

Highlights: Oregon State Bar New Lawyer Survey, 2006

In April 2006, the Oregon State Bar launched a longitudinal survey to collect information about the attitudes and experiences of Oregon lawyers during their first five years of practice. Among other results, this year's survey found the following:

Financial Issues – Salaries and Student Debt

Many new lawyers in Oregon have significant levels of student debt.

- 42.3% of survey participants reported remaining debt from undergraduate work.
 - Among these respondents, remaining undergraduate debt averaged about \$17,000.
- 84.9% of survey participants reported debt from law school.
 - Among these respondents, law school debt averaged over \$80,000.

Starting salaries for new lawyers are not always high.

- Among survey respondents who are currently practicing law, a majority (63.8%) reported starting salaries below \$50,000.
 - 16.3% cited starting salaries in the \$30,000-\$39,000 range, and 15.6% cited starting salaries of less than \$30,000.

Challenges for New Lawyers

- According to survey participants, the most challenging aspect of being a new lawyer is understanding legal procedures. This element was rated 2.62 on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “very difficult” and 5 being “very easy.”
- Billable hours requirements were rated as the next most difficult aspect of practicing law, at 2.64 on the 5-point scale.
- Participants indicated that the least difficult aspects of being a new lawyer are maintaining civility and professionalism (4.19) and receiving challenging work (3.89).

Job and Career Satisfaction

New lawyers appear to be rather satisfied with their work and their career choice.

- Of survey participants who are currently practicing law, 81.4% said they were either “highly satisfied” or “somewhat satisfied” with their first position as a lawyer.
- Survey respondents rated their satisfaction with “being a lawyer” at 3.89 on a 5-point scale, with 1 being “very dissatisfied” and 5 being “very satisfied.”

For more detail on these and other issues in the survey, please see “Executive Summary: Oregon State Bar New Lawyer Survey, May 2006” and “Survey Responses: Oregon State Bar New Lawyer Survey, 2006.”