ABA's Young Lawyers Division adopts resolution on truth in law school education
By Karen Sloan
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The Young Lawyers Division of the American Bar Association has joined the chorus of voices calling for more accurate job data for would-be law students.

The division on Saturday adopted the Truth in Law School Education resolution: a six-point resolution urging law schools to beef up the availability and accuracy of information on the cost of legal education and the job and salaries of graduates. The resolution won't be heard by the ABA's House of Delegates until August, but division chairman David Wolfe said it sends a strong message to law school.

"This was a unanimous vote of our assembly," Wolfe said, noting that the assembly has nearly 300 members. "This is about creating informed consumers of law school and ensuring prospective students get accurate information about the cost of law schools, as well as realistic employment and earnings potential."

For instance, the resolution urges law schools to stipulate on their Web sites and acceptance notices what percentage of graduates are in full-time, part-time and temporary positions. It also calls for schools to provide median salary statistics for different types of employment rather than provide a single median covering both private law firms jobs and other jobs such as public interest — a statistic that can be misleading to prospective law students since law firm jobs typically pay more than public interest jobs. Additionally, the resolution calls on law schools to report the "actual" cost of legal education by disclosing the per-credit costs, and average cost of living expenses.

The resolution goes beyond simply asking law schools to comply, however. The final two provisions urge the ABA's Section on Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar to consider requiring law schools to comply with these conditions and have its questionnaire committee include more detailed job information on the survey each ABA-approved law school must fill out every year.

Wolfe said that the division worked with the ABA's Law Student Division to draft the resolution.

"I honestly believe that having the ABA call upon law schools to do this will result in a high percentage of law schools complying voluntarily," he said. "That said, it would help of the Section on Legal Education would make it a requirement."

Law schools likely won't have a choice about offering up better employment data in the near future regardless of what happens with the Truth in Law School Education resolution. The ABA's questionnaire committee, which devises the annual survey each accredited law school must complete, is in the process of overhauling the questionnaire.
"What we’d like to see is that the information we gather deals with jobs in individual categories," said chairman Art Gaudio, dean of Western New England College School of Law. "Job information would be school specific. For instance, you could look up the median income for graduates in a specific state working at law firms of 2 to 10 lawyers."

The committee is still working on the details of the questionnaire overhaul, which will likely come in two phases. The first phase of changes will likely appear on the surveys that go out to law school this October, Gaudio said.

Similarly, the ABA committee charged with revising accreditation standards is also looking into the accuracy and transparency of cost and employment data.

"This resolution is largely consistent with the direction the Standards Review Committee is taking," said member David Yellen, dean of Loyola University Chicago School of Law. "So although I don’t know whether or how schools will respond to the resolution, I believe that fairly soon most of this data will be required to be disclosed, assuming the [council of the Section on Legal Education] adopts the [committee's] proposal."