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May. 7, 2018

## California law graduates secured legal work at higher clip

More graduates of the state's law schools obtained jobs requiring a law degree or providing a J.D. advantage



*Andrew T. Guzman, dean of USC Gould School of Law, said his school successfully undertook a strategic effort to expand the geographic area in which students sought work.*

The state's 2017 law graduates were more successful in securing full-time, permanent jobs requiring bar exam passage than their peers from the previous year.

Roughly 10 months after graduation, about 70 percent of graduates from California's American Bar Association-accredited schools were able to land long-term positions mandating a law license or providing an advantage for a law degree, up from 64 percent last year.

The uptick mirrored a national trend aided by a declining number of students completing law school, though

California's figures covering the top job categories still lagged behind the comparable national average, which rose from 73 to 75 percent.

Derek T. Muller, a professor at Pepperdine University School of Law, said he was encouraged that California law schools saw a rise in the raw number of graduates obtaining permanent positions requiring a law degree. That figure increased 8 percent from 2,206 to 2,397.

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Meanwhile, the number of in-state graduates landing so-called J.D. advantage positions fell from 420 to 337, a 20 percent decrease.

“There are still some areas for improvement, but year over year this is a really good sign for California,” Muller said.

Stanford Law School and UC Berkeley School of Law once again led the way among California schools. Both saw just above 90 percent of their graduates secure jobs within the two top categories, with Stanford slightly ahead.

The next best performance came from USC Gould School of Law’s graduates, with about 88 percent obtaining bar passage or J.D. advantage positions. The result was a substantial improvement from the school’s 75 percent figure reported last year.

Andrew T. Guzman, USC’s law dean, said he was delighted with the results and attributed them in part to enhanced investment in career services. He also said there was a strategic effort to expand the geographic reach for students seeking work.

“We encouraged students to think more nationally, and we worked with firms and employers in other states,” Guzman said.

Graduates of Thomas Jefferson School of Law, which the ABA placed on probation last year, performed the worst among California schools. Just 32 percent of the school’s graduates landed jobs in the two categories, according to the ABA figures.

Meanwhile, 51 of the San Diego school’s 174 graduates who sought jobs, or 29 percent, were unemployed 10 months after graduation.

“We are fairly consistent from the prior year,” said Joan Bullock, Thomas Jefferson’s dean and president. “I would believe that, like any school, there is always room for improvement.”

The two other California schools that saw less than 50 percent of their graduates obtain positions in the top two categories were University of La Verne College of Law in Ontario (37 percent) and Whittier Law School in Costa Mesa (40 percent), which has announced plans to close.

Law school officials cited several reasons why they think the state as a whole again trailed the national employment numbers, such as a bar exam with the second highest passing score.

Stephen C. Ferruolo, dean at University of San Diego School of Law, noted that 70 percent of first-time takers from the state’s ABA law schools passed the July 2017 California bar exam. First-time takers from New York’s ABA schools passed their

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state's 2017 summer test at an 86-percent clip.

Sean Scott, a Loyola Law School professor, also highlighted that most graduates of California law schools want to stay in the state, and the region is an attractive place for aspiring lawyers from other areas.

Last year's graduates did have fewer peers to compete with, as the number of in-state graduates fell from 4,081 to 3,909, a 4 percent drop. Nationally, the number of graduates dropped to just shy of 35,000 students, a 6 percent decrease.

Those figures could start to level off or reverse in the years to come, as schools have spent recent years rightsizing and the Law School Admission Council reported an 8 percent increase in applications through the end of March.

Muller, the Pepperdine professor, said if law schools maintain their class sizes while utilizing the larger applicant pool to admit a higher caliber of student more likely to pass the bar, they could see their employment outcomes further improve.

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