US LAW ADMISSIONS FAQ

Expertise by Lucian Wang,
JD candidate at NYU School of Law, and former UTPLS Vice-President and Moot Court Director

In partnership with the University of Toronto Pre-Law Society

WHAT ARE THE T14/T6/T3 SCHOOLS?

These are the top US law schools, as denoted by US News and World Rankings. The numbers refer to the rankings of those schools (ex. T14 are the top 14 schools, T6 are the top 6, T3 are the top 3). These are not perfect for all metrics, especially for schools whose graduates tend to have strong impact in the public and non-profit sectors which reduce their average salaries somewhat; but are a suitable proxy for "quality" and "earnings potential".

- Note that there is very little difference in earnings potential between individual schools at the T14 level. Starting salaries are standardized across the big firms at $160-$190k, and vary depending on *location* not based on the perceived quality of individual attorneys. The pipeline to the big firms is well established, especially among the T6.

Understanding the methodology behind these rankings is strongly encouraged: https://www.usnews.com/education/best-graduate-schools/articles/law-schools-methodology

- Accounts for GPA, LSAT, lawyer/judge/faculty assessments, employment rate, financial resources.

LIST OF THE T14 LAW SCHOOLS

1. Yale University (173/3.92)

2. Stanford University (171/3.93)

3. Harvard University (173/3.9)

4. University of Chicago (171/3.89)

5. Columbia University (172/3.75)

6. New York University (170/3.79)

7. University of Pennsylvania (UPenn, not to be confused with Penn State) (170/3.89)

8. University of Virginia (169/3.89)

9. University of Michigan-Ann Arbor (Not to be confused with Michigan State) (169/3.77)

10. Duke University (169/3.78)

11. Northwestern University (169/3.84)

12. University of California-Berkeley (168/3.8)

13. Cornell University (167/3.82)

14. Georgetown University (167/3.8)

*reported LSAT/GPA in the list is the median, not the minimum.

As stated below, US GPA calculation is relatively favourable to Canadians, especially compared to OLSAS. Figures are from 2018.

Tuition is at or around $50-$60,000USD per year for all of these schools, with cost-of-living varying widely (Michigan is much cheaper than NYC).

While large scholarship/financial aid packages are routine amongst US schools, half-tuition would still leave $30,000USD to pay off per year.

T14 students are often older than most recent graduates, averaging 24 years of age at many T14 schools.

How much does the LSAT matter for US Schools?

Generally, the LSAT matters more for state-level schools than the T14s (top 14 law schools). However, even at the T14 level, you can expect the LSAT to be worth as much as your entire undergrad GPA combined; thus you can consider the LSAT to be equivalent to all the work you've put in during your undergrad.

US schools generally rely on the LSAT more than GPA due to the nature of the US educational landscape; US undergraduate institutions are much more varied in quality than Canadian schools, making GPA less reliable.

How does US GPA conversion work?

US GPA conversion is highly favourable for most Canadians, as the US uses a 4.3 scale that is friendlier than Canadian scales such as OLSAS. However, all four years are considered in GPA calculation, although schools will be more willing to forgive first-year lapses than fourth-year lapses.

When converting to US GPA, rest assured that they will use the letter grade that your grade corresponds to in Canada; thus an 85 at a Canadian school is a 4.0 for the purposes of LSAC conversion, whereas an 85 would only be a 3.0 in a US school. This is due to the nature of US universities, which tend to have relatively simpler exams at face value, in conjunction with a very steep grading scale.

Source: https://www.lsac.org/jd/applying-to-law-school/academic-record

Would I be at a disadvantage as an International Applicant?

Generally, no. Almost all major US law schools offer extensive financial aid/ scholarship packages for both international and domestic applicants, and do not favour one type of student over another. Moreover, tuition costs are identical for domestic and international schools at almost all of the aforementioned schools. This is due to the nature of education in Canada vs. US.

In Canada, universities (including law schools) are heavily subsidized through tax dollars as public institutions, so it is reasonable to make university cheaper for presumably tax-paying residents. In the US, this is not necessarily the case when most of the prestigious schools are private institutions, so there is not reason why it should be cheaper for a US citizen vs. an international citizen.

The exception is for state-level schools, though from a strict fiscal perspective, it may be better to stay in Canada if you're looking at anything below T14. This is due to the high costs of a US education - which are more likely to be economically reasonable if you have a potential shot at T14-level earnings.

However, you would be disadvantaged in being unable to access US federal government student loans. Canadian student loans for postgraduate students are generally capped at much lower amounts (~$7,000 a year, Ontario). This will require you to either have parental resources or take out extensive student loans from banks to cover the difference. Even then, it may still require significant loans from family or friends to cover the difference.
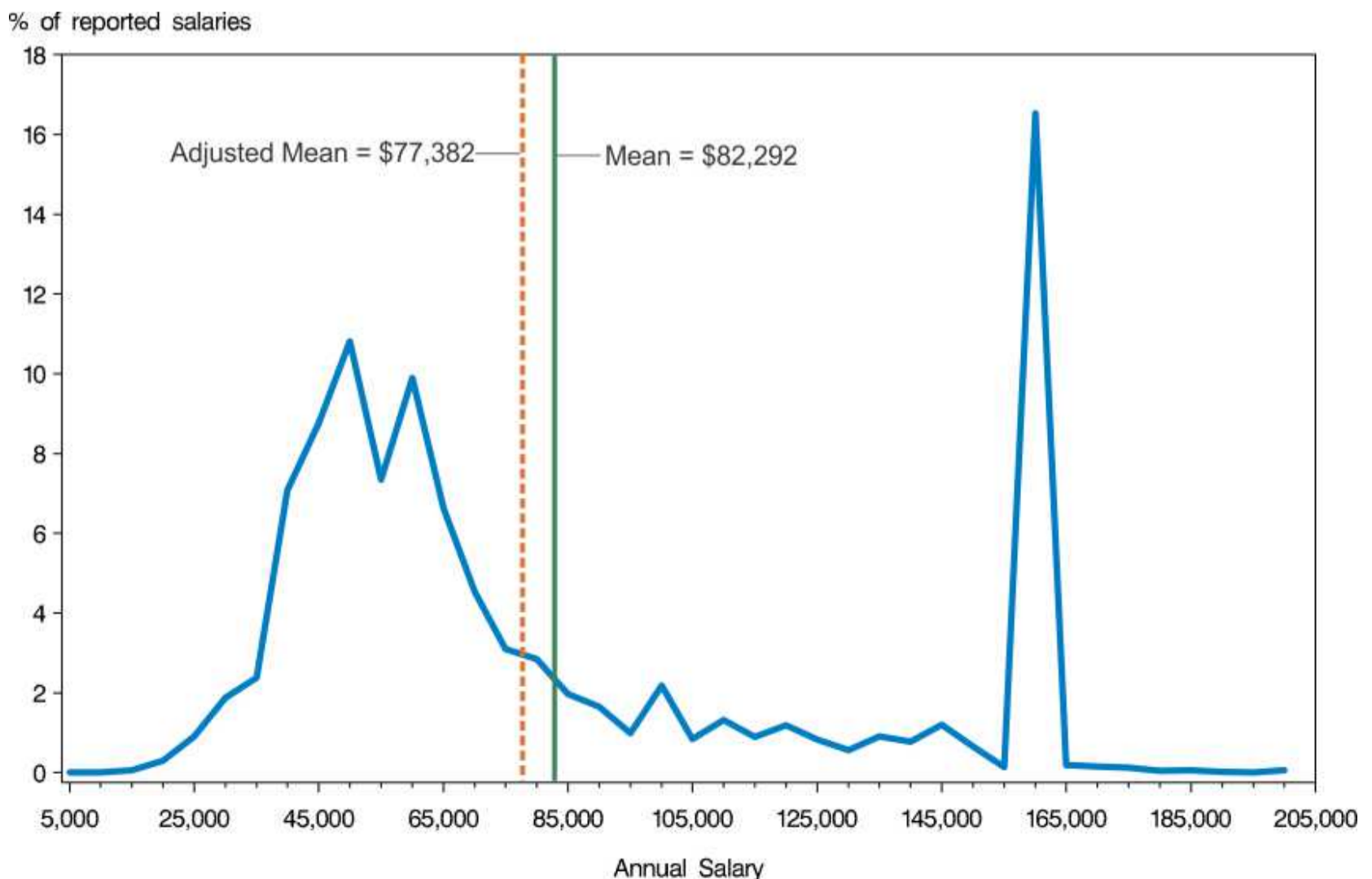
WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES IN EARNINGS POTENTIAL?

Please note that this section should not be construed as anything other than reporting earnings data, and not encouraging students to pursue careers purely based on earnings potential. It is a financial assessment, independent of moral or value judgements.

U of T Law, a school renowned for producing corporate-sector attorneys, reports that: "Students who article with a mid- to large-size Toronto law firm earns about $50,000CAD to $65,000CAD a year." This should be construed as on the high-end in Canada, as Toronto can reasonably be considered the centre of corporate law in Canada. This is somewhat misleading however, as **Americans do not article, they can write the bar and become lawyers immediately upon graduation.** First-year attorney salaries are difficult to confirm in Toronto, but estimates appear around $80-$90k for a large-firm corporate lawyer.

Source: https://www.law.utoronto.ca/student-life/career-development-office/cdo-frequently-asked-questions?

• •

Distribution of Reported Full-Time Salaries – Class of 2014

© NALP, 2015
www.nalp.org

In contrast, Columbia and NYU, report median first-year salaries of $180,000USD in 2016 and 2017, respectively, roughly converting to $240,000CAD. These schools are at the high end of earnings however, given their placement in NYC. Accounting for a higher cost of living in NYC still reveals a substantial advantage economically.

As a result of the earnings potential, law school is economically wise in the US, assuming you are committed to the corporate law path AND are enrolled at a T14 law school.

The following link is a great additional resource to see first year salaries and hiring numbers on several American based law firms:
https://www.chambers-associate.com/home?fbclid=IwAR3mVeffN_TD9d7tcDBKBetS5mynwvob4j5DOcZftFdCv3vb1-t9Pn-UZAM

Earnings data is extremely difficult to obtain for Canadian schools, whereas American schools have standardized disclosure through "ABA-required disclosure". If you are looking for specific data, extensive reporting can be found through googling "-school name- ABA disclosure" or "-school name- earnings data".

Note that while the data is self-reported, survey response rates are routinely >90%, and show strong statistical consistency. Moreover, ABA guidelines for disclosure specify that employment statistics should be within 10 months of graduation (approximately 6 months after bar passage).