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A FEW WORDS ABOUT LAW SCHOOL ADMISSIONS

Orrin L. Helstad, Acting Dean



In my recent contacts with the judiciary and the practicing bar, a topic of discussion which comes up about as often as any is the matter of law school admissions. The concern often is a personal one because a son or daughter, or the son or daughter of a friend, is about to seek admission. But the subject is quite a legitimate one from the standpoint of a broader perspective as well, for law school admissions committees have quite accurately been called, in recent years, the gatekeepers to the profession.

The admissions pressures of recent years are generally well known. During the past five years, we have averaged between 1800 and 1900 applicants each year for an entering class which has averaged about 300 each year over that same period. Roughly half of the applicants each year are residents of Wisconsin. The same pattern seems to be holding for the present admissions season.

The applicants' prospects are not quite as grim as these statistics indicate, for a substantial number of persons who are offered admission choose not to come. Whether for financial or other reasons, an accepted applicant may decide not to attend law school or may decide to attend some other law school. Our experience indicates that we are able to offer acceptance to roughly one of every three residents who apply and to roughly one of every five non-residents. Nevertheless, the fact remains that we deny admission to nearly a thousand qualified applicants each year. Respected and competent members of the bar often say to me: "I wouldn't even have gotten into law school today." Whether or not that statement is true in a given case, it is true that many persons who would have made competent lawyers are not being given a chance. The responsibility placed upon law school admissions committees clearly is an awesome one.

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