Law school applicants decline
By Jerry Crimmins
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The number of applicants to law school for the 2012-2013 school year is trending down for the second year in a row, says the Law School Admission Council (LSAC).

The number of students taking the Law School Admission Test (LSAT) also declines.

Law schools in Illinois also reported that law school applicants are down.

Nationally, "as of Nov. 25, applicants to law school were down 16.3 percent," said Wendy Margolis, director of communications for LSAC. "Last year at that time, roughly 25 percent of the applicant count was in."

The number of students who took the LSAT in October — 45,169 — was the lowest in 11 years, LSAC charts show.

That 45,169 was also a drop of 16.9 percent compared to October 2010, when 54,345 students took the LSAT. The 2010 figure was down 10.5 percent from 2009, when 60,746 took the LSAT.

The LSAT is offered in June, October, December and February. Typically, the October number of test takers is the largest.

"I think the correct information about the job market and the false information in the New York Times stories" that was critical of law schools in general, "has had an impact," said Dean David N. Yellen of Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

Also, Yellen said, "normally applications go up during a recession, and that happened during our recent recession, and applications always go down after a recession, and that's happening now too."

The downward trend in applications is accelerating, Yellen said, because people are so aware of the tough job market throughout the economy and "for lawyers in particular."

"Mostly the people who are applying now are really much more committed to going to law school," he said.

Applications to Loyola for the next school year are down 15 percent. But in part that's because for the previous two school years, Loyola received the most applications in the school's history, Yellen said.

"Last year, we had 5,000 applications. The year before that 5,500" for about 275 slots, he said.
Dean Harold J. Krent of IIT Chicago-Kent College of Law agreed with Yellen that the employment outlook for lawyers, and the economy in general, affects applications to law school.

"I think that there are fewer legal jobs … and they pay less so people are being more cautious about taking out that kind of debt load," Krent said.

"I do have some hope that there is more self-selection going on and that students are thinking more deeply before they decide to go to law school. And if that's true, I think it's good for us and for the profession generally."

Nevertheless, Krent said applications to IIT Chicago-Kent are down only 2 percent compared to last year at this period — 1,088 as of Dec. 16 compared to 1,112 on Dec. 17, 2010. Last year, IIT Chicago-Kent ended up with 3,719 applicants.

"We may be better than others, but we're still losing," Krent said.

At The John Marshall Law School, Associate Dean for Admission and Student Affairs William B. Powers, said applications for the 2012-2013 school year are down about 10 percent so far compared to this time last year.

But last year, "we experienced record-breaking volume" in applications, Powers said, "partly fueled I think by the fact that we waived our application fee last year."

Thus, last year, "we picked up about 400 additional applications," bringing John Marshall's total to about 3,500 applications, he said.

That application fee had been $60. The fee is still waived for applicants to John Marshall this year.

"I think the shrinkage in the national applicant pool is affecting us and other law schools," Powers said.

Applications to DePaul University College of Law are down 16 percent this year compare to this time last year, said Michael S. Burns, assistant dean and director of law admission.

So far, DePaul law received 1,288 applications for the next school year, Burns said.

Applications to the University of Illinois College of Law are down roughly 15 percent so far this year, said Melissa Englund, director of communications.

Applications to the University of Chicago Law School are down 6.96 percent so far this year, said Ann Killian Perry, assistant dean for admissions.

"I believe we're down about half of what the rest of the schools are," said the dean of the University of Chicago Law School, Michael H. Schill.

Applications went down somewhat for the current first-year class at the law school too, Schill said.
But the grade point average of the current first-year class at the University of Chicago Law School is the highest the school has ever had at 3.87.

"We had a huge jump (from 3.78) with fewer applications," he said.

Schill said University of Chicago's law school, always rated one of the top schools in the nation, is "a great value proposition" for anyone who gets accepted there, and the school's statistics show almost every graduate gets a job, often high paying.

Asked if he considered whether overall in America, too many people are in law school, Schill said:

"I think there is a supply and demand imbalance at the moment. More students are coming out of law schools than there are jobs. ... I can't say whether too many students are going to law school. ... That's their choice."

But nationwide, Schill said, "if ultimately, they want jobs as lawyers, too many people are coming out of law schools right now chasing too few jobs."