

ABA Releases Report on Law School Enrollment

By Carina Zaragoza

The American Bar Association released this week findings from its report on law school enrollment. The report was conducted by the ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. The report only includes ABA-approved law schools.

The report shows relatively little change in law school enrollment over the past year. Enrollment of first-year law students was 48,964 for the 2007-2008 academic year. This number represents an increase of just 27 students from the previous academic year. The report found an increase of total enrollment of 402 law students from the previous academic year, bringing total enrollment of all ABA-approved law schools to 141,433.

The number of minorities increased slightly from 30,557 in the 2006-2007 academic year to the current 30,598. This figure includes a 0.9% increase of minorities as first-year enrollees, from 10,989 to 10,992. However, the proportion of minorities in comparison to the overall first-year class dropped this year from 22.4% to 22.3%.

The gender breakdown of all students enrolled in law school this year is relatively even, with 53.2% being male and the other 46.8% being female. The number of female first-year enrollees increased slightly by 2.4%.

The numbers of female, male, and minority students reflect the overall picture of total law school enrollment, which changed only slightly compared to that of the previous year. ABA consultant Hulett Askew attributes the small changes to a variety of factors, including possibly fewer people applying to law school and the decision on the part of law schools to keep entering classes small.

The report includes enrollment numbers from two new law schools that recently gained ABA accreditation: the Phoenix School of Law, located in Phoenix, Arizona, and founded in 2005, and the Charleston School of Law, located in Charlotte, North Carolina, and founded in 2006. Both schools, along with the Florida Coastal School of Law (FCSL) are part of the InfiLaw System. FCSL was founded in 1996 by Donald E. Lively and was the first law school to focus on developing “practice-ready” lawyers. InfiLaw’s mission is to “establish student-centered, ABA-accredited law schools in underserved markets that graduate students with the skills of a second-year associate.” Currently, InfiLaw is working on securing funds for new campuses.

The ABA Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar also reports on various other law school factors, such as tuition. One survey finds that law school tuition has increased anywhere from 5% to 20% over the past five years. These numbers include tuition from both public and private law schools.

In a related study, the average amount borrowed by students to pay for law school was also calculated. For public schools, law students borrowed \$54,509 on average in the 2005-2006 academic year. This represents an increase of almost \$10,000 over a five-year period. Students attending private law schools saw an increase of \$13,000 over the same five-year period, to \$83,181 borrowed on average in the 2005-2006 academic year. This survey is the most recent available on the ABA website.

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