Online grad job data takes step forward
By Jerry Crimmins
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Starting in the fall, law schools may be required to post on their websites detailed data on jobs obtained by graduates, said Dean David N. Yellen of Loyola University Chicago School of Law.

The key step that remains, Yellen said today, is whether the Council of the Section of Legal Education and Admissions to the Bar of the American Bar Association adopts the proposal approved by the Standards Review Committee last Saturday.

"I believe they're planning to take it up at their March meeting," Yellen said. "There's a good chance they'll vote on it."

"The vast majority of U.S. law schools are still hiding critical information from their applicants," said two prominent law school critics in a report issued this week.

Kyle McEntee, executive director of the Law School Transparency website, and Patrick J. Lynch, the website's policy director, said that posting graduate employment data "can put pressure on the current law school model and thereby act as a catalyst for broader, legal education reform."

This is in their "Winter 2012 Transparency Index Report," found at tiny.cc/cdn8x.

But McEntee said today, "We are pleased that the (Standards Review) committee has decided to include individual school salary information" among the data to be required for posting on law school websites.

"Dean Yellen once again shows that he gets it," McEntee said. "He has been a valuable advocate for transparency."

Yellen said he drafted the transparency proposal that the committee approved Saturday in Washington, D.C. He is a committee member and the chairman of its subcommittee on consumer information.

Assuming the ABA council adopts the proposal, "every school would be required to post employment data about graduates on their websites," Yellen said, including "how many graduates were working nine months after graduation in a whole range of categories."

The categories that would have to be reported include: "full-time jobs, part-time jobs, temporary jobs, permanent jobs, law firms jobs" by various law firm sizes; "government jobs, business jobs" and other types.

"One really important thing about it," Yellen said, "is that if adopted, schools will also have to disclose the 25th, 50th and 75th percentile salaries for graduates in each of those categories" to
the extent that they know it. The data would have to include how many responses were received for each jobs category.

At Loyola Chicago law school, detailed data on employment status of graduates and salary data is already on the website. At Loyola Chicago, "almost everyone tells us whether they're employed or not, close to 100 percent," Yellen said.

But only 40 to 50 percent of graduates tell Loyola the salaries they are being paid. Salary data reported tends "to be skewed toward people earning the most," Yellen said.

The proposal that each law school post salaries obtained by graduates to the extent available led to hours of discussion among committee members. In the end, one member voted against it, Yellen said.

"This kind of salary data isn't perfect at all," Yellen said. "Whenever you're approving something that isn't perfect, you want to have a vigorous discussion about 'Could we do better and is it worth doing given that the information isn't perfect?'"

Yellen said he believes "it's better to add this to the menu of information that students have than not do it."

A separate proposal that the Standards Review Committee approved, Yellen said, would require law schools to disclose on their websites how many students enter with scholarships and how many students have those scholarships reduced or eliminated because they didn't meet certain academic standards.

The data these proposals will require for law school websites matches the data that the ABA now requires law schools to report to the ABA in the annual law school questionnaire, Yellen said, with two exceptions.

He said the ABA law school questionnaire does not require law schools to report to the ABA school-specific salary information on jobs obtained by graduates and it does not require schools to report to the ABA scholarship retention data.

Overall, Yellen said, "I think this is a really positive step to show that law schools believe in transparency" and it will give "students information they need to make intelligent choices."

From their examination of the data available now on the websites of ABA-approved law schools, the operators of Law School Transparency said this week:

27 percent of schools, or 54 schools, don't report information on employment outcomes for 2010 graduates in a manner that is possible to evaluate.
Of those 54 schools, 22 schools provide no such information and 32 schools provide potentially misleading information on 2010 graduates.
51 percent of schools fail to say how many graduates "actually responded" back to the school with their employment information, thus weakening the value of the data posted.
Only 49 percent of schools provide "at least some salary information."
Only 17 percent of schools report whether jobs are full time or part time; only 10 percent report whether jobs obtained are temporary; and only 10 percent say whether graduates' jobs are school funded.

Law School Transparency said its website now contains the graduate employment data reported by every ABA-approved law school.