Just six in 10 of the 4,967 students who graduated last year from New York state's 15 law schools were able to find full-time, permanent employment requiring bar passage by Feb. 15, according to recently released statistics from the American Bar Association.

Reflecting a job market that remains tight, the 59.8 percent rate was somewhat higher than the national figure of 56.2 percent but only a slight improvement from 2011's 57.2 percent for New York graduates.

See the results of the ABA's questionnaire.

Nationwide, the class of 2013 is expected to be even larger than the class of 2012, according to ABA enrollment data, which means increased competition for limited jobs. But the worst of the employment figures may soon be over. Graduating class sizes will be smaller from 2014 onward.

Only six U.S. schools placed more than 90 percent of their 2012 graduates in full-time, permanent positions requiring bar passage, including two from New York: Columbia Law School at 93.4 percent and New York University School of Law at 91.1 percent. Cornell Law School sent 85.8 percent of its graduates to those jobs.

Most New York schools succeeded in placing only about half of their graduates in such legal jobs. However, three schools could take comfort in achieving significant increases—including 17.7 points to 54.6 percent in the case of City University of New York School of Law, a 12.3 point jump to 48 percent for Pace Law School and a 10.5 point bump to 51.2 percent for the Maurice A. Deane School of Law at Hofstra University.

"We are pleased the numbers went up, but they're not high enough," said Eric Lane, dean of Hofstra Law. "Our goals are 100 percent employment. So we're paying a lot more attention to our responsibility of helping our students find jobs."

The school's overall employment rate, which includes part-time, short-term positions and jobs not
requiring a law degree, is 77.7 percent.

According to the ABA, 11 percent of 2012 graduates nationwide were unemployed in February, an increase of more than 1 percent over last year. The unemployment rate for graduates of New York schools was about 13 percent. (The New York figure includes those not seeking work but does not count those pursuing graduate degrees.)

About 24 percent of graduates from New York's law schools were underemployed, meaning they held short-term or part-time jobs, nonprofessional positions or were unemployed and looking for work.

The ABA first began requiring schools to report the number of graduates in full-time, long-term jobs requiring bar passage two years ago. Before that, schools reported less detailed employment numbers that didn't differentiate among part-time, short-term and full-time positions, making it difficult to tell which schools placed their new J.D.'s in the most coveted jobs. Employment summary reports for each ABA-approved law school are available on the bar group's website.

Prospective law students hoping to enroll this fall have more time to review the ABA's employment data before deciding where to enroll. The figures were released on March 29, compared to late June of last year for 2011 graduates.

Two schools in New York—Brooklyn Law School and Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center—posted unemployment rates above 20 percent.

But Brooklyn Law did show some improvements, dean Nicholas Allard pointed out. The school's overall employment rate is 71.9 percent, up from 67 percent the year before. And 48.7 percent of its 2012 graduates landed long-term, full-time jobs requiring J.D.'s, a slight increase from the previous year's 47.3 percent.

"We have seen an uptick in employment at small- and medium-sized firms among our recent graduates," Allard said. "Permanent placements in our traditional strongholds in public service, such as in courts, prosecutors' offices, and agencies, are trending up."
Patricia Salkin, dean of Touro Law, said the unemployment figures, however detailed, can be misleading.

"What they don't factor in is why some people are unemployed," she said. For example, four 2012 graduates chose not to look for a job for personal reasons, while two took the bar exam in other states and weren't seeking work in the time period counted by the ABA. That can sway overall figures for a class size of 244. "They were counted in the unemployment number. We can't take them out or not count them," Salkin said.

Both Allard and Salkin noted that several graduates counted as unemployed at the Feb. 15 ABA cutoff have now secured jobs.

'Turning a Corner'

Nationwide, job-seekers from the class of 2012 faced disadvantages on two fronts: in addition to a slowdown in hiring, they came from the largest graduating class in history at 46,364. In New York, last year's graduating class of 4,967 was about 5 percent larger than the class that preceded it.

This year's nationwide graduating class is expected to break last year's record. After that, graduating classes will shrink as applications and enrollment drop off sharply.

New York schools may be ahead of the curve. Some are already trimming class sizes and will see fewer students graduate this year, while others' 2013 graduating classes will remain about the same. Fewer students will mean better employment outcomes in years to come, some deans said.

"Personally, I'm optimistic that we have turned a corner on the job front," said Brooklyn Law's Allard. "Preliminary statistics for the class of 2013 show further improvement."

Applicants to U.S. law schools nationwide have decreased about 35 percent since their peak in 2010, according to figures by the Law School Admission Council. About 87,900 applicants vied for a spot in the class that began in the fall of 2010, compared with projections of around 57,000 for the current application cycle.
At New York Law School, about 40 percent of the school's 601 graduates last year found permanent, full-time jobs requiring bar passage, an improvement over 35.5 percent of 515 graduates for the class of 2011. The school's overall employment rate also rose slightly, to 80 percent from 78 percent. It expects to hand out about 470 J.D. degrees this year.

"Last year's class was the largest ever and eclipsed any law school in the state, so I was particularly concerned about such a high number of students and the current state of the market," said Anthony Crowell, New York Law's dean. "We've made tremendous gains in the past year. The progress we're making is a turnaround story for the law school."

Three New York law schools— Columbia, NYU and Cornell—were in the nation's top five most likely to send their students to jobs at big law firms with 100 or more lawyers, according to ABA data. Columbia sent 64.2 percent to big firms, while NYU and Cornell sent 59.5 percent and 57.9 percent, respectively.

Others were far likelier to send their students into government and public interest jobs.

The City University of New York School of Law, for example, sent 43.3 percent of its graduates into those fields, one of the highest rates in the nation, while NYU Law, sent 21.6 percent, the second-highest percentage for the New York schools.

Nationwide, the percentage of students in positions funded by their schools decreased less than 1 percent, to about 4 percent of all recent graduates.

CUNY Law leads the pack for New York schools in that category, employing 13.5 percent of its most recent class. NYU Law and Fordham University School of Law employ about 13 percent and 12 percent, respectively, in jobs with nonprofits, public interest and governmental organizations across the country, as well as in their own centers and clinics.

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