

Weekly Introduction

Hi everyone,

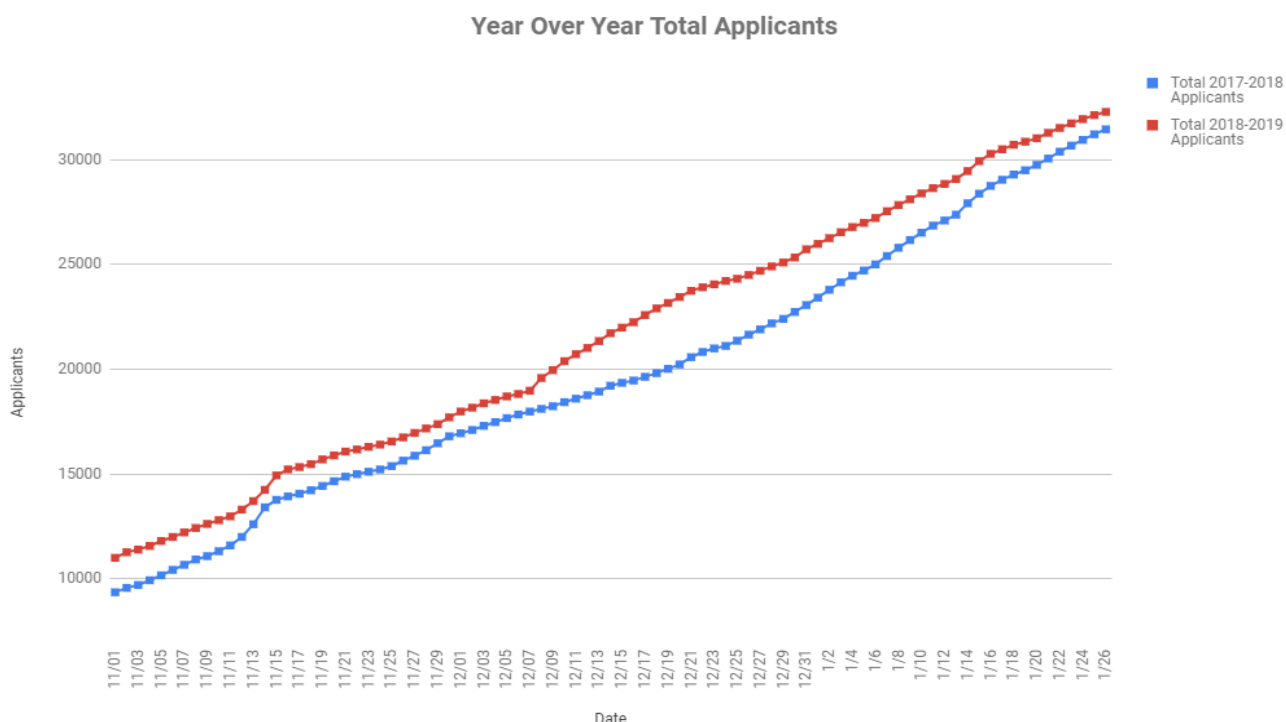
Once again your positive energy gave the Patriots the strength they needed to beat the Chiefs. I definitely did not engage in behavior a neutral observer would describe as “utterly pathetic” and “demeaning even for a toddler” during the game. Absolutely not. I was the picture of calm. My nerves are steel. The Pats don’t play this week, so I guess I’ll just ask that ya’ll join me in hoping no one on either team gets injured in the practices this week.

Alright. Football aside, let’s get into it. You probably know how this works by now- but for those of you who haven’t read these before, I’m gonna break down LSAC published applicant and application data/volume and what it means for people (and schools) this cycle.

[Here](#) is the link to the data I’ve compiled for each category. Scroll through the tabs on the bottom of the sheet to see each category in greater detail. [Here](#) is the raw data that LSAC publishes for anyone who wants to see source stuff and really specific information.

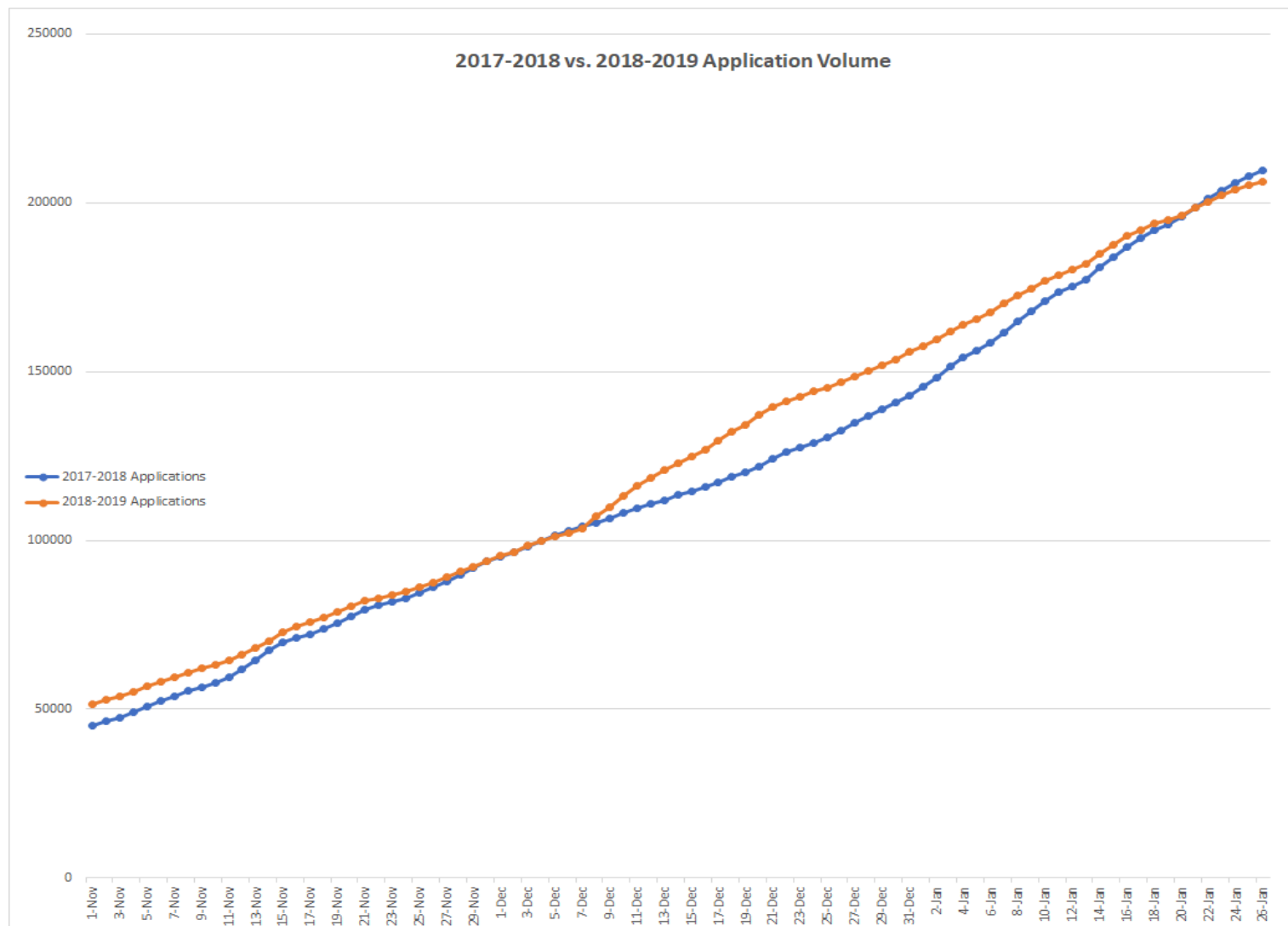
Topline Numbers

So, to start off, our totals. **LSAT applicants are up by 0.2% year over year** (so close...). **Total applicants are up by 2.6% year over year. Applications are DOWN by 1.6%.** At this time last year we had 52% of the final applicant count- a 3% jump from last week in total applicant count. We’re now definitively past the halfway mark in applicants. Here’s a look at our narrowing total applicant volume.



Weekly Summary

Well the obvious big news is that we have an actual decline in applications compared to this time last year. **110 schools have seen a decline in applications, and 12 are at a net zero change.** We actually had a decline in applications (by a smaller number) in early December prior to the release of November results. That disappeared after those scores came out, but this time we've got a few weeks to build up a buffer before January results are released. Please note that applications are not the same as applicants. LSAT applicants and total applicants remain up. You can see the application volume below.

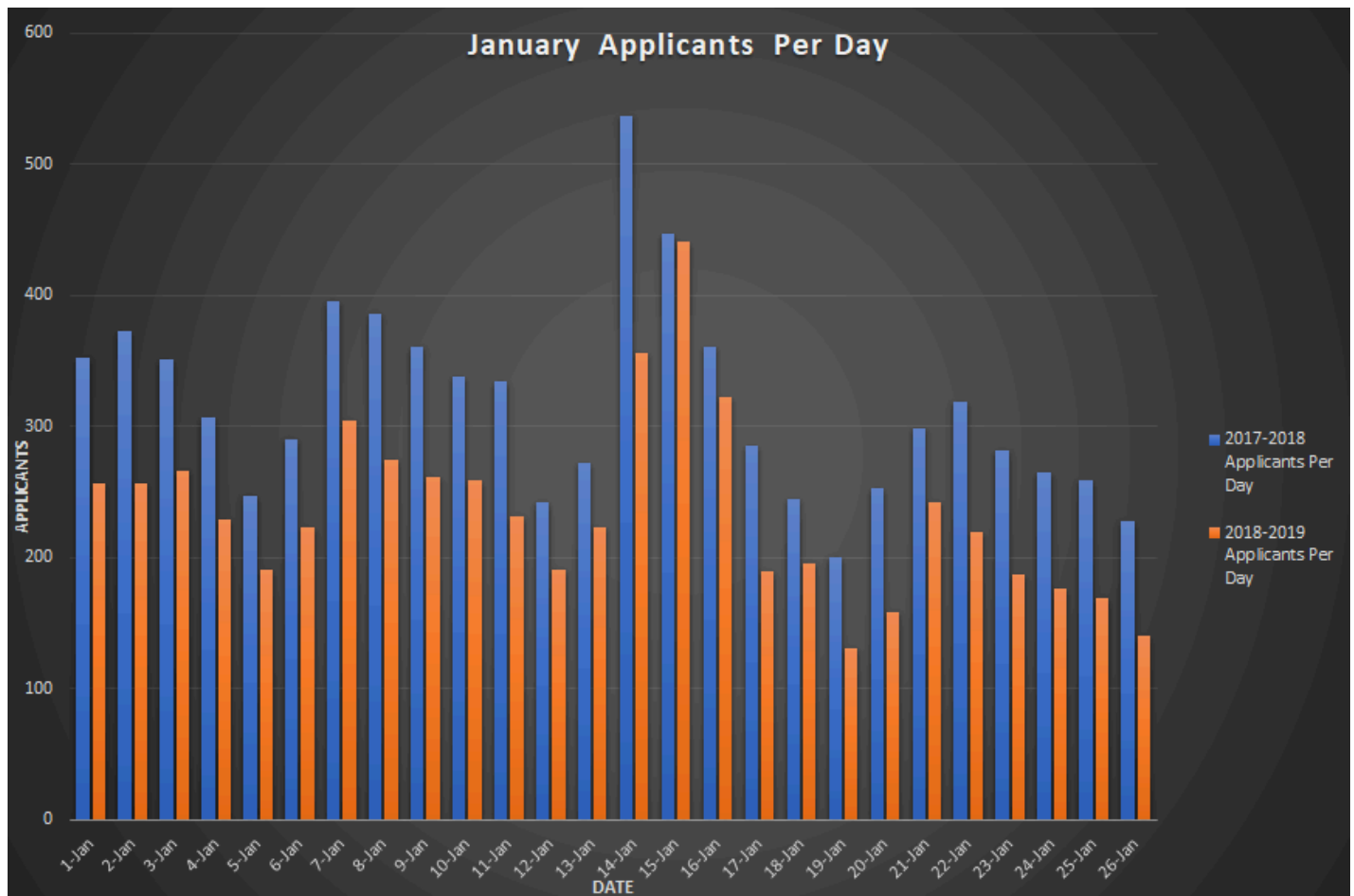


And applications per applicant continue to decrease relative to last year. As of today there have been an average of 6.39 applications submitted per applicant, compared to 6.67 applications per applicant last year. That's a difference of 0.27 fewer applications per applicant this year. The gap continues to widen. On January 1st this year there was an average of 6.06 applications per applicant this cycle compared to 6.21 applications per applicant last cycle- the gap between applications per applicant this year and last is growing. This is very clear evidence that applicants are being more choosy with where they send applications this year. /u/spivey_consulting has speculated that last year many applicants started throwing in more and more applications as the cycle went on- which makes sense

given the tough nature of that cycle. Applicants who had not heard from schools could have been hedging their bets by widening their pool, so he's probably right that contributes to this phenomenon. Another explanation is obviously the increase in LSAC fees to \$45 per application this year, which is fairly substantial.

A decrease in applications isn't quite as good as a decrease in actual applicants, but it does mean somewhat less competition at each school- and for those of you waiting to hear back, it means admissions committees have fewer applications to sort through. Silver linings!

Last week I mentioned it might be possible that we see an uptick in applicants prior to the January test date, but that didn't happen. In fact, applicants this past week have pretty consistently stayed in the low 200's, which is unusually low volume for January in any cycle. Obviously some of this is because of the move to a November test, but it's still notable. The chart below shows the daily volume just for January.



As you can see from the above, we still haven't had a single day this month where applicants this cycle exceeded last year. There is no indication this trend will abate anytime soon.

Ok, onto the individual categories.

Score Range Changes

Here's a look at the changes for each individual range of scores relative to last year. Please remember we most likely have more of our final applicant count to date this year than last thanks to the move from a December LSAT to November.

175+ Applicants

There has been a 22.4% **decrease** in 175+ applicants from last year. This decrease is still largely driven by the higher range. Daily volume in this category remains low, 1 or 2 a day, which is unsurprising as usually these scorers are among the earliest to submit applications. If you noticed nothing I wrote above changed from last week, it's because this category is very static at this point in the cycle. Last year we had 88.8% of the final applicant count in this category at this time.

170-174 Applicants

There has been a 4% **decrease** in applicants in this range from last year. The down trend actually sort of stopped this week, which was disappointing. There were a couple days with small relative increases. Daily volume is getting fairly low, with several days being between five and seven applicants. All scores in this range except 170 are down, with 170 scorers being up by 6%, which is basically unchanged from last week. I'm hoping for our down-trend to resume- I was surprised it stopped, and it's an interesting category to keep an eye on, as you would think almost all these applicants would be in right now, pending just retakers. Last year we had 86.6% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

165-169 Applicants

There has been a 1.7% **decrease** in applicants in this range from last year. Applicants are down in this category for the first time since tracking started November 1st. The 169 surplus has completely disappeared. 165-168 remains a complete mess, with some up and downs like the mountains and valleys of the Himalayas. I had some people inquire what I meant last week about "funky curve nonsense" here. Essentially, this shouldn't really happen. Extreme volume changes happen at the margins (<140 and 175+) due to very small sample sizes. But for scores in the 165-169 range, where we have about four thousand applicants, the curve should normalize- somewhat- the distribution of scores so that any volume changes we see are in the five to ten percent range. The LSAT is not a forced curve, but LSAC does have a lot of tools at its disposal to predict how takers will do, and scales the test accordingly. They aim for a normal bell curve distribution of scores. But look at these numbers: 165, -13.7 percent. 166, +25.8 percent. 167, -35.1 percent. 168, +33.2 percent. Utterly ridiculous. That shouldn't happen, and hopefully it doesn't repeat next year. I hope that clarifies for folks- any questions let me know, I know LSAT curve stuff is a bit technical. Anyways. Last year we had 79.1% of the final applicant count in this category at this time.

160-164 Applicants

There has been a 2.8% **increase** in applicants in this range from last year. We're seeing a solid catchup here, with a 2.5 percent drop since last week. I'm pretty confident we'll hit net zero before January results come out. The 19.4% increase in 162 applicants continues to

drive the increase here. Last year we had 67.5% of our final applicant count in this category at this time- volume is speeding up here.

155-159 Applicants

There has been a 5.8% **increase** in applicants in this range from last year. You all know by now that this category is ruining it for the rest of us, as they single handedly prevent us from having a net decrease in applicants. 159's remain public enemy number one, with a 26.3% increase, 262 total applicants. That score single handedly outpaces our total change in applications (though to be fair a couple others do as well). Last year we had 55.5% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

150-154 Applicants

There has been a 0.6% **increase** in applicants in this range from last year. We're getting very close to net zero or a decline in this category- with any luck it'll arrive before next weeks update.. Last year we had 48.8% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

145-149 Applicants

There has been a 0.1% **decrease** in applicants in this range from last year. This category has now joined the ranks of net zero change (barely, but it counts). Last year we had 38.6% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

140-144 Applicants

There has been a 2% **decrease** in applicants in this range from last year. Another category that has joined the net decrease group. As I have discussed before, the increases in this range continue to come generally on the higher end- the 142 and 143's. Last year we had 33.3% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

<140 Applicants

There has been a 9.9% **decrease** in applicants in this range from last year. We continue to trend down in this category. You're probably tired of me harping on about how great it is for this category to go down, so let me just repeat what I said last time: this is maybe the best news of all, and I encourage anyone thinking of applying, or who has applied in this range, to reach out or post in the thread and see what good options might be. Anyways. Last year we had 31.6% of our final applicant count in this category at this time.

Non-LSAT Applicants

There has been a 116.8% **increase** in applicants in this category, for a total of 1,431 non LSAT applicants to date. Remember, this can include any other test (GRE, GMAT, MCAT etc). For obvious reasons it's likely the vast majority of this increase is coming from GRE applicants. Last week I talked about how we've seen the volume in this category go up- this week alone we had 131 new non-LSAT applicants, a 9.2% increase in the category's total number just this week. The relative increases here continue to far outpace the LSAT applicants. I've talked before about how this is an interesting group for several reasons, in large part because we just don't know a lot about them. What's the quality of applicants in this group? How many non-LSAT applicants do schools intend to accept? Will they be treated the same for scholarships? A lot of unknowns that we'll get more clarity on as the

cycle develops. Anecdotal reports continue of good outcomes for some non-LSAT applicants. And of course, there are a lot of implications for future cycles.

Analysis

We're over halfway through getting all our applicants, well into the cycle. So far, things are continuing largely as expected: the slowdown this year is letting us catch up in volume. I am going to treat the forward shift in applicants /u/spivey_consulting predicted as fact given the data and trends, so kudos to him for sniffing that out. I think this trend is likely to continue, and be self-reinforcing for a few reasons. First, now that LSAC is offering more regular, and earlier, LSAT administrations, we may see more applicants come into October/November/December ready to get their applications in almost immediately. Second, the more people apply early the greater the disadvantage of applying later on. It's an arms race of sorts where there's a benefit to being the earliest- and applicants have more access these days to information sources (reddit, TLS/LSL, twitter etc) that will relay that information to them. So tell all your friends, have applications ready to go early, because we're going full med-school now.

The non-LSAT category is still super interesting. I can't wait to see what happens to it after the January LSAT scores come out. If it drops like after November I'm going to write off non-LSAT applicants as having a real impact on applications for the next couple cycles, because it will demonstrate that most are using non-LSAT tests as a placeholder until they get an LSAT score. But if by the end of the cycle we have a couple thousand non-LSAT applicants, that will really bolster a flat year. Schools may then start really looking to non-LSAT applicants to pad their stats. They might also be a source of students for non-JD programs law schools offer, which have grown since 2010. As of now these applicants accounts for about 4.5% of the total pool, which is an ever growing share. The quality of those applicants remains to be seen- I've speculated in the past that these are generally not equal quality applicants to the average LSAT taker. With any luck LSAC will release some data on the quality of these applicants.

International applicants remain up by 21.3%. I believe this category accounts for a decent chunk of non-LSAT applicants, though admittedly I'm basing this on just speculation.

Waves continue to come in steadily. Columbia finally started admitting people. The Hamiltons they've handed out are kind of telling (based on a limited sample size). There's people with 175, 174, even a 172! I've talked before about how Columbia is particularly vulnerable to the drop in high scorers, so they may be throwing money around to keep their shiney new 172 median. As for Harvard I know a lot of folks are disappointed there was no JS2 wave. Here's some comfort for those waiting on JS2's (and JS1's I guess): there has been a 15.5% decrease in applicants at or above Harvard's 173 median. Something's gotta break eventually, because the trend is very obviously not reversing anytime soon.

Looking Forward

We're still waiting on final January registration- and test taker- numbers to be able to form a determination on how this cycle will turn out. I'm hoping that we'll have that information soon. I'm sticking with my prediction that ultimately the registrants/takers will be down versus last year, but it remains to be confirmed either way. I've been wrong before. And if I'm right about a chunk of non-LSAT applicants taking the January test, then we'll see some cannibalization in volume from one category to another that has 0 net change.

The January test curve will matter a lot. Since this is a non-disclosed test we won't ever know what it actually is, but if the curve is tight that will help keep our significant drop in 170+ scorers where it is. A generous curve will do the opposite. And maybe it'll help smooth out the 165-168 nonsense.

We have 18 days left in the countdown until those scores come out and start (temporarily I think) reversing the decline. For those of us number watching, I feel good about predicting that we'll be below last years volume by the time the test rolls around. Heck, we'll probably have a decrease in LSAT applicants by tomorrow.

Volume this year for applicants 165 and up will be pretty low going forward. The most significant changes we'll see there are from re-takers who move into those categories. We're really moving into decision season for schools in that category, as shown by recent waves.

What does all this mean for you? Well, /u/spivey_consulting recently tweeted [here](#) about this data meaning plus waitlist movement if it continues. Last year we didn't see a whole lot of waitlist movement, so this would be a real change. I'd also refer you to his blog post about this being a slow, flat cycle if you'd like to know more about how things are going to work out, it can be found [here](#). Although if January numbers do end up down I'm optimistic the cycle may end up being slightly down overall!

That's pretty much it. Just all around good news and a continuation of what we already know. I'll keep you updated as we find out more, and any questions just post them as usual!