Council Approves Changes in Collection and Publication of Law Graduate Placement Data

At its meeting on December 3, 2011, the Council of the American Bar Association Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar approved significant changes in the way the Section manages the collection and publication of graduate placement data provided by law schools. The changes expand the level of detail of graduate placement data that law schools must report, refine the definitions of the reporting categories, and accelerate the timetable on which the data will be published. The revisions are intended to provide placement data that is more accurate, timelier, more complete and more specific.

As part of the Standards for Approval of Law Schools, Standard 509 requires that law schools publish basic consumer information, including placement data. “The information shall be published in a fair and accurate manner reflective of actual practice.” The ABA relies on law schools to provide fair and accurate information, which is then published for use by prospective students.

The Council approved recommendations from the Questionnaire Committee of the Section, which has worked diligently over the past year to develop a comprehensive revision of the Section’s approach to the collection and publication of placement data. The Committee consulted with the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) in its work. NALP provided valuable suggestions and comments on the Committee’s work, and has conformed its graduate placement survey to the ABA’s.

Job placement information is reported directly to the ABA.

Law schools are now required to report placement data (as of nine months after graduation), for each individual graduate, directly to the Section. This is a significant change from prior practice, and a significant undertaking for schools and the Section. In previous years, law schools reported placement data for their graduates only to NALP, a membership organization of law school career services offices and legal employers. NALP aggregated the data for individual graduates of each school, and sent a report to the schools. Schools then reported information given them by NALP to the Section as part of the mandatory Annual Questionnaire. The new procedure, requiring law schools to report data directly to the accrediting agency, is expected to help ensure the accuracy of the data, and permit its expedited publication. It also allows the Section to determine how and what data are collected, and how various survey terms are defined.

Information will be more readily available.

The Section is significantly expediting the collection and reporting of placement data. In the past, there was a two-year delay of publication of employment data for a particular class. For example, placement data for the class of 2009 was published in the summer of 2011. Under the Section’s new timetable for collecting and publishing data, they will now be reported online approximately one year (not two) after graduation. Thus, the placement data for the class of 2011 will be published during the summer of 2012, not the summer of 2013.

Information will be more detailed and complete.

The Council’s action expands and refines the placement data that are reported by schools and published by the Section. As for this past year, law schools must report for each graduate: employment status (employed, unemployed/seeking, unemployed/not seeking, pursuing graduate degree full-time, unknown); employment type (law firm, business/industry,
Further, going forward, schools will report on employment type: bar passage required, J.D. advantage, other professional, nonprofessional; and whether a position is full time or part time. On the Questionnaire Committee’s recommendation, the Council has approved what it believes to be significantly improved definitions of these types of employment.

“The Section is fully committed to clarity and accuracy of law school placement data,” says Dean John O’Brien, chair of the Section. “As a result of these changes, future law students will be better informed about the prospects for employment than ever before.”

The Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar and its Accreditation Committee are both recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) as the only federal accreditors for programs leading to the first degree in law. In this function, the Section and its Council are separate and independent of the ABA, as required by DOE regulations.