

Wednesday, July 3, 2013

## Conditional Scholarships and Scholarship Retention for 2011-12

By Legal Whiteboard

As a result of the ABA's revisions to Standard 509, Consumer Information, there is now a much greater universe of publicly available information about law school scholarship programs, specifically conditional scholarship programs and scholarship retention. Based on a review of law school websites conducted between March 19 and May 29, 2013, I have compiled a complete list of schools with conditional scholarship programs, with only one-year scholarships, with good standing (or guaranteed) scholarships and with only need-based scholarships.

The availability of this data now gives each admitted scholarship recipient some meaningful basis for assessing the likelihood that any given scholarship will be renewed. (That said, within a given cohort of conditional scholarship recipients at a given school, those at the top end of the entering class profile likely retain their scholarships at a higher percentage than reflected in the law school's overall data while those further down the class profile likely retain their scholarships at a lower percentage than reflected in the law school's overall data.)

What do we know about the conditional scholarship programs in place for students entering law school in 2011-12? There were 140 schools with conditional scholarship programs. The average retention rate across all law schools was 69%. In total, 12,735 students who entered law school in the fall of 2011 and continued into their second year of law school at the same school entered with conditional scholarships and 4,387 students lost those scholarships, a retention rate across individual students of 66%. Across the 194 law schools on which I compiled data, the Fall 2011 entering first-year class totaled 46,233, so roughly 27.5% of the students in the Fall 2011 entering first-year class were on conditional scholarships and roughly 9.5% of the students in the Fall 2011 entering first-year class failed to retain their conditional scholarship as they moved into the second year of law school.

The distribution of scholarship retention rates by deciles across all 140 schools reporting conditional scholarship programs is set forth in Table 1. Table 1 shows the largest number of law schools grouped around the overall average retention rate, with 30 law schools in the 60-69% range and 24 law schools in the 70-79% range; nearly 40 percent of law schools with conditional scholarships fall in these two ranges. Interestingly, the decile range of 90% or better is the second largest decile range, with 26 law schools (nearly half of which are ranked 50

or better in the USNEWS ranking). Notably, 23 law schools had scholarship retention rates of less than 50%.

**Table 1: Number of Law Schools Reporting Retention Rates by Decile Range**

| Retention Rate | Number | Brief Description                                                                               |
|----------------|--------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Less than 40%  | 8      | Four of the eight were law schools ranked alphabetically                                        |
| 40-49%         | 15     | Eight of the 15 were law schools ranked between 50 and 99                                       |
| 50-59%         | 20     | 16 of the 20 were law schools ranked 100 or lower, while only two were in the top 50            |
| 60-69%         | 30     | 23 of the 30 were law schools ranked 100 or lower, while only one was in the top 50             |
| 70-79%         | 24     | 13 of the 24 were law schools ranked in the top 100, but only three of those were in the top 50 |
| 80-90%         | 17     | 12 of the 17 were law schools ranked between 50 and 145                                         |
| 90% or better  | 26     | 12 of the 26 were law schools ranked in the top 50                                              |

As shown in Table 2, law schools ranked in the top-50 in the U.S.News 2012 Rankings had the smallest percentage of law schools with conditional scholarship programs, with only 20 law schools – 40% -- having conditional scholarship programs, directly impacting only 1,674 students who had conditional scholarships (12.8% of the 13,109 first-year students at these law schools) and only 192 who failed to retain their scholarships (11.5% of the 1674 conditional scholarship recipients and only 1.5% of the 13,109 first year students). By contrast, across the balance of law schools, over 80% of the law schools had conditional scholarships with 11,061 of the 33,124 first-year students (33.4%) having conditional scholarships and 4,195 (37.9% of those

on scholarship and 12.7% of first-years at the balance of law schools) losing their scholarships after their first-year of law school.

**Table 2: Number and Percentage of First-Year Students in 2011 Having Conditional Scholarships and Losing Conditional Scholarships by US News Rankings Categories**

|                                                                             | Top 50 Law Schools                                                        | Law Schools Ranked 51-100                                                    | Law Schools Ranked 101-146                                                   | Law Schools Ranked Alphabetically                                          |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Total Number of Law Schools                                                 | 50                                                                        | 50                                                                           | 46                                                                           | 48                                                                         |
| Number (%) of Law Schools with Conditional Scholarship Programs             | 20 (40%)                                                                  | 40 (80%)                                                                     | 36 (78.3%)                                                                   | 43 (89.6%)                                                                 |
| Total First-Years at These Law Schools                                      | 13,109                                                                    | 11,592                                                                       | 9,293                                                                        | 12,239                                                                     |
| Number (%) of First-Years with Conditional Scholarships                     | 1,674 (12.8% of all first-year students in top-50 schools)                | 4,176 (36% of all first-year students in schools 51-100)                     | 2,754 (29.6% of all first-year students in schools 101-145)                  | 4,131 (33.6% of all first-year students at alphabetically-ranked schools)  |
| Number (%) of Conditional Scholarship Recipients NOT Retaining Scholarships | 192 (11.5% of conditional scholarship recipients and 1.5% of first-years) | 1,454 (34.8% of conditional scholarship recipients and 12.5% of first-years) | 1,044 (37.9% of conditional scholarship recipients and 11.2% of first-years) | 1,697 (41% of conditional scholarship recipients and 13.7% of first-years) |

A number of law schools switched to non-conditional scholarship programs for 2012-13 or will be switching to non-conditional scholarship programs for the 2013-14 academic year. As a result, for the 2013-14 academic year, there will be 131 law schools with conditional scholarship programs, five law schools with non-renewable one-year scholarships, four that only offer need-based scholarships, and 54 law schools with good standing (or guaranteed) scholarships. Of the 194 schools on which I was gathering information, therefore, as of the 2013-14 academic year, 70% will have conditional or one-year scholarship programs (136/194), while nearly 28% will have good standing (or guaranteed) scholarships (54/194), with 2% (4/194)

having only need based scholarship assistance. (Note that some law schools with conditional scholarship programs also offer some scholarships on a non-conditional basis and/or offer some need-based assistance.)

Those who might be interested in a more detailed analysis of conditional scholarship programs, may want to look at the draft article I have posted on SSRN – [\*Better Understanding the Scope of Conditional Scholarship Programs in American Law Schools.\*](#)

[posted by Jerry Organ]