

Young Lawyers

BY GUEST COLUMNIST SCOTT LACHMAN, ESQ.



THE YOUNG LAWYERS COMPENSATION AND STUDENT LOAN SURVEY

Student loans are the bane of my existence. Each and every month, I take out my checkbook and write Uncle Sam a “second mortgage payment.” Back in 2007, it seemed like a great investment: I would be attending a private law school and learning the law from Ivy-league-educated professors. Eager to be this generation’s Perry Mason, I gladly signed on the dotted line at an 8 percent interest rate to pursue my lifelong dream of becoming an attorney. Little did I know that I would be paying off my six-figure student loan while paying my infant daughter’s college tuition at the same time, in 2035. I am not alone.

Student Loan Debt is Rising

The Young Lawyers Section recently polled its membership from across Nevada, regarding its student loan debt. Sixty-nine percent of young lawyers with student loan debt, not counting undergraduate and other educational debt, responded that they are very concerned or somewhat concerned about their debt. These concerns are legitimate, given that that 81 percent of young lawyers who signed on the dotted line had more than \$60,000 in debt upon graduating from law school. Sixty-two percent of young lawyers in this state had more than \$100,000 in debt upon graduating from law school. Making matters worse, 32 percent of young lawyers had more than \$150,000 in student loan debt. The median amount of debt in 2015 was \$100,000-\$110,000, whereas the median amount of debt in 2013 was \$70,000-\$75,000. Student loan debts are rising in Nevada at an alarming rate, and will continue to increase with crippling interest rates. Legislators, take notice.

Ninety-two percent of young lawyers in Nevada are paying back their student loan debt, which is slightly higher than the national average. Nearly half (46 percent) are taking advantage of income-driven or other repayment options. The biggest obstacle for young attorneys is that interest is accruing as the federal government and private banks collect disturbingly high interest rates, some of which are more than double an average, fixed, 30-year

mortgage rate. Young lawyers are lucky if they have started paying principal by the time they age-out of the Young Lawyers Section.

Salaries are Rising Too

The section also polled its members, as it has been doing since 2002, about their compensation. The results of the survey showed that the median base salary of Nevada young lawyers is \$90,000-\$100,000, slightly up from \$80,000-\$85,000 in 2013. Eighty-two percent of young lawyers received increases to their salary in 2015. Survey responses indicate that salaries for full-time young attorneys vary tremendously, ranging for the most part from \$50,000-\$120,000 (not including bonuses). Of course, there are some outliers like the three young attorneys who reported making in excess of \$190,000.

While salaries appear to be rising, annual billable hour requirements remain steady. Young attorneys with a billable hour requirement reported a median minimum requirement of 1,851-1,900, which has not changed since 2010. Fifty-one percent of young lawyers reported no minimum billable requirement at all. (The other 49 percent envy them.)

Young Lawyers are Jumping Ship

Young lawyers are also switching employers, email addresses and business cards. Indeed, nearly half (46 percent) of young lawyers have changed employers in the last two years. This percentage

may be inflated as a result of one- or two-year clerkships following law school. Removing judicial clerkships, approximately 40 percent of young lawyers have moved on to a new job in the past two years.

Young lawyers are employed in a variety of practice settings: law firms with two to nine attorneys (30 percent), law firms with 51+ attorneys (18 percent), government (15 percent), solo practitioners (5 percent) and in-house counsel (5 percent). These jobs have been secured by a number of methods, including, but not limited to, family/friends (41 percent), online posts (25 percent) and law schools (19 percent).

Multiple Bar Exams?

If you thought one bar exam was enough, 45 percent of Nevada's young lawyers took and passed a second (or even third) bar exam. Twenty-eight percent are presently licensed to practice law in California; 3 percent are licensed in both Arizona and Utah; and the remaining percentage of young Nevada attorneys is licensed elsewhere. Some young lawyers deem their Nevada license secondary, as they primarily work in California, Utah and the District of Columbia.

Young Lawyers are Flocking to Nevada

Whether it be the neon lights of Vegas or the snow-laden mountains in the Sierras, young lawyers are leaving their home-states for greener pastures in Nevada. In fact, nearly half of Nevada's young lawyers

did not attend a Nevada high school. Likewise, 57 percent did not attend Nevada's in-state law school, UNLV William S. Boyd School of Law.

Young lawyers flocked to Nevada from all over the country post-law school. While there are a handful of young lawyers who attended University of Pacific, McGeorge School of Law in nearby Sacramento and Thomas Jefferson School of Law in San Diego, young lawyers in Nevada are truly geographically diverse. For instance, 21 percent of young lawyers in this state attended law school east of Mississippi, and another 21 percent attended law school in California. A total of 7 percent went to law school in the Washington D.C./Virginia area. The reality is that Nevada is a melting pot of attorneys, some of whom were born and raised here and others who now call Nevada home. The best part is that the courthouse is full of accents.

Don't Forget About Pro Bono Cases

The State Bar of Nevada and its pro bono partners encourage all attorneys (not just young attorneys) to take pro bono cases. These cases provide young lawyers with hands-on opportunities in the courtroom, along with other valuable experience. However, only 11 percent of employers have a pro bono requirement. Of these employers, some include pro bono hours as part of their

billable hour requirements, and others simply have an unwritten rule.

The Young Lawyers Section will continue to monitor compensation and student loan debt in 2017. To see the full results of the 2015 Young Lawyers Section Compensation and Student Loan Survey,¹ please visit <https://www.nvbar.org/sites/default/files/Young%20Lawyers%20Section%20Compensation%20Survey%202015%20-%20results%20summary.pdf>. NL

1. The results are based on 160 voluntary respondents, 68 percent from Clark County, 18 percent from Washoe County, 10 percent from Carson City and 4 percent from the rural counties. Note that these numbers are rounded to the nearest percentage and are based solely on survey responses.

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