UH law school enrollment bucks U.S. trend

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Despite a continuing national trend of fewer applicants at law schools, the University of Hawaii at Manoa’s William S. Richardson School of Law had an increase this year.

National numbers of law school applicants dropped from 97,700 in 1992 to an estimated 73,100 this year, according to the Law School Admission Council, which produces the LSAT or Law School Admissions Test.

At UH, the only law school in the state, the number of applicants rose until 1995 when the number dipped slightly to 792 from 799 in 1994. In 1996, 668 applied and in 1997, 428 applied. And then, despite the national trend, the number rose in 1998 to 468.

“Our applications have gone down, but are now heading back up. We had a 9 percent increase from last year,” said Laurene Mylar, director of student services, who is filling in for the assistant dean of the law school.

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—Shirley Jurich
Hawaii Bar Association

Regardless of the number of applicants, the law school aims to enroll 75 to 85 new law students every year, far fewer than the number of applicants. During the last five years, the school has accepted approximately 175 students each year. Of those accepted, an average of 74 actually enroll.

Mylar said most of those enrolled stay in the program and graduate. During the last five years, the number of graduates averaged 71.

“A lot has been said about the reasons for the decline [of law school applicants] and there have been reports of declining opportunities for new lawyers,” said Ed Haggerty, media relations specialist with the Law School Admission Council.

Haggerty suspects financial reasons are another cause for the decline.

“Increasing undergraduition costs leads to increasing debt. If you owe a lot of money, you are going to think twice before you get into a situation [like law school] where you’re going to owe a lot more money,” he said.

Even so, Haggerty said the national downward trend for law school applicants seems to be looking up.

“This year, the first time since 1991, we expect an increase in the number of applicants. We expect 73,100 to apply, and that is up 1.1 percent from last year when 72,300 applied to law school,” he said.

And in 1997, the number of applicants broke nearly evenly between the sexes, with 53 percent of the applicants being men and 47 percent being women.

However, women only make up about 27 percent of the Hawaii Bar Association. About 1,100 women are active members out of 4,100 active attorneys.

But all attorneys with active bar status are not necessarily working as lawyers, said recording clerk Shirley Jurich.

“Finding jobs here is tough for an attorney, but they still go through law school and take their bar exam,” she said. And every year the number of members with the Hawaii Bar Association rises, she said.

The number of people admitted to the Hawaii Bar Association has remained steady for more than 20 years at an average of 250 a year.

UH law wins in moot court

For the seventh straight year the University of Hawaii’s William Richardson School of Law team won honors at the Philip C. Jessup International Law Moot Court Competition in April.

The law team was awarded the Richard R. Baxter Award for the best overall statements about the main points of a law case submitted by any team at this year’s competition.

In addition, the team came in second for the Hardy C. Dillard Award, given to the best combined briefs at the Jessup regional or national competitions.