

# A LAW DEGREE IS NO SURE THING

Some Law School Graduates Earn Top Dollar, but Many Do Not

By Jeff Strohl, Catherine Morris, and Ban Cheah

2024



  
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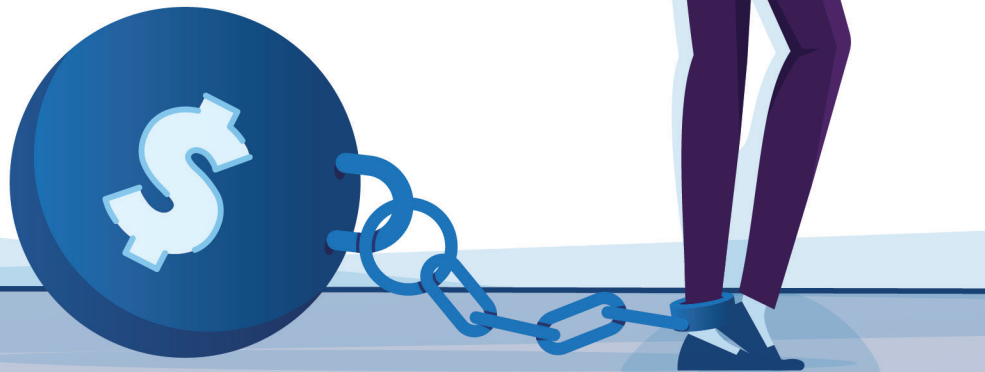


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**Our preference is to cite figures and tables as follows:** Jeff Strohl, Catherine Morris, and Ban Cheah. *A Law Degree Is No Sure Thing: Some Law School Graduates Earn Top Dollar, but Many Do Not*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 2024. [cew.georgetown.edu/law](http://cew.georgetown.edu/law)

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# Acknowledgments

We are grateful to the individuals and organizations whose generous support has made this report possible: Lumina Foundation (Jamie Merisotis and Courtney Brown) and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (Patrick Methvin and Jamey Rorison). We are honored to be their partners in our shared mission of promoting postsecondary access, completion, and career success for all Americans.

We would also like to extend our sincere gratitude to Anthony P. Carnevale, the founding director of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, for his leadership and guidance in this work.

The staff of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce was instrumental in the production of this report from conception to publication. In particular, we would like to thank

- ⦿ Artem Gulish for qualitative and quantitative feedback;
- ⦿ Nicole Smith for data analysis;
- ⦿ Martin Van Der Werf and Gayle Cinquegrani for editorial and qualitative feedback;
- ⦿ Katherine Hazelrigg, Fan Zhang, Johnna Guillerman, Maryam Noor, and Abiola Fagbayi for communications efforts, including design development and public relations; and
- ⦿ Coral Castro for assistance with logistics and operations.

Many others contributed their thoughts and feedback throughout the production of this report. We especially are grateful to our talented designers and editorial advisors, whose efforts were vital to its successful completion.

*The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Lumina Foundation or the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, or any of their officers or employees. All errors and omissions are the responsibility of the authors.*



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# Introduction

The legal field is poised to grow over the next decade, offering great opportunity to people with master’s, professional, and doctoral degrees in the law. For much of their careers, lawyers at the median pay level earn a comfortable six-figure annual salary. But how well do law degrees pay off out of the gate? For many recent graduates, a Juris Doctor (JD) offers solid returns after a few years. Across all law schools, median earnings four years after graduation are \$88,800.<sup>1</sup> However, law school is notoriously expensive. When student loan payments are subtracted from median earnings, net earnings fall to a more modest \$72,000.<sup>2</sup>

Although \$72,000 might sound like good earnings for someone starting out in their career, it falls short of what some might think of as the stereotypical, flashy lawyer salary. Net earnings are in fact substantially higher for the graduates of a handful of institutions at the very top of the law school hierarchy. Data from the US Department of Education’s College Scorecard show that a JD from the 26 law schools with the highest-earning graduates soon translates to six-figure net earnings. These 26 institutions

currently educate approximately 20 percent of all law students. They include all but one of the “T14” law schools — or the top 14 institutions that perennially dominate law school rankings.<sup>3</sup>

*Graduates of the law schools of Columbia University, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Chicago have the highest net earnings four years after graduation.*

But not all law degrees lead to lucrative earnings. At the other end of the law school spectrum, graduates can expect to find themselves saddled with high debt and earnings that are too low to comfortably support monthly debt payments. At the 33 institutions where graduates’ earnings outcomes are lowest — educating approximately 12 percent of students attending law schools accredited by the American Bar Association (ABA) — net earnings range from approximately \$22,000 to \$55,000.<sup>4</sup> The image

- 
- 1 Earnings data are derived from the US Department of Education’s College Scorecard. See Appendix A for details. This report uses the terms JDs and law degrees interchangeably. These degrees are earned at the first professional or doctoral level. Not all doctoral degree programs lead to a JD: a small number of doctoral degrees in law included in College Scorecard data may lead to PhDs rather than JDs.
  - 2 For more information on the share of law graduates who take out loans, see Appendix A.
  - 3 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association (ABA), Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Historically, the top 14 law schools were determined by their standing in the *U.S. News & World Report* rankings. As of 2022–23, institutions in the top 14 list include Columbia University; Cornell University; Duke University; Harvard University; New York University; Northwestern University; Stanford University; University of California, Berkeley; University of California, Los Angeles; University of Chicago; University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; University of Pennsylvania; University of Virginia; and Yale University. Full data on debt and earnings outcomes at the New York University School of Law are not available in the College Scorecard, but are available for the 13 other top law schools.
  - 4 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association (ABA), Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. A number of institutions with lower-earning graduates — including the Massachusetts School of Law, Thomas Jefferson School of Law, Trinity International University, Valparaiso University, and Whittier College — are missing from ABA data. These law schools are either no longer operating or are not accredited by the ABA.





### JD AND NON-JD GRADUATE PROGRAMS

Although this report primarily focuses on the earnings and career outcomes associated with first professional and doctoral degrees in the law – the two degrees that lead to a Juris Doctor (JD) – there are opportunities to study the law at every degree level. The number of students pursuing non-JD-granting master’s programs have doubled over the past decade, but their enrollments are just one-fifth the number enrolled in JD programs. Non-JD-granting master’s in the law can be applied to work in fields like education, healthcare, human resources, law enforcement, and real estate.



### DEFINING ROI

In this report, we evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of a law degree using median earnings four years after graduation against the debt accrued at a given institution, drawing on data from the US Department of Education’s College Scorecard. Graduate and professional degree debt totals do not include student loan debt that law graduates might have incurred during their undergraduate education. The “net earnings” referred to throughout this report represent median earnings four years after graduation, net of debt payments. ROI calculations do not include the cost of tuition, fees, and living expenses – just the debt associated with a particular program. For more detail on the methodology, see Appendix A.

of lawyers living paycheck-to-paycheck does not fit the preconceptions that many hold about what life is like after earning a law degree.

Earnings for attorneys vary, but student loan debt keeps many from prospering financially. A survey of lawyers under the age of 36 finds that many have put off critical life decisions, such as purchasing a home or starting a family, as a consequence of their debt. About one-fifth of those who responded to the survey (21 percent) said they would not be able to come up with \$1,000 in the event of an emergency, with such financial insecurity disproportionately affecting

Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) law graduates. Close to one in five Black/African American law graduates under the age of 36 reported holding more than \$200,000 in student loan debt, a higher share than any other group.<sup>5</sup>

Law schools are subject to periodic bouts of concern that they are graduating “too many” lawyers for the relatively small number of well-paid legal jobs that exist. As a 1976 *New York Times* article put it, “Law-school students, once considered sure to enter a gilt-edged profes-

5 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *Student Debt*, 2021.

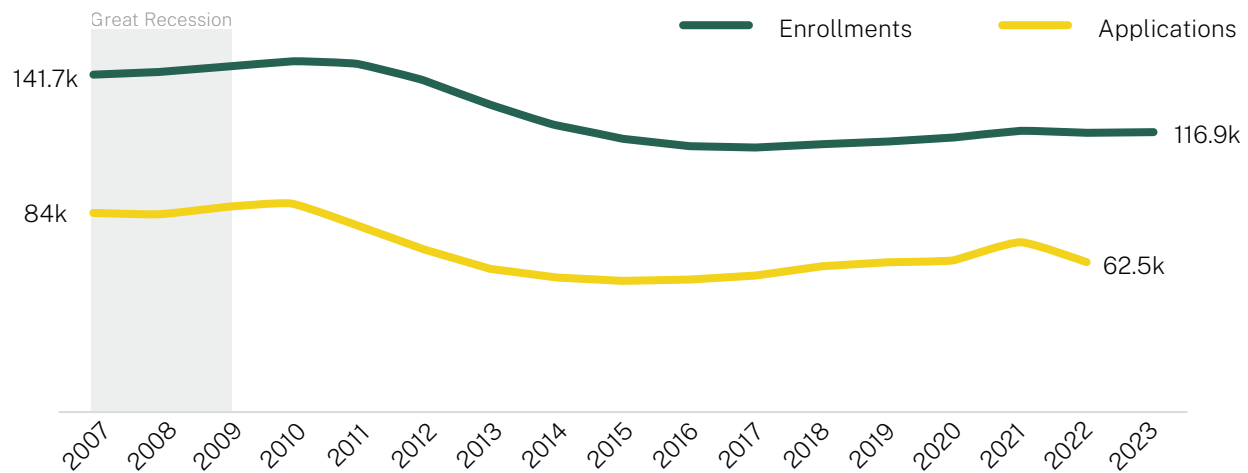
sion, are graduating in record numbers and finding increasingly that there are not enough jobs to go around.”<sup>6</sup> Among a slew of similar prognostications in the wake of the Great Recession of 2007–09, a *Slate* article titled “The Real Problem with Law Schools” suggested that they were simply producing too many lawyers.<sup>7</sup> Worries about the ratio of newly minted lawyers to available entry-level legal positions resurface cyclically, tracking with broader downturns and upturns occurring in the labor market.

The most recent dimming of the JD’s appeal occurred in the aftermath of the Great Reces-

sion, when broader financial contractions forced law firms to cull their ranks.<sup>8</sup> Initially, students were drawn to law schools in greater numbers to wait out a grim labor market. But there were not enough legal jobs to go around for all the new JDs. Unemployment among recent law graduates rose in consequence: just over one in 10 graduates of the class of 2011 was unable to find work.<sup>9</sup>

Once word got out that law school was no longer such a good bet, applications and enrollments plummeted.<sup>10</sup> Law school applications fell from a high of 87,900 in 2010 to a low of 54,400 in 2015, a drop of 38 percent, while total

**FIGURE 1.** Law school applications and enrollments have stabilized after experiencing a steep decline in the years following the Great Recession.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Note: Enrollment includes all students (non-JD and JD) up to 2012, but only JD students from 2013 to present. Numbers have been rounded.

6 Goldstein, “Law Students Find a Shortage of Jobs,” 1976.

7 Posner, “The Real Problem with Law Schools,” 2013.

8 Weissmann, “The Death Spiral of America’s Big Law Firms,” 2012.

9 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2011.

10 Barton, *Fixing Law Schools*, 2019.

enrollments fell by 25 percent from 2010 to 2017 (Figure 1). In the years since, applications and enrollments have stabilized, but law school enrollments are still about one-fifth below where they were just over a decade ago.

The enrollment crunch had a direct impact on many law schools. Those where post-graduation employment and bar passage outcomes were particularly low began to struggle to recruit students. This led to a cascading effect of tuition revenue losses, the loss of accreditation in some cases, and other challenges. The pressures on some of the lowest-performing law schools are evidenced in the closures — or loss of accreditation — of a small number of ABA-accredited schools over the past decade.<sup>11</sup>

### The legal field is expected to grow over the next decade, but opportunities could change along with new developments in AI and other technologies.

Today, law schools are no longer producing far more graduates than the number of available legal jobs. Enrollments have stabilized since the aftermath of the Great Recession, with ABA-accredited schools graduating an average of 35,000 students each year from 2019 to 2022.<sup>12</sup> And although legal occupations represent just 1 percent of the US economy, the number of jobs in the field is poised to grow, from 1.26 million in 2021 to 1.41 million by 2031. Labor-market projections indicate that there

will be approximately 103,600 job openings in legal occupations on an annual basis from 2021 to 2031.<sup>13</sup>

While these numbers are encouraging, they may be impacted by the recent advent of generative artificial intelligence (AI) platforms, such as ChatGPT and the like. The development of these technologies continues a preexisting trend within the legal field towards digitization and automation. During and after the Great Recession, these forces led to the outsourcing of what once were key tasks for lawyers, such as document review. This pushed some lawyers to take on lower-paid contract work. The tech-driven transformation of the legal field is likely to continue. Today, with the support of generative AI, large language models (LLMs) are poised to further transform legal research and document generation, condensing to a matter of seconds work that might take a human worker days, weeks, or months to complete.<sup>14</sup>

What AI means for the future availability of legal jobs — and jobs in other industries highly exposed to LLMs — remains to be seen. Changes in the way lawyers work and the automation of some of the more monotonous tasks over the past decade led to predictions that job opportunities in the field would contract. While legal work has evolved along with the adoption of new technologies, the more dire predictions about sweeping job losses have yet to come to pass. Nor is it a certainty that future advances in AI and other technologies will decimate the field. While nearly one in three skills asso-

11 American Bar Association, “ABA-Approved Law Schools Archive,” 2023. Eight law schools have either lost the accreditation of the ABA or closed since 2017.

12 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2019–22.

13 Carnevale et al., *After Everything*, 2023.

14 Villasenor, “How AI Will Revolutionize the Practice of Law,” 2023.

ciated with legal work will be at high risk of automation,<sup>15</sup> it is possible that advances in technology may support the practice of the law and create new roles, rather than eliminate legal jobs en masse.<sup>16</sup>

## Wide gaps in outcomes mark the disparities between law schools.

In Part 1 of this report, we describe the earnings of people who completed a JD and, when possible, the earnings of those who completed another law-related program. To better understand the ROI across all JD programs, we analyzed outcomes among recent graduates of 186 institutions with complete earnings and debt data in the College Scorecard.<sup>17</sup> ABA data provide an overview of employment outcomes, demographic trends, and bar passage rates. This analysis confirms a widely held belief about legal education: the most prestigious schools lead to higher-paid work on average, and also are a more surefire path to work directly related to the JD.

Unsurprisingly, law schools whose graduates have high net earnings also rate highly by a number of related metrics, such as bar passage rates. Passing the bar is an essential part of gaining entry to the legal field — graduates must be licensed in order to practice the law in

most states. At the 26 schools where earnings are highest, the ultimate bar passage rate<sup>18</sup> is 97 percent, as compared to the all-law school average of 92 percent. This pattern reverses at institutions where median earnings are lowest. At those law schools, the average ultimate bar passage rate is 82 percent. Schools where net earnings are higher also tend to see a larger share of graduates land work for which bar passage is required, while they are less likely to be employed in work for which a JD is not required but a law degree confers an advantage.<sup>19</sup> The latter jobs — often referred to as “JD advantage” jobs — have emerged in the compliance, legal process outsourcing, and data privacy and security industries since 2007. In other words, graduates of the top 26 law schools are finding work directly relevant to their JD.

How readily graduates can find work is another measure of a law degree’s value. Twenty-seven percent of students attending ABA-accredited law schools were enrolled at institutions where the average unemployment rate 10 months after graduation was just 3 percent or less.<sup>20</sup> Schools with higher earnings outcomes tend to see fewer graduates struggle to get a foot in the door. From the class of 2022, just over half of recent graduates found work at a law firm, 10 percent in government, 9 percent as a judicial clerk, and 9 percent found work in other businesses. Another 8 percent were employed

15 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) 28.0 database, 2023.

16 Lohr, “A.I. Is Coming for Lawyers, Again,” 2023.

17 In most cases, the first professional and doctoral degree in the law lead to a JD. However, a small number of doctoral degrees in law included in College Scorecard data may lead to PhDs rather than JDs.

18 The ultimate bar passage rate measures the percentage of test-takers from a law school who passed the bar exam within two years.

19 For more detail, see Appendix A.

20 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.

in a public interest position, work that encompasses lobbying, policy advocacy, or community organizing, typically on behalf of groups or individuals who might otherwise not receive effective representation in the legal system.<sup>21</sup>

Large law firms are where the most money is to be made, with first-year associate salaries surpassing \$200,000 at some of the largest and most competitive firms in 2023.<sup>22</sup> Graduates of law schools with the highest net median earnings are much more likely than average to be employed as federal clerks or at the biggest law firms within 10 months of leaving law school.<sup>23</sup>

However, some recent graduates find themselves unable to secure any work at all. Twenty percent of students attending ABA-accredited law schools were enrolled at institutions where the unemployment rate was 10 percent or higher 10 months after graduation.<sup>24</sup> Unemployment is generally higher at law schools where net earnings are lowest. While there are outliers on both ends of the spectrum, positive outcomes on a range of measures — such as earnings, employment, and bar passage — tend to be mutually reinforcing and skew the best returns towards institutions at the top of the law school hierarchy.

Although enrollments in JD-granting programs have been stable since the years following



the Great Recession, another area of legal studies is growing rapidly. The fastest-growing subset of law students are to be found in non-JD master's programs that train students for careers adjacent to lawyers and the courts. These programs are aimed at working professionals whose jobs require them to interact with lawyers or navigate complex laws and regulations, such as law firm administrators and law librarians, bankers, health care and human resources administrators, reporters, and international lawyers working in the US. The number of students pursuing such programs<sup>25</sup> has more than doubled from approximately 11,100 in 2013 to just over 23,000 in 2023.<sup>26</sup> While many institutions offer such programs, earnings and debt data about these programs are scarce to nonexistent, particularly as compared to the availability of data on outcomes for JD programs.

21 These findings are from the American Bar Association. Employment data represent outcomes for graduates of ABA-accredited institutions approximately 10 months after graduation. For more information on these employment categories, please see Appendix A.

22 National Association for Law Placement, *2023 Associate Salary Survey*, 2023. The largest, most competitive law firms referred to are those with more than 500 employees.

23 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2022.

24 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

25 These include non-JD-granting master's and certificate programs.

26 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

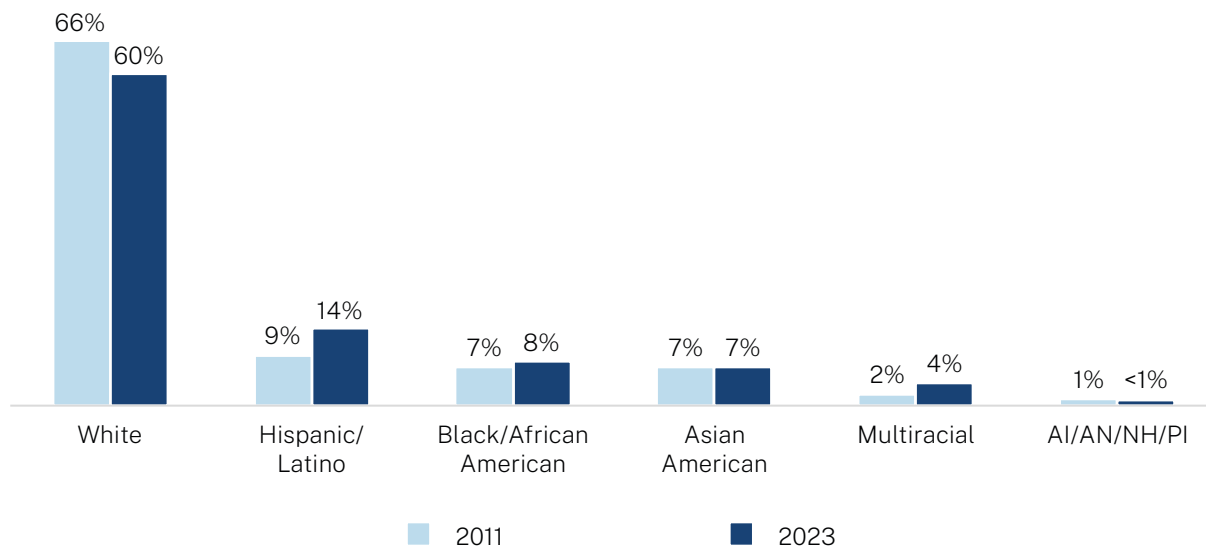
However, the limited data that do exist suggest that students who attend the programs end up with less debt and higher median earnings than students in JD programs.<sup>27</sup>

**Law schools are becoming more demographically diverse, but the legal field is still disproportionately white and male.**

The demographics of law schools are changing, much like the rest of postsecondary education.

As the total number of law school enrollees fell from 2010 to 2023, so did the numbers of white and Asian American students. Meanwhile, the numbers of Hispanic/Latino students and multi-racial students grew. White students still make up the majority, comprising 60 percent of students enrolled at ABA-accredited law schools in 2023, down from 66 percent in 2011 (Figure 2).<sup>28</sup> Hispanic/Latino students now comprise 14 percent of law school enrollments, up from 9 percent in 2011. Although the number of Black/African American students enrolled has fallen, their proportional representation has improved

**FIGURE 2. Hispanic/Latino law students experienced the most significant increase in total enrollment share at law schools from 2011 to 2023.**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2011 and 2023.

Note: Values do not sum to 100 percent because nonresident students and students of unknown race/ethnicity are not included. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; NH = Native Hawaiian; and PI = Pacific Islander.

27 These findings are complicated by the fact that some people who pursue a non-JD master’s in the law may already hold a JD. Additionally, earnings and debt data derived from the College Scorecard are based on only a small fraction of existing programs. In the College Scorecard, full earnings and debt data are missing for 87 percent of master’s programs in legal research and advanced professional studies.

28 For more detail on the demographic data included in this report, please see Appendix A.

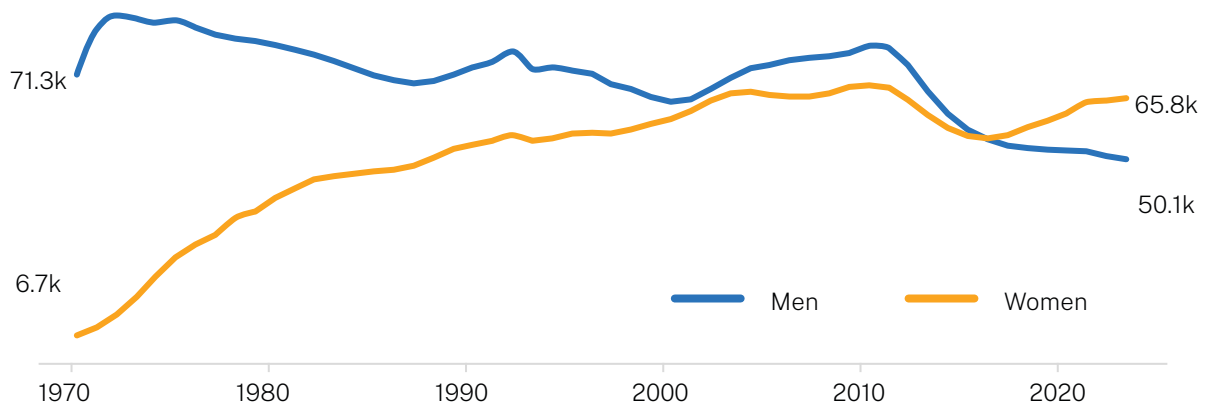
very slightly, from 7 percent in 2011 to just under 8 percent in 2023.<sup>29,30</sup> Despite a decline in numerical terms, the share of Asian American students enrolled in law schools is stable, making up 7 percent of enrolled students in both 2011 and 2023. Meanwhile, American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) students make up less than 1 percent of the total, as they did in 2011.<sup>31</sup>

Another important change in law school demography is that law schools are now majority female. Women surpassed men in enrollment

in 2016 for the first time, and they continue to widen the gap in total enrollment (Figure 3).<sup>32</sup>

Representation by race and ethnicity varies across law schools. Notably, Asian American students of both genders are more concentrated at schools where earnings outcomes net of debt payments are \$100,000 or more, but make up just 3 percent of total enrollments at schools with some of the lowest earnings outcomes.<sup>33</sup> Meanwhile, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina women are disproportionately represented at schools where graduates earn

**FIGURE 3. Enrollment of women has been higher than enrollment of men at law schools since 2016.**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

29 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2011, 2023.

30 Li et al., "Who's Going to Law School?," 2020.

31 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023. For further information about the demographic data included in this report, please see Appendix A.

32 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

33 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar. Enrollment shares represent a three-year average from 2020–22.

\$55,000 or less four years after graduation, compared to their share of the total law school population.<sup>34</sup> Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino men are underrepresented across all law schools. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) students of both genders are underrepresented across law schools, making up less than 1 percent of total enrollments.

Although law school enrollments are now more racially and ethnically diverse and inclusive of women overall, these changes are not reflected in the makeup of those practicing the law. The share of female lawyers increased from 33 percent in 2012 to 39 percent in 2023,<sup>35</sup> but still falls short of proportionality, given their higher enrollments in law school. This prompts the question: If there are more female law students than male law students, why has the share of female lawyers not yet caught up? It is tempting to speculate that there has not been enough time to effect change in the legal industry, given that women only gained the upper hand in law school enrollments in 2016. However, women have not been too far behind in enrollments in past decades — since 1999, they have made up at least 46 percent of law school enrollments.<sup>36</sup> This suggests that there are other structural barriers interfering with their ability to make inroads in the legal field.

Research shows that female lawyers have lower earnings over the full arc of their careers, although the gender wage gap is less severe for law school graduates at the start of their careers.<sup>37</sup> Similar trends are reflected in College Scorecard earnings data, which show that net median earnings among men are \$72,300 four years after graduation from law school, compared to \$70,700 among women. Across all prime-age working lawyers, the gender pay gap is \$28,000 in favor of men, with female lawyers earning a median of \$113,000 and male lawyers earning \$141,000.<sup>38</sup>

A parallel question can be asked about law school diversity and representation in the legal field: As law school enrollments become more diverse, will the structural barriers that have historically blocked access to the legal profession and positions of judicial influence for racial and ethnic minority groups weaken? The unfortunate reality is that the perceived rank and prestige of a given law school has direct consequences for how easily graduates can find work, and what kind of work it is. Since racial and ethnic minority groups — and in particular women in these groups — are disproportionately enrolling in schools with lower bar passage rates and generally worse postgraduation outcomes, it is unclear how quickly the status quo will change. The end of affirmative

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34 For more information on the earnings categories, please see Appendix A.

35 American Bar Association, *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession*, 2023.

36 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 1970–2022.

37 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19. This is reflective of earnings outcomes among 25-to-34-year-old, 35-to-54-year-old, and 25-to-54-year-old lawyers working full-time, full-year.

38 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19, 25-to-34-year-old and 25-to-54-year-old lawyers working full-time, full-year.



action may also further impact the pipeline to law schools.<sup>39</sup>

### Debt-to-earnings ratios are critical to determining return on investment from law degrees.

In Part 3 of this report, we examine student debt, a grim reality for almost every student who pursues a law degree.

Tuition costs are high. On average, tuition and fees were \$38,100 in 2020–21 and ranged up to more than \$70,000 for some of the most elite law schools.<sup>40</sup> Law school graduates accumulated \$118,500 in debt at the median while obtaining their JD.<sup>41</sup>

Students from underrepresented racial/ethnic groups tend to have higher debt than white students. College Scorecard data show that the debt burden at some of the law schools with the

lowest net earnings outcomes — in some cases, the same schools that enroll higher shares of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students — are similar to the debt levels at law schools with the highest net earnings.<sup>42</sup> This means that graduates of these schools have similar debt levels to conquer with fewer financial resources to draw on. Survey research<sup>43</sup> and College Scorecard data indicate that many graduates struggle to pay down significant portions of their debt during the early stages of their careers, unless they attended one of the handful of law schools where net earnings are highest.

39 Brooks et al., “Affirmative Action and Racial Diversity in U.S. Law Schools, 1980–2021,” 2024; Carnevale et al., *Race-Conscious Affirmative Action*, 2023; Sloan, “If Affirmative Action Is Struck Down, These Law Schools May Point to the Future,” 2023.

40 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2020–21.

41 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023. The median debt cited here does not include debt accumulated from undergraduate degrees, but it may reflect debt from other graduate programs within the same institution.

42 The median monthly debt payment at the 33 lowest-earning institutions is \$1,500, compared to \$1,700 at the 26 highest-earning institutions. For additional institutional-level debt and earnings data, see Appendix B.

43 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *Student Debt*, 2021.

# Evaluating the ROI of a Law Degree

**A law degree offers a lifetime earnings boost relative to a bachelor's degree alone, but the best earnings outcomes are concentrated at a handful of institutions.**

When most people think of law degrees, they think of the Juris Doctor, or JD, the professional credential awarded to law school graduates after what is generally a three-year program. While the JD makes up the majority of degrees awarded by law schools, there are a fast-growing number of master's degrees related to law and undergraduate degrees in law-related fields as well. In this section, we look at each of these levels of degrees and measure their outcomes. Where there are complete debt and earnings data, we rank colleges by median net earnings.

The return on investment that a JD offers over a lifetime depends on a range of factors. These include what type of work lawyers go into, the type and size of firm they work for, and what city or state they work in. Four years after graduation, law school graduates have median net earnings of \$72,000. Outcomes vary considerably across law schools, with the best returns concentrated at a handful of institutions. At 26 schools, graduates earn at least \$100,000 net of debt payments, and at the top seven institutions, graduates' earnings exceed \$200,000 (Table 1). Columbia Law School produces the highest earners, with graduates earning a median \$253,800 net of debt just four years after graduation. At the other end of the spectrum, graduates of 33 institutions earn less than \$55,000 net of debt (Table 2).<sup>44</sup> Most graduates, however, land somewhere in the middle of these two extremes.

**TABLE 1. Columbia University law graduates have the highest annual median earnings net of debt payments four years after completing their degree.**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
1	Columbia University in the City of New York	NY	\$ 2,300	\$ 280,900	\$ 253,800
2	University of Pennsylvania	PA	\$ 2,000	\$ 261,400	\$ 238,000
3	University of Chicago	IL	\$ 2,100	\$ 256,400	\$ 230,700
4	Cornell University	NY	\$ 1,800	\$ 249,300	\$ 227,100
5	Stanford University	CA	\$ 1,700	\$ 248,000	\$ 227,100

<sup>44</sup> For more detail, see Table B2 in Appendix B. This assumes that graduates are enrolled in a standard 10-year repayment plan at an interest rate of 7.54 percent.

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
6	Harvard University	MA	\$ 1,100	\$ 233,600	\$ 220,900
7	Northwestern University	IL	\$ 1,800	\$ 227,800	\$ 206,700
8	University of Virginia	VA	\$ 2,000	\$ 221,600	\$ 197,200
9	Duke University	NC	\$ 1,800	\$ 214,800	\$ 193,200
10	Yale University	CT	\$ 1,600	\$ 204,700	\$ 185,400
11	University of California-Berkeley	CA	\$ 1,800	\$ 182,900	\$ 161,700
12	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	MI	\$ 1,500	\$ 176,100	\$ 158,000
13	University of Southern California	CA	\$ 1,600	\$ 164,400	\$ 145,500
14	Vanderbilt University	TN	\$ 1,600	\$ 154,300	\$ 135,300
15	Fordham University	NY	\$ 1,700	\$ 153,500	\$ 133,300
16	University of California-Los Angeles	CA	\$ 1,500	\$ 151,500	\$ 133,100
17	Boston College	MA	\$ 1,400	\$ 144,500	\$ 127,700
18	Georgetown University	DC	\$ 1,800	\$ 146,900	\$ 124,800
19	Washington University in St. Louis	MO	\$ 1,100	\$ 131,900	\$ 119,300
20	Boston University	MA	\$ 1,300	\$ 132,800	\$ 116,800

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: For additional institutional-level debt and earnings data across 186 law schools represented in the College Scorecard, see Appendix B, Table B2. Debt and earnings figures are rounded; net earnings are calculated using unrounded figures. These figures reflect outcomes among graduates of first professional degree and doctoral degree programs.

**TABLE 2. Graduates of the Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico-Ponce have the lowest median earnings net of debt, at \$22,000.**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
167	New England Law-Boston	MA	\$1,400	\$67,800	\$50,500
168	Elon University	NC	\$1,400	\$66,600	\$50,300
169	Ave Maria School of Law	FL	\$1,600	\$69,200	\$49,500
170	Thomas Jefferson School of Law	CA	\$2,600	\$80,800	\$49,400

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
171	St. Thomas University	FL	\$1,900	\$71,500	\$48,800
172	Whittier College	CA	\$2,600	\$79,600	\$48,600
173	Western New England University	MA	\$1,100	\$60,600	\$47,300
174	Campbell University	NC	\$1,500	\$65,600	\$47,100
175	Charleston School of Law	SC	\$1,700	\$67,900	\$47,100
176	Southern University and A & M College	LA	\$1,300	\$62,900	\$46,800
177	Lincoln Memorial University	TN	\$1,200	\$61,300	\$46,600
178	Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University	FL	\$1,300	\$60,600	\$44,900
179	Mississippi College	MS	\$1,600	\$61,300	\$41,700
180	Barry University	FL	\$1,800	\$62,200	\$41,100
181	Appalachian School of Law	VA	\$1,400	\$52,500	\$35,600
182	Faulkner University	AL	\$1,600	\$53,900	\$35,200
183	Thomas M. Cooley Law School	MI	\$2,300	\$60,900	\$33,200
184	Atlanta's John Marshall Law School	GA	\$2,200	\$58,400	\$32,100
185	Inter American University of Puerto Rico-School of Law	PR	\$1,300	\$44,100	\$29,000
186	Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico-Ponce	PR	\$1,400	\$38,700	\$22,000

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: For additional institutional-level debt and earnings data across 186 law schools represented in the College Scorecard, see Appendix B, Table B2. Debt and earnings figures are rounded; net earnings are calculated using unrounded figures. These figures reflect outcomes among graduates of first professional degree and doctoral degree programs.

When looking at the economic payoff of a law degree, it is important to remember while the JD offers an earnings premium relative to a bachelor's degree alone,<sup>45</sup> that premium dif-

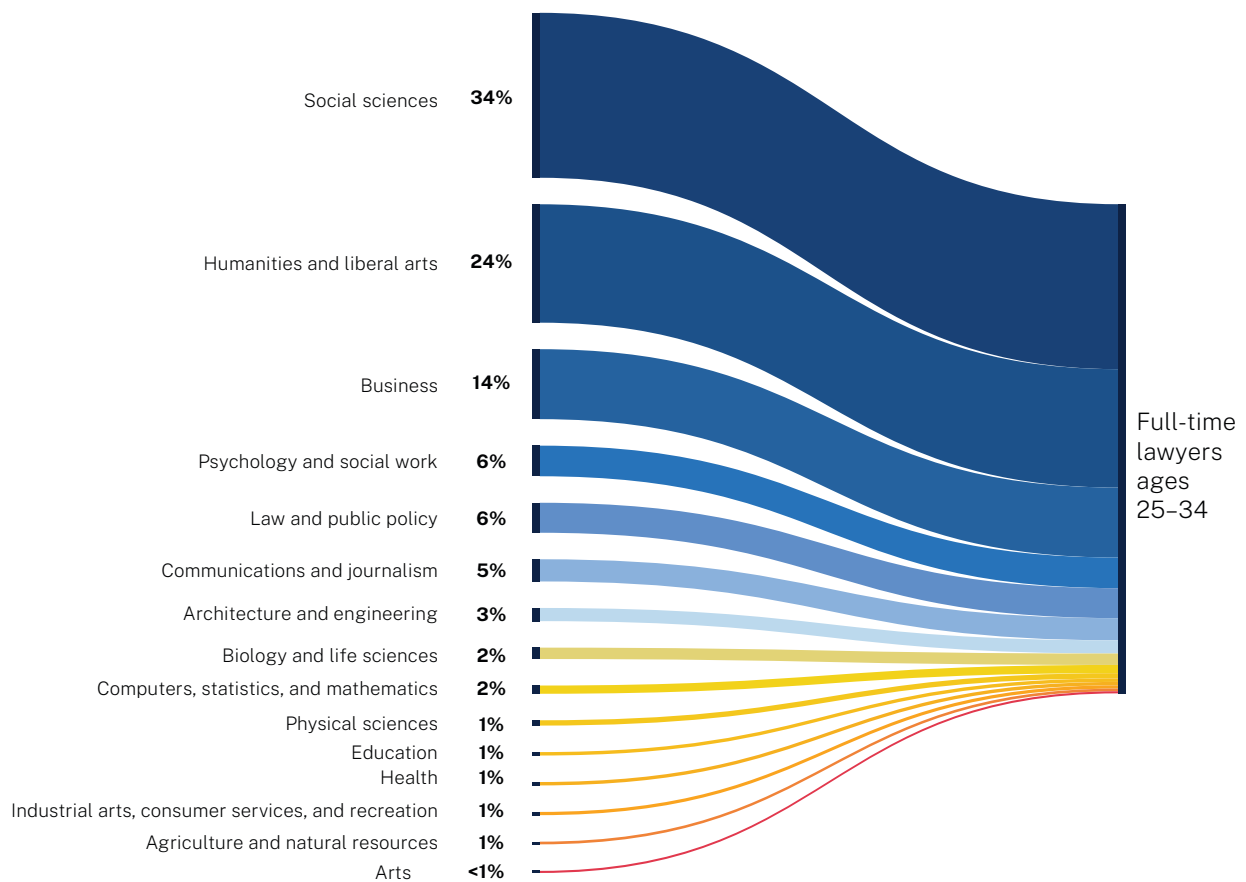
fers depending on the lawyer's undergraduate degree. Students enrolled at law schools tend to come from a variety of undergraduate disciplines, with the largest share having studied

45 Simkovic and McIntyre, "The Economic Value of a Law Degree," 2014.

the social sciences, the humanities, or business (Figure 4).<sup>46</sup> The JD is associated with more than a doubling of expected earnings for humanities majors, doubled earnings for social sciences majors, and an increase of approximately 50 percent for those who majored in business or a STEM (science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics) discipline.<sup>47</sup> These trends are similar for both men and women.<sup>48</sup> The JD premium is thus particularly meaningful for people who majored in the humanities or the social sciences as undergraduates — groups that comprise some of the largest shares of bachelor’s degree holders who go on to pursue a JD.

**FIGURE 4.** Approximately one in three young lawyers have an undergraduate degree in the social sciences, and one in four have an undergraduate degree in the humanities.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19 (pooled).

Note: This analysis is based on full-time, full-year workers ages 25–34 with a graduate degree working as lawyers. Totals may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

46 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19, lawyers employed full-time, ages 25–34.

47 STEM majors generally out-earn those in the humanities and social sciences.

48 McIntyre and Simkovic, “Value of a Law Degree by College Major,” 2019.

## Non-JD legal master’s programs are fast growing, but still represent just a fraction of total enrollments at law schools.

The JD is not the only credential available to students who want a deeper understanding of the law. One of the fastest-growing subsets of legal studies is non-JD master’s programs in law-related fields.

The growth in non-JD enrollments took off in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2007–09, as law schools began adding programs

designed to prepare students for work in or adjacent to the legal field, but not to practice as lawyers. These programs are instead aimed at working professionals whose jobs require them to interact with lawyers or navigate complex laws and regulations. Such degrees provide students with deeper insight into how laws intersect with their field. Examples include law firm administrators and law librarians, bankers, health care and human resources administrators, and reporters who write about the judicial system.<sup>49</sup> Law schools also offer post-JD master’s programs for practicing lawyers and international lawyers working in the US.<sup>50</sup>

**TABLE 3. Graduates of JD programs have higher median levels of debt and lower earnings compared to people who receive a master’s degree in law-related studies.**

Level	Field	Median monthly earnings before debt payments	Median monthly earnings net of debt payments	Median annual earnings before debt payments	Median annual earnings net of debt payments	Median total debt
Master’s degree (non-JD)	Legal research and advanced professional studies	\$8,600	\$7,800	\$103,200	\$93,600	\$54,700
Doctoral degree (JD)	Law	\$7,200	\$5,900	\$86,400	\$70,800	\$113,400
First professional degree (JD)	Law	\$7,400	\$6,100	\$88,800	\$73,200	\$118,500
First professional degree and doctoral degree (JD)	Law	\$7,400	\$6,000	\$88,800	\$72,000	\$118,500

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023. Debt and earnings figures are rounded; net earnings are calculated using unrounded figures.

Note: Median outcomes at the degree level are weighted by the number of debt holders within each institution. The number of debt holders are approximations, as the true number is suppressed by the College Scorecard for privacy reasons.

49 Northeastern University School of Law Online Programs, “What Can You Do With a Master of Legal Studies Degree?,” 2021.

50 Hanover Research, “Alternative Non-JD Programming for Law Schools,” 2013.

As of 2023, some 23,000 students were enrolled in non-JD law programs, up from approximately 11,100 in 2013.<sup>51</sup> These programs now represent 16 percent of total enrollment across all ABA-accredited institutions. Median earnings for graduates of master's programs in legal research and advanced professional studies are \$103,200 four years after graduation (Table 3).<sup>52</sup>

Taken at face value, these median earnings would suggest that a master's degree related to law might be the savvy bet for prospective students, promising higher earnings potential combined with fewer years of study and less

debt. Students who graduate with a master's degree in legal studies have less median debt (\$54,700) than graduates with law degrees (\$118,500). Partly as a result, the median earnings net of debt favor graduates of law-related master's programs (\$93,600) compared to the median of \$72,000 among graduates with JDs.<sup>53</sup>

Non-JD master's graduates from Georgetown University earn the most, at \$129,700 net of debt payments, followed by University of Florida graduates, at \$120,200 (Table 4). Meanwhile, graduates of St. John's University in New York earn a median of only \$41,400 net of debt.

**TABLE 4. Among master's programs in legal studies, graduates of Georgetown University have the highest annual earnings net of debt four years post-graduation.**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
1	Georgetown University	DC	\$1,100	\$143,000	\$129,700
2	University of Florida	FL	\$400	\$125,300	\$120,200
3	Boston University	MA	\$700	\$118,100	\$109,800
4	Seton Hall University	NJ	\$500	\$115,200	\$108,700
5	Loyola University Chicago	IL	\$700	\$110,700	\$102,700
6	University of Alabama	AL	\$500	\$105,100	\$99,000
7	University of Illinois Chicago	IL	\$1,300	\$110,600	\$95,200
8	University of Washington-Seattle Campus	WA	\$500	\$99,700	\$93,400

51 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023. These enrollment numbers also include students pursuing certificate programs.

52 Full debt and earnings data for 87 percent of non-JD granting legal master's programs are omitted in the College Scorecard.

53 This assumes that graduates are enrolled in a standard 10-year repayment plan at an interest rate of 7.54 percent.

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
9	George Washington University	DC	\$900	\$102,600	\$92,000
10	Southern Methodist University	TX	\$700	\$95,800	\$87,600
11	Temple University	PA	\$600	\$92,000	\$85,200
12	University of San Diego	CA	\$1,500	\$101,600	\$83,100
13	Emory University	GA	\$800	\$87,800	\$78,700
14	American University	DC	\$800	\$84,400	\$75,400
15	Nova Southeastern University	FL	\$600	\$74,300	\$66,800
16	Arizona State University Campus Immersion	AZ	\$600	\$70,500	\$63,100
17	Vermont Law and Graduate School	VT	\$600	\$68,600	\$62,000
18	University of Tulsa	OK	\$600	\$64,900	\$57,900
19	Washington University in St. Louis	MO	\$700	\$58,000	\$50,200
20	University of Southern California	CA	\$800	\$54,400	\$45,300
21	St. John's University-New York	NY	\$700	\$49,700	\$41,400

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: Debt and earnings figures are rounded; net earnings are calculated using unrounded figures.

However, there are a number of caveats to be aware of. Law-related master's programs grew rapidly at a time when many law schools were facing an enrollment crunch. This rapid growth raises questions about the quality of these programs that cannot be easily answered, largely because there are fewer metrics available to assess the post-graduate outcomes of people who attend these programs, as compared to JD programs. The ABA does not track employment and post-graduation outcomes at these programs in the same way that it does for JD-grant-

ing programs. And while the College Scorecard provides a general overview of outcomes at a range of programs, it too has some limitations. Full debt and earnings data for 87 percent of non-JD granting legal master's programs are omitted in the College Scorecard. Nor is there a single exam — such as the bar exam — taken by a majority of graduates that would provide additional insight into how graduates of non-JD legal master's programs are faring.



## An undergraduate degree in a law-related major does not necessarily lead to work in the legal field.

Colleges and universities across the country also offer pre-law or legal studies undergraduate tracks (Table 5).<sup>54</sup> These include associate's level programs in legal support services, bachelor's level programs in legal research, and advanced professional studies and non-professional general legal studies. However, four years after completing their degree, earnings for graduates at the associate's and bachelor's degree levels<sup>55</sup> are at least 52 percent and 28

percent less, respectively, than the median earnings of JD program graduates who left law school at the same time.

Some law schools are now offering undergraduate law programs. The law schools of the University of Southern California, Drexel University, and Nova Southeastern University, for example, began offering such programs in fall 2022.<sup>56</sup> While these degrees are intended to help graduates find work adjacent to the legal field or prepare them to one day attend law school, an analysis of post-graduate outcomes indicates that undergraduate pre-law studies

**TABLE 5. Graduates of law-related associate's and bachelor's programs have low median earnings.**

Level	Field	Median monthly earnings before debt payments	Median monthly earnings net of debt payments	Median annual earnings before debt payments	Median annual earnings net of debt payments	Median total debt
Associate's degree	Legal support services	\$2,900	\$2,700	\$34,800	\$32,400	\$21,100
Bachelor's degree	Non-professional general legal studies	\$4,300	\$4,100	\$51,600	\$49,200	\$22,500
Bachelor's degree	Legal support services	\$3,200	\$2,800	\$38,400	\$33,600	\$30,600

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: Debt and earnings figures are rounded; net earnings are calculated using unrounded figures.

54 For institutional-level earnings data, please see Appendix B.

55 The data for approximately eight in 10 programs are not given in the College Scorecard because of small numbers of students in these programs. Further detail can be found in Appendix A.

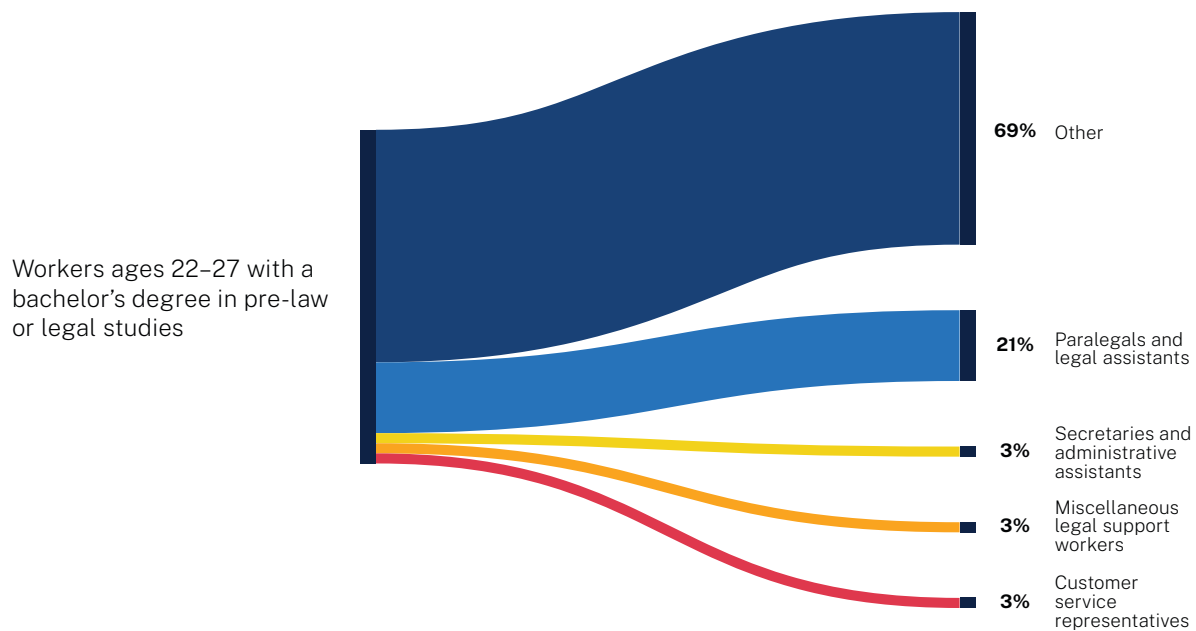
56 Sloan, "Law Schools Are Offering Undergrad Degrees in Emerging Legal Education Trend," 2022.

do not necessarily translate to work in the legal field. Just one in five recent graduates with an undergraduate degree in pre-law or legal studies works as a paralegal or a legal assistant (Figure 5). The majority work in unrelated fields and occupations.<sup>57</sup>

To strengthen the connection between undergraduate studies and JD programs, a number of law schools now offer accelerated programs that allow students to get both a bachelor’s

degree and a JD in either five or six years, as opposed to the customary seven years. This is most common within public university systems aiming to train local lawyers, but a number of private institutions have similar partnerships as well,<sup>58</sup> such as the 3+3 partnership between Tuskegee University and Pepperdine University’s Caruso School of Law.<sup>59</sup> Such programs are designed to reduce the number of years students need to spend in college and help reduce graduates’ total cost of education.

**FIGURE 5. A majority of young workers with a bachelor’s in pre-law or legal studies are not employed in fields directly related to law.**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19.

Note: This analysis is based on full-time, full-year workers ages 22–27 who majored in pre-law or legal studies. Totals do not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

57 These findings are from the US Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS). We created a sample of pre-law and legal studies majors for full-time, full-year workers, ages 22–27. Although the American Community Survey is a nationally representative survey, it may not be fully representative of young workers with pre-law and legal studies majors.

58 Kuris, “What to Weigh about Accelerated BA-JD Programs,” 2020.

59 Caruso School of Law Newsroom, “Pepperdine Caruso School of Law Signs Agreement with Tuskegee University to Offer Accelerated Degree Program,” 2022.

# Who Pursues Law Credentials, and How Well Do They Do Financially?

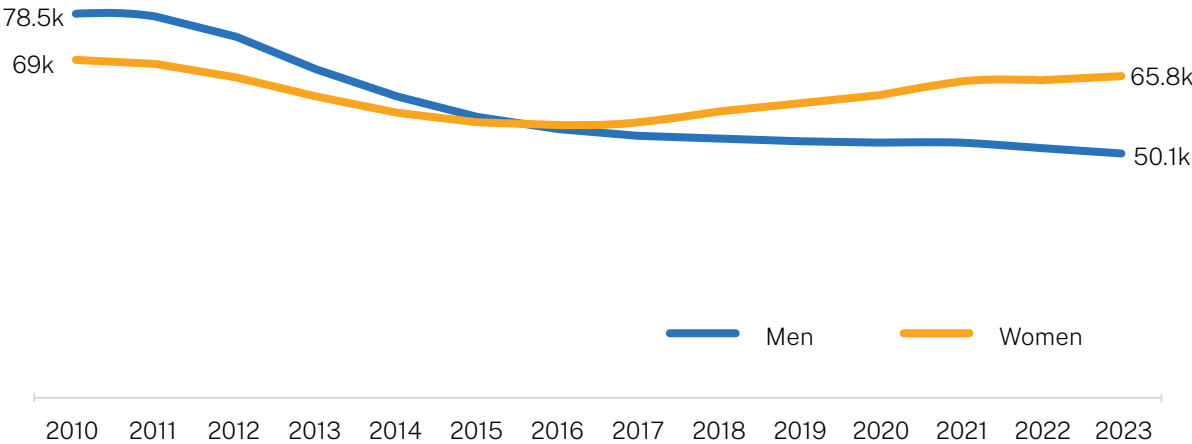
**Women outnumber men at law schools, and their enrollment shares are highest at the schools with the lowest earning outcomes.**

Law has long been a male-dominated field. This is still the case, but law schools are changing quite quickly. Women surpassed men in law school enrollments for the first time in 2016, and they have continued to gain an edge in enrollment share: women now make up 56

percent of all law school students.<sup>60</sup> Men have been abandoning law school in droves: since the peak in law school enrollments in 2010, the number of men enrolled at ABA-accredited law schools has decreased by 36 percent. For women, the decline has been a much more modest 5 percent (Figure 6).

The distribution of men and women isn't the same across all law schools. Although women are now in the majority across all law schools,

**FIGURE 6.** Women have outnumbered men in JD program enrollments since 2016.



Source: American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

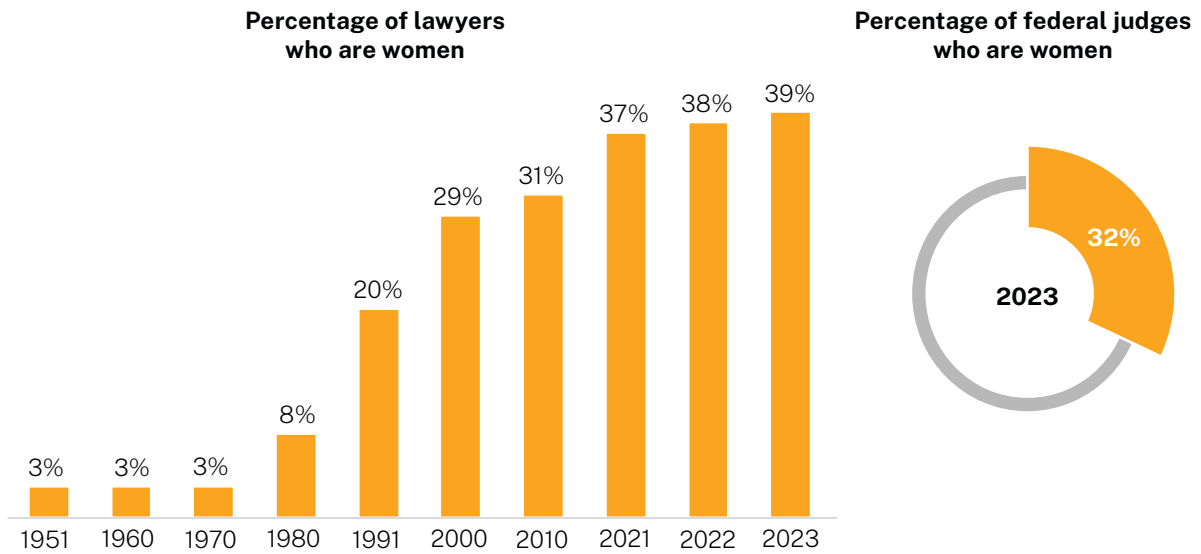
60 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2010–23. The demographic data outlined in this section are drawn from ABA-accredited law schools.

top institutions are closer to parity in gender representation, while women make up a greater share of enrollments at law schools where earnings are lower and unemployment is higher. This trend may have implications for the legal jobs pipeline. It is significant because although women make up a growing share of the law school population, they have yet to achieve parity in the legal field, making up just 39 percent of practicing lawyers (Figure 7).<sup>61</sup>

**The gender wage gap is already evident just four years after graduation and is larger among older lawyers.**

Across the labor force, women earn 82 cents for every dollar that men make.<sup>62</sup> The gender wage gap tends to be less extreme at the start of people’s working lives, and it grows wider and more entrenched over time.<sup>63</sup> The legal field

**FIGURE 7. Women are underrepresented in the legal field, making up 39 percent of lawyers and 32 percent of federal judges in 2023.**



Source: American Bar Association, *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession*, 2023.

61 Not all state bars or licensing agencies track gender; in 2023, 45 states reported on the number of men and women lawyers in the profession. American Bar Association, *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession*, 2023.

62 Kochhar, “The Enduring Grip of the Gender Pay Gap,” 2023.

63 Fry, “Young Women Are Out-Earning Young Men in Several U.S. Cities,” 2022.

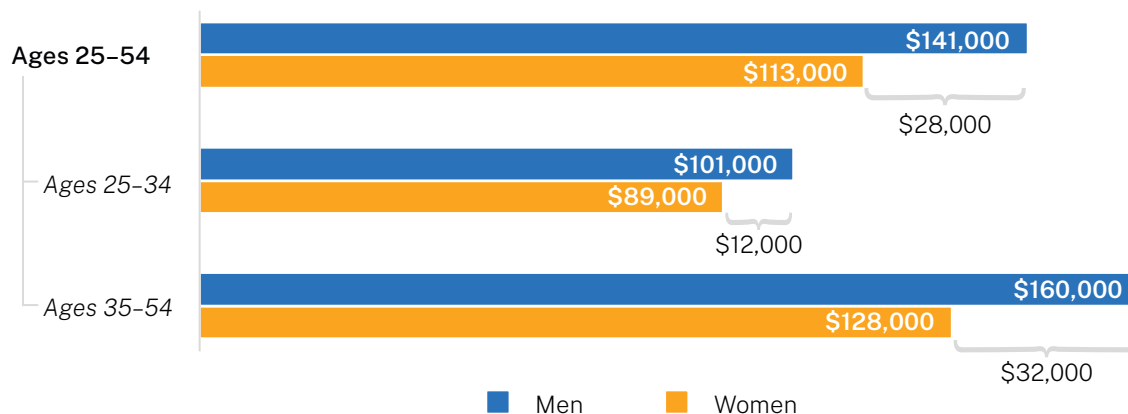
reflects a similar pattern.<sup>64</sup> Male lawyers generally earn more than female lawyers: among all prime working-age lawyers (ages 25–54), the gender gap in median earnings is \$28,000 (Figure 8). For lawyers still at the early stages of their careers, the gap is \$12,000.

The root causes of wage disparities in the legal field are complex. From a whole-of-society perspective, it is generally true that women tend to pay an outsize penalty for taking time off from the labor force to care for their children or other family members.<sup>65</sup> This dynamic is also present in the legal profession.<sup>66</sup> The disproportionate burden on women to manage family and childcare has not gone unnoticed by the women working at the nation’s top 500 firms, 58

percent of whom say that caretaking responsibilities are the top reason why experienced women lawyers drop out of corporate law.<sup>67</sup> This reflects the continued pressure on women lawyers to juggle both a career and a family.

Survey research shows that female lawyers are more likely to feel that managing their family is their sole responsibility, while male lawyers do not report carrying similar emotional and logistical burdens. Over half (54 percent) of female lawyers working at the nation’s largest law firms say that it falls on them to arrange childcare, and 32 percent say it is their responsibility to leave work for childcare needs. By contrast, just a tiny fraction — 1 percent and 4 percent, respectively — of male lawyers feel the same.<sup>68</sup>

**FIGURE 8.** The gap in the median earnings between male and female lawyers is narrowest among more recent graduates.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19.

Note: This analysis is based on 25-to-34-year-old, 35-to-54-year-old, and 25-to-54-year-old lawyers working full-time, full-year.

64 Goldin, “A Grand Gender Convergence,” 2014.

65 Goldin et al., “When the Kids Grow Up,” 2022.

66 Goldin, “A Grand Gender Convergence,” 2014.

67 Liebenberg and Scharf, *Walking Out the Door*, 2019. The *Walking Out the Door* survey results represent the views of 1,262 men and women who have practiced law for at least 15 years and were in private practice at the nation’s 500 largest law firms.

68 Liebenberg and Scharf, *Walking Out the Door*, 2019.

For this and other reasons, women go through a process of attrition at law firms, making them less likely to land one of the highest-paying legal jobs: partner at a law firm. Although they are currently starting out at the associate level in almost equal shares to men, they are much less likely to become partners. Women make up 47 percent of associates, but just 32 percent of non-equity partners, 22 percent of equity partners, and 12 percent of managing partners.<sup>69</sup>

Beyond the unique pressures women face at law firms, another possible cause of the gender wage gap is the type of legal work that women tend to do. Women often gravitate towards public service, where they are likely to be paid

less than they might have been at a large firm or in business. Location also matters. Recent male graduates tend to make up a larger share of lawyers employed at law firms in parts of the country where compensation is highest, such as the mid-Atlantic region or New York City.<sup>70</sup>

College Scorecard data show just a small difference in net median earnings among early-career male and female law graduates, at \$72,300 for men and \$70,700 among women. At most law schools, male graduates earn more than women. But at a small number of institutions, female graduates earn meaningfully more than men four years after graduation (Table 6).<sup>71</sup>

**TABLE 6.** Four years after completing their degree, female graduates of Vanderbilt University make \$48,700 more than their male counterparts.

Rank	Institution	State	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Women)	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Men)	Difference (+ Women)
1	Vanderbilt University	TN	\$160,000	\$111,300	+ \$48,700
2	Cornell University	NY	\$237,200	\$209,700	+ \$27,500
3	University of Southern California	CA	\$163,200	\$136,800	+ \$26,400
4	University of Virginia-Main Campus	VA	\$204,800	\$184,900	+ \$19,900
5	Syracuse University	NY	\$81,000	\$64,800	+ \$16,200
6	Howard University	DC	\$60,600	\$47,600	+ \$13,000
7	Chapman University	CA	\$74,800	\$63,200	+ \$11,600

69 National Association of Women Lawyers, *2021 Report*, 2021.

70 National Association for Law Placement, "Does a Gender Pay Gap Exist for New Law Graduates and Has It Changed Over Time?" 2019.

71 A number of institutions were excluded from this gender analysis due to incomplete earnings and debt data in the College Scorecard.

Rank	Institution	State	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Women)	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Men)	Difference (+ Women)
8	Washington University in St. Louis	MO	\$128,000	\$117,200	+ \$10,800
9	University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	PA	\$70,200	\$60,000	+ \$10,200
10	University of California-Davis	CA	\$96,400	\$87,300	+ \$9,100

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Breaking the data down by earnings outcomes of particular institutions, women have the most significant earnings advantage at Vanderbilt University, where median earnings net of debt for female law school graduates are \$48,700 higher than those of male graduates; Cornell Law School, where the difference is \$27,500; and the University of Southern California, where median earnings net of debt for female graduates are \$26,400 greater than for male graduates.

At most law schools, however, men earn more than women four years after graduating. And the earnings gap favors men even more prominently at some of these institutions. At the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, the gender pay gap favors men by \$67,200; it favors men by \$54,100 at Yale Law School and by \$43,700 at Harvard Law School (Table 7).

**TABLE 7.** Four years after completing their degree, male graduates of the law school at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor earn \$67,200 more net of debt payments than their female counterparts.

Rank	Institution	State	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Men)	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Women)	Difference (+ Men)
1	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	MI	\$186,600	\$119,400	+\$67,200
2	Yale University	CT	\$205,500	\$151,400	+\$54,100
3	Harvard University	MA	\$239,100	\$195,400	+\$43,700
4	University of California-Berkeley	CA	\$175,300	\$137,400	+\$37,900
5	Stanford University	CA	\$239,400	\$206,100	+\$33,300
6	University of Pennsylvania	PA	\$247,400	\$214,600	+\$32,800

Rank	Institution	State	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Men)	Median annual earnings net of debt payments (Women)	Difference (+ Men)
7	Columbia University in the City of New York	NY	\$270,900	\$238,200	+\$32,700
8	Boston College	MA	\$147,700	\$115,900	+\$31,800
9	University of Chicago	IL	\$240,400	\$211,300	+\$29,100
10	Nova Southeastern University	FL	\$69,600	\$42,200	+\$27,400

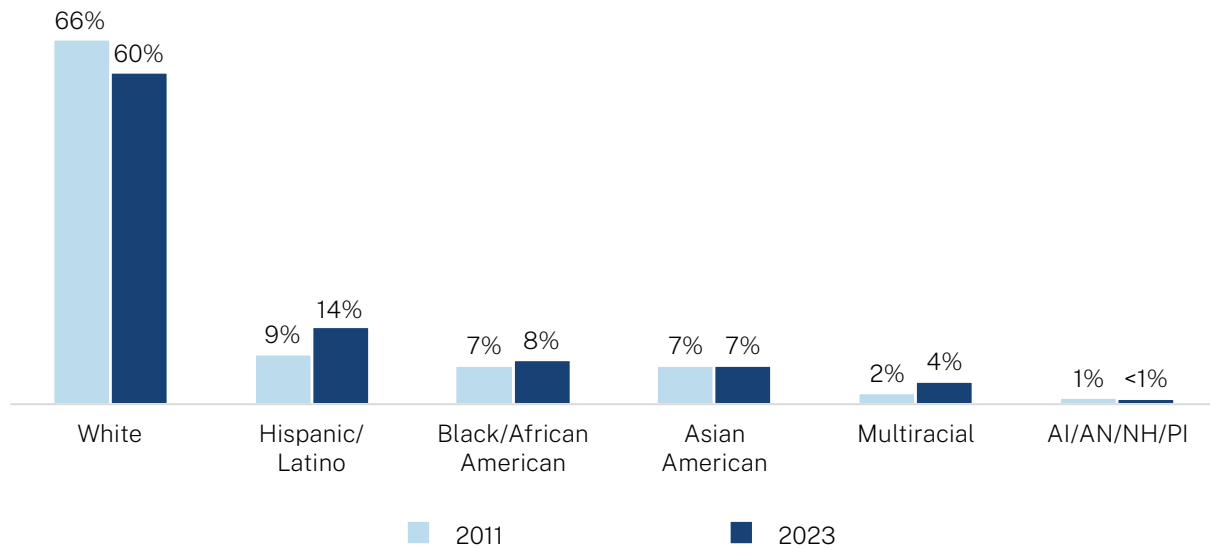
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

### Hispanic/Latino students experienced the largest numeric increase in law school enrollments amid broader declines.

As the total number of law students fell in the aftermath of the Great Recession of 2007–09,

so did the number of white, Asian American, and Black/African American students. At the same time, the number of Hispanic/Latino and multiracial law students grew (Figure 9). Although there are fewer white students overall, they still make up the majority of law school students, comprising 60 percent of students

**FIGURE 9.** Hispanic/Latino students experienced the most significant increase in total enrollment share at law schools from 2011 to 2023, but white students still make up the majority of enrollments.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2011, 2023.

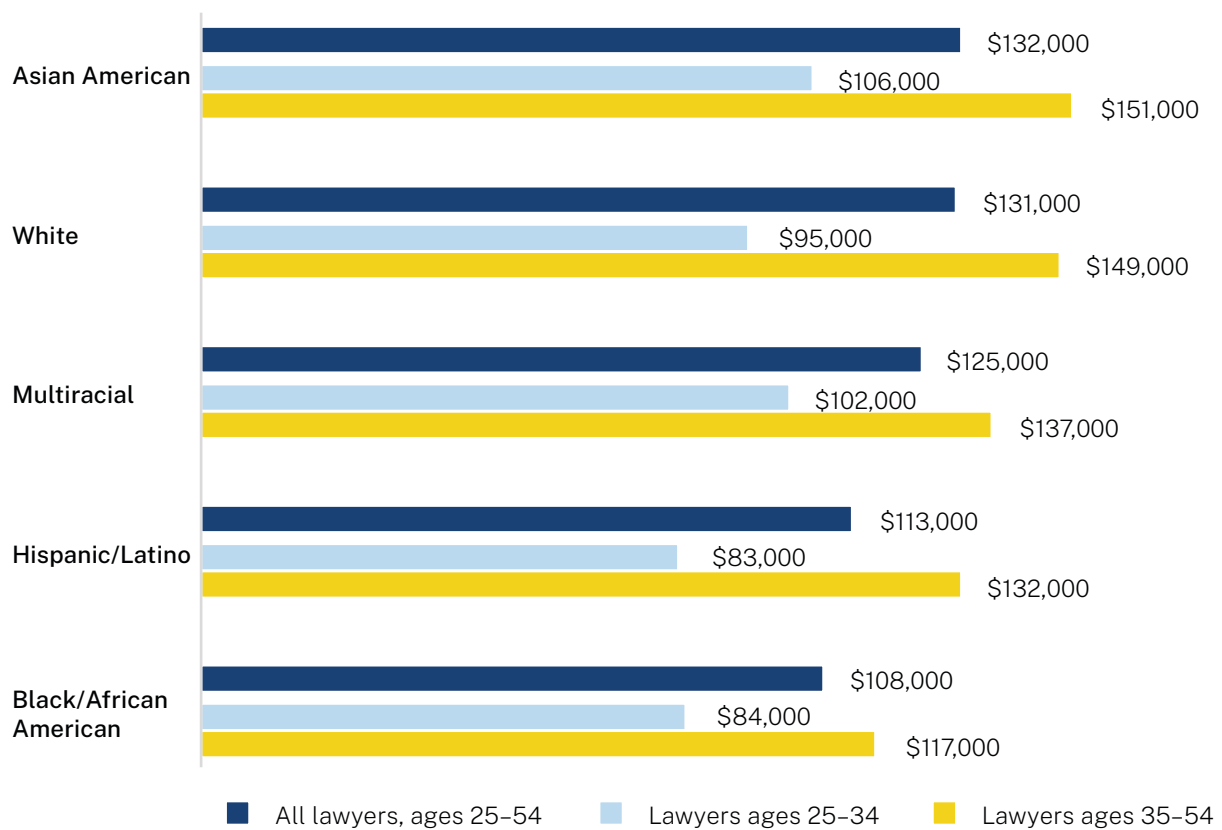
Note: Values do not sum to 100 percent because nonresident students and students whose race/ethnicity is unknown are not included. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; NH = Native Hawaiian; and PI = Pacific Islander.



enrolled at ABA-accredited schools in 2023. The share of students who identify as Hispanic/Latino grew from 9 percent to 14 percent over the same period. Meanwhile, the shares of Asian American, Black/African American, and American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) students have remained essentially flat, despite numeric declines across all three groups.<sup>72</sup>

Although a law degree promises to boost earnings, some racial/ethnic groups benefit more than others.<sup>73</sup> White, Asian American, and multiracial law graduates have the highest earnings, compared with lawyers of other racial/ethnic groups (Figure 10). The racial/ethnic wage gap is less extreme, but still present, among lawyers ages 25 to 34, when they are still in an earlier phase of their careers.

**FIGURE 10.** Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American lawyers consistently earn less than white, Asian American, and multiracial lawyers, a disparity that persists throughout their careers.



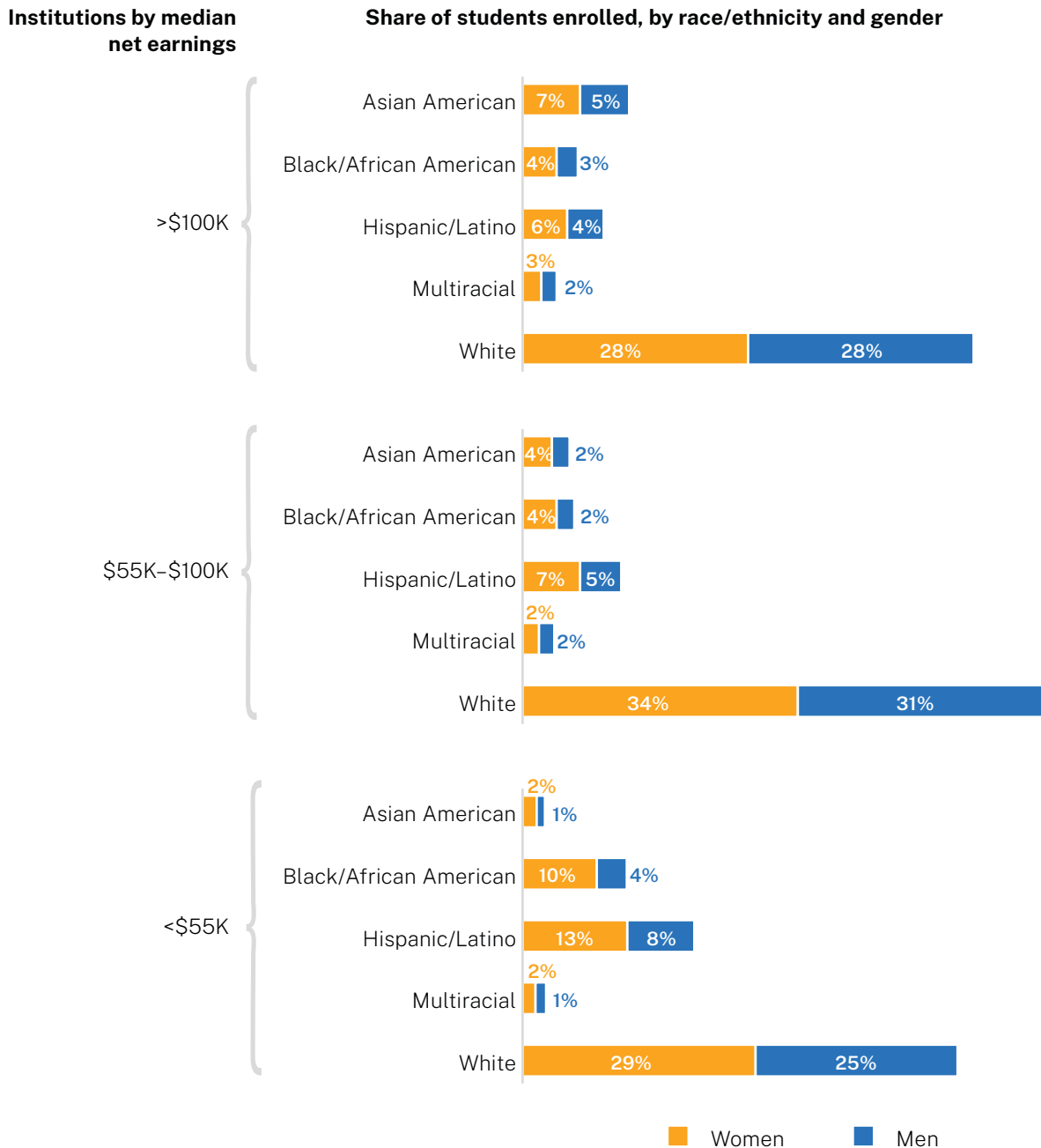
Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19.

Note: This analysis is based on 25-to-34-year-old, 35-to-54-year-old, and 25-to-54-year-old lawyers working full-time, full-year. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) lawyers are not included in this analysis due to small sample size.

72 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

73 McIntyre and Simkovic, “Are Law Degrees as Valuable to Minorities?,” 2018.

**FIGURE 11.** Relative to their share of all enrollments, Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American students are overrepresented in law schools where net earnings are less than \$55,000 four years after graduation.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, 2020-22; and the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: Values do not sum to 100 percent because nonresident students and students whose race/ethnicity is unknown are not included. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) male and female students make up less than 1 percent of enrollments across all three tiers of institutions.

There are a number of possible causes behind this. The earnings gap may be attributable in part to high attrition rates among Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino lawyers from law firms, meaning that they are less likely to eventually make partner, despite small gains in representation at the associate level.<sup>74</sup> The law schools that students from underrepresented racial or ethnic minority groups attend also matter. Although law schools are much more diverse overall than they were just a few decades ago,<sup>75</sup> Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students are overrepresented in law schools with the lowest earnings outcomes. This is particularly true for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina women (Figure 11).<sup>76,77</sup> These are the institutions whose students also generally suffer from worse employment outcomes and lower bar passage rates, making the path to success in the legal field more fraught. While such institutions are broadening access to a legal education, creating a more diverse pool of graduates overall, it remains to be seen whether they can meaningfully contribute to breaking the next glass ceiling — breaking down historic barriers in representation and, ultimately, creating greater parity in pay.

Relatedly, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino lawyers remain underrepresented at large law firms that pay the highest salaries. In 2022, only 11 percent of all law firm partners identified with a race other than white. While this is a meaningful improvement from years

gone by,<sup>78</sup> law firms are still far from representative of the racial/ethnic diversity of American society. Among lawyers working at large law firms, 8 percent are Asian American. Just 5 percent are Hispanic/Latino, and 4 percent are Black/African American.<sup>79</sup>

The demographics of law firm associates have followed a similar pattern, still favoring white and Asian American lawyers but slowly growing more diverse. The number of associates who are not white has grown from 8 percent in 1993 to 28 percent in 2022. Again, Asian American associates make up the second-largest group of law associates, at 12 percent overall. Hispanic/Latino and Black/African American associates are far from reaching equivalence with their representation in the broader US population, making up 6 percent and 7 percent, respectively, of all associates.<sup>80</sup> This lack of representation has implications for who gets into the pipeline to becoming a partner.

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74 National Association for Law Placement, *2022 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms*, 2023.

75 As recently as the 1980s, only about one in 10 students at ABA-accredited law schools identified as a member of a racial or ethnic group other than white.

76 Li et al., “Who’s Going to Law School?,” 2020.

77 For additional detail on law school demographic patterns, see Appendix A.

78 In 1993, just 3 percent of law firm partners were from an underrepresented racial or ethnic minority group.

79 National Association for Law Placement, *2022 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms*, 2023.

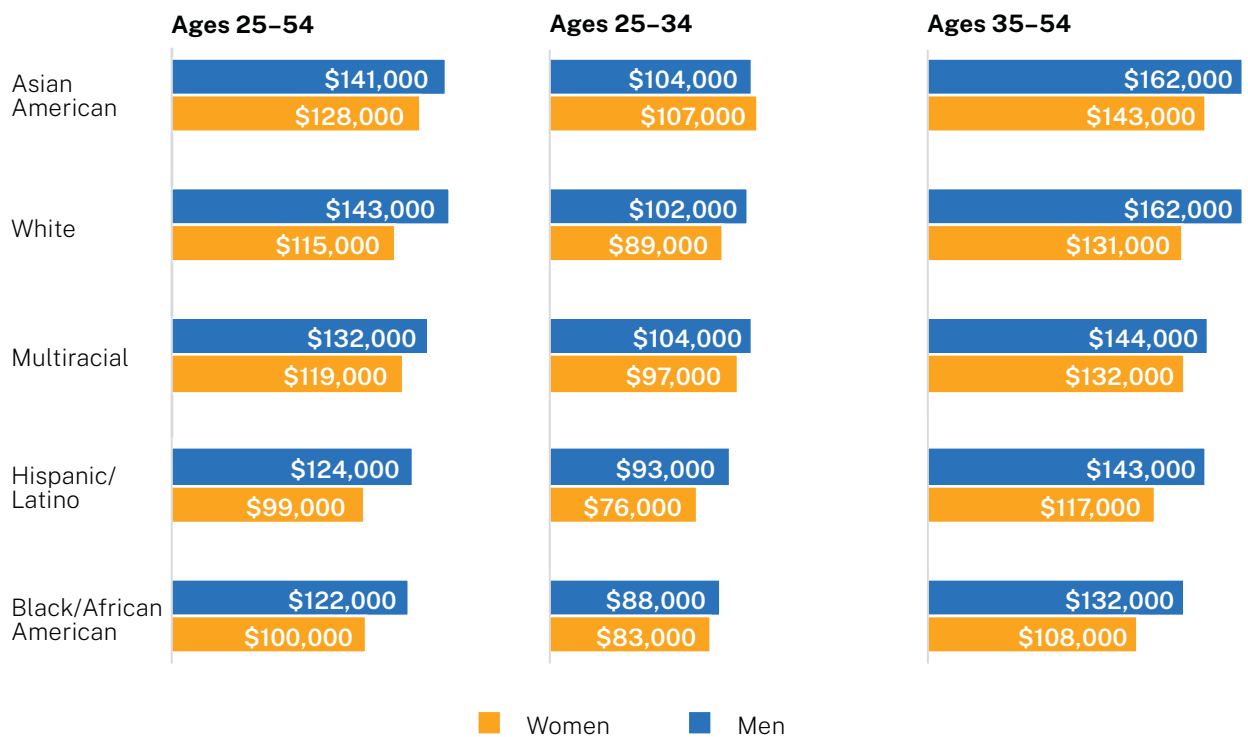
80 National Association for Law Placement, *2022 Report on Diversity in U.S. Law Firms*, 2023.

### Disparities in earnings by race and ethnicity become even more pronounced when gender is also factored in.

The earnings divide across race/ethnicity becomes even more stark when gender is also factored in. Among lawyers ages 25 to 34, Asian American women have the highest median annual earnings, at \$107,000 (Figure

12). They are followed by Asian American men, at \$104,000; multiracial men, also at \$104,000; and white men, at \$102,000. But when considering earnings among lawyers who are further advanced in their careers, Asian American women’s earnings advantage vanishes. Men, irrespective of their racial or ethnic background, earn more than their female counterparts.

**FIGURE 12.** Among lawyers ages 25–34, Asian American women have the highest earnings of all racial/ethnic and gender groups, but among lawyers ages 35–54, men earn more than women within every racial/ethnic group.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–19.

Note: This analysis is based on 25-to-34-year-old, 35-to-54-year-old, and 25-to-54-year-old lawyers working full-time, full-year. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) lawyers are not included in this analysis due to small sample size.

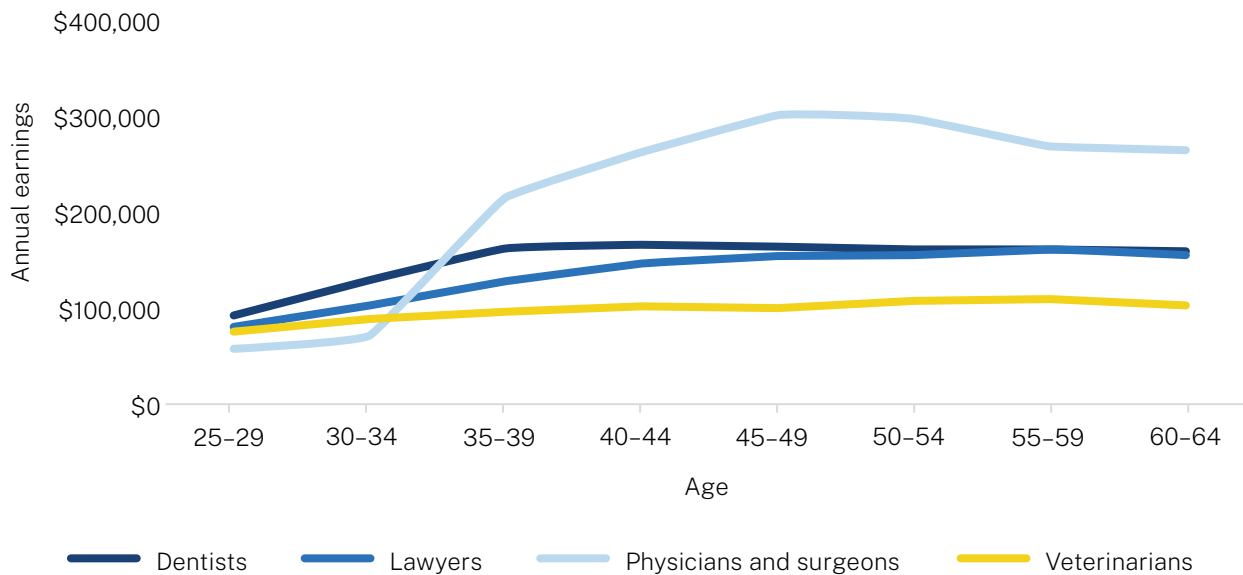
## Where law graduates work — and their legal specialty — has consequences for how much they earn.

Earnings vary for lawyers. There are certain truths that define the range in pay: private-sector lawyers generally earn significantly more money than public interest lawyers, and lawyers working in larger law firms generally earn more than those working in smaller law firms. For instance, first-year associates can command salaries of \$215,000 at some large firms in major cities. By contrast, first-year public defenders can expect to make a median \$59,700 starting

salary.<sup>81</sup> Over time, however, lawyer salaries generally grow with age and experience, peaking when workers are in their 50s (Figure 13).

An analysis of earnings among recent graduates showed that the median salary among the graduating class was \$85,000 in their first year after earning a JD, including both full- and part-time workers.<sup>82</sup> A different analysis showed that among those in full-time jobs, the average salary was \$109,700. However, more than half (53 percent) earn significantly less than this — \$50,000 to \$90,000 on average.<sup>83</sup> Graduates who go to

**FIGURE 13. Median earnings for lawyers generally begin to peak when they enter their 50s.**



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009-19.

81 National Association for Law Placement, *NALP/PSJD 2022 Public Service Attorney Salary Survey*, 2022.

82 National Association for Law Placement, "Employment Market for Class of 2022 Law Graduates Reaches 35-Year High," 2023. This median salary represents outcomes among graduates who were working in full- and part-time jobs.

83 National Association for Law Placement, "Salary Distribution Curves," 2023.

work at law firms generally command higher pay: the median base salary among first-year associates was \$200,000 in 2023.<sup>84</sup>

Lawyers who choose to work in the public sector can expect their initial earnings to be low, but they will increase with time. Lawyers who go to work for public interest organizations

earn a median of \$63,000 when starting, but \$95,000 after working in the field for 11 to 15 years,<sup>85</sup> underlining the gulf in earnings potential between a lawyer at a large law firm and a lawyer in the public sector. A public defender with a decade or more of experience earns less (\$100,500) than someone just getting their foot in the door at a large law firm (Table 8).

**TABLE 8. Public service attorney salaries increase with more time on the job, but it takes many years before median earnings approach \$100,000.**

Years of experience	Civil legal services	Public defenders	Public interest organizations
Entry-level	\$57,500	\$59,700	\$63,000
5 years	\$67,100	\$75,700	\$78,700
11–15 years	\$78,500	\$100,500	\$95,000

Source: National Association for Law Placement, 2022 NALP/PSJD Public Service Attorney Salary Survey, 2022.

Note: Numbers have been rounded.

**TABLE 9. At the median, lawyers overall earn \$135,700, but earning potential varies depending on whether lawyers work in federal, state, or local government or in legal services.**

Broad occupation type	Median earnings	Lawyers employed in:	Median earnings
Lawyers	\$135,700	Federal government	\$158,400
Legal occupations	\$95,200	Legal services	\$132,100
All occupations	\$46,300	Local government*	\$109,100
		State government*	\$97,600

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, “Lawyers,” 2023.

Note: Numbers have been rounded. \*This analysis excludes those working in education and hospitals.

84 National Association for Law Placement, 2023 Associate Salary Survey, 2023.

85 National Association for Law Placement, NALP/PSJD 2022 Public Service Attorney Salary Survey Report, 2022.

The median annual earnings for all lawyers are \$135,700. For those who opt to go into government, earning potential also varies (Table 9). Lawyers working in the federal government have median annual earnings of \$158,400; lawyers working in legal services earn a median of \$132,100; those in local government earn a median of \$109,100; and lawyers in state government earn a median of \$97,600 annually.

Working in a private firm brings the highest compensation. Average compensation for partners — senior lawyers who have an ownership interest in the law firm — was \$1.12 million in 2022.<sup>86</sup> Partners' compensation often differs based on their legal specialty. A survey of seven practice areas revealed that in 2022, corporate partners received the highest level of compensation, at \$1.49 million. ERISA (pensions and benefits) partners reported the next highest total compensation, at \$1.15 million. Next were litigation partners, who reported total compensation of \$1.05 million, followed by intellectual property partners at \$1.01 million and real estate partners at \$950,000. Labor and employment partners had the lowest average total compensation, at \$650,000.<sup>87</sup>

Geography also influences partner compensation. Among partners at large firms, average total compensation was highest in New York City, at \$1.82 million. The second-highest average partner compensation was \$1.52 million in San Francisco, fol-

lowed closely by the nearby Palo Alto/Silicon Valley area in California, where it was \$1.50 million. Average total compensation was almost as high in Boston (\$1.48 million), Dallas (\$1.45 million), and Washington, DC (\$1.41 million). In contrast, the average total compensation for partners at large law firms in Seattle was \$710,000.<sup>88</sup>

### Just over half of recent law school graduates work in law firms.

In 2022, 52 percent of recent graduates found work at a law firm, while 9 percent of graduates found work in business, 10 percent in government, and 9 percent as a judicial clerk.<sup>89</sup> Another 8 percent were employed in a public interest position.<sup>90</sup>

A critical measure of whether a law degree has paid off is whether graduates can find work for which bar passage or authorization to practice the law in one or more jurisdictions is required. Close to 78 percent of law graduates from the class of 2022 found a job that requires bar passage.<sup>91</sup> This marks a healthy increase in employment prospects from the aftermath of the Great Recession. In 2011, just 55 percent of recent graduates found full-time, long-term work that required a JD.<sup>92</sup>

Instead of practicing law, some law school graduates opt to take what are called “JD advantage” jobs — jobs for which a JD is required or preferred, but that do not require bar passage

86 Compensation includes bonuses as well as other monetary perks. Lowe, *2022 Partner Compensation Survey*, 2022.

87 Lowe, *2022 Partner Compensation Survey*, 2022.

88 Lowe, *2022 Partner Compensation Survey*, 2022.

89 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22. Employment shares represent outcomes for graduates of ABA-accredited institutions approximately 10 months after graduation. When this analysis was conducted, employment data for the graduates of the class of 2022–23 were not yet available.

90 The employment categories cited here are those used by the ABA in its classifications.

91 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

92 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2012.

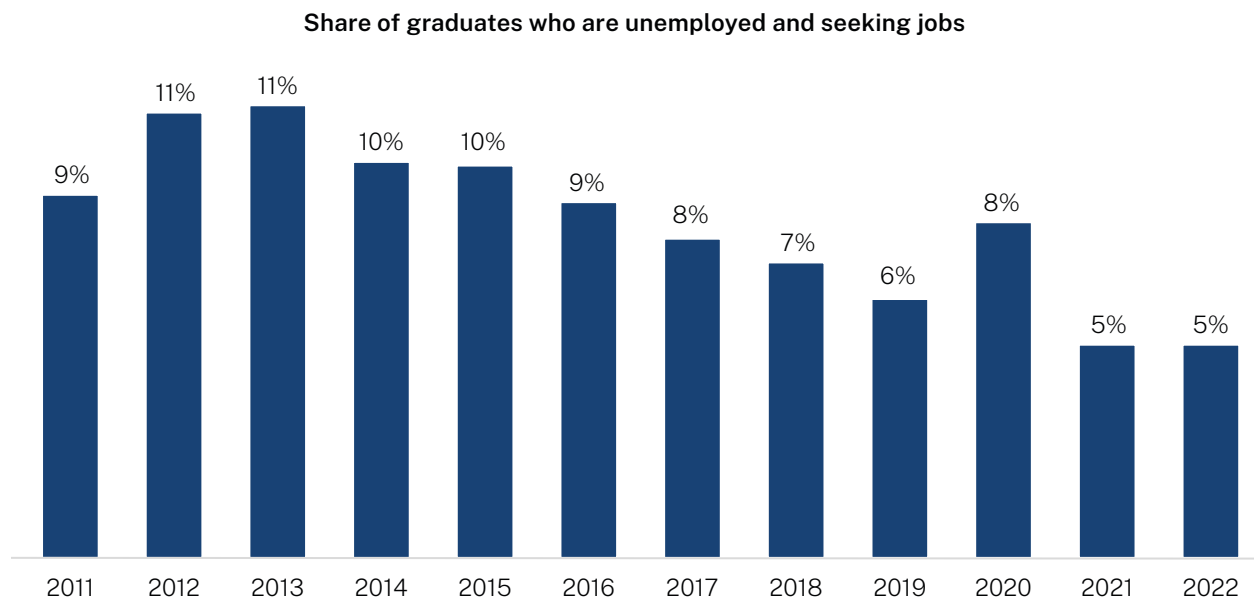
or an active law license, or involve practicing the law. Many of these jobs have emerged in the compliance, legal process outsourcing, and data privacy and security industries since 2007.<sup>93</sup> For the class of 2020, the largest source of JD advantage jobs in business was in banking and finance, followed by technology companies and accounting firms.<sup>94</sup> Overall, 87 percent of the class of 2022 found work for which bar passage was required or that was considered a JD advantage job.<sup>95</sup>

Employment prospects for law graduates

have improved since the fallout of the Great Recession of 2007–09. From 2020 to 2022, an average of just 6 percent of graduates were still looking for work 10 months after earning their degree, as compared to the post-recession high of 11 percent of the graduating class of 2012 (Figure 14).<sup>96</sup>

Just over half of the graduates of 2022 were employed at a law firm 10 months after earning their JD, up from 38 percent in 2011. Over the same time frame, the number of graduates finding full-time, long-term work at the largest

**FIGURE 14.** The share of unemployed recent law graduates has declined most years since 2015.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2011–22.

93 Leipold and Collins, “The Entry-Level Employment Market for New Law School Graduates 10 Years after the Great Recession,” 2018.

94 National Association for Law Placement, “What We Know About JD Advantage Jobs,” 2022.

95 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2022.

96 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.



law firms (those employing 500 or more people) more than doubled. In 2022, fewer graduates opted to go into business, as compared to the class of 2011. Government, public service, and clerkships tend to have more stable job openings, so employment patterns are less likely to fluctuate.

The top jobs in the field, however, largely go to the graduates of a few select law schools. Graduates of the 26 highest-earning law schools are more likely to be employed at the biggest law firms or to be federal clerks, underlining the extent to which a law school's prestige can make or break a legal career.<sup>97</sup> While just 16 percent of law graduates overall went on to a full-time, full-year role in Big Law over the past three years, 44 percent of graduates of the 26 highest-earning law schools did so. And while just 3 percent of law graduates overall landed a federal clerkship, 8 percent of graduates of the top 26 schools did.<sup>98</sup>

The narrow path to the top of the field is further highlighted by Supreme Court clerkships, a role that sits at the top of the legal prestige pyramid and generally cements clerks' future career success. Supreme Court justices typically hire four clerks for each one-year term, meaning that there are 36 spots available for every graduating class. Over the last 40 years, more than

two-thirds of those spots went to graduates of just five law schools: Harvard, Yale, Stanford, Columbia, and the University of Chicago.<sup>99</sup> Where law graduates went to college matters too: earning one's undergraduate degree at Harvard, Yale, or Princeton gave applicants a better shot at landing a coveted Supreme Court clerkship.

In other words, how easily recent graduates can find work, and how prestigious that work turns out to be, tends to skew the best returns to the top handful of institutions.

### **As with earnings outcomes, employment outcomes vary across law schools by race and gender.**

Another way to evaluate career prospects associated with a given law school is the number of graduates who find employment soon after graduation. Finding a job — any job — shortly after completing a degree might sound like a very simplistic measure of success, but even this is not a given for all graduates at some schools. At the top-earning 26 institutions, the unemployment rate averaged 3 percent for the classes of 2020, 2021, and 2022.<sup>100</sup> Meanwhile, at the lowest-earning ABA-accredited schools, an average of 13 percent of graduates were still looking for work 10 months after graduation.

97 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

98 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023. The share of graduates going into "Big Law" jobs referenced here are those that the ABA reports as working full-time, full-year at law firms with more than 500 employees.

99 George et al., "Some Are More Equal Than Others," 2023.

100 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

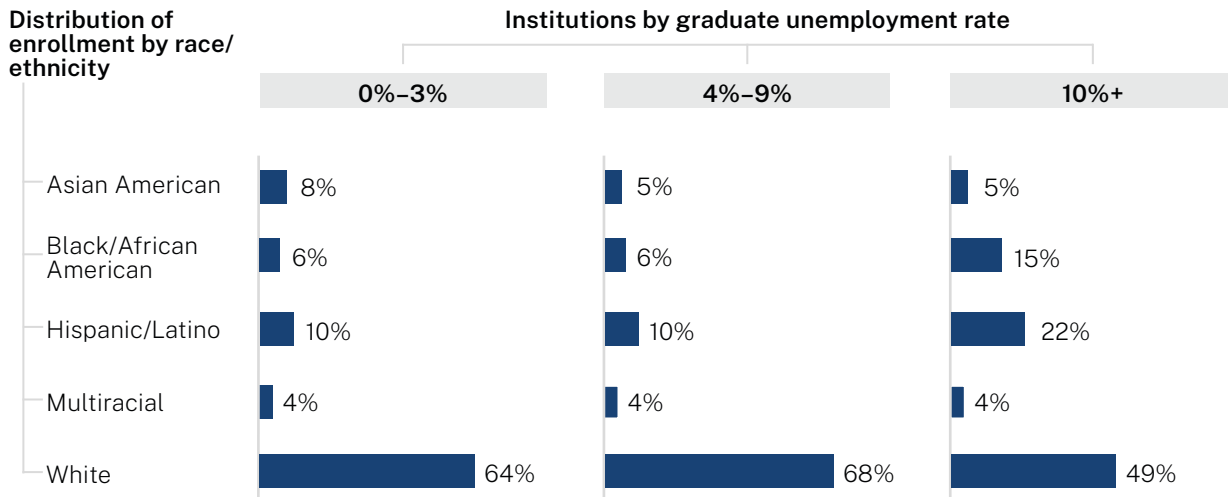
As is also the case with earnings outcomes by school, the institutions with some of the highest rates of unemployment tend to enroll a larger share of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students (Figure 15).<sup>101</sup>

Unemployment disproportionately affects female law graduates, and the rates are particularly high for Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina women. These students have greater representation at institutions with high-

er rates of unemployment among early career graduates (Figure 16).

Employment rates track with other outcomes, such as earnings, debt levels, and bar passage outcomes, as we explore in Part 3. At the top institutions, career prospects are excellent. Meanwhile, graduates of a significant number of institutions struggle to make ends meet. Depending on whether they pass the bar, they may never even have a chance to practice law.

**FIGURE 15.** Institutions where the average unemployment rate is 10 percent or higher 10 months after graduation enroll higher shares of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino students.

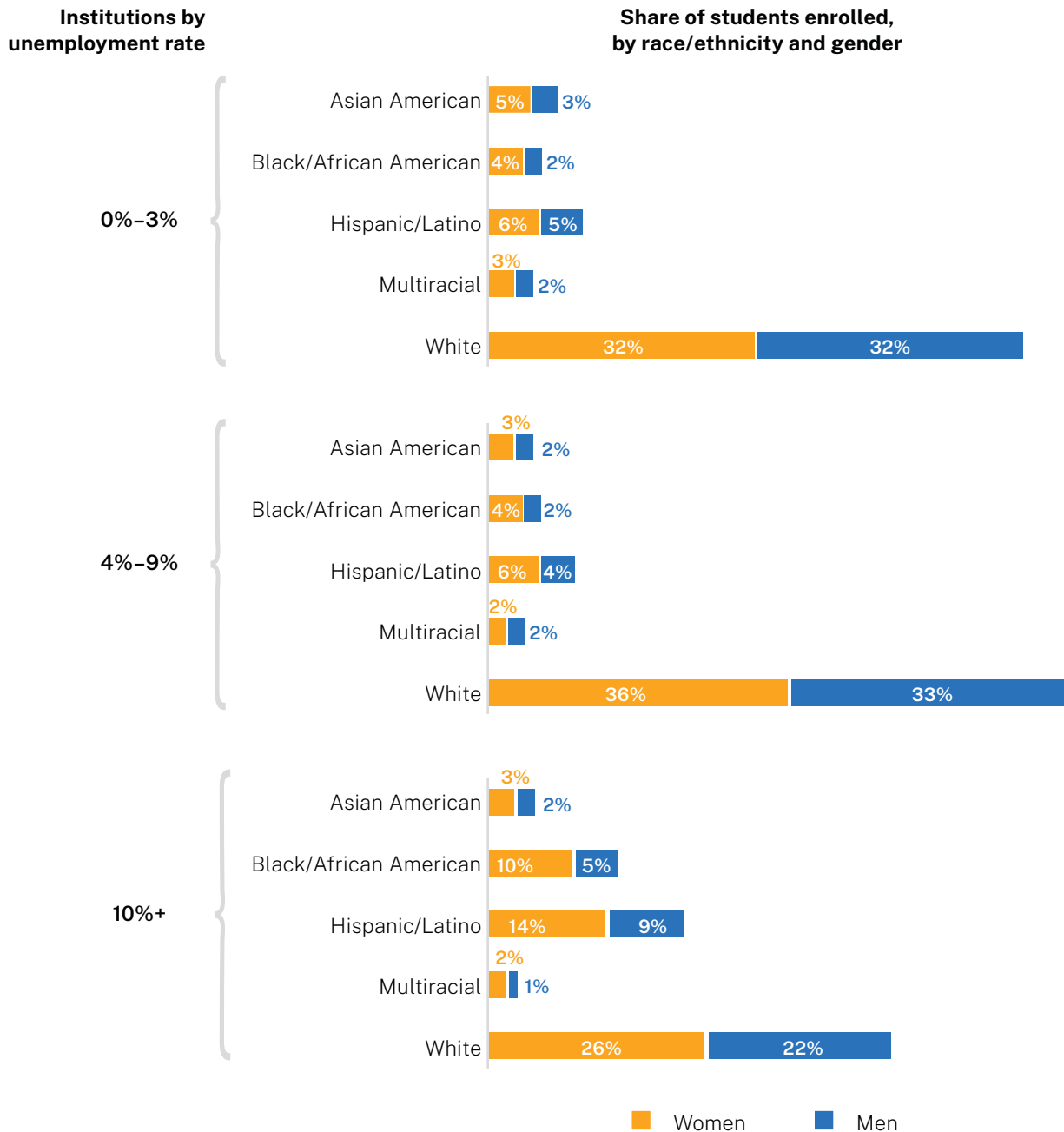


Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.

Note: The unemployment rate is calculated 10 months after graduation. Values do not sum to 100 percent because nonresident students and students whose race/ethnicity is unknown are not included. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) students make up less than 1 percent of enrollments across all three categories of institutions.

101 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.

**FIGURE 16.** Black/African American and Hispanic/Latina women make up a greater share of enrollments at institutions where the unemployment rate among recent graduates is 10 percent or higher.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.

Note: Values do not sum to 100 percent because nonresident students and students whose race/ethnicity is unknown are not included. American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) male and female students make up less than 1 percent of enrollments across all three tiers of institutions.

# Debt and Bar Passage

## Debt weighs heavily on many law school graduates.

High debt levels weigh down the returns on law degrees. Most law students borrow a significant part of the cost of attendance. Law schools range in price — from \$11,000 for in-state students at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University to \$74,600 at Columbia University in the 2020–21 academic year — but for most students, law school is expensive. In 2020–21, average law school tuition and fees alone were \$42,300 for out-of-state students and \$37,200 for in-state students.<sup>102</sup> Once living expenses are factored in, the total cost of attendance has surpassed \$100,000 at some law schools.<sup>103</sup>

Ultimately, graduates are leaving law school with a median debt burden of \$118,500 from their legal education alone.<sup>104</sup> Surveys show that when accounting for the debt acquired for their undergraduate degree, JD, and any other degree, law school graduates have an average cumulative debt of \$130,000.<sup>105</sup>

Repayments of federal student loans were

paused from March 2020, shortly after the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, until September 2023, meaning that more recent College Scorecard data are not illustrative of long-term repayment rates. But College Scorecard debt data from before the pause in loan payments show that people who attended law school were not making significant progress in paying off student loans. Among graduates of most law schools, loan balances were the same as they were at graduation or had increased for many graduates three years after completing their degree (Figure 17).<sup>106</sup>

As with other professional degrees, such as medicine, it can take longer for legal graduates to get settled in their careers, offering some context for the large numbers who have not been able to chip away at their debt. College Scorecard data show a clear upward trajectory in earnings among law graduates over the first four years after they earn a degree.<sup>107</sup> This suggests that at least at the outset, graduates' earnings are not high enough for them to make meaningful inroads on retiring their debt. But this is not the case for every law school

102 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 2020–21. A number of for-profit law schools that are not accredited by the ABA report lower tuition costs.

103 Anderson, “3 Law Schools Pass the \$100,000-a-Year Mark,” 2019.

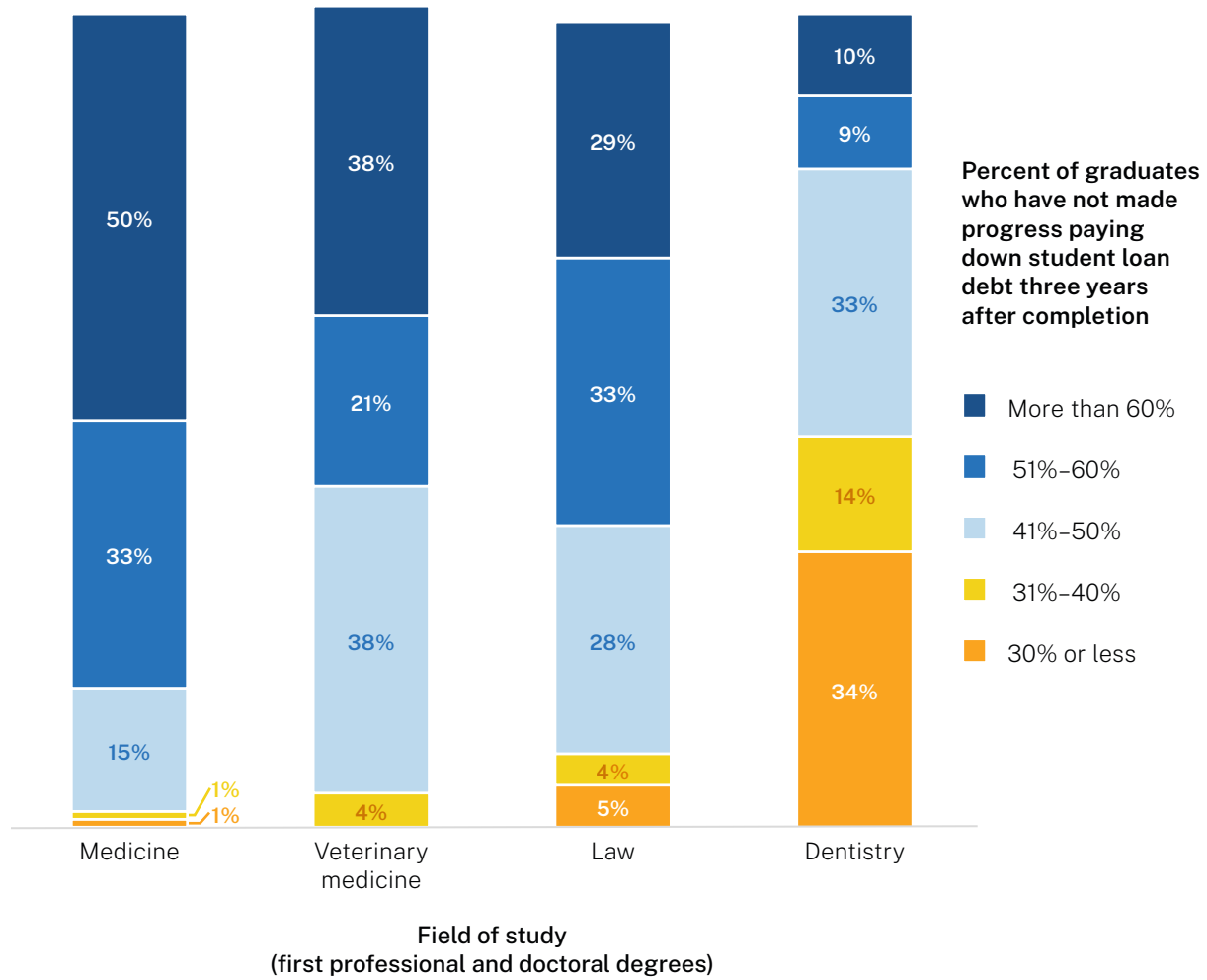
104 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2022. The median debt cited here does not include debt accumulated from undergraduate degrees, but it may reflect debt from other programs and/or transfers from other institutions.

105 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *Student Debt*, 2021.

106 The College Scorecard defines “no progress on loans” as an instance where an individual is making regular payments but the sum of all outstanding loan balances exceeds the sum of the original loan. Beyond “no progress,” other loan status categories include the following: delinquent, in forbearance, in deferment, making progress, paid in full, and discharged.

107 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

**FIGURE 17.** Three years after graduation, the majority of graduates from 62 percent of law programs have not made any progress in paying down their loans.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: Loan status was measured in 2017-18 and 2018-19 among the pooled cohort of graduates in the classes of 2015-16 and 2016-17 first professional and doctoral degree program completers in dentistry, law, medicine, and veterinary medicine. The borrowers whose debt was the same or higher three years after completion as upon graduation were categorized as making no progress on paying down debt. Although the College Scorecard categorizes the share as a range, we used the midpoint for that range across programs to calculate findings.

graduate. At 12 law schools,<sup>108</sup> graduates were more likely to have either made progress on paying down their loans or to have paid them off in full. These 12 institutions, likely not coincidentally, are among the institutions with the highest earnings among graduates.

There are several possible reasons why law graduates' loan balances were not shrinking prior to the loan freeze.<sup>109</sup> First, if loan payments were being made, those payments might not have been large enough to cover the principal and interest. Second, the interest may have been capitalized after deferment or forbearance, which might have increased the loan balances beyond the original amount.

Paying back loans is much easier with a Big Law salary. But graduates who do not land the highest-paying jobs have a number of options. For instance, income-driven repayment plans are intended to keep monthly payments at a manageable amount relative to income, and possibly cancel any remaining balance at the end of the repayment period, assuming that graduates make timely payments. For lawyers interested in going into public sector work, the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program — which forgives outstanding loan balances after 10 years of work in qualifying government, non-profit, or public service roles — may be a lifeline. A survey of recent law graduates suggests that a large share of attorneys working in government, nonprofits, and the public sector pursued these positions specifically because of the

PSLF program. This was particularly true for graduates with \$100,000 or more in debt.<sup>110</sup>

Law schools are well aware of the debt problem and have sought to provide remedies of their own. Many offer loan repayment assistance programs (LRAPs) to graduates working in public interest, government, or other lower-paying fields. While LRAPs vary depending on the institution, they generally consist of a forgivable, interest-free loan that helps graduates cover debt payments. Institutions offer other forms of assistance, too. For instance, Stanford Law School offers an income-share agreement in which up to \$170,000 of students' tuition is provided to them up front if the students agree to pay back 10 percent of their salaries for 12 years after graduation.<sup>111</sup>

The consequences of six-figure student loan debt are far-reaching. Spiraling student loans impact young people's ability to purchase a home, start a family or a business, and achieve other traditional markers of adulthood. Debt has an impact on career trajectories, pushing some recent graduates into a career track they hadn't initially envisioned for themselves. And it has consequences for graduates' basic financial stability. About 21 percent of young law school graduates say they would not be able to come up with \$1,000 on short notice in the event of an emergency.<sup>112</sup>

Median debt levels are higher for graduates of

108 This group includes the law schools at Columbia University; Cornell University; Duke University; Harvard University; Northwestern University; Stanford University; the University of Chicago; the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; the University of Pennsylvania; the University of Virginia; Washington University in St. Louis; and Yale University.

109 Loan status was measured in 2017–18 and 2018–19 among the pooled cohort of law graduates in the classes of 2015–16 and 2016–17.

110 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *2020 Law School Student Loan Debt*, 2020.

111 Bauer-Wolf, "Stanford Law School Tries Out Income-Share Financing," 2022.

112 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *2020 Law School Student Loan Debt*, 2020. The median age of respondents to this survey was 32, and the survey drew on respondents from the ABA's database who were identified as having been licensed as a lawyer or having graduated from law school in the preceding 10 years.

the highest- and lowest-earning institutions. However, graduates of the top institutions, who have median earnings net of debt of more than \$200,000, will find it much less burdensome to meet a monthly loan payment of \$1,700. For graduates of institutions where median earnings are \$55,000 or less net of debt, the median monthly debt payment of \$1,500 is much more onerous.

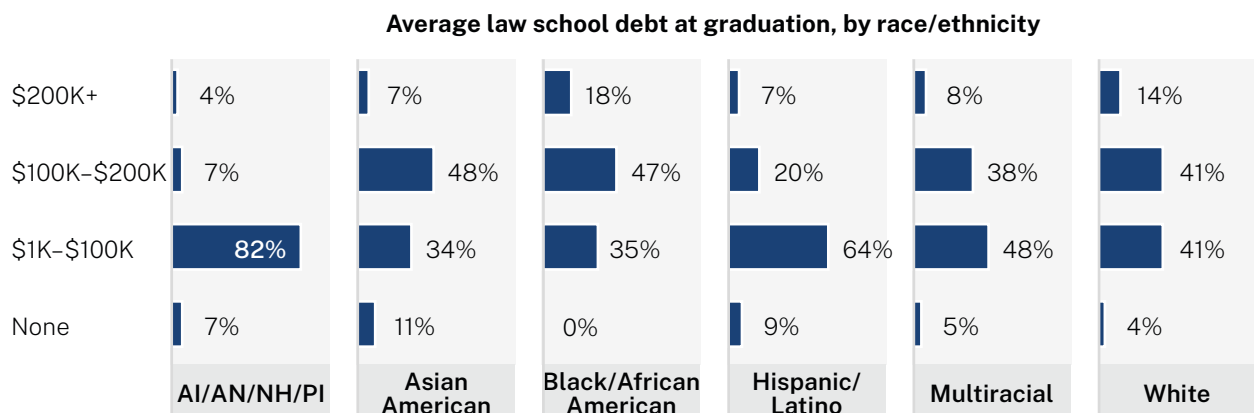
### Race and ethnicity are closely linked to how much debt students leave school with — and how likely they are to fund their bar studies with further loans.

The burden of debt falls more heavily on some groups than others. In particular, Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino graduates are more likely to leave law school burdened with higher debt than their white or Asian American

peers. According to a 2021 survey of young lawyers, close to one in five Black/African American lawyers report having left law school with more than \$200,000 in debt (Figure 18).<sup>113</sup> Another 47 percent of Black/African American lawyers reported \$100,000–\$200,000 in student loan debt. That means that 65 percent of Black/African American lawyers have at least \$100,000 in debt. By contrast, 55 percent of both white and Asian American lawyers reported graduating with at least \$100,000 in student debt.

Some law school graduates need to borrow money even after finishing. Getting the law degree is one thing. Passing the bar exam is another. Studying for the bar is often a monthslong process, which necessitates some financial outlay for living expenses, bar prep courses, and the fees for the bar exam itself. These expenses are stacked on top of what students already spent during their pursuit of

**FIGURE 18.** Almost one in five Black/African American law graduates carry more than \$200,000 in student loan debt, a higher share than for any other racial/ethnic group.



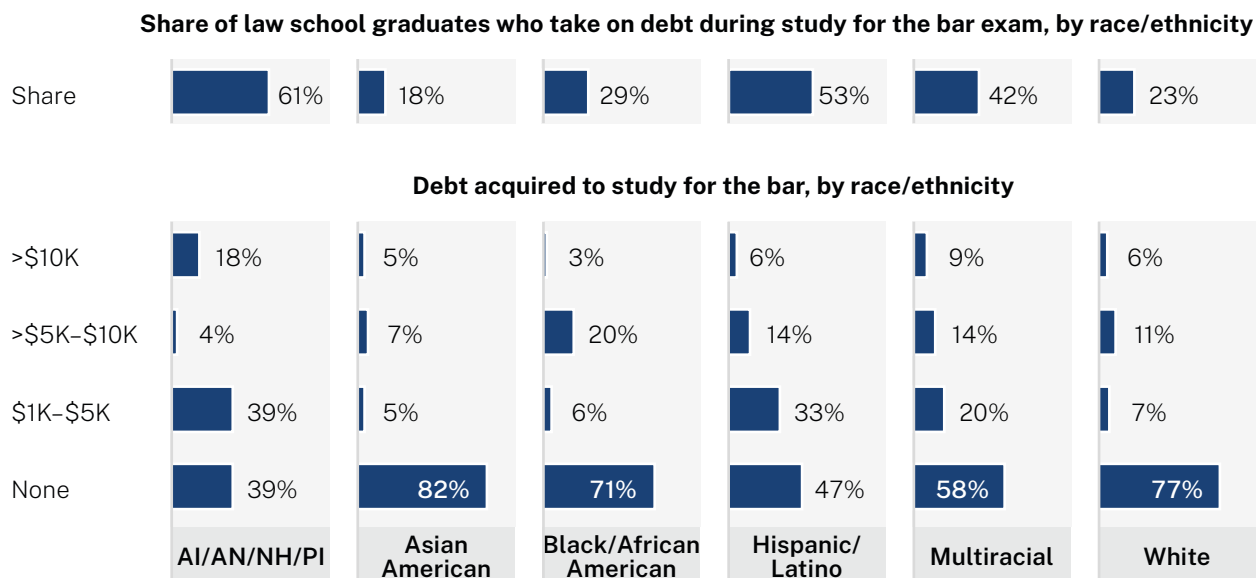
Source: American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division, AccessLex Institute survey, *Student Debt*, 2021.

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; NH = Native Hawaiian; and PI = Pacific Islander.

the JD. To cover them, graduates can turn to bar exam loans, which are offered by private lenders. Thirty percent of young lawyers report having taken out bar loans to support themselves during this process.<sup>114</sup> Hispanic/Latino (61 percent), American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (AI/AN/NH/PI) (53 percent), and multiracial (42 percent) law school graduates are the most likely to turn to

a loan to cover the costs of studying to pass the bar exam (Figure 19). The disproportionate impact of bar exam-related expenses on Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, and AI/AN/NH/PI graduates helps contextualize disparities in bar passage outcomes across racial and ethnic groups, as we will explore in the next section.

**FIGURE 19.** Asian American and white law graduates are least likely to take out loans to cover the costs associated with studying for the bar exam.



Source: American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *Student Debt*, 2021.

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding. AI = American Indian; AN = Alaska Native; NH = Native Hawaiian; and PI = Pacific Islander.

114 American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division and AccessLex Institute, *Student Debt*, 2021. Bar exam registration fees exceed \$750 in most jurisdictions. Hiigel, “How Much Does Bar Exam Registration Cost?,” 2022.



## Bar passage rates vary across institutions, with implications for graduates' job and earnings prospects.

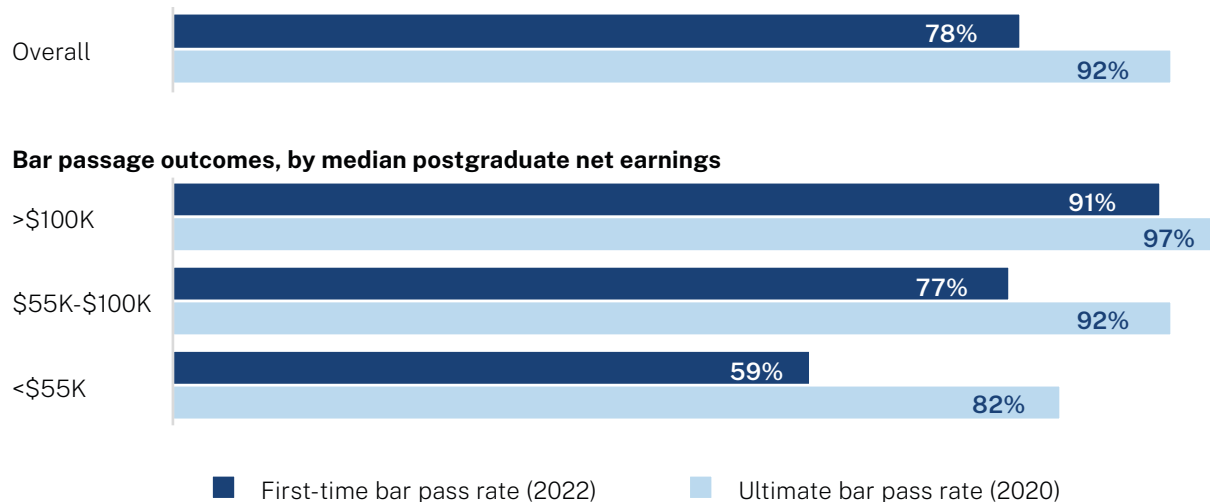
Bar passage rates are a key measure of success for law graduates. Without passing the bar, newly minted lawyers generally cannot practice law.<sup>115</sup>

In 2022, 78 percent of first-time test takers passed the bar. The two-year bar passage rate was 92 percent (Figure 20).<sup>116</sup> Law schools with better median earnings net of debt generally have higher bar passage rates on the first attempt. The reverse is true among schools with

lower earnings net of debt — these institutions tend to have the lowest bar passage rates. The first-time bar passage rate in 2022 averaged 91 percent at law schools where net median earnings exceed \$100,000 four years after graduation. At schools where graduates net less than \$55,000 four years after graduation, the average first-time bar passage rate was 59 percent.

Bar passage rates differ markedly by race/ethnicity. The most recent results show a 26-percentage point difference in passage rates between white and Black/African American first-time test-takers, underlining a difference in outcomes by race/ethnicity that extends back

**FIGURE 20.** Bar passage rates are highest at law schools where graduates' net earnings surpass \$100,000.



Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

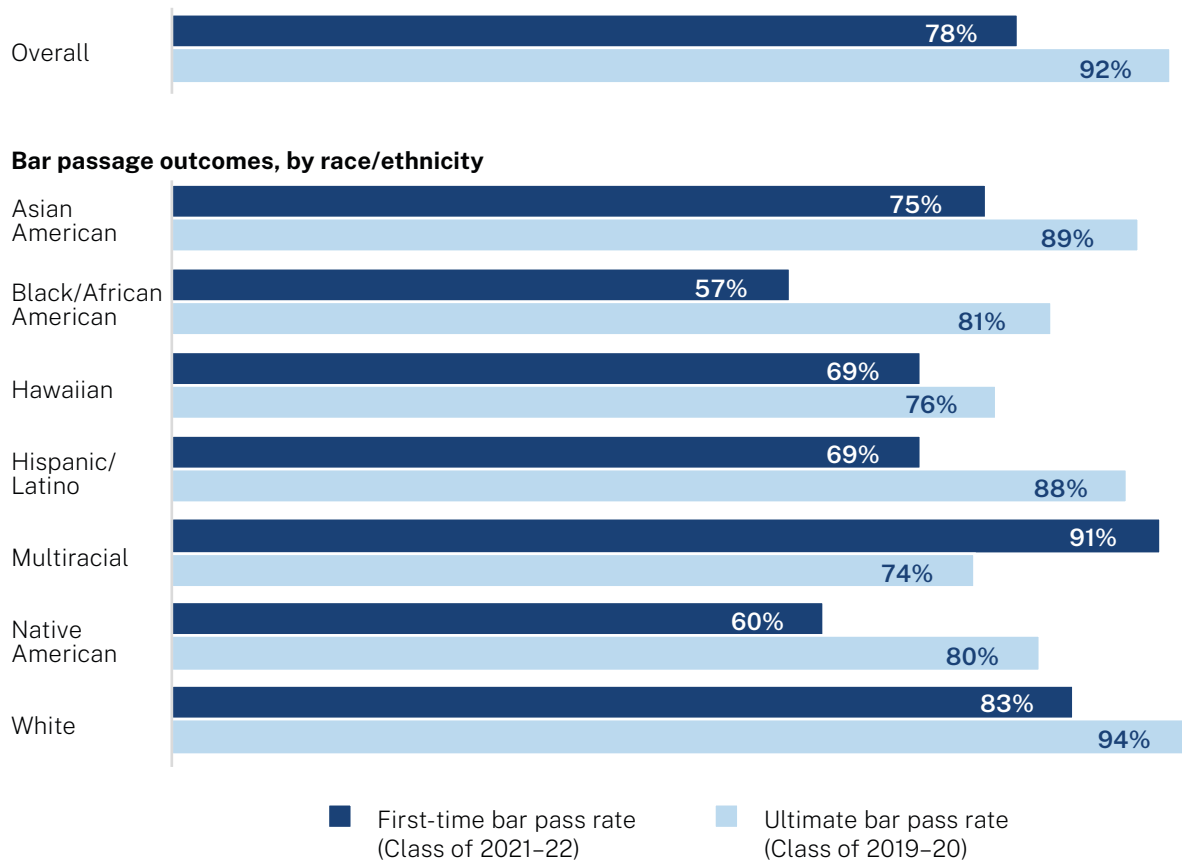
115 In a limited number of cases, law school graduates are admitted to the practice of law solely based on graduation status.

116 During those two years, graduates have four opportunities to sit for the bar. These percentages also include people who obtained work through diploma privilege, which means they found jobs for which a law degree is preferred or required but which do not require bar membership.

to at least the 1970s.<sup>117</sup> In 2022, the first-time bar passage rate was 91 percent among multiracial test-takers, 83 percent among white test-takers, 75 percent among Asian American test-takers, 69 percent among Hispanic/Latino test-takers, and 57 percent among Black/African American test-takers (Figure 21). The difference in passage rates between white and Black/African American test-takers narrows

with further attempts, but still remains substantial — the two-year bar passage rate among white graduates from the class of 2019–20 was 94 percent, compared to their Black/African American peers’ passage rate of 81 percent.<sup>118</sup> Disparate bar outcomes stand as a clear obstacle to growing the pipeline for greater representation of underrepresented racial/ethnic groups in the legal profession.

**FIGURE 21.** Among first-time bar exam takers in 2022, the gap in passage rates between white and Black/African American law graduates was 26 percentage points.



Source: American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Note: The terms “Hawaiian” and “Native American” follow ABA definitions.

117 Sloan, “Racial Disparities on the Bar Exam Have Persisted for Decades,” 2021; Associated Press, “A High Percentage of Minority Law Students Are Failing Bar Exams,” 1977.

118 American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Prior research shows that passing the bar on the first attempt, paired with a strong GPA, offers graduates the best shot at landing a good job straight out of law school. Passing the bar on the first try is also associated with higher earnings over time, compared to graduates who eventually pass the bar and those who never do.<sup>119</sup> Law graduates who never pass the bar tend to experience worse earnings outcomes than those who do, even if their JD eventually offers them a boost in earnings relative to people with a bachelor's degree alone.<sup>120,121</sup>

In 2019, the ABA revised its accreditation standards to encourage schools with low bar passage rates to find ways to improve outcomes for students. Today, ABA-approved law schools must have a bar passage rate of at least 75 percent for students in their first two years after graduation. If bar passage rates fail to improve within a set period, the school runs the risk of losing its accreditation.<sup>122</sup> While lauded as a move that will encourage schools to give students the best chance of thriving professionally after graduation, this change has also sparked some debate within the legal community around the potential ramifications for institutions that serve largely underrepresented racial/ethnic minority student populations, such as the three ABA-accredited law schools in Puerto Rico and some of those affiliated with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

What makes some test-takers succeed and others fail is a problem that researchers have long sought to understand. A 2021 study of first- and second-time New York bar exam takers found that bar passage success rests on the amount of time candidates spent studying and the “quality” of that study, i.e., how focused they were in covering areas that were not their strengths. These factors were particularly critical for success on the first attempt. Distractions from that study, whether they took the shape of a job, family obligations, or financial or personal stress, all detracted from candidates' chances of passing.<sup>123</sup>

Academic preparedness is an oft-cited factor in success at all stages of the law school experience, affecting LSAT scores; attrition, particularly in the notoriously challenging first year of law school; and post-graduation outcomes. When identifying likely causes for the negative outcomes that underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups tend to disproportionately experience on multiple dimensions — from higher attrition rates to lower bar passage rates, among others — experts point to disparities in educational outcomes at the K–16 level. This sets the stage for an uneven playing field heading into law school.

Setting aside the issue of disparate educational outcomes in K–12 schools and at the college undergraduate level, advocates have pushed for

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119 Yakowitz, “Marooned,” 2010.

120 Yakowitz, “Marooned,” 2010.

121 Bar passage is not the sole determinant of whether graduates will secure full-time, high-paying work. Other factors — such as the relative prestige of the school they attended, law school grades, and individual characteristics and personality traits — influence the job search.

122 Even before this standard was adopted, the ABA took action against schools with notoriously bad bar passage outcomes. For instance, Arizona Summit Law School's two-year bar passage rate was 20 percent in 2018. The for-profit school's ABA accreditation was withdrawn. It has since closed.

123 New York State Board of Law Examiners and AccessLex Institute, *Analyzing First-Time Bar Exam Passage on the UBE in New York State*, 2021.

other solutions to the problem of the gap in bar exam passage rates. Some argue that reducing the minimum passing score or redesigning<sup>124</sup> the way the exam is administered would help improve passage rates, while others point to alternative credentialing systems,<sup>125</sup> such as allowing the degree from law school — commonly known as diploma privilege — to stand as proof of aptitude. Alternatively, supervised clinical experiences and post-graduate practice could serve as measures of competence, beyond the

standard bar exam.<sup>126</sup>

The urgency of addressing this issue is reflected in the ongoing underrepresentation of marginalized racial/ethnic groups in the legal profession. Although law schools are gradually diversifying by race/ethnicity, lawyers as a group remain overwhelmingly white. And while the federal bench is also becoming more diverse, it is still predominantly white as well.<sup>127</sup>

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124 Howarth, “The Professional Responsibility Case for Valid and Nondiscriminatory Bar Exams,” 2020.

125 Merritt et al., “Racial Disparities in Bar Exam Results—Causes and Remedies,” 2021.

126 Howarth, “The Professional Responsibility Case for Valid and Nondiscriminatory Bar Exams,” 2020.

127 American Bar Association, *ABA Profile of the Legal Profession 2022*, 2022.

# The Future of Legal Occupations

## Legal jobs make up less than 1 percent of US employment, and most require workers to have a master’s, professional, or doctoral degree.

Currently, legal occupations — an employment category that includes lawyers, judges, paralegals, and related jobs — make up a small part of the US economy. In total, legal occupations represent less than 1 percent of all jobs. This will remain the case into the next decade. From 2021 to 2031, the total number of jobs associated with legal occupations will grow from 1.26 million to 1.41 million.<sup>128</sup>

Seven in 10 legal jobs are to be found in the professional, business, and management services industries. Another 16 percent are in the public

administration industry, and 6 percent are in the financial services industry.<sup>129</sup>

Critically, the overwhelming majority of legal jobs will require postsecondary education or training. Almost 80 percent of jobs in legal occupations will require a master’s degree, professional degree, or doctoral degree by 2031 (Table 10). Another 20 percent will require a bachelor’s degree. Opportunity is very limited for those seeking legal work with an associate’s degree, some college, or a high school diploma or less. By 2031, only 2 percent of legal jobs will be available to these workers, down from an already-paltry 4 percent in 2021.

The total number of jobs within the legal occupations are expected to grow by 12 percent from 2021 to 2031, and an average of 103,600

**TABLE 10.** The vast majority of jobs in the legal field will only be available to workers with more than a bachelor’s degree.

	Share of legal jobs available, by education level		
	High school, some college, and associate’s degree	Bachelor’s degree	Master’s, professional, and doctoral degrees
2021	4%	20%	78%
2031	2%	20%	79%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce forecast using data from the US Census Bureau and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey (CPS); US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS); US Bureau of Labor Statistics; IHS Markit; and Lightcast.

Note: Numbers may not sum to 100 percent due to rounding.

128 Carnevale et al., *After Everything*, 2023.

129 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Census Bureau, American Community Survey (ACS), 2009–21.

job opportunities will open up each year during that timeframe.<sup>130</sup> These job openings are a combination of newly created jobs and jobs that will become available when current workers retire or exit the field. They do not account for the job churn that occurs when workers transition between existing jobs within the legal field.

Some of the more significant question marks hanging over the future of the legal profession are artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, which could reshape the current practice of the law. Tasks that were previously thought to be immune to the forces of automation could now potentially be done or complemented by generative AI and large language models.<sup>131</sup> About one-third of the skills typically associated with legal work are projected to be at high risk of automation.<sup>132</sup> These include skills such as

complex problem solving, writing, coordination, systems analysis, and systems evaluation.

While there are meaningful concerns about what automation might mean for job security in the legal field, fears that the bottom is about to fall out of the profession are likely overblown. Even before the advent of ChatGPT, software and technology had already transformed some of the more monotonous tasks traditionally associated with entry-level legal work, such as document review.<sup>133</sup> Despite these changes, opportunities in the legal field have not collapsed. It is possible that as automation and technology advance, these innovations could complement and change the work that legal workers do, but not replace it altogether. Increased usage of AI could also usher in a new set of legal issues, sparking more demand for lawyers and those with legal training.

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130 Carnevale et al., *After Everything*, 2023.

131 Lassebie, "Skill Needs and Policies in the Age of Artificial Intelligence," 2023.

132 Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) 28.0 database, 2023.

133 Winick, "Lawyer-Bots Are Shaking Up Jobs," 2017.

# Conclusion

A law degree is generally a solid bet. Job prospects for newly minted lawyers have improved from the ugly days in the aftermath of the Great Recession, and job opportunity is expected to grow at least into the next decade. Compensation is growing, particularly for those who find work at a top law firm. But median outcomes may mean little on an individual level, given the wide range in possible net earnings across law schools. And prospective students should be clear-eyed about the impact that law school debt could have on their future.

Additionally, the value proposition is more solid for some law schools than others. There is a vast gulf in outcomes between graduates of top law schools and those on the bottom. Four years after completing a JD, graduates of Columbia Law School net a median of \$253,800 after accounting for debt payments. At the other end of the spectrum, graduates of Atlanta's John Marshall Law School net a median of just \$32,100 net of debt payments. But these institutions are outliers: outcomes across the majority of schools land somewhere in the middle of these extremes. Median net earnings are a comfortable — if not extravagant — \$72,000 four years after graduation.

Debt weighs down many graduates, but not all. As this analysis of College Scorecard data shows, at law schools with the best earnings outcomes, graduates' monthly earnings are nine to 11 times as much as their monthly debt payments. At seven schools, educating a tiny 5 percent of all law students, median net earnings exceed \$200,000. For these students, the return on investment is already more than paying off within a few years after graduation.

Other graduates may find it takes longer to achieve a positive return. In the short term, they may find themselves having to delay major life milestones, like purchasing their first home or starting a family, due to their student loan debt.

Given these contingencies, it is not a surprise that many prospective law students would turn to publicly available rankings and other metrics to assess school quality. The rankings matter for schools, too: institutions that slip to the very bottom of the rankings due to poor outcomes, such as lower bar passage rates or less favorable employment outcomes, generally have a harder time attracting students. In fact, law schools where outcomes are particularly poor are at risk of losing the accreditation of the ABA, as has happened to a small number of institutions in the past decade. The loss of ABA accreditation has direct implications for graduates. If their law school is no longer accredited by the ABA, they are ineligible in many states to sit for the bar, meaning that they are unable to be licensed to practice as lawyers.

This report uses earnings and debt to evaluate ROI, but there are other measures of value that may ultimately matter more to prospective law students. Many public-sector jobs that require a JD are vitally important for society at large, even if salaries for these jobs are just a fraction of what a lawyer working for a large law firm might make. Given the debt levels of many law students, earning potential is something they would be wise to pay attention to before committing to three years of postgraduate study, particularly in relation to other life goals they might have.

The debate around what constitutes a more equitable assessment of value has taken on greater resonance as traditional school ranking systems have come under fire in recent years. Close to a third of law schools opted out of participating in the 2023–24 cycle of the *U.S. News & World Report (USNWR)* rankings, arguing that rankings create perverse incentives, such as the recruitment of wealthier students—in order to keep reported debt levels low—at the expense of lower-income students who would bring a needed diversity of experience and perspective to the legal profession. The rankings also discourage investments in programs that would support students going into lower-paid public service work. This, some schools argue, plays into the common critique that law schools reflect and perpetuate class divisions across society. In response, *USNWR* changed its 2023–24 methodology, giving greater weight to employment and bar passage outcomes.<sup>134</sup>

As discussions of rankings and perceptions of value unfold, law school demographics are shifting in a way that reflects broader changes in the larger postsecondary student population. Women now outnumber men on law school campuses, an extraordinary shift in historical terms when considering that as recently as the 1960s, women made up less than 10 percent of all law school enrollments. Law schools are also diversifying in other ways: the total number of white and Asian American students has fallen, and enrollment of Hispanic/Latino students has increased. However, racial/ethnic minority groups remain underrepresented at law schools at which graduates have the highest earnings and are overconcentrated at institutions where net earnings are \$55,000 or less four years after graduation.

Although law schools are becoming more diverse, this has yet to translate into corresponding racial and gender representation in the legal field. Women make up just 39 percent of practicing lawyers, despite now accounting for 56 percent of those enrolled in law schools. Male lawyers continue to outearn their female counterparts over the course of their careers. Within firms, men are more likely to make partner, opening the door to the highest earnings. Earnings also break down by race and ethnicity: Asian American and white lawyers tend to outearn Black/African American and Hispanic/Latino lawyers. In short, the legal profession still has a great deal of ground to cover before it can be said to be fully inclusive.

While the JD is generally seen as synonymous with a law degree, there are opportunities for students interested in learning more about the law at the associate's, bachelor's, and master's degree levels. In particular, enrollments in master's degrees related to law have grown quickly, from 11,100 in 2013 to over 23,000 in 2023.

The vast majority of legal jobs require a master's degree or above. Just one in five legal jobs is available to workers with an undergraduate degree. Financial returns are highest for workers who have attained a master's, professional, or doctoral degree. Beyond potential earnings and debt, prospective students across all degree types should be mindful of the ways in which the legal field may evolve in the coming years due to technological and AI-driven change. Fears that the bottom will fall out of the legal profession because of advances in AI are likely overblown. The legal profession has adapted before to outsourcing of work and technological change, and it will continue to adapt.

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# Data Sources and Methodology

## College Scorecard

We limited this analysis to data from law-related programs that report students' median debt and earnings of graduates four years after completion. The US Department of Education's College Scorecard pooled the 2014–15 and 2015–16 completion cohorts to obtain their earnings in 2019–20. Debt amounts were based on pooled 2018–19 and 2019–20 cohorts who received federal student aid. The Department of Education assumed a 10-year repayment period and an interest rate of 4.99 percent when computing monthly debt payments for undergraduate programs and 7.54 percent for graduate programs.

Earnings and debt outcomes shown in this report were current as of April 2023.

### Data from the College Scorecard have a number of limitations, including:

- ◆ College Scorecard data only include students who received Title IV grants or loans. Not all graduates received Title IV aid, and as a result, the earnings may not be representative of all students who completed the program.
- ◆ Debt calculations are based only on federal loans and do not capture loans from other entities such as institutions, states, or private lenders. The calculations also do not include capitalized interest on debt, so estimates may be lower than the actual amounts owed upon completion.
- ◆ The earnings and other data from many programs at the undergraduate and master's degree level (83–98 percent) are suppressed due to small cohort sizes and privacy measures implemented by the US Department of Education. To further reduce disclosure risk, specific suppression rules are not publicly released. Most programs (74 percent of first professional and 53 percent of doctoral degree programs in the law) at the Juris Doctor (JD) level are represented in this report.
- ◆ Earnings reported in the first few years after completion of a credential may not be indicative of longer-term earnings.
- ◆ Earnings of past students may not be predictive of earnings for future students due to changes in global or local economic conditions.
- ◆ Names of programs are based on codes from the Department of Education's Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) and may not have the same names as fields of study in the course catalogs from institutions. Different institutions may report graduates under different CIP codes even though they may have the same course offerings.
- ◆ Some institutions report earnings at the system level rather than at the specific campus level.

**TABLE A1.** Share of law-related programs in the College Scorecard with some data suppression due to privacy protections

Degree	Program	Total number of programs with complete earnings and debt data in the College Scorecard	Share of programs with suppressed earnings and debt data
<b>Undergraduate certificate or diploma</b>	Legal support services	8	98%
<b>Associate's degree</b>	Legal support services	72	88%
<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	Non-professional general legal studies (undergraduate)	29	85%
	Legal support services	23	83%
	Legal professions and studies, other	6	85%
<b>Master's degree</b>	Legal research and advanced professional studies	22	87%
<b>Juris Doctor</b>	Law (doctoral degree)	25	47%
	Law (first professional degree)	161	26%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, April 2023.

Note: Only degree programs that are offered by at least four institutions are tabulated.

To understand enrollment patterns and employment outcomes at the top and bottom end of the net earnings spectrum, we organized law schools into three broad categories: institutions where net earnings exceed \$100,000, those where net earnings are between \$55,000 and \$100,000, and those where net earnings are less than \$55,000 (Table A2). In cases where net earnings were within \$1,000 of the lower or higher earnings tier, we rounded up or down, as applicable.

**TABLE A2.** The total number of law schools in the College Scorecard by annual median earnings net of debt payments

Annual median earnings net of debt payments	Number of institutions represented in the College Scorecard	Number of ABA-accredited institutions represented in the College Scorecard
>\$100K	26	25
\$55K–\$100K	127	123
<\$55K	33	29

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023, and from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

### American Bar Association (ABA)

The American Bar Association (ABA) collects detailed enrollment, demographic, employment, and bar exam passage data from law schools that are accredited by the association. In cases where College Scorecard data are contrasted with ABA data, not all College Scorecard and ABA-accredited institutions are included. This is because not all ABA-accredited institutions are represented in the College Scorecard, nor are all law schools represented in the College Scorecard accredited by the ABA. Earnings net of debt from ABA-accredited law schools data range from \$22,000 at the bottom to \$253,800 at the top (Table A3).

**TABLE A3.** Enrollment distribution at ABA-accredited institutions by annual median earnings net of debt payments

Annual median earnings net of debt payments	Earnings net of debt range	Enrollment distribution at ABA-accredited institutions (2020–22)
>\$100K	\$100,200–\$253,800	20%
\$55K–\$100K	\$55,500–\$99,400	63%
<\$55K	\$22,000–\$55,100	11%
Earnings unknown	-	6%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023, and from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2020–22.

Note: Values may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

The American Bar Association compiles law school information by race, ethnicity, and gender. The data are collected by law schools, typically based on self-reporting by students, and compiled into the Standard 509 Information Reports that the ABA requires schools to submit. These reports contain consumer information on admissions, curriculum, enrollment, financial aid, and other topics. In terms of reporting race and ethnicity, law students have been able to select more than one racial or ethnic category since 2011, but the ABA directs schools to then sort students into one category. The ABA

uses the following definitions for racial and ethnic categories:

- ◆ Hispanics of any race: A person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race.
- ◆ American Indian or Alaska Native: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliation or community recognition.
- ◆ Asian: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian Subcontinent, including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam.
- ◆ Black or African American: A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
- ◆ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands.
- ◆ Two or more races: The category used to report a non-Hispanic person who selects two or more of the other racial categories.
- ◆ Nonresident alien: A person who is not a citizen or national of the United States and who is in this country on a visa or temporary basis and does not have the right to remain indefinitely.
- ◆ Race/ethnicity unknown: The category used to report persons whose race and ethnicity are not known.
- ◆ White: A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa.

For the purposes of this report, we refer to the students that the ABA classifies as “Hispanic” as “Hispanic/Latino” and students who identify with two or more races as “multiracial.” Students identified as “Asian” by the ABA are referred to as “Asian American” in this report, and generally should be understood to be students who self-report as having origins in Asia, but who are not citizens of other countries. We grouped American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students in one category due to the low representation of individuals from each group in the data. In figures, tables, and related references to data, we use the terms Asian American, AI/AN/NH/PI, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latino, multiracial, and white.

Table A4 provides a more complete demographic breakdown of law school enrollments by race/ethnicity and gender overall and by institutions’ net earnings category.



**TABLE A4. Enrollment patterns by race/ethnicity and gender, across all ABA-accredited institutions, by net earnings (2020–22)**

Race/ethnicity, by gender	Annual earnings net of debt payments			
	>\$100K	\$55K–\$100K	<\$55K	Total
AI/AN/NH/PI men	0%	0%	0%	0%
AI/AN/NH/PI women	0%	0%	0%	0%
Asian American men	5%	2%	1%	3%
Asian American women	7%	4%	2%	4%
Black/African American men	3%	2%	4%	3%
Black/African American women	4%	4%	10%	5%
Hispanic/Latino men	4%	5%	8%	5%
Hispanic/Latina women	6%	7%	13%	8%
Multiracial men	2%	2%	1%	2%
Multiracial women	3%	2%	2%	2%
Non-US resident, men	2%	1%	0%	1%
Non-US resident, women	3%	1%	1%	2%
Race/ethnicity unknown, men	2%	2%	2%	2%
Race/ethnicity unknown, women	2%	1%	1%	2%
White men	28%	31%	25%	29%
White women	28%	34%	29%	32%
<b>Total</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>99%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>99%</b>

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023, and from the American Bar Association, Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar, 2023.

Note: Values may not sum to 100 percent as those students who are classified as “another gender identity” or “student preferred not to report” are not included.

In some instances, we pooled three years of enrollment and employment data (2020–22) to account for temporary changes driven by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The employment categories used throughout the report are based on ABA data. These are collected by law schools and typically rely on self-reporting by graduates. Employment data reflect outcomes 10 months after graduation. Employment status as defined by the ABA includes the following categories:

- ◆ Employed — Bar passage required
- ◆ Employed — JD advantage
- ◆ Employed — Professional position
- ◆ Employed — Other position
- ◆ Employed — Law school/University funded
- ◆ Enrolled in graduate studies
- ◆ Employed — Undeterminable
- ◆ Employed — Start date deferred
- ◆ Unemployed — Seeking
- ◆ Unemployed — Not seeking
- ◆ Employment status unknown

A majority of employed graduates find work for which bar exam passage is required. Examples of bar-passage-required work include but are not limited to the following: associate, attorney, counsel, judicial law clerk, lawyer, prosecutor, public defender, solo practitioner, and staff attorney. A small share find work that is defined as “JD advantage.” These are jobs for which a JD offers an advantage in the hiring process or legal knowledge is integral to carrying out job duties, but which do not require passage of the bar exam. JD advantage positions include but are not limited to the following: accountant, compliance manager, FBI agent, human resources manager, investigator, journalist (covering the law or legal-adjacent matters), law clerk, law teacher, and document reviewer. When discussing unemployed graduates, this report focuses on those who were unemployed and seeking work 10 months after graduation.

Employment type as defined by the ABA includes the following broad categories

- ◆ Law firms
- ◆ Business and industry
- ◆ Government
- ◆ Public interest
- ◆ Judicial clerkships
- ◆ Education
- ◆ Employer type unknown

## National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

According to the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP), the field of "law" is defined as follows: "A program that prepares individuals for the independent professional practice of law, for taking state and national bar examinations, and for advanced research in jurisprudence. [It] includes instruction in the theory and practice of the legal system, including the statutory, administrative, and judicial components of civil and criminal law." However, this applies only to programs at the first professional degree level rather than at the master's degree level. The field of "legal professions and studies, other" is defined as: "Any program in law, legal services, and legal studies not listed above." Listed programs include the following, among others: banking, corporate, finance, and securities law; comparative law; energy, environment, and natural resources law; health law; intellectual property law; international business, trade, and tax law; and international law and legal studies. The field "legal research and advanced professional studies" is defined as "any program in legal research and advanced professional studies not listed above."

## National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS)

Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) data shows that 65 percent of law students took out graduate federal student loans (Table A5). These findings reflect outcomes for those who graduated in the 2019–20 academic year.

**TABLE A5. Share of law graduates who take out loans and those who do not**

Loan types	Federal only	Non-federal only	Federal and non-federal	No loans for graduate education
Total*	44%	4%	5%	47%
Law (LLB or JD)	65%	*	*	25%

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS): Graduate Students (GR), 2023.

Note: Total refers to all graduate students who were completing their studies in 2019-20.

\*Value suppressed due to insufficient sample.

# Postgraduate, Undergraduate, and Associate's-Level Rankings

The following is the full list of programs with sufficient data on earnings and debt, and a large enough sample of students, to be listed in the College Scorecard. Please note that many institutions that offer these programs are not listed in the College Scorecard because of insufficient data or the small number of students who are enrolled. The earnings and debt information below are reflective of outcomes four years after graduation across all degree types related to the law.

**TABLE B1. Median debt and earnings outcomes across all degree programs related to law**

Level	Field	Median total debt	Median monthly earnings	Median monthly earnings net of debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median monthly earnings net of debt payments
<b>Associate's degree</b>	Legal support services	\$21,100	\$2,900	\$2,700	\$34,800	\$32,400
<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	Non-professional general legal studies (undergraduate)	\$22,500	\$4,300	\$4,100	\$51,600	\$49,200
<b>Bachelor's degree</b>	Legal support services	\$30,600	\$3,200	\$2,800	\$38,400	\$33,600
<b>Master's degree</b>	Legal research and advanced professional studies	\$54,700	\$8,600	\$7,800	\$103,200	\$93,600
<b>Doctoral degree</b>	Law	\$113,400	\$7,200	\$5,900	\$86,400	\$70,800
<b>First professional degree</b>	Law	\$118,500	\$7,400	\$6,100	\$88,800	\$73,200
<b>First professional degree and doctoral degree</b>	Law	\$118,500	\$7,400	\$6,000	\$88,800	\$72,000

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

Note: Debt and earnings figures are rounded, so net earnings cannot be calculated from the figures shown.

The earnings and debt information below are reflective of recent graduates who pursued a first professional degree or doctoral degree in the law. Both degrees lead to a Juris Doctor (JD) degree, but some institutions report their law degree programs as doctoral programs while others report them as first professional degree programs.

**TABLE B2. Median earnings net of debt payments among graduates with a first professional or doctoral degree in law**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
1	Columbia University in the City of New York	NY	\$2,300	\$280,900	\$253,800
2	University of Pennsylvania	PA	\$2,000	\$261,400	\$238,000
3	University of Chicago	IL	\$2,100	\$256,400	\$230,700
4	Cornell University	NY	\$1,800	\$249,300	\$227,100
5	Stanford University	CA	\$1,700	\$248,000	\$227,100
6	Harvard University	MA	\$1,100	\$233,600	\$220,900
7	Northwestern University	IL	\$1,800	\$227,800	\$206,700
8	University of Virginia-Main Campus	VA	\$2,000	\$221,600	\$197,200
9	Duke University	NC	\$1,800	\$214,800	\$193,200
10	Yale University	CT	\$1,600	\$204,700	\$185,400
11	University of California-Berkeley	CA	\$1,800	\$182,900	\$161,700
12	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	MI	\$1,500	\$176,100	\$158,000
13	University of Southern California	CA	\$1,600	\$164,400	\$145,500
14	Vanderbilt University	TN	\$1,600	\$154,300	\$135,300
15	Fordham University	NY	\$1,700	\$153,500	\$133,300
16	University of California-Los Angeles	CA	\$1,500	\$151,500	\$133,100
17	Boston College	MA	\$1,400	\$144,500	\$127,700
18	Georgetown University	DC	\$1,800	\$146,900	\$124,800
19	Washington University in St Louis	MO	\$1,100	\$131,900	\$119,300
20	Boston University	MA	\$1,300	\$132,800	\$116,800
21	University of Notre Dame	IN	\$1,500	\$127,100	\$109,600
22	University of California College of the Law, San Francisco	CA	\$1,600	\$122,500	\$103,500

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
23	George Washington University	DC	\$2,000	\$125,600	\$101,500
24	University of California-Irvine	CA	\$1,500	\$118,700	\$100,500
25	George Mason University	VA	\$700	\$109,300	\$100,400
26	Southern Methodist University	TX	\$1,700	\$120,100	\$100,200
27	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	IL	\$900	\$109,900	\$99,400
28	Yeshiva University	NY	\$1,200	\$109,800	\$96,000
29	University of Houston	TX	\$1,000	\$107,600	\$95,800
30	Emory University	GA	\$1,500	\$112,500	\$94,100
31	Seton Hall University	NJ	\$1,300	\$109,500	\$93,800
32	University of California-Davis	CA	\$1,100	\$105,700	\$93,000
33	University of Connecticut	CT	\$1,100	\$104,300	\$91,100
34	University of San Diego	CA	\$1,700	\$109,700	\$89,800
35	Brooklyn Law School	NY	\$1,100	\$101,700	\$88,500
36	Loyola University Chicago	IL	\$1,400	\$104,500	\$88,200
37	Santa Clara University	CA	\$2,000	\$112,100	\$87,600
38	University of Florida	FL	\$800	\$97,000	\$87,300
39	University of Nevada-Las Vegas	NV	\$900	\$97,800	\$86,400
40	Pepperdine University	CA	\$1,800	\$107,600	\$86,400
41	St. John's University-New York	NY	\$1,300	\$101,000	\$85,700
42	Villanova University	PA	\$800	\$94,300	\$84,800
43	University of Washington-Seattle Campus	WA	\$1,200	\$99,100	\$84,300
44	The Catholic University of America	DC	\$1,700	\$104,000	\$83,800

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
45	Loyola Marymount University	CA	\$1,800	\$104,900	\$83,700
46	Rutgers University-New Brunswick	NJ	\$800	\$93,400	\$83,600
47	Texas Tech University	TX	\$1,000	\$95,200	\$83,500
48	University of Iowa	IA	\$900	\$94,100	\$83,200
49	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	NC	\$1,000	\$95,500	\$83,000
50	Temple University	PA	\$900	\$93,100	\$82,000
51	University of Alabama	AL	\$700	\$89,400	\$81,000
52	Arizona State University Campus Immersion	AZ	\$1,100	\$94,500	\$80,800
53	Washington and Lee University	VA	\$1,100	\$93,600	\$80,300
54	University of Arizona	AZ	\$800	\$89,100	\$79,800
55	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	MN	\$1,100	\$93,000	\$79,500
56	Georgia State University	GA	\$800	\$89,300	\$79,400
57	William & Mary	VA	\$1,200	\$93,700	\$79,300
58	University of Georgia	GA	\$900	\$89,900	\$78,600
59	Wayne State University	MI	\$700	\$86,800	\$78,500
60	University of Maryland, Baltimore	MD	\$1,300	\$94,300	\$78,100
61	Illinois Institute of Technology	IL	\$1,100	\$91,000	\$77,600
62	University of New Hampshire-Main Campus	NH	\$700	\$85,400	\$77,000
63	Ohio State University-Main Campus	OH	\$1,000	\$88,500	\$76,000
64	University of Wisconsin-Madison	WI	\$700	\$84,400	\$76,000
65	University of Utah	UT	\$800	\$86,000	\$75,900
66	Indiana University-Bloomington	IN	\$1,000	\$88,500	\$75,900

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
67	Tulane University of Louisiana	LA	\$1,700	\$95,900	\$75,500
68	Baylor University	TX	\$2,000	\$98,400	\$74,900
69	University of Colorado Boulder	CO	\$1,200	\$89,200	\$74,800
70	Northeastern University	MA	\$800	\$84,200	\$74,500
71	Pace University	NY	\$1,100	\$87,500	\$74,500
72	University of San Francisco	CA	\$2,100	\$99,000	\$74,100
73	University of Tennessee-Knoxville	TN	\$700	\$82,400	\$74,000
74	Texas A & M University-College Station	TX	\$800	\$83,400	\$73,600
75	Wake Forest University	NC	\$1,200	\$87,200	\$72,900
76	Purdue University Global	IN	\$900	\$83,800	\$72,700
77	Drexel University	PA	\$800	\$82,500	\$72,600
78	University of Richmond	VA	\$1,100	\$86,200	\$72,500
79	Quinnipiac University	CT	\$900	\$83,400	\$72,400
80	Case Western Reserve University	OH	\$1,100	\$85,600	\$72,100
81	Taft University System	CO	\$700	\$80,300	\$72,000
82	Duquesne University	PA	\$800	\$81,400	\$71,500
83	University of Kansas	KS	\$700	\$79,700	\$71,300
84	Suffolk University	MA	\$1,300	\$86,800	\$71,300
85	University of Baltimore	MD	\$1,200	\$85,600	\$71,200
86	South Texas College of Law Houston	TX	\$1,600	\$90,700	\$71,200
87	Chapman University	CA	\$1,900	\$94,400	\$71,100
88	American University	DC	\$1,800	\$93,000	\$70,900
89	Florida International University	FL	\$1,000	\$83,000	\$70,700
90	University of Hawaii at Manoa	HI	\$1,100	\$83,900	\$70,500
91	University of the Pacific	CA	\$1,700	\$90,500	\$70,400



Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
92	University of Miami	FL	\$1,700	\$90,700	\$70,400
93	Florida State University	FL	\$800	\$79,400	\$70,200
94	Pennsylvania State University	PA	\$700	\$79,100	\$70,200
95	University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus	OK	\$800	\$79,400	\$69,900
96	New York Law School	NY	\$1,600	\$89,400	\$69,900
97	Hofstra University	NY	\$1,900	\$91,800	\$69,500
98	University of Arkansas	AR	\$700	\$78,200	\$69,300
99	Syracuse University	NY	\$1,300	\$84,700	\$69,300
100	University of Kentucky	KY	\$900	\$79,500	\$69,300
101	Touro University	NY	\$1,500	\$86,500	\$68,500
102	Indiana University-Purdue University-Indianapolis	IN	\$1,100	\$81,300	\$68,000
103	CUNY School of Law	NY	\$900	\$78,300	\$67,100
104	University at Buffalo	NY	\$1,100	\$79,700	\$66,900
105	Mitchell Hamline School of Law	MN	\$1,200	\$80,400	\$66,500
106	Albany Law School	NY	\$1,100	\$78,900	\$66,100
107	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	NE	\$600	\$73,400	\$66,000
108	California Western School of Law	CA	\$2,000	\$90,200	\$65,700
109	DePaul University	IL	\$1,500	\$83,500	\$65,500
110	Southwestern Law School	CA	\$2,300	\$93,300	\$65,500
111	Cleveland State University	OH	\$800	\$75,200	\$65,500
112	University of Oregon	OR	\$1,100	\$78,700	\$65,300
113	Seattle University	WA	\$1,600	\$84,600	\$64,900
114	University of Missouri-Columbia	MO	\$800	\$74,700	\$64,700

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
115	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	LA	\$1,000	\$76,400	\$64,300
116	Michigan State University	MI	\$1,200	\$78,400	\$64,200
117	Stetson University	FL	\$1,600	\$83,400	\$63,900
118	Golden Gate University	CA	\$1,800	\$85,100	\$63,900
119	University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	PA	\$1,200	\$78,400	\$63,500
120	University of St. Thomas	MN	\$900	\$73,300	\$63,100
121	University of Wyoming	WY	\$800	\$72,200	\$62,600
122	University of South Carolina-Columbia	SC	\$1,300	\$78,300	\$62,600
123	University of Mississippi	MS	\$800	\$71,900	\$62,300
124	Belmont University	TN	\$1,200	\$76,000	\$62,200
125	University of Tulsa	OK	\$1,000	\$74,300	\$62,000
126	Gonzaga University	WA	\$1,300	\$76,900	\$61,800
127	University of North Dakota	ND	\$700	\$70,100	\$61,700
128	University of Denver	CO	\$1,800	\$83,300	\$61,300
129	West Virginia University	WV	\$1,100	\$73,600	\$60,800
130	University of New Mexico-Main Campus	NM	\$1,000	\$73,100	\$60,700
131	University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	OH	\$800	\$69,600	\$60,500
132	Drake University	IA	\$1,000	\$71,700	\$60,300
133	University of Detroit Mercy	MI	\$1,400	\$76,900	\$60,200
134	Northern Kentucky University	KY	\$1,200	\$73,200	\$59,400
135	University of Memphis	TN	\$1,000	\$71,700	\$59,100
136	Howard University	DC	\$2,100	\$83,800	\$58,500
137	University of Missouri-Kansas City	MO	\$1,100	\$71,700	\$58,500

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
138	Marquette University	WI	\$1,600	\$77,100	\$58,300
139	Nova Southeastern University	FL	\$1,800	\$80,400	\$58,200
140	Regent University	VA	\$1,000	\$69,700	\$58,000
141	University of Southern Maine	ME	\$1,000	\$69,700	\$58,000
142	Lewis & Clark College	OR	\$1,700	\$78,200	\$57,800
143	Mercer University	GA	\$1,400	\$74,800	\$57,800
144	Widener University	PA	\$1,500	\$75,500	\$57,600
145	University of Idaho	ID	\$1,100	\$70,900	\$57,200
146	University of Montana	MT	\$800	\$66,500	\$56,600
147	Washburn University	KS	\$900	\$66,800	\$56,200
148	Roger Williams University	RI	\$1,400	\$72,800	\$56,100
150	Willamette University	OR	\$1,900	\$77,900	\$55,600
151	Samford University	AL	\$1,200	\$70,400	\$55,600
152	University of Arkansas at Little Rock	AR	\$700	\$63,900	\$55,500
153	Northern Illinois University	IL	\$900	\$65,400	\$55,100
154	Capital University	OH	\$1,200	\$69,400	\$54,900
155	Massachusetts School of Law	MA	\$900	\$65,700	\$54,800
156	University of Illinois Chicago	IL	\$1,800	\$75,600	\$54,600
157	Valparaiso University	IN	\$1,000	\$66,700	\$54,400
158	Trinity International University-Illinois	IL	\$1,800	\$75,300	\$54,100
160	St. Mary's University	TX	\$1,600	\$73,800	\$54,000
161	University of Toledo	OH	\$900	\$63,800	\$53,400
162	University of Louisville	KY	\$1,100	\$66,500	\$53,300
163	Creighton University	NE	\$1,500	\$70,500	\$53,000

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
164	University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth	MA	\$1,400	\$69,300	\$52,500
165	Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	IL	\$1,000	\$64,100	\$51,600
166	North Carolina Central University	NC	\$1,300	\$66,800	\$50,800
167	New England Law-Boston	MA	\$1,400	\$67,800	\$50,500
168	Elon University	NC	\$1,400	\$66,600	\$50,300
169	Ave Maria School of Law	FL	\$1,600	\$69,200	\$49,500
170	Thomas Jefferson School of Law	CA	\$2,600	\$80,800	\$49,400
171	St. Thomas University	FL	\$1,900	\$71,500	\$48,800
172	Whittier College	CA	\$2,600	\$79,600	\$48,600
173	Western New England University	MA	\$1,100	\$60,600	\$47,300
174	Campbell University	NC	\$1,500	\$65,600	\$47,100
175	Charleston School of Law	SC	\$1,700	\$67,900	\$47,100
176	Southern University and A & M College	LA	\$1,300	\$62,900	\$46,800
177	Lincoln Memorial University	TN	\$1,200	\$61,300	\$46,600
179	Mississippi College	MS	\$1,600	\$61,300	\$41,700
180	Barry University	FL	\$1,800	\$62,200	\$41,100
181	Appalachian School of Law	VA	\$1,400	\$52,500	\$35,600
182	Faulkner University	AL	\$1,600	\$53,900	\$35,200
183	Thomas M. Cooley Law School	MI	\$2,300	\$60,900	\$33,200
184	Atlanta's John Marshall Law School	GA	\$2,200	\$58,400	\$32,100
185	Inter American University of Puerto Rico-School of Law	PR	\$1,300	\$44,100	\$29,000

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
186	Pontifical Catholic University of Puerto Rico-Ponce	PR	\$1,400	\$38,700	\$22,000

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

**TABLE B3. Median earnings net of debt among graduates with bachelor's degrees in non-professional general legal studies and legal support services**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
1	American University	DC	\$300	\$64,000	\$60,900
2	University of Miami	FL	\$200	\$62,800	\$60,800
3	University of Maryland Global Campus	MD	\$300	\$63,900	\$60,500
4	Siena College	NY	\$300	\$63,300	\$59,900
5	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	MA	\$200	\$60,500	\$57,800
6	University of the District of Columbia	DC	\$400	\$62,200	\$57,400
7	University of Washington	WA	\$200	\$58,900	\$57,100
8	University of La Verne	CA	\$300	\$59,700	\$56,100
9	University of California-Berkeley	CA	\$100	\$56,700	\$55,000
10	Ohio State University-Main Campus	OH	\$200	\$55,900	\$53,400
11	Michigan State University	MI	\$300	\$56,200	\$53,100
12	Hamline University	MN	\$200	\$54,400	\$51,600
13	University of Wisconsin-Madison	WI	\$200	\$54,200	\$51,600
14	University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	OH	\$200	\$54,300	\$51,300
15	James Madison University	VA	\$300	\$53,600	\$50,500
16	CUNY John Jay College of Criminal Justice	NY	\$100	\$51,300	\$50,400

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
17	St. John's University-New York	NY	\$300	\$52,300	\$49,000
18	Arizona State University Campus Immersion (Multiple campuses)	AZ	\$200	\$51,700	\$48,900
19	University of California-Santa Cruz	CA	\$200	\$49,900	\$47,600
20	Pennsylvania State University	PA	\$300	\$50,600	\$46,500
21	University of Houston-Clear Lake	TX	\$200	\$48,700	\$46,500
22	University of Denver	CO	\$200	\$48,700	\$46,100
23	Grand Valley State University	MI	\$200	\$47,800	\$45,100
24	Stevenson University	MD	\$300	\$47,100	\$43,900
25	Mercy College	NY	\$300	\$46,800	\$43,600
26	American Public University System	WV	\$300	\$47,400	\$43,500
27	Florida Gulf Coast University	FL	\$200	\$44,600	\$42,100
28	Clayton State University	GA	\$300	\$45,300	\$41,700
29	Bay Path University	MA	\$300	\$45,000	\$41,600
30	Kent State University at Kent	OH	\$200	\$44,000	\$41,200
31	Peirce College	PA	\$400	\$45,400	\$41,100
32	University of Toledo	OH	\$300	\$43,900	\$40,600
33	SUNY College of Technology at Canton	NY	\$200	\$41,700	\$39,100
34	St. Petersburg College	FL	\$300	\$42,100	\$39,000
35	University of West Florida	FL	\$200	\$41,300	\$38,900
36	Keiser University-Ft. Lauderdale	FL	\$500	\$44,200	\$38,100
37	Liberty University	VA	\$300	\$41,200	\$37,300
38	National Paralegal College	AZ	\$400	\$40,900	\$36,200
39	Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	IL	\$300	\$39,100	\$35,900

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
40	Minnesota State University Moorhead	MN	\$300	\$39,000	\$35,800
41	Suffolk University	MA	\$300	\$39,100	\$35,600
42	Purdue University Global* (Multiple campuses)	IN	\$400	\$37,600	\$33,100
43	South University (Multiple campuses)	AL	\$500	\$38,300	\$32,700
44	Purdue University Global** (Multiple campuses)	IN	\$500	\$36,300	\$29,700
45	Post University	CT	\$400	\$29,100	\$24,600

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.

\*Reflects outcomes for Purdue University Global's legal support services undergraduate program.

\*\*Reflects outcomes for Purdue University Global's non-professional general legal studies undergraduate program.

**TABLE B4. Median earnings net of debt among graduates with associate's degrees in legal support services**

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
1	Portland Community College	OR	\$200	\$52,600	\$50,400
2	Arapahoe Community College	CO	\$100	\$49,600	\$48,200
3	MTI College	CA	\$100	\$48,500	\$47,000
4	Inver Hills Community College	MN	\$200	\$46,900	\$44,700
5	Salt Lake Community College	UT	\$100	\$45,400	\$44,100
6	Tacoma Community College	WA	\$100	\$45,700	\$43,900
7	Phoenix College	AZ	\$100	\$45,000	\$43,800
8	Houston Community College	TX	\$100	\$44,700	\$42,900
9	Austin Community College District	TX	\$100	\$44,600	\$42,800
10	Remington College (Multiple campuses)	TX	\$200	\$45,000	\$42,500
11	Post University	CT	\$300	\$45,300	\$41,300

Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
12	Community College of Philadelphia	PA	\$100	\$42,600	\$41,100
13	North Hennepin Community College	MN	\$100	\$42,300	\$40,600
14	Center for Advanced Legal Studies	TX	\$200	\$42,600	\$40,000
15	Rose State College	OK	\$100	\$41,200	\$40,000
16	Dallas College	TX	\$100	\$41,200	\$39,500
17	American Public University System	WV	\$200	\$41,300	\$38,900
18	Seminole State College of Florida	FL	\$200	\$41,600	\$38,800
19	Valencia College	FL	\$100	\$40,300	\$38,600
20	Roosevelt University	IL	\$200	\$39,900	\$37,900
21	Harrisburg Area Community College	PA	\$100	\$39,500	\$37,800
22	Midlands Technical College	SC	\$100	\$39,000	\$37,400
23	Fremont University	CA	\$200	\$39,500	\$37,000
24	Greenville Technical College	SC	\$100	\$37,900	\$36,300
25	Ivy Tech Community College	IN	\$100	\$36,600	\$35,000
26	Liberty University	VA	\$200	\$37,100	\$34,400
27	Rasmussen University (Multiple campuses)	FL	\$200	\$37,100	\$34,200
28	National Paralegal College	AZ	\$200	\$36,300	\$33,900
29	Herzing University (Multiple campuses)	AL	\$200	\$36,500	\$33,500
30	Tidewater Community College	VA	\$100	\$35,000	\$33,300
31	South University (Multiple campuses)	AL	\$300	\$36,400	\$33,100
32	Purdue University Global	IN	\$200	\$35,200	\$32,400
33	Bryant & Stratton College (Multiple campuses)	NY	\$200	\$34,500	\$31,800
34	Bryan University	AZ	\$200	\$34,400	\$31,800



Rank	Institution	State	Median monthly debt payments	Median annual earnings	Median annual earnings net of debt payments
35	Keiser University-Ft. Lauderdale	FL	\$300	\$34,600	\$31,500
36	Miller-Motte College (Multiple campuses)	NC	\$300	\$33,900	\$30,600
37	Erie Community College	NY	\$100	\$30,400	\$28,900
38	Eastern Florida State College	FL	\$200	\$27,800	\$25,800

Source: Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce analysis of data from the US Department of Education, College Scorecard, 2023.





*A Law Degree Is No Sure Thing: Some Law School Graduates  
Earn Top Dollar, but Many Do Not*

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