ABA May Revise Law School Job Reporting
By Robert Morse
March 17, 2011

The American Bar Association’s Subcommittee on Consumer Information has issued a proposal, "Revised Standard Regarding Employment Data," on how law schools should report employment and salary data for new graduates. The proposed new reporting standards can be seen here. The proposal calls for law schools to calculate their nine-month after graduation rates based on the entire graduating class—something that U.S. News is now doing in our Best Law Schools rankings.

The new standards would also require law schools to report many different employment rates based on disaggregated data that would separate out full-time and part-time jobs where bar passage is required and a J.D. is preferred; other professional and non-professional jobs; and whether the job is law-school funded. This would be in sharp contrast to the one aggregated employment rate for both full and part-time legal and non-legal jobs that is currently used. It would also require schools to report salary data by many job types, which would be more detailed than the one overall salary figure for private and public sector jobs that is currently available.

Dean David Yellen of the Loyola University Chicago School of Law, one the members of the standards committee, told U.S. News that there were still a few more procedural steps that need to happen before this proposal can be adopted. However, Yellen thought there was a good chance that at least some of the new standards would be implemented by fall 2011 for reporting on 2010 J.D. graduates.

If any of the new employment standards are implemented in fall 2011, U.S. News would collect the more detailed employment and salary data and incorporate it in the next edition of our law school rankings methodology. U.S. News believes that while this proposal does not solve all employment data issues, it would make significant improvements to the current rules. U.S. News urges the ABA to take action.

In the most recently published new Best Law Schools rankings, U.S. News changed the methodology for how we compute J.D. employment rates for 2009 graduates, in an initial effort to publish employment data that is more reflective of the job market for new J.D. graduates compared to our previous calculation method. In the past, new J.D.s counted as employed at graduation and at nine months out if they were working full or part time in a legal or non-legal job or pursuing additional graduate school education after their J.D.; so did 25 percent of those whose status was "unknown."

Now, both the at-graduation and nine months after employment rates are figured solely based on the number of grads working full or part time in a legal or non-legal job divided by the total number of J.D. graduates. Also, those who are not seeking employment are now counted in the calculation as part of the total number of J.D. graduates; previously, they were excluded from the
size of the graduating class and the calculation. Those in graduate school don't count as employed in this year's calculation.

U.S. News believes that this calculation is a more realistic presentation of the employment data that is currently available to us.