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### **Will Law School Pay Off? Proposed Change Would Give Applicants the Data to Decide**

*By Katherine Mangan*

Law schools would be required to post detailed information about the cost of a legal education, as well as the success their graduates are having in landing full-time, law-related jobs, under one of several proposals up for discussion at a meeting of the American Bar Association this weekend.

Legal educators will gather in Chicago to weigh in on that suggestion and other proposed changes to the standards the ABA uses to accredit law schools.

One of the proposals the Standards Review Committee of the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar is considering would address widespread concerns about how law schools inform potential students about their costs and placement rates. It comes at a time when applications to law schools are taking a nosedive.

The Law School Admission Council confirmed on Wednesday that, with about 90 percent of applications for next year received, the number of applicants is down 11 percent from the same time last year. That's the lowest it has been at this point since 2001.

Experts attribute the decline to the rising cost of law school and the diminished job prospects for graduates—factors that have resulted in a flurry of news articles and blog entries questioning the value of a law degree. In addition, with the economy slowly improving, some students who might have headed to law school to delay entering the work force are feeling more optimistic about getting jobs today, admissions officials say.

The University of Kansas School of Law, for instance, extended its deadline by one month, to April 15, but it still expects applications to be down 15 percent to 20 percent from last year.

Under the proposal that would require schools to post detailed job-placement and cost information on their Web sites, potential applicants would get a more realistic picture of whether their

investment would pay off.

Another proposal before the standards committee would raise the required passage rate on the bar exam from 75 percent to 80 percent. Other suggested changes would allow schools to drop the Law School Admission Test as an admissions requirement and require schools to design and apply new methods to measure how much students are [learning](#).

And perhaps the most controversial suggestion would eliminate what many consider a requirement that law schools offer a [tenure system](#). Law schools could retain tenure, or instead devise their own, possibly cheaper, ways to ensure that professors have academic freedom.

Donald J. Polden, dean of Santa Clara University School of Law, says the committee, which he chairs, is trying to make the accreditation process more flexible and less expensive for law schools, while providing prospective students with more accurate information.

But some legal experts worry that the committee is moving too fast.

Michael A. Olivas, a professor of law at the University of Houston and president of the Association of American Law Schools, says giving each speaker 10 minutes to address such a wide range of topics is not enough.

"My biggest concern is that they want to do way too much all at once," Mr. Olivas said in an interview this week. It is difficult to understand how the proposals interrelate unless they're examined together, and some of the proposed changes were only posted online less than two weeks before the deadline for people who want to speak to submit written comments, he said.

"This wasn't designed to be a discourse, but a slam, bam, thank you, ma'am."

**Arming Students With Information**

The proposed changes and the dozens of written comments they have generated are now posted on the standards committee's [Web site](#).

The consumer-information subcommittee described the existing standards on the job-placement data schools must disclose as "vague" and said that as a result, law schools often provide limited information that is hard to compare from school to school and is sometimes misleading.

The proposed change would apply a more consistent approach, requiring each law school to fill a chart with detailed employment data, including the percentage of jobs that are full- or part-time and whether they are related to the legal profession. (Currently, schools aren't required to detail the types of jobs their graduates have, so students who are working as bartenders or store clerks are counted as employed.) Each school would have to post the chart on its Web site and update it annually.

"This new standard will, if adopted, provide more meaningful and consistent employment information to prospective students," the subcommittee wrote. "We believe that this information will greatly assist prospective students in making informed decisions about whether to go to law school or which school to attend." The proposed change would not require much more work for law schools, the subcommittee wrote, because they already collect the information that would be on the chart.

Among the groups that have been pushing for such a requirement are the ABA's Young Lawyers Division, which, in February approved a resolution urging law schools to provide better, more accurate information about job prospects and law-school costs to prospective law students.

A nonprofit group called Law School Transparency has also been prodding schools to provide students with more reliable employment data.

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**feudi** 2 hours ago

Hopefully, this will discourage young people from becoming lawyers. America is THE most litigious society in the world. The last thing we need are more lawyers. When you have too many of these things, they just write more silly laws to make work for themselves.



**elyria** 1 hour ago

Um-the point is not to discourage students from going to law school, but to make informed decisions as to whether they should go. For too long, law schools have been cash cows for universities, and accept students' tuition without necessarily serving them well.

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