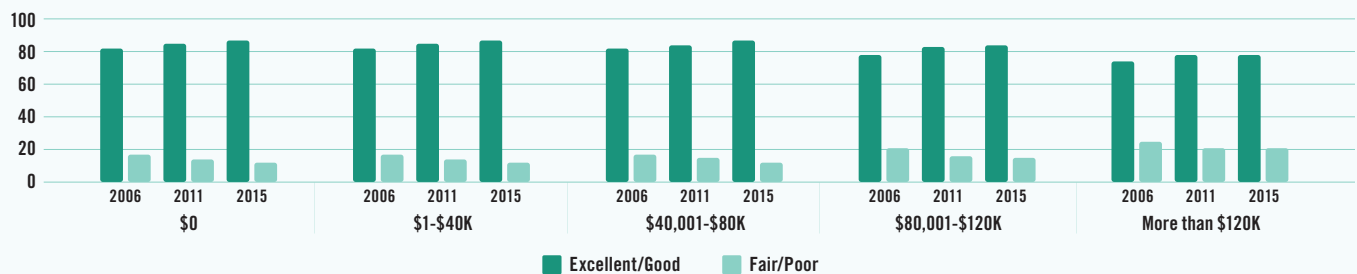
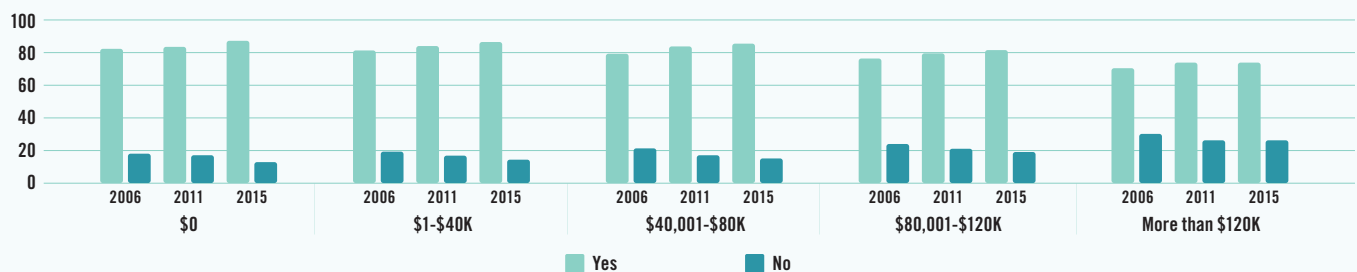


Figure 12

“Same Law School” response proportions, by debt





DEBT AND LAW STUDENT STRESS

The topic of student health has garnered increased attention in legal education. An area of emphasis has been on law student stress. Much of the lore surrounding legal education is premised on its stress-inducing qualities. Everything from the oft-unsettling Socratic method of instruction to high-stakes exams are cited, if not celebrated, as emblematic rites of passage for those seeking to become lawyers. So the fact that many law schools are now considering the effects of stress in the larger context of student health and wellness is significant.

This attention is necessary and long overdue. Law students demonstrate higher levels of stress compared to graduate and professional students in other academic fields. This stress

has been tied to higher levels of substance abuse among law students. Given the prominence of this issue, LSSSE created a 9-question Law Student Stress Module that was appended to the core survey and administered to a subset of students at 13 law schools. The module garnered 3,716 responses that provide interesting insights into this under-researched but central aspect of the law student experience.

The first question in the module asked respondents:

During the current school year, how would you characterize your level of law school related stress or anxiety?



➤ Respondents were given a 7-point scale to characterize the intensity of their stress or anxiety. The first point on the scale (1) signified no stress; the last point (7) signified “very high” stress. For purposes of the analyses below, we constructed the following three response groupings:

- High stress/anxiety: 6 or 7
- Medium stress/anxiety: 3 or 4 or 5
- Low (or no) stress/anxiety: 1 or 2

Half of respondents reported high stress or anxiety during the school year, 46% reported medium levels, and 4% reported low levels.

(Figure 13) This means that virtually every respondent reported appreciable law school related stress or anxiety. These proportions are not surprising given the nature of legal education, and it is important to note that stress and anxiety are not always associated with negative outcomes. But given the almost universality of law school stress and anxiety, it is important that law schools have a sense of the causes.

The Law Student Stress Module identified six elements of the law school experience that are believed to be common stressors for students.

Using the same 7-point scale, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which each element indeed caused them stress or anxiety. The elements are listed below, in order of the proportion of respondents who indicated *high* levels of stress or anxiety relating to each: (Figure 14)

- Academic performance: 78%
- Academic workload: 74%
- Job prospects: 62%
- Financial concerns/student debt: 51%
- Competition: 33%
- Classroom environment/teaching methods: 32%

Figure 13

Overall stress levels:

50%
high stress
46%
medium
4%
low stress

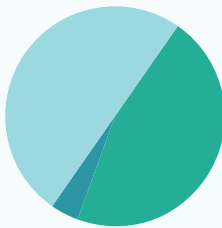
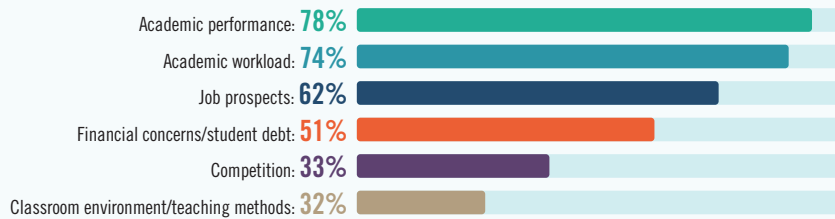


Figure 14

High-stress by individual element:



About three-quarters of respondents reported that concerns about academic performance and academic workload were sources of high stress and anxiety. More than half of respondents indicated that concerns about job prospects and finances (including student debt) were sources of high stress and anxiety. About a third of respondents indicated that competition with their peers and concerns relating to the classroom environment (including the teaching methods) were sources of high stress.

Among those who reported high levels of overall stress, the hierarchy of individual stressors was the same, but more intense. About 90% of high-stress respondents indicated that academic performance and academic workload were sources of high stress or anxiety. (Figure 15) About 16% of highly-stressed respondents indicated that all six of the elements were each sources of high stress, compared to 4% of those who indicated medium overall stress, and none of those who indicated low (or no) overall stress. (Figure 16)

Levels of stress and anxiety varied across race and ethnicity. Fifty-nine percent of Asian respondents reported high levels of overall stress—the highest proportion. Latinos had the second-highest proportion, at 55%. Black and white respondents both had proportions around 50%. (Figure 17)

For each race and ethnicity, the hierarchy of stressors was the same as overall, with academic performance and academic workload being the most prominent stressors.

But trends varied somewhat among the groups. The highest proportion of respondents who identified concerns about academic performance and academic workload as sources of high levels of stress was among Asian respondents. Black and white respondents had the highest proportions for whom concerns about job prospects were sources of high stress. Stress and anxiety about finances and student loans were most intense among Latino and black respondents. (Figure 18)



Figure 15

High-stress by individual source, among respondents with high overall stress:

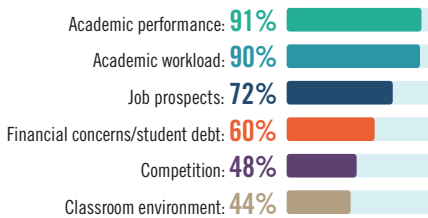


Figure 16

Proportion who indicated high-stress across all sources, by overall stress level:

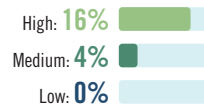


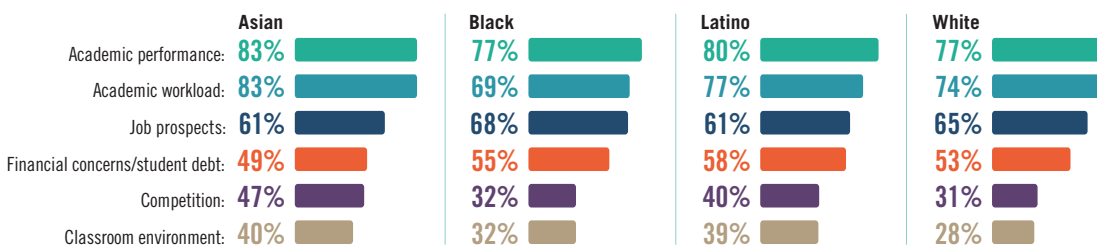
Figure 17

Proportions of high-stress, by race



Figure 18

High-stress by individual source, by race





Seventeen percent of Asian respondents indicated that all six elements of the law school experience were sources of high stress or anxiety. Latinos accounted for the next highest proportion at 13%, followed by 9% and 8% of black and white respondents respectively. (Figure 19)

Higher expected debt was associated with higher stress and anxiety. More than half of respondents who expected to owe more than \$80,000 reported experiencing high levels of stress or anxiety during the school year, compared to 41% of those who expected no debt. (Figure 20) The causes of the stress varied in predictable ways.

High levels of stress related to finances and student loans were much more widespread among respondents expecting high debt. At the extremes, 70% of respondents who expected to owe more than \$120,000 reported high levels of stress relating to finances and student loans, compared to only 9% of respondents expecting no debt. High levels of stress about job prospects rose along with expected debt as well. (Figure 21)



Additionally, 13% of respondents who expected to owe more than \$80,000 indicated that all six elements of the law school experience were sources of high stress or anxiety, more than four times the 3% proportion among respondents who expected no debt. (Figure 22)

The law school experience is an inherently stressful endeavor; indeed much of its transformative character is derived from its stress-inducing qualities. Given this

prominence, law schools should make efforts to understand the nature of stress and stressors among students. The goals should be to minimize unnecessary and unproductive stressors and provide students with resources and strategies for healthily dealing with stressors that are essential or unavoidable. The health of our students has direct implications on the health of the legal profession. ■

Figure 19

Proportion who indicated high-stress across all sources, by race/ethnicity:

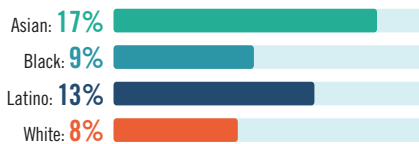


Figure 20

Proportion who indicated high overall stress, by expected debt:

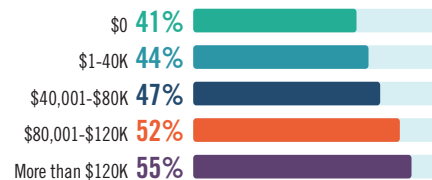


Figure 22

Proportion who indicated high-stress across all sources, by expected debt:

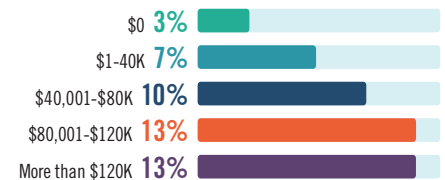
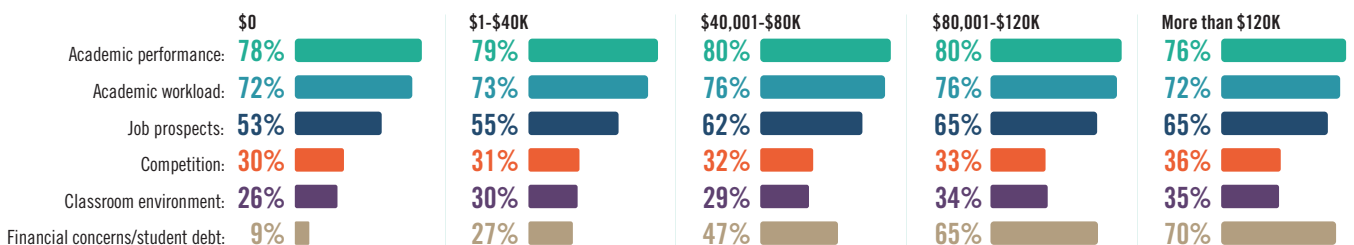


Figure 21

High-stress by individual source, by expected debt:



Participating Law Schools: 2004–2015

Alabama

Faulkner University
Thomas Goode Jones School of Law
Montgomery

Samford University
Cumberland School of Law
Birmingham

The University of Alabama
School of Law
Tuscaloosa

Arizona

Arizona State University
Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law
Tempe

Arizona Summit Law School
Phoenix

Arkansas

University of Arkansas at
Little Rock
William H. Bowen School of Law
Little Rock

University of Arkansas
School of Law
Fayetteville

California

California Western School of Law
San Diego

Chapman University School of Law
Orange

Concord Law School
Los Angeles

Golden Gate University
School of Law
San Francisco

Humphreys College
Laurence Drivon School of Law
Stockton

Loyola Law School
Los Angeles

Pepperdine University
School of Law
Malibu

Santa Clara University
School of Law
Santa Clara

St. Francis School of Law
Irvine

Southwestern Law School
Los Angeles

Thomas Jefferson School of Law
San Diego

University of California, Berkeley
School of Law
Berkeley

University of California, Davis
School of Law
Davis

University of California, Hastings
College of the Law
San Francisco

University of California, Irvine
School of Law
Irvine

University of California,
Los Angeles
School of Law
Los Angeles

University of La Verne
College of Law
La Verne

University of the Pacific
McGeorge School of Law
Sacramento

University of San Diego
School of Law
San Diego

University of San Francisco
School of Law
San Francisco

University of Southern California
Gould School of Law
Los Angeles

Western State University
College of Law
Fullerton

Whittier Law School
Costa Mesa

Colorado

University of Colorado Law School
Boulder

University of Denver Sturm
College of Law
Denver

Connecticut

Quinnipiac University School of Law
Hamden

University of Connecticut
School of Law
Hartford

Delaware

Widener University School of Law
Wilmington

District of Columbia

American University
Washington College of Law

The Catholic University of America
Columbus School of Law

The George Washington University
Law School

Georgetown University Law Center
The University of the
District of Columbia
David A. Clarke School of Law

Florida

Ave Maria School of Law
Naples

Florida Coastal School of Law
Jacksonville

Florida International University
College of Law
Miami

Nova Southeastern University
Shepard Broad Law Center
Ft. Lauderdale

St. Thomas University
School of Law
Miami

Stetson University College of Law
Gulfport

University of Florida
Levin College of Law
Gainesville

University of Miami School of Law
Coral Gables

Georgia

Emory University School of Law
Atlanta

Georgia State University
College of Law
Atlanta

John Marshall Law School, Atlanta
Atlanta

Mercer University
Walter F. George School of Law
Macon

Hawai'i

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa
William S. Richardson
School of Law
Honolulu

Idaho

Concordia University School of Law
Boise

University of Idaho College of Law
Moscow

Illinois

DePaul University College of Law
Chicago

Northern Illinois University
College of Law
DeKalb

Northwestern University
School of Law
Chicago

The John Marshall Law School
Chicago

Loyola University Chicago
School of Law
Chicago

Southern Illinois University
School of Law
Carbondale

University of Illinois College of Law
Champaign

Indiana

Indiana University
Maurer School of Law
Bloomington

Indiana University
Robert H. McKinney School of Law
Indianapolis

Valparaiso University School of Law
Valparaiso

Iowa

Drake University Law School
Des Moines

The University of Iowa
College of Law
Iowa City

Kansas

The University of Kansas
School of Law
Lawrence

Washburn University School of Law
Topeka

Kentucky

Northern Kentucky University
Salmon P. Chase College of Law
Highland Heights

University of Kentucky
College of Law
Lexington

University of Louisville
Louis D. Brandeis School of Law
Louisville

Louisiana

Louisiana State University
Paul M. Hebert Law Center
Baton Rouge

Loyola University
New Orleans College of Law
New Orleans

Southern University Law Center
Baton Rouge

Tulane University Law School
New Orleans

Maine

University of Maine School of Law
Portland

Maryland

University of Baltimore
School of Law
Baltimore

University of Maryland
Francis King Carey School of Law
Baltimore

Massachusetts

Boston College Law School
Newton

Harvard University Law School
Cambridge

Northeastern University
School of Law
Boston
Suffolk University Law School
Boston

University of Massachusetts
School of Law
Dartmouth

Western New England College
School of Law
Springfield

Michigan

Michigan State University
College of Law
East Lansing

Thomas M. Cooley Law School
Lansing

University of Detroit Mercy
School of Law
Detroit

Wayne State University Law School
Detroit

Minnesota

Hamline University School of Law
Saint Paul

University of Minnesota Law School
Minneapolis

University of St. Thomas
School of Law
Minneapolis

William Mitchell College of Law
St. Paul

Mississippi

Mississippi College School of Law
Jackson

The University of Mississippi
School of Law
Oxford

Missouri

Saint Louis University School of Law
St. Louis

University of Missouri
School of Law
Columbia

University of Missouri Kansas City
School of Law
Kansas City

Washington University
School of Law
St. Louis

Montana

The University of Montana
School of Law
Missoula

Nebraska

Creighton University School of Law
Omaha

University of Nebraska
College of Law
Lincoln

Nevada

University of Nevada, Las Vegas
William S. Boyd School of Law
Las Vegas

New Hampshire

University of New Hampshire
School of Law
Concord

New Jersey

Seton Hall University School of Law
Newark

New Mexico

The University of New Mexico
School of Law
Albuquerque

New York

Albany Law School
Albany

Brooklyn Law School
Brooklyn

City University of New York
School of Law at Queens College
Flushing

Cornell Law School
Ithaca

Fordham University School of Law
New York

Hofstra University
Maurice A. Deane School of Law
Hempstead

New York Law School
New York

Pace University School of Law
White Plains

St. John's University School of Law
Queens

Syracuse University College of Law
Syracuse

Touro College
Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center
Central Islip

University at Buffalo Law School
Buffalo

Yeshiva University
Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law
New York

North Carolina

Campbell University
Norman Adrian Wiggins
School of Law
Raleigh

Charlotte School of Law
Charlotte

Duke University School of Law
Durham

Elon University School of Law
Greensboro

North Carolina Central University
School of Law
Durham

University of North Carolina
School of Law
Chapel Hill

Wake Forest University
School of Law
Winston-Salem

Ohio

Capital University Law School
Columbus

Case Western Reserve University
School of Law
Cleveland

Cleveland State University
Cleveland-Marshall College of Law
Cleveland

Ohio Northern University
Claude W. Pettit College of Law
Ada

The Ohio State University
Michael E. Moritz College of Law
Columbus

The University of Akron
School of Law
Akron

University of Cincinnati
College of Law
Cincinnati

University of Dayton School of Law
Dayton

Oklahoma

Oklahoma City University
School of Law
Oklahoma City

The University of Oklahoma
College of Law
Norman

The University of Tulsa
College of Law
Tulsa

Oregon

Lewis & Clark Law School
Portland

University of Oregon School of Law
Eugene

Willamette University College of Law
Salem

Pennsylvania

Earl Mack School of Law
Drexel University
Philadelphia

Temple University
James E. Beasley School of Law
Philadelphia

University of Pittsburgh
School of Law
Pittsburgh

Rhode Island

Roger Williams University
School of Law
Bristol

South Carolina

Charleston School of Law
Charleston

University of South Carolina
School of Law
Columbia

South Dakota

University of South Dakota
School of Law
Vermillion

Tennessee

Lincoln Memorial University
Duncan School of Law
Knoxville

The University of Tennessee
College of Law
Knoxville

Vanderbilt University School of Law
Nashville

Texas

Baylor University School of Law
Waco

St. Mary's University of San Antonio
School of Law
San Antonio

South Texas College of Law
Houston

Southern Methodist University
Dedman School of Law
Dallas

Texas Southern University
Thurgood Marshall School of Law
Houston

Texas Tech University School of Law
Lubbock

Texas Wesleyan University
School of Law
Fort Worth

The University of Texas
School of Law
Austin

University of Houston Law Center
Houston

Utah

Brigham Young University
J. Reuben Clark Law School
Provo

University of Utah
S.J. Quinney College of Law
Salt Lake City

Vermont

Vermont Law School
South Royalton

Virginia

Regent University School of Law
Virginia Beach

University of Richmond
School of Law
Richmond

Washington and Lee University
School of Law
Lexington

William & Mary Law School
Williamsburg

Washington

Gonzaga University School of Law
Spokane

Seattle University School of Law
Seattle

University of Washington
School of Law
Seattle

West Virginia

West Virginia University
College of Law
Morgantown

Wisconsin

Marquette University Law School
Milwaukee

University of Wisconsin Law School
Madison

Wyoming

University of Wyoming
College of Law
Laramie

Australia

University of New South Wales
Faculty of Law
Sydney, NSW

University of Tasmania
Faculty of Law
Hobart, TAS

Canada

University of Alberta
Faculty of Law
Edmonton, AB

University of Calgary
Faculty of Law
Calgary, AB

University of British Columbia
Faculty of Law

Vancouver, BC

University of Victoria
Faculty of Law
Victoria, BC

University of Manitoba
Faculty of Law
Winnipeg, MB

University of New Brunswick
Faculty of Law
Fredericton, NB

Dalhousie University
Schulich School of Law
Halifax, NS

McGill University Faculty of Law
Montreal, ON

Osgoode Hall Law School of York
University
Toronto, ON

Queen's University Faculty of Law
Kingston, ON

Université d'Ottawa
Faculté de droit, Section de droit civil
Ottawa, ON

University of Ottawa
Faculty of Law, Common Law Section
Ottawa, ON

University of Toronto Faculty of Law
Toronto, ON

University of Western Ontario
Faculty of Law
London, ON

University of Windsor Faculty of Law
Windsor, ON

Université de Montréal
Faculté de droit
Montréal, QC

University of Saskatchewan
College of Law
Saskatoon, SK



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