

## Opinion: Are Law Schools Scamming Students?

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(Oct. 15) -- You don't need a law degree to know that false advertising is against the law. So why is it that so many law schools appear to be doing just that: inflating job prospects for graduates while jacking up tuition rates?

Last weekend, about 55,000 students took the LSAT -- the standardized test for law school. That's the second highest tally ever, according to exam officials.

Most of these students are aiming for a law degree to get rich. In a 2008 [Kaplan survey](#), 73 percent cited high income potential as a reason for attending law school.

But the legal job market, decimated by the recession, [isn't the golden ticket](#) it used to be -- and some legal scholars believe the calamity [may be permanent](#). Law schools are releasing an army of young professionals who will start off with \$150,000-plus in non-dischargeable debt and not be able to find work as attorneys and repay their loans.

"Many graduates can't get jobs," Brian Tamanaha, professor at Washington University Law School in St. Louis, [told The National Jurist](#). "Many graduates end up as temp attorneys working for \$15 to \$20 an hour on two-week gigs, with no benefits. The luckier graduates land jobs in government or small firms for maybe \$45,000, with limited prospects for improvement. A handful of lottery winners score big firm jobs." The New York Daily News [recently profiled](#) one young lawyer from a good school who is cleaning toilets in Manhattan.

But don't expect to get any of this news from laws schools. They're too busy scamming applicants by advertising deceptively high rates of employment and misleading income figures, [critics contend](#).

"This data is entirely self-reported by schools and should be treated as essentially fiction," [said University of Chicago law professor Brian Leiter](#), a well-known expert on law school rankings. "In addition, we know nothing about the nature of the employment -- it could simply be as a research assistant, which is what Northwestern did a few years ago for its unemployed grads."

[Law School Transparency](#), a nonprofit organization hoping to shed light on the real employment situation, asked law schools in July to provide more detailed job statistics than they now report to the American Bar Association, which regulates law schools, or U.S. News & World Report, which ranks law schools.

Their deadline for committing to cooperate passed last month and only one school out of 199 agreed to provide the information, said executive director Kyle McEntee.

"Everybody is up in arms about Goldman Sachs allegedly selling products it expected to fail," lawyer [Elie Mystal wrote](#) in popular law blog Above the Law. "How is that any different than the scam being run by some law schools where the tuition keeps going up while the job prospects disappear?"

It's time to send in auditors to examine what law schools advertise and ensure numbers are being reported accurately, so customers can make an informed decision about whether a law degree will really be a good investment of money, time and energy.

In the meantime, potential law school students need to do their research, temper their expectations and weigh the opportunity costs. Sure, law school is a smart decision for some people, especially if you can get into a top school, attend school for free or are so passionate about law that you don't care how much you earn. It's also a profession with one of the [lowest job satisfaction](#) rates and [highest depression](#) rates.

But far too many who get their JD will find themselves three years down the road with a mountain of debt, few job prospects and doubts that their law school has any idea what truth in advertising means.

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