



**First-Year Law School Class:
A Focus on Students with Disabilities, 2023 Update**



Debra Langer, MPA, MSc
Applied Research Analyst

Anna Russian, MAS, PhD
Applied Research Scientist

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Key Insights

Disproportionate burdens are placed on students with disabilities,¹ in life and in law school, as compared to students without disabilities — whether it's the often costly and time-consuming process of having to prove one's disability, difficulties obtaining accommodations, confronting stigmas around the receipt of accommodations, or other aspects of living and learning in a largely non-accessible world.² These processes can be isolating and affect students' sense of belonging. It can be particularly difficult when students have “non-apparent” disabilities — such as mental health disorders, chronic pain, autoimmune disorders, and other types of disabilities — which can result in feeling extra pressure to “perform” one's disability in order to be believed. The multiple identities of law students with disabilities (i.e., the intersectionality of identities) can exacerbate existing inequities; for example, the socioeconomic barriers for students with disabilities are compounded for racially and ethnically marginalized³ students with disabilities.⁴

Through the 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys, current law students have helped us begin to understand how the law school application and decision-making processes are experienced by individuals with disabilities.⁵ **Key insights from the 2023 survey sample include:**

- In 2023, 12% of students in their first year of law school identified as a person with a disability. This is the same as the proportion who identified as students with disabilities in 2022.
- The most commonly reported disabilities included mental health disabilities (59%) followed by developmental or intellectual disabilities (28%), cognitive or processing disabilities (27%), and physical disabilities (21%). The proportion of 1Ls reporting each category of disabilities is similar to those reported in 2022.⁶

¹ LSAC has chosen to use person-first language in alignment with the National Organization on Disability, the American Association of People with Disabilities, and the American Bar Association. Person-first language is largely recognized as emphasizing the individual over their disability, condition, or diagnosis. We respect and honor an individual's personal preferences when referring to their own disability including the use of identity-first language.

² Emens, E. F. (2020). Disability admin: The invisible costs of being disabled. *Minn. L. Rev.*, 105, 2329.

³ “Marginalized” refers to populations that historically have been excluded, disempowered, disenfranchised, or otherwise treated as being insignificant, unimportant, or peripheral. Marginalized can be used to describe various populations and is not synonymous with or limited to racially/ethnically underrepresented populations.

⁴ Payne-Tsoupros, C. (2020). A starting point for disability justice in legal education. *Journal Committed to Social Change on Race and Ethnicity (JCSCORE)*, 6(1), 165-189.

⁵ For insights and trends from students with disabilities in the 2022-2023 1L class, check out [2022 First-Year Law School Class: A Focus on Students with Disabilities](#).

⁶ The disability categories used in the surveys and specific disabilities that fall within each category can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

- Students reporting a disability were more likely to be white, continuing-generation college graduates, cisgender women, and straight/heterosexual students. This is also similar to respondents in 2022.
- Students with disabilities entered law school with significantly higher average undergraduate education debt loads than students without disabilities. The difference in average debt load (approximately \$9,000 higher for students with disabilities) was almost exactly the same as the average difference in undergraduate debt loads reported in the 2022 survey.
- Almost half of all 1Ls with disabilities (49%) disclosed their disability on all their law school applications, just slightly more than those who disclosed to all in 2022 (46%). Racially and ethnically marginalized 1Ls were more likely not to disclose their disabilities (43%) than their white (37%) peers with disabilities. This is similar to the trend in 2022.
- Students who enrolled in law schools in the highest selectivity quartile (Q1) were less likely to disclose to all schools they applied to (42%) compared to students enrolled in law schools in Q2, Q3, and Q4 (49%, 49%, and 58%, respectively).⁷

Introduction

In 2022, LSAC first asked 1L students questions about disability in an effort to better understand how the law school application and decision-making processes are experienced by individuals with disabilities. This brief is an update to the report [“2022 First-Year Law School Class: A Focus on Students with Disabilities”](#) and presents the responses of first year (1L) law students with disabilities in the 2023-2024 academic year. The purpose of this update is to add to the knowledge base regarding the journey to law school for students with disabilities and provide further information that can be used by law schools to better understand and effectively address the barriers that law school candidates with disabilities face.⁸

⁷ Based on the 2023 admission rate, median LSAT of admitted students, and mean UGPA of admitted students, each school is assigned a selectivity index score used to create quartiles of law school selectivity. The top 25% of highly selective law schools are in quartile 1 (Q1), and they are the first 49 law schools with the highest index score.

⁸ Where questions from the 2022 and 2023 matriculant surveys were comparable, comparison between the responses from 2023 and 2022 respondents are described.

Defining Disability

There are many ways to define disability, and, often, the definition an institution uses can include or exclude specific individuals. While there is a legal definition set by the Americans with Disabilities Act⁹ that most institutions use and is based largely, but not solely, on a medical model of disability (i.e., disability as an individual medical condition causing impairment), it is important to note, especially when considering policy changes, the social-relational and other models of disability. The social-relational model reframes disability as an interplay of social factors, environmental factors, and individual impairment that can together or individually limit the extent of participation in society.¹⁰ This model takes the onus off an individual to adapt to a society created for non-disabled people and puts more of that responsibility on society or an institution to create an inclusive, accessible, and equitable environment. In this report, we acknowledge the medical model of disability that many schools use when, for example, deciding who qualifies for accommodations. However, for the purposes of self-identification in the Matriculant Survey and to acknowledge the lived experience of those with disabilities, we use the social-relational model to understand disability.

2023 Law School Matriculants with Disabilities

In October 2023, LSAC distributed a survey to all 2023 1L students to understand who current law school matriculants are and what factors they considered to determine which law school(s) would meet their academic, professional, and personal needs.¹¹ For the second time, LSAC included questions on disability.¹² Overall, 12% (n=229) of the 2023 1L respondents (n=1,903) identified as a person with a disability (Table 1). While this is the same as the 12% of 1Ls who identified as students with disabilities in the 2022 survey, this does not mean that these populations are similar. There may be a

⁹ ADA.gov. (2023). Introduction to the Americans with Disabilities Act. <https://www.ada.gov/topics/intro-to-ada/>. As a stakeholder noted, to meet the definition of “regarded as” being disabled the person need only show that an action has been taken based on an actual or perceived physical or mental impairment, whether or not that impairment limits or is perceived to limit a major life activity. There is a subtle distinction between “perceived” and “regarded as.” Moreover, the distinction between “one or major life activities” and “one or more major life activities of such individual” is important because a person has to show that they are specifically limited and not just limited in a generic sense. Finally, although the first and arguably second prong of the ADA definition bespeak a medical model to an extent, the third prong (regarded as) more directly implicates a social model of disability.

¹⁰ Martin, J. J. (2013). Benefits and barriers to physical activity for individuals with disabilities: A social-relational model of disability perspective. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 35(24), 2030-2037; Martin, J.J. (2018). *Handbook of Disability Sport and Exercise Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

¹¹ For a full profile of the 2023-2024 1L class based on the 2023 LSAC Matriculant Survey, please see “[LSAC’s Knowledge Report: The 2023 1L Profile](#).”

¹² These questions were developed with the input of a focus group of current and former law students with disabilities organized by the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy, and Innovation as well as the ABA Council on Disability Rights. The questions were first asked on the LSAC 2022 Matriculant Survey. The disability categories used in the surveys and specific disabilities that fall within each category can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

difference between the populations from the 2022 and 2023 surveys because a larger proportion of respondents to the 2023 survey did not answer the question at all (6% in 2022 compared to 24% in 2023). As LSAC continues to collect information from students with disabilities in each 1L class, there will be more information to better understand the population.

Similar to first-year law students (1Ls) responding in 2022, close to one in three students with disabilities reported being first-generation college graduates. In 2023, cisgender women comprised a majority of respondents, double the proportion of respondents with disabilities identified as gender diverse (10%), compared to respondents in 2022 (5%; Table 1). Over half of respondents with disabilities identified as straight/heterosexual, similar to 2022, but almost double the proportion of respondents chose not to identify their sexual orientation (13% in 2023 and 7% in 2022). In 2023, a smaller proportion of the responding 1Ls with disabilities were racially and ethnically marginalized (35%) compared to 2022 (41%).

Table 1: 1Ls with Disabilities by Socio-Demographic Groups in 2022 and 2023

| Student Identities | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2023 (n=229) | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2022 (n=356) | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2022 and 2023 (n=585) |
|--|---|---|--|
| First-Generation College Status | | | |
| First-Generation | 31% | 30% | 30% |
| Continuing-Generation | 66% | 69% | 68% |
| Not Identified | 3% | 1% | 2% |
| Gender Identity | | | |
| Man (Cisgender) | 24% | 28% | 26% |
| Woman (Cisgender) | 65% | 64% | 64% |
| Gender Diverse | 10% | 5% | 7% |
| Not Identified | 2% | 3% | 3% |
| Sexual Orientation | | | |
| Straight/Heterosexual | 51% | 53% | 52% |
| Not Straight/Not Heterosexual | 36% | 40% | 38% |
| Not Identified | 13% | 7% | 10% |

| Student Identities | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2023 (n=229) | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2022 (n=356) | % of Individuals with Disabilities in 2022 and 2023 (n=585) |
|---|--|--|---|
| Race and Ethnicity | | | |
| Native American or Alaska Native ¹³ or Indigenous Person of Canada | 4% | 3% | 3% |
| Asian | 6% | 8% | 7% |
| Black/African American | 7% | 9% | 8% |
| Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x ¹⁴ | 4% | 9% | 7% |
| Middle East or North African/Arab | 2% | 3% | 2% |
| Multiracial or Ethnoracial (2 or more) ¹⁵ | 12% | 10% | 10% |
| Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander ¹⁶ | <1% | <1% | <1% |
| White | 58% | 50% | 53% |
| Not identified | 7% | 9% | 8% |

Source: 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys. Percent reporting disabilities is based on only those who specifically identified whether they did or did not have a disability in the survey.

¹³ LSAC is committed to improving how data is collected and reported. Given conversations with community leaders and advocates, American Indian and Alaska Native students include those who identify exclusively or in part (multiracial or ethnoracial by selecting American Indian and Alaska Native and one other racial or ethnic category) as American Indian or Alaska Native. [Layers of Identity: Rethinking American Indian and Alaska Native Data Collection in Higher Education](#)

¹⁴ Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x students counted here are those who identify as only Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x and/or Puerto Rican. This category is not Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x of any race. Ethnoracial Hispanic or Latina/é/o/x students are counted under Multiracial or Ethnoracial (2 or more).

¹⁵ The term “ethnoracial” refers to a combination of racial and ethnic identities and thereby offers a more accurate representation of the lived experiences of individuals with those combined identities (Goldberg, 1993). For example, Black people are not a monolithic group, and describing someone who is Afro-Latina/é/o/x or Afro-Caribbean only as “African American” obscures key ethnic aspects of their identities. Different ethnic identities often imply distinctly different experiences due, in part, to different immigration histories and the political-economic circumstances of each group. Goldberg, D.T. (1993). *Racist culture: Philosophy and the politics of meaning*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

¹⁶ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander includes anyone who identifies exclusively or in part (multiracial or ethnoracial by selecting Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander and one other racial or ethnic category) as Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander.

While we are pointing to trends consistent with national-level data throughout this report, we do not have enough data at this time to say that the trends identified are representative of all 1Ls with disabilities. LSAC will continue to administer the matriculant survey on a yearly basis to all 1Ls. As we gather more data, we will be able to make more definitive statements about law students with disabilities and their different intersecting identities. Until that time, these results serve as a starting point for law schools to think about how law school programs and policies can create the most equitable and inclusive environments for all.

Undergraduate Debt Load

Debt can and does affect many aspects of a 1L's life, from the time before they are even applicants to the decisions they make about the type of work they want to do and where they want to live after they graduate. Recent studies have found that educational debt loads affect the personal lives of young lawyers, causing them to postpone or not get married, buy a house, and/or have children; choose legal jobs they do not really want, leave the legal profession, or not enter the legal profession at all; and is cited as the cause of stress, anxiety, depression, and anger, among other negative mental health effects.¹⁷ The impact of debt on future outcomes is even greater for students with disabilities.¹⁸ Although reported debt for both 1Ls with and without disabilities was lower among 2023 respondents, similar to 2022, it was significantly higher for 1Ls with disabilities (Table 2). In addition, in both years, students with disabilities owed, on average, about \$9,000 more in undergraduate debt than those without disabilities. While these numbers should still be viewed as preliminary trends, this will be important to explore in subsequent years since individuals with disabilities often have higher expenses and may need access to more and different kinds of financial support to make law school a possibility for them.

¹⁷ American Bar Association. (2020). 2020 Law School Student Loan Debt: Survey Report. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/young_lawyers/2020-student-loan-survey.pdf; American Bar Association. (2021). Student Debt: The Holistic Impact on Today's Young Lawyer. https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/young_lawyers/2021-student-loan-survey.pdf.

¹⁸ Guevara, A. (2024). How American society and law continue to prevent people with disabilities seeking education and employment. *UC Law Constitutional Quarterly*, 51(1), 65.

Table 2: Average Debt Among Students With and Without Disabilities in 2022 and 2023¹⁹

| Student Identity | Average Debt in 2023 | Average Debt in 2022 | Average Debt in 2022 and 2023 |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------------|
| Students With Disabilities | \$23,259 | \$39,287 | \$32,999 |
| Students Without Disabilities | \$14,260 | \$30,074 | \$25,155 |

Source: 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys.

Average debt is based only on respondents who specifically identified whether they did or did not have a disability in the survey. In 2023, 224 respondents who replied to the debt question indicated they had a disability, and 1,095 who replied to the debt question reported they did not have a disability. In 2022, 347 respondents who replied to the debt question indicated they had a disability, and 2,425 who replied to the debt question reported they did not have a disability.

Program Type and Law School Selectivity

The 2023 1L class was the most diverse law school class in history. Part of understanding that diversity involves understanding how and what type of law schools students are attending. About the same proportion of 1L respondents with and without disabilities were full- and part-time students (Table 3). Slightly more students without disabilities attended schools in the top 25% highly selective law school quartile.²⁰ As mentioned above, these trends are preliminary. This is the first time LSAC is analyzing students by program type and law school selectivity quartile. With subsequent years and larger sample sizes, trends may emerge that will be useful in understanding how to best support students with disabilities through the application and enrollment phases of their law school journeys.

¹⁹ Average debt is different than reported in [“2022 First-Year Law School Class: A Focus on Students with Disabilities,”](#) because a different method was used to calculate the average. For comparison purposes, all debt averages were calculated the same way for this report.

²⁰ Using LSAC data, law schools are each assigned a selectivity index based on each school’s 2023 admission rate, median LSAT of admitted students, and median UGPA of admitted students. The top 25% highly selective law schools are in the first quartile (Q1). The percentages indicate the proportion of respondents who matriculated to a school within each quartile.

Table 3: Percentage of 2023 1Ls with and Without Disabilities by Program Type and School Selectivity Quartile

| Category | % of 1Ls with Disabilities (n=229) | % of 1Ls without Disabilities (n=1,128) |
|---|------------------------------------|---|
| Program Type | | |
| Full-time | 86% | 91% |
| Part-time | 14% | 9% |
| Law School Selectivity | | |
| Q1 (Top 25% Highly Selective Law Schools) | 29% | 34% |
| Q2 | 25% | 24% |
| Q3 | 27% | 23% |
| Q4 | 20% | 18% |

Source: 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys. There were no significant differences between the proportion of students with disabilities and without who were full- or part-time students.

Using LSAC data, law schools are each assigned a selectivity index based on each school's 2023 admission rate, median LSAT of admitted students, and median UGPA of admitted students. The top 25% highly selective law schools are in the first quartile (Q1), and they are the first 49 law schools with the highest index score..

Disability Categories

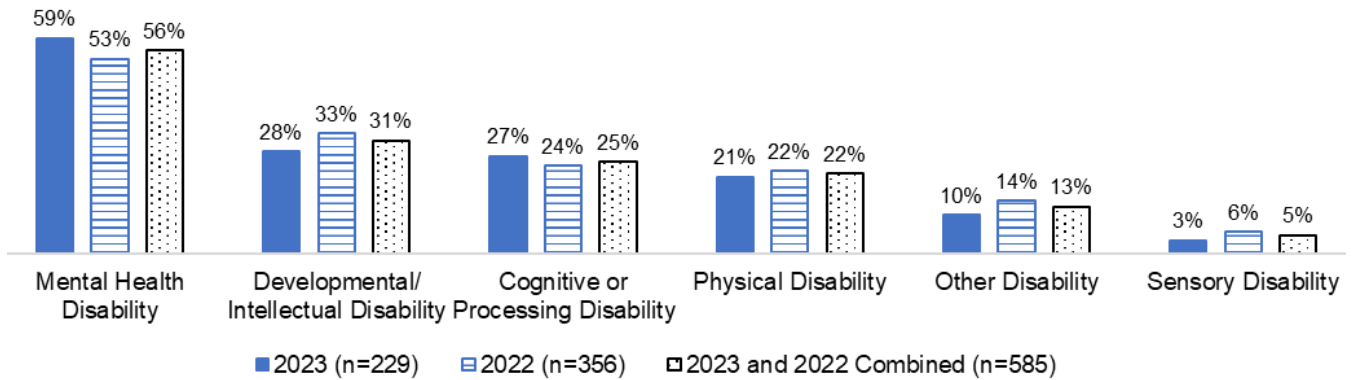
How an individual's disability may impact their legal education journey and what type of supports, if any, will be needed and appropriate necessarily varies with the type of disability.²¹ Trends in the type of disability changed very little between 2022 and 2023 with a mental health disability being reported by more than half of 1Ls with disabilities (Figure 1). While not surprising based on the noted high rates of mental health and substance use issues among law students and concomitant increased efforts to address issues of law student well-being, this is important for law school admissions professionals as well as faculty and those who support law students through their schooling to note, so they can consider how to provide students the best opportunity for success.²² Developmental or intellectual disabilities such as attention deficit

²¹ The disability categories used in the surveys and specific disabilities that fall within each category can be found in [Appendix 1](#).

²² The issue of mental health issues among law students, especially in the context of student wellbeing, is complex and beyond the scope of this report. However, this is a critical and growing issue among law students. Within the last decade, recognition of the high rate of mental health and substance abuse issues have increased as well as an increasingly strident call to address law student wellbeing in a holistic way. See, for example: Ferris, G. (2022). Law-students wellbeing and vulnerability. *The Law Teacher*, 56(1), 5-19; Jaffe, D., Bender, K. M., & Organ, J. (2021). "It is okay to not be okay": The 2021 survey of law student well-being. *U. Louisville L. Rev.*, 60, 441; Jaffe, D., et al. (2017). The path to lawyer well-being: Practical recommendations for positive change (the report of the national task force on lawyer well-being), part II, recommendations for law schools. American University Washington College of Law. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3021218

hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder as well as cognitive or processing disabilities such as executive functioning issues or language-based learning disorders like dyslexia were also commonly reported by more than one-quarter of 1Ls with disabilities. Physical disabilities, those that most people tend to think of when considering the need for student supports, were reported by just over 20% of students with disabilities.

Figure 1: Students With Disabilities by Disability Category in 2023 and 2022



Source: 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys

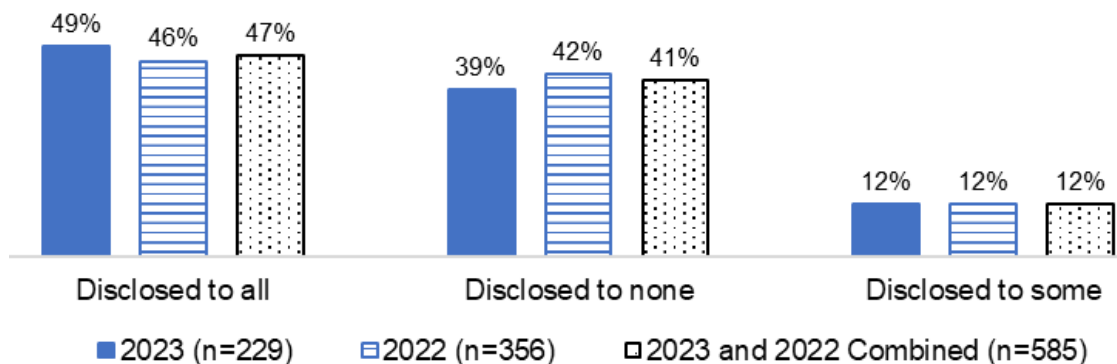
Disclosing Disabilities

Providing reasonable modifications or accommodations under the ADA is intended to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity to succeed on par with law students without disabilities. When requesting modifications or accommodations, students must disclose their disabilities. The first step in the process is deciding whether to disclose. Both the competitive environment of law school in which high achievement is seemingly at odds with the ADA’s definition of disability (i.e., substantial limitations to one or more major life activities)²³ and “accommodation discrimination”²⁴ (or experiencing discrimination or stigma as a result of accommodations being granted) can be strong disincentives for students to disclose. While almost half of students with disabilities disclosed to all schools in 2023, slightly more than disclosed in 2022, there is still a significant proportion who did not disclose to any schools (Figure 2).

²³ Hensel, W. F. (2007). Disability dilemma: A skeptical bench & (and) bar, *The U. Pitt. L. Rev.*, 69, 637.

²⁴ MacFarlane, K. (2022). Accommodation discrimination. *Am. UL Rev.*, 72, 1971.

Figure 2: Percent of Students by Disability Disclosure on Law School Applications in 2023 and 2022

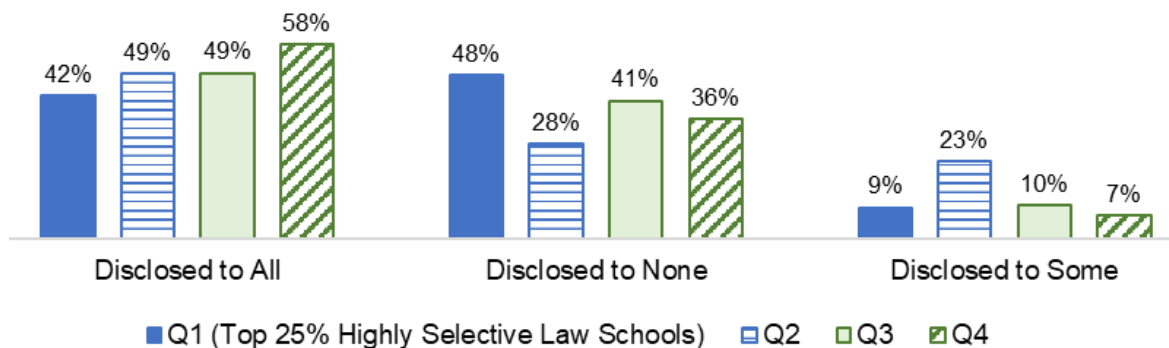


Source: 2022 and 2023 LSAC Matriculant Surveys

Racially and ethnically marginalized 1Ls were more likely to have not disclosed to any schools they applied to (43%) compared to white 1Ls (37%). The reluctance of already marginalized populations to disclose their disability indicates that they may be more likely to see it as a disadvantage, even though it may be a very important aspect of finding a school that would best meet their academic and personal goals.

Almost 30% more 1Ls with disabilities who enrolled in part-time programs disclosed their disability to all the schools they applied to (46% of full-time students and 64% of part-time students). This is consistent with the trend in students with disabilities who disclosed to all schools when examining school selectivity quartiles. Specifically, the more selective the school, the less likely students with disabilities were to disclose their disabilities, demonstrated by survey results showing that compared to students who enrolled in schools in Q2, Q3, and Q4 combined, 31% more students enrolled in Q1 schools chose not to disclose their disabilities to any of the schools to which they applied (Figure 3). This is further supported by the fact that among 1Ls with disabilities who did not disclose their disability to any schools they applied to, most often because they thought it would disadvantage their application, 36% subsequently enrolled in the top 25% highly selective law schools (Q1). This is much less than those who did not disclose their disabilities on any of their applications who enrolled in schools in Q2 (18%), Q3 (28%), and Q4 (18%).

Figure 3: Percent of Students by Disability Disclosure on Law School Applications by Law School Selectivity Quartile (n=229)



Source: 2023 LSAC Matriculant Survey. Due to the low number of respondents attending schools in each law school quartile, data should not be used to make strong generalizations about the entire population based on the small sample size.

Using LSAC data, law schools are each assigned a selectivity index based on each school’s 2023 admission rate, median LSAT of admitted students, and median UGPA of admitted students. The top 25% highly selective law schools are in the first quartile (Q1), and they are the first 49 law schools with the highest index score.

Students who disclosed to all schools indicated they wanted to be transparent about their needs as a student (75%) or find out about available accommodations (54%). As one first-generation, gender diverse student explained, “I knew if accommodations weren’t available to me, I couldn’t succeed in law school.” It is important to note that students may not disclose a disability on their law school application, but this does not mean they will not disclose later through, for example, their school’s disability services office, to receive accommodations. Over half of the students also shared that they disclosed to all schools because their disability was an important part of their journey to law school (54%), and about one-third reported that they wanted to show how a student with disabilities can excel (35%) and that disability is central to their identity (33%). One in five 1Ls with disabilities noted that their disability was the reason why they wanted to attend law school.

Conversely, those who chose not to disclose to all of the law schools to which they applied — over 50% of students with disabilities — were afraid doing so would disadvantage their application (56%) or did not want to be defined by their disability (46%). As one gender diverse, American Indian or Alaska Native, continuing-generation college graduate stated, “They say it doesn’t impact you, but yea, no. I’m not taking that chance.” One-third of students who only disclosed to some schools also thought it would disadvantage their application and close to half reported they only disclosed to schools they knew would be supportive of students with disabilities. One continuing-generation college graduate, woman, who is a full-time student who disclosed only to some schools who she knew would be supportive of students with disabilities and who were worried about the possible application disadvantage. She explained further that “I only disclosed disabilities they would not see as a significant issue.” One not straight/not

heterosexual, multiracial or ethnoracial (2 or more), woman was thinking not only about her application, but about disclosure's effect on her eventual ability to practice saying, "[I do] not want bar admission to consider mental health diagnoses."²⁵

Other reasons for not disclosing to any schools included being unsure if their diagnoses qualified as a disability (36%), not wanting special treatment (20%), no place on the application to disclose (15%), and thinking they needed medical documentation they did not have (12%). Many of these responses signal that there is a lot of confusion/lack of information and ongoing stigma around the decision to disclose. It is vital that information about how disability determinations are made at schools, what is required to receive accommodations, and a person who can help guide a prospective applicant through the process and answer any questions is important information for schools to provide. Additionally, those guiding candidates through their journey to law school should include disability information among information and resources they provide to students.

Important Factors When Deciding Where to Enroll

1Ls were also asked about the importance of various factors in their decision about which law school to attend. While the sample size of students with disabilities responding to the LSAC 2023 Matriculant Survey was too small to lay out trends related to the factors students consider very important when deciding where to apply to law school as well as how that changes after experiencing a portion of their 1L year,²⁶ overall trends provide prelaw stakeholders with information about decision-making factors they can use to guide students on their journey to law school from the very beginning. And, law school representatives and admission staff can use the information to design more targeted recruitment based on which resources, opportunities, and experiences prospective law students will look for in a school. A detailed description of the trends in important factors when deciding where to enroll can be found in "[LSAC's Knowledge Report: The 2023 1L Profile](#)." A brief summary of those trends with additional considerations for law students with disabilities is provided below. The most important point to keep in mind is that for any prospective law student, both those with and without disabilities, choosing where to enroll is a multi-faceted decision process during which they need to weigh many often-competing factors.

²⁵ The American Bar Association provides detailed [Bar Information for Applicants with Disabilities](#), including a state-by-state guide to mental health questions asked as part of the character and fitness portion of the bar exam. As of the writing of this report, 23 states do not consider a candidate's mental health diagnosis at all.

²⁶ The LSAC 2023 Matriculant Survey asked respondents to rank (on a five-point scale from very important to very unimportant) the importance of factors organized into seven broad categories: 1) law school reputation factors, 2) financial factors, 3) location factors, 4) academic program factors, 5) social factors, and 6) academic services availability.

Three factors were ranked most important to 1Ls when deciding where to enroll. Half of all respondents ranked availability of scholarship funds (52%), employment rate of recent graduates (50%), and cost of attendance (49%) as very important in their enrollment decision. Considering that students with disabilities carry higher debt loads, cost and scholarships may be overriding factors when it comes to their ultimate decision where to enroll. In addition, with worries about debt on their minds, a school's employment rate may be part of the financial picture in a way that it is not for students who are less concerned about debt.

Around two-fifths of all 1L respondents also ranked a number of other factors as very important in their decision about where to enroll. First-time bar passage rate and the reputation of a law school were two of those factors within reputational factors the survey asked about. While first-time bar passage rate is likely equally important to students with and without disabilities, those with disabilities may be looking for very specific programs that override reputational factors. This is supported by the preliminary trends that suggest 1Ls with disabilities cite advocating for social justice as their primary motivation for going to law school much more often than those without disabilities.

Among academic and faculty factors, course offerings in a respondent's area(s) of interest as well as applied law experiences were also very important to around two out of five students. While not as important overall, factors related to diversity, including student body diversity, diverse course offerings, faculty diversity, and DEI programming/services are likely very important to students with disabilities who may specifically want to seek out a law school environment that will be maximally supportive and inclusive for students with disabilities. To this end, social factors, including classmates who are friendly, supportive, and inclusive; an environment where they can bring their authentic selves; faculty who are available, helpful, and sympathetic; and administrative staff who are helpful, considerate, and flexible, which were, overall, very important to between one-third and two-fifths of all 1Ls, would be very important to more prospective 1Ls with disabilities.

Last, school-provided supports will necessarily play a role in providing students with disabilities the greatest opportunity for success. While career services was, overall, the support factor very important to the most 1Ls when deciding where to enroll, students with disabilities will likely rely on and need to know about in more detail other support services including disability services, financial support services, academic support services, mental health services, and availability of healthcare coverage.

As LSAC collects more information, we will be able to further explore the multiple intersecting identities that influence how 1Ls with disabilities make their law school choice and how prelaw and other legal education professionals can best guide prospective law students with disabilities through their journey to law school.

Conclusion and Recommendations for Law Schools

The conclusions and recommendations for this report mirror those offered in the report, [“2022 First-Year Law School Class: A Focus on Students with Disabilities.”](#) They are provided here to both highlight the continued salience of the conclusions and the ongoing applicability of the recommendations. As with the previous report, the results in this brief report are preliminary and do not address all aspects of the legal education journey that law students with disabilities take; however, they do highlight some important aspects of the journey to law school for students with disabilities that we can learn from. First, just because we cannot always see students with disabilities, often because we don’t specifically and systematically count them, does not mean that they do not make up a sizeable portion of the law student population. Second, although there is great diversity within the umbrella term “students with disabilities,” similar to students without disabilities, students within the group have heterogenous experiences, thoughts, and needs in and about many aspects of law school that should not be reduced to one voice representative of all. Unless law schools begin to better understand what those experiences, thoughts, and needs are and take steps toward ensuring equal access to the opportunity for a legal education, law schools will, often unknowingly, perpetuate barriers to an inclusive and equitable legal education for all law students. Lastly, there is still significant stigma around disclosure of a disability. Whether that is internal to the individual due to discriminatory experiences and/or the everyday challenges they encounter moving through a world designed for those without disabilities, law schools have the opportunity to begin addressing this stigma and ensure that our future lawyers will better understand disability issues and be part of increasing access to justice for the millions of people with disabilities in our communities.

The following is not a comprehensive list of recommendations and is not intended to be proscriptive. Each school can and should determine what is appropriate within the constraints of its budget and available human resources. However, it is important to remember that even a small change can have a large impact and that one small change can build momentum for greater change.

- **Encourage your 1L students to complete the LSAC Matriculant Survey every year.** This will allow us to collect more and more complete information about students with disabilities at your school that you can use to make informed and evidence-based decisions about policies and practices that affect your student body.

- **Provide clear information about how your school defines disability and ensure there is a method to share it with applicants, admitted students, and matriculants.** Many students who have disabilities may not realize their specific condition constitutes a protected disability. Providing examples as to what is considered a disability and what services are available, both for those who choose to use accommodations and those who do not, may encourage all students to think about disability differently and help chip away at the stigma often associated with requesting and receiving accommodations.
- **Include recruitment activities that are preferred by students with disabilities.** As you think about equitable recruitment practices that are inclusive of students with disabilities, you may want to do the following:
 - Make sure that all students and faculty who may meet with any prospective or admitted student can answer general questions about disability services or other services students with disabilities may need or at least be able to provide a specific contact person at your law school who can answer these questions.
 - If your school provides information for students who sit in on classes, include specific mentions of disability services and accommodations. Including the proportion of students with disabilities or the proportion of students who receive accommodations may help destigmatize disability and the use of accommodations. In addition, make sure all classes offered for students to attend are in ADA-accessible spaces.
 - Make sure that school open houses include information about disability services and availability of accommodations, as well as a map of facilities that are and are not ADA accessible.
 - Law school representatives, whether on the campus of an undergraduate institution or at prelaw fairs, should have literature that includes specific mention of disability services, accommodations, and who to contact with questions about disability services. Since many students are hesitant to disclose their disabilities, providing the information to all students will ensure that everyone, especially those who need it the most, receives it.
- **Evaluate the process a student with disabilities must go through to receive accommodations and identify areas for improvement.** Make sure to consider aspects of the process that will place additional burdens on students such as the cost of a private evaluation to prove disability status. This should include ongoing contact with students with disabilities and their affinity groups to learn how the process for receiving accommodations can be improved as well as getting feedback from those who need to use the process.

- **Evaluate general efforts around diversity to understand where disability fits in at your school. Some questions you can ask include:**
 - How do we characterize diversity?
 - What identities do we focus on when thinking about/talking about/planning programming for diverse populations at the school?
 - What student identities are represented in student organizations, how are those organizations supported, and how active are they? (e.g., your school may have a disability affinity group, but they may not be visible to students if they aren't very active or don't have support from the school, whether that is funding, faculty supervision, or another aspect of a healthy student organization.)
- **Encourage law professors with disabilities to participate in committees and hold leadership positions.** Inclusion of faculty with disabilities in decision-making positions, especially when it comes to policies and practices that can disproportionately affect students with disabilities, will ensure that the voices and needs of individuals with disabilities will be considered.
- **Assess services that students with disabilities use or may use to determine how well the services your school offers meet those needs.** Services can include any and all aspects of being a law school student such as living accommodations, academic support services, specialty health care services, and more. The experience of these services will be different for students based on the type of disabilities they have, so it will be important to include a breadth of disability voices in the conversation assessing current services and planning for the future.
- **Assess curricular and co-curricular offerings to determine whether students interested in disability rights/law or students with disabilities would find coursework that would be relevant to them personally or for their future careers.** Offering courses addressing disability issues in law and hands-on learning opportunities through, for example, a disability legal clinic, will signal to prospective students with disabilities that they will both see personal issues reflected in course content and have the opportunity to be part of disability law in action.
- **Use resources to learn about best practices and find resources for your students and school.** The following is a starting point but should not be viewed as a comprehensive list of all resources. Be proactive in seeking out resources that address specific issues you may identify.

- **The National Disabled Law Students Association** (<https://ndlsa.org/>): They offer resources for law students (e.g., an internship and externship guide and information to consider when making the choice to disclose or not to disclose), law schools (e.g., tips and information for law school career services offices and ensuring that on-campus interviews are accessible), and information for law students who would like to start their own school organization affiliated with NDLSA.
- **The National Disabled Legal Professionals Association** (<https://ndlpa.org/>): The National Disabled Legal Professionals Association (NDLPA) is a national association of disabled lawyers, judges, policy experts, legislators, academics, and other legal workers, professionals, and organizers. NDPLA was founded in 2022 to organize and unify disabled legal professionals into a force for change, and to advocate for and empower disabled legal professionals. NDPLA strives to promote professional growth and opportunity for disabled attorneys and legal professionals; provide community service; improve access and inclusion in the profession; and ensure access to justice for all.
- **American Bar Association Commission on Disability Rights** (<https://ambar.org/disability>): They offer many resources for prospective law students and law students with disabilities (e.g., a state-by-state directory of disability programming at law schools, state-by-state guide of character and fitness questions that ask about mental health, scholarship opportunities, corporate summer internships for 1Ls, free webinars, a mentorship program for law students and recent graduates with disabilities, and more) and law schools (e.g., opportunity to sign Disability Diversity in the Legal Profession: A Pledge for Change; a 21-Day Disability Equity Habit-Building Challenge syllabus, accessibility resources, ABA resolutions addressing the rights of people with disabilities in all aspects of society, free webinars, etc.).
- **Disability Justice** (<https://disabilityjustice.org/law-schools-and-disability-law/>): This site includes a series of interviews with President and Dean of Mitchell Hamline School of Law Anthony Niedwiecki. While the interviews are aimed at prospective law students, these can help law schools better understand the needs of law students with disabilities and aspects of law school which may impose undue burdens.

- **The Coelho Center for Disability, Law, Policy and Innovation at Loyola Law School** (<https://www.lls.edu/coelhocenter/>): The mission of The Coelho Center is to collaborate with the disability community to cultivate leadership and advocate innovative approaches to advance the lives of people with disabilities. Their Coelho Law Fellowship Program aims to increase the pipeline of disabled law students and legal professionals. The year-long program prepares college students and recent graduates with disabilities to apply and succeed in law school and includes a summer disability rights law course, LSAT prep, and mentorship.
- **American Association of People with Disabilities Summer Internship Program** (<https://www.aapd.com/summer-internship-program/>): The purpose of the internship program is to “develop the next generation of leaders with disabilities.” This paid internship located in the Washington, D.C., area with placements in congressional offices, federal agencies, non-profits, for-profits, and STEM-focused federal agencies includes accessible housing for in person or a housing stipend for remote participants, participation in a Disability Advocacy Certificate Program, and connection with a mentor for career guidance.
- **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)** (<https://www.ahead.org/home>): The vision of AHEAD is to promote “professional practice that operationalizes an expanded concept of access grounded in civil rights, disability equity, and social justice.” They offer numerous resources for disability resource professionals and institutions including free webinars, consultation to assess disability offices and/or approach to access for students with disabilities, and white papers and guiding documents for disability resource professionals, among other resources.

It is important to remember that disability is not a problem to be solved nor is it a distraction from the goals of education, but some institutional structures can make it seem that way to the unknowing administrator or instructor. Thus, using resources like those referenced above and creating programs that universally support students have the potential to positively impact all students in their law school journey. Because of the stigma attached to disabilities, especially the invisible ones that impact cognitive processing or mental health, it can be difficult for individuals to disclose their need for accommodation in spaces like law school where perfection is valorized. However, if most student needs are met in advance through universal design or low-barrier access to needed accommodation, then students and their law schools will have higher chances of successful outcomes long term.

Appendix 1

The following categorization of disabilities and specific disability options included in each category were developed with the input of a focus group of current and former law students with disabilities organized by the Coelho Center for Disability Law, Policy, and Innovation as well as the ABA Council on Disability Rights. The questions were first asked on the 2022 LSAC Matriculant Survey.

| Disability Category | Specific Disability Options Included in Category |
|--|--|
| Sensory Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blind or low vision • Deaf or hard of hearing |
| Physical Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mobility condition that affects walking • Mobility condition that does not affect walking • Speech or communication impairment |
| Mental Health Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anxiety • Depression • Post-traumatic stress disorder • Another mental health disability (optional to specify) |
| Developmental or Intellectual Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention deficit or hyperactivity disorder (ADD or ADHD) • Autism spectrum disorder • Another developmental or intellectual disability (optional to specify) |
| Cognitive or Processing Disability | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive functioning issues • Language-based learning disability • Traumatic or acquired brain injury • Another cognitive or processing disability (optional to specify) |
| Another Disability or Condition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronic medical condition (asthma, diabetes, Chron's disease, etc.) • Medical condition (cancer, post-COVID conditions, etc.) • Disability or condition not listed (optional to specify) |