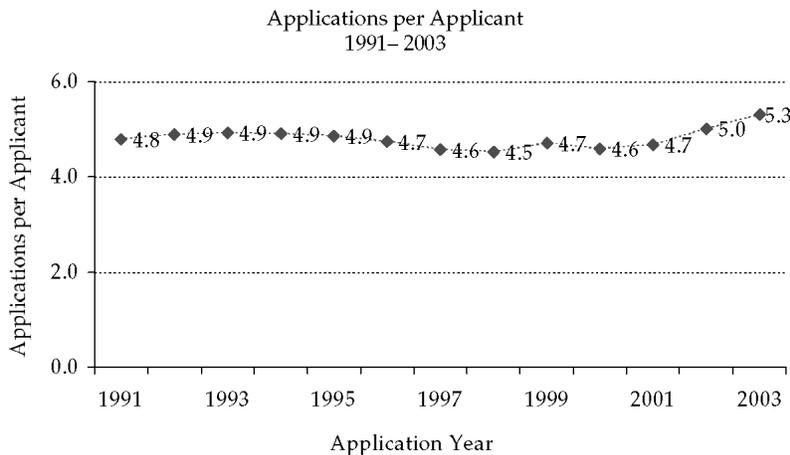# National Applicant Trends

This paper presents a discussion of some short- and long-term trends regarding national applicants to ABA-approved law schools.

The trends discussed are:

- Applicants are applying to more schools (short-term trend)

- Applicants are applying earlier in the admission-year cycle (short-term trend)

- Non-Asian minorities, especially blacks, apply later in the admission-year cycle than whites and Asians (long-term trend)

- Older applicants apply later in the admission-year cycle (long-term trend)

- Credentials generally decline later in the admission-year cycle (long-term trend)

Each of these trends is discussed in detail on the following pages.

Applicants are applying to more schools (short-term trend)

Applications per Applicant
1991– 2003

The preceding chart shows that applications per applicant ranged from 4.8 to 4.9 during the 5-year period from 1991 through 1995 and between 4.5 and 4.7 during the 6-year period from 1996 through 2001. For 2001 there were 4.7 applications per applicant, for 2002 there were 5.0 applications per applicant, and for 2003 the ratio jumped to 5.3. While this may not seem like a large change, consider the following example:

> *If there were 100,000 applicants in each of those 3 years, the number of applications would have increased by 60,000 from 2001 to 2003, an increase of more than 300 applications per school, with no increase in the total number of applicants nationwide!*

Most likely this short-term trend has been caused by applicants recognizing that applicant volumes are high and, therefore, they are applying to more schools in order to improve their likelihood of acceptance. A lesser factor may be that the increased usage of LSAC's LSACD and LSACD on the Web products is fostering additional applications due to the fact that it is easier to apply. (There is only a little anecdotal evidence to support this idea, but sales in these products have increased by 80% in the last 2 years.)

It seems likely that this ratio will remain high as long as applicants perceive that volumes are remaining high.

1

Applicants are applying earlier in the admission-year cycle (short-term trend)
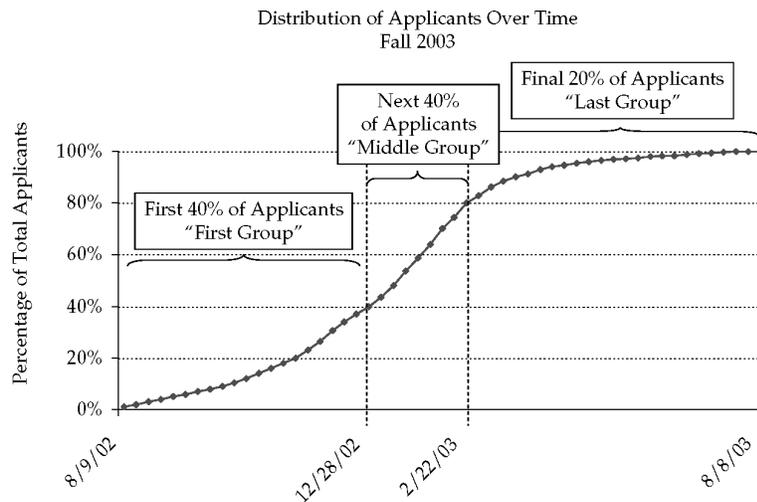
In early December of the last 3 years (2001, 2002, 2003) applicants had reached 26%, 28%, and 31% of the preliminary final applicant counts, respectively. A similar pattern exists for later dates as well. Most likely, the reasons for this are similar to those discussed above. Applicants are applying earlier because they recognize the competitive environment. Also, the LSACD and LSACD on the Web make completing applications easier, and the electronic submission of applications (up 200% over the last 2 years) also speeds up the process.

It seems likely that this trend will also continue as long as applicant volumes are perceived to remain high.

This trend makes year-to-year comparisons in application counts problematic, particularly early in the application cycle.

Non-Asian minorities, especially blacks, apply later in the admission-year cycle than whites and Asians (long-term trend)

This has been a persistent trend for a number of years. In order to illustrate this trend, data from the 2003 application cycle are discussed and graphed below. For purposes of the discussion and the discussions regarding age and gender that follow, the applicant pool was divided into three groups based on when they first applied to a school. The groups are: the first 40% of all applicants, who first applied by late December; the second 40%, who first applied between late December and late February; and the final 20%, who first applied after late February. For purposes of the discussion and charts that follow, these groups will be referred to as the "first group," "middle group," and "last group," respectively. [See chart below.]

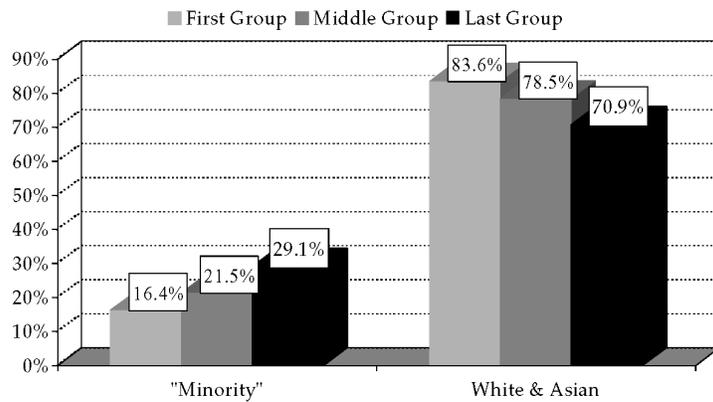Distribution of Applicants Over Time
Fall 2003

The first group of applicants applied to at least one school by 12/27/02. The composition of this group of applicants was 83.6% white and Asian and 16.4% for all other ethnic groups. Black applicants comprised 8.5% of the total.

The middle group of applicants applied to at least one school between 12/28/02 and 2/21/03. The composition of this group of applicants was 78.5% white and Asian and 21.5% for the remainder. Blacks represented 10.3% of the total.

The last group of applicants applied between 2/22/03 and 8/8/03. This group was 70.9% white and Asian and 29.1% other. Blacks made up 15.3% of the total. These results are shown on the next two charts.

2

Composition of Applicant Pool
by Summarized Ethnic Group & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

■ First Group ■ Middle Group ■ Last Group

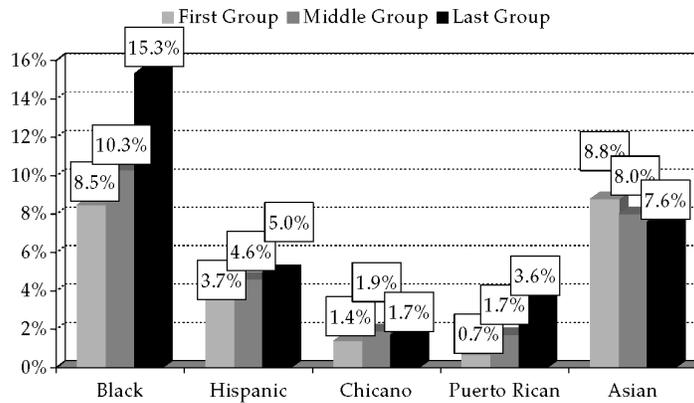|	"Minority"	White & Asian
First Group	16.4%	83.6%
Middle Group	21.5%	78.5%
Last Group	29.1%	70.9%

First Group applied by 12/27/02, Middle Group applied from 12/28 through 2/21,
Last Group applied from 2/22 through 8/8

"Minority" includes American Indian/Alaskan Native, Black/African American
Chicano/Mexican American, Hispanic/Latino, and Puerto Rican

A more detailed ethnic group breakdown is shown on the next chart.

Composition of Applicant Pool
by Ethnic Group & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

■ First Group ■ Middle Group ■ Last Group

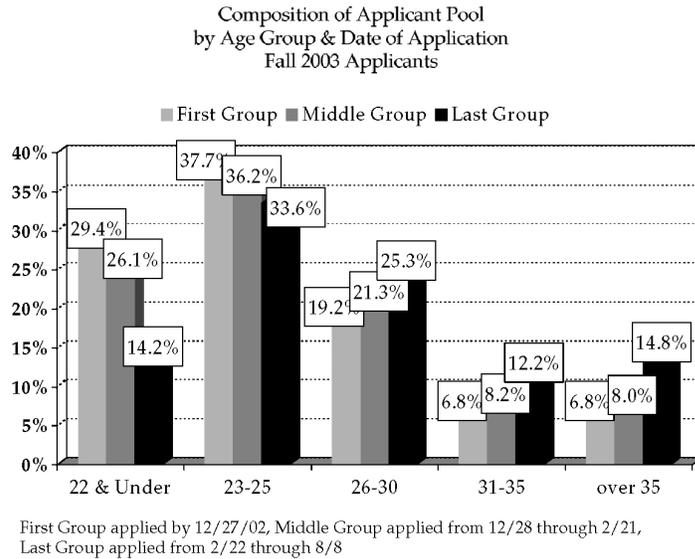|	Black	Hispanic	Chicano	Puerto Rican	Asian
First Group	8.5%	3.7%	1.4%	0.7%	8.8%
Middle Group	10.3%	4.6%	1.9%	1.7%	8.0%
Last Group	15.3%	5.0%	1.7%	3.6%	7.6%

First Group applied by 12/27/02, Middle Group applied from 12/28 through 2/21,
Last Group applied from 2/22 through 8/8

White = 67.1%, 62.7%, 57.0%

3

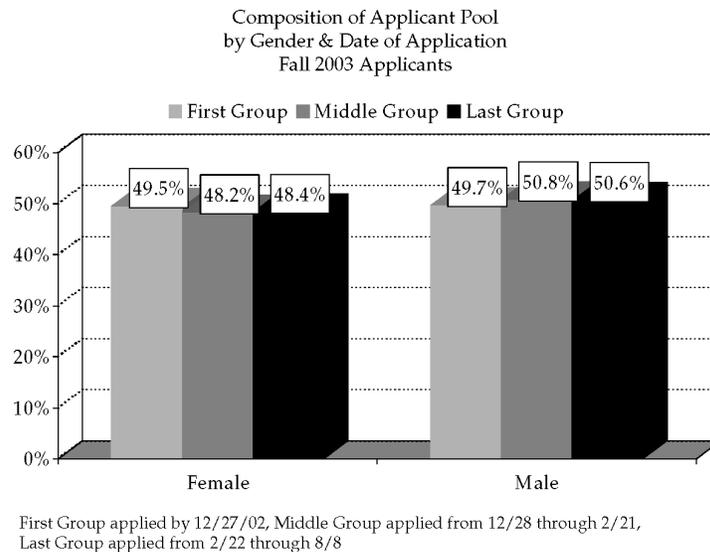## Older applicants apply later in the admission-year cycle (long-term trend)

Using the same 2003 chronological breakdown described above, the 67.2% of the first group of applicants were age 25 and under and 32.8% age 26 and over. Of the middle group, 62.4% were age 25 and under and 37.6% age 26 and over. Of the last group, 47.8% were age 25 and under and 52.2% age 26 and over.

A more detailed breakdown by age group is shown in the next chart.

Composition of Applicant Pool
by Age Group & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

■ First Group ■ Middle Group ■ Last Group

Age Group	First Group	Middle Group	Last Group
22 & Under	29.4%	26.1%	14.2%
23-25	37.7%	36.2%	33.6%
26-30	19.2%	21.3%	25.3%
31-35	6.8%	8.2%	12.2%
over 35	6.8%	8.0%	14.8%

First Group applied by 12/27/02, Middle Group applied from 12/28 through 2/21,
Last Group applied from 2/22 through 8/8

Applicants by gender

The gender of applicants was also examined for the same 2003 time periods (see next chart). Men applied slightly later in the cycle than women, but not significantly so.

Composition of Applicant Pool
by Gender & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

■ First Group ■ Middle Group ■ Last Group

Gender	First Group	Middle Group	Last Group
Female	49.5%	48.2%	48.4%
Male	49.7%	50.8%	50.6%

First Group applied by 12/27/02, Middle Group applied from 12/28 through 2/21,
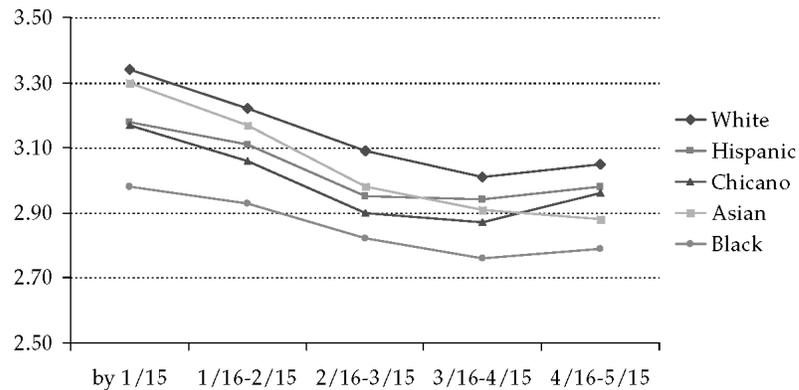Last Group applied from 2/22 through 8/8

4

Credentials generally decline later in the admission-year cycle (long-term trend)
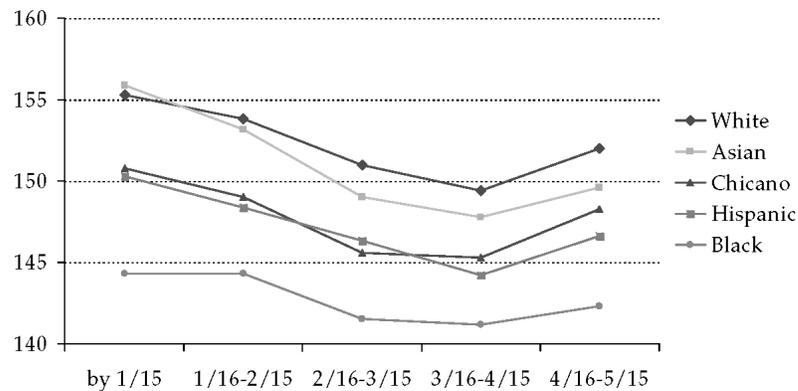
An examination of applicant credentials (GPAs and LSAT scores) reveals that the credentials of applicants generally tend to decline throughout most of the admission-year cycle. That is, on average, candidates who apply early in the cycle have better credentials than those who apply later in the cycle. This trend is true across every ethnic and gender group. There are, of course, some candidates with excellent credentials who apply late in the cycle.

The two charts that follow show the changes in average GPA and LSAT across a portion of the admission-year cycle for various ethnic groups. Data for these charts were derived from the Monthly Applicant Summary reports and therefore is based on different time periods than the preceding charts.

Average GPA of Applicant Pool
by Ethnic Group & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

Average LSAT of Applicant Pool
by Ethnic Group & Date of Application
Fall 2003 Applicants

A few caveats

Because this paper deals with national trends, it is not possible to draw conclusions about how these trends impact individual schools. Schools may want to examine whether similar application patterns exist in their environment and adjust their admission process if appropriate.

The chronological data used for this paper was derived from when schools identify applicants to LSAC via ACES. This differs somewhat from when each school actually receives its applications. However, this should not have any significant impact on the trends discussed as long as most schools identify their applicants to LSAC in a relatively consistent and timely manner.

Due to the batch processing of many applications by the Ontario Law School Application Service (OLSAS) it was not possible to do a similar analysis regarding applicants to Canadian member schools.

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