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Reflections On Legal Employment Outcomes Over The Past Five Years

By Jerry Organ

With the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar's reporting of employment outcomes for the Class of 2018, I thought it might make some sense to look at five-year trends for a couple of different categories of jobs data.

The Total Number of Graduates in Full-time, Long-term Bar Passage Required or JD Advantage Positions Increased Slightly for the Class of 2018

First, as shown in Table 1, with respect to full-time, long-term, Bar Passage Required (BPR) and JD Advantage (JDA) positions, the Class of 2018 offers some good news, with the first-increase in the total number of these positions in the last four years, increasing from 26,302 for the Class of 2017 to 26,632 for the Class of 2018 (although down from 29,740 for the Class of 2014).

Table 1 -- Full-time, Long-Term BPR and JDA for Class of 2014 to Class of 2018

	FTLTBPR	FTLTJDA	TOTAL	Graduates	% of Grads in FTLTBPR/JDA
2014	24978	4762	29740	43132	68.95%
2015	23738	4340	28078	39983	70.22%
2016	22851	4000	26851	36786	72.99%
2017	23117	3185	26302	34923	75.31%
2018	23424	3208	26632	34283	77.68%

This is the second year in a row in which full-time, long-term BPR positions increased (from 22,851 for the Class of 2016, to 23,117 for the Class of 2017, to 23,424 for the Class of 2018), although still down from 24,978 for the Class of 2014. This year also saw a four-year decline in the number of full-time, long-term JDA jobs paused as the number of these positions grew from 3,185 for the Class of 2017 to 3,208 for the Class of 2018 (still down almost one-third from the 4,762 for the Class of 2014).

Because the number of graduates has fallen from 43,132 for the Class of 2014 to 34,283 for the Class of 2018, the percentage of graduates in full-time, long-term BPR or JDA positions has climbed for the fourth consecutive year, reaching 77.68% (up from 68.95% for the Class of 2014).

Interestingly, if one just looks separately at the percentage of graduates in full-time, long-term BPR positions as a percentage of July first-time bar passers from ABA-accredited law schools, the percentage has grown for three consecutive years from 72.75% for the Class of 2014 to 89.59% for the Class of 2017. Given the modest increase in the number of full-time, long-term BPR positions for the Class of 2018, this percentage likely grew again for the Class of 2018, probably increasing to over 90% (although the number of July first-time passers for the Class of 2018 has not been posted yet by the NCBE).

Table 2 -- Full-time, Long-term BPR as a Percentage of July 1st Time Bar Passers from ABA-Accredited Law Schools for 2014-2017

	FTLTBPR	July 1st Passers from ABA-Acc. Schools	Graduates with Full-time, Long-term BPR Jobs as a Percentage of July 1st Time Bar Passers from ABA Acc. Schools
2014	24978	34333	72.75%
2015	23738	29808	79.64%
2016	22851	26443	86.42%
2017	23117	25802	89.59%

Bad News Indicators Continue to Improve

Second, looking at "bad news" indicators, one sees positive trends as well. Focusing just on the percentage of graduates whose employment status is "unemployed seeking," the Class of 2018 showed a continued decline. Between the Class of 2014 and the Class of 2018, there has been a steady decline in the percentage of graduates who are unemployed seeking, from 9.91% for the Class of 2014 to 7.28% for the Class of 2018. Similarly, the percentage of graduates whose employment status is "unknown," although it bumped up a little for the Class of 2018, remains near the low for the Class of 2017. For the Class of 2014, those with unknown status were 2.06% of the graduates. That percentage fell over the next three years to 1.38% for the Class of 2017, before bouncing up slightly to 1.46% for the Class of 2018.

Table 3 -- Percentage of Graduates with Bad News Indicators for Class of 2014 to Class of 2018

	Unemployed Seeking	Unknown
2014	9.81%	2.06%
2015	9.73%	1.87%
2016	8.59%	1.58%
2017	7.88%	1.38%
2018	7.28%	1.46%

Source: [Reflections on Employment Outcomes over the Last Five Years](), TaxProf Blog, May 12, 2019 (5.7K Shares -- Dec. 2019)