

The Law School Scholarship Game: Be Informed



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If you should receive a scholarship offer to attend law school you should certainly feel a sense of achievement, as most accepted applicants do not receive scholarship money to study law.

These monetary awards are extremely rare, and reserved for the applicants with the “best” LSATs and GPAs among the school’s applicant pool. Some schools are fortunate to have very generous amounts of scholarship money to offer; while other schools have limited amounts of money to offer. So what does that mean for you, the applicant?

Sometimes law schools offer scholarships simply to improve their incoming statistics (which helps the school’s ranking and reputation.) Most often, a scholarship offer is made because the admissions committee believes you can and will perform extremely well at their institution, graduate, pass the bar the first time (which helps the school’s ranking and reputation), make a lot of money, and in turn give generously to the law school in appreciation for your “free” legal education (which also helps ranking and reputation.) After all, they saved you quite a few thousand dollars in tuition & fees, right?

Not so fast! All offers are not equal and the requirements to keep a scholarship for the duration of your studies may be too high a bar for even students with the best incoming academic statistics. The question becomes: What are your chances of maintaining the scholarship for duration of your studies? You might be surprised at what you will hear if you ask.

The reality is that law school is competitive. And because your incoming LSAT and GPA do not guarantee you a place at the top of your class even if offered a scholarship (though it helps the school’s ranking and reputation), retention requirements are set to ensure that only the top performers keep their scholarships (and that the law school does not go bankrupt.) So many schools set a minimum GPA requirement and/or class rank requirement to keep scholarships.

Because law school grades are typically “curved” for first-year students, achieving the requisite GPA or class rank is not as easy as it may appear. Let me explain. If scholarships are offered to 50% of incoming students because the law school happens to be a school with a generous incoming scholarship budget, and a 3.0 GPA is required to keep the scholarship, it becomes mathematically impossible for half the class to have a 3.0 GPA or better because of the grading curve. So.....

If you’re fortunate enough to receive a scholarship, celebrate. But after your moment of euphoria has subsided, pull yourself together, pick up the phone and ask the admissions officer:

- 1.) What percentage of incoming students **receive** scholarships?
- 2.) What percentage of students **keep** their scholarships AFTER their first semester/year?

Then do a quick probability analysis and make an INFORMED decision about the scholarship offer and your chances of keeping it. You may find that some offers are not as gratuitous as they appear.



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