

Decline in Law Professor Pay and Employment Raises Concerns



Analysis Reveals a 24% Drop in Average Law Professor Pay from 2013 to 2022

In a recent analysis of data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, it has been revealed that the average pay for law professors in real terms has experienced a significant decline over the past decade. The study, conducted by Michael Simkovic, a distinguished professor at the University of Southern California Gould School of Law, indicates that this alarming trend is one that warrants close attention and concern within the academic community. In this article, we delve into the key findings and implications of this analysis.

Average Law Professor Pay Plummeted by 24% in Real Terms

The central revelation of the analysis is the noteworthy decline in the average pay for law professors. In terms of inflation-adjusted 2022 dollars, the average wage in this profession fell to \$136,000 last year. This marks a substantial drop from the peak average salary of \$179,000 recorded back in 2013. The implications of this pay decrease extend far beyond mere statistics; they have tangible impacts on the livelihoods of legal educators.

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Widening Pay Gap Affects Lowest-Paid Faculty

While the overall pay decrease is concerning, it's essential to note that the lowest-paid faculty members have borne the brunt of this decline. At the 25th percentile, law professor pay plummeted by a staggering 34% in 2022 dollars. In concrete terms, this means that the income of these professors dwindled from \$95,761 in 2013 to just \$63,330 in 2022. This disparity raises questions about fairness and equity within the profession, which is vital for maintaining a healthy and diverse academic environment.

Stagnation in Law Professor Employment

The decrease in law professor employment has also been a point of concern during the same time period. From an estimated 14,500 law professors employed in 2013, the number declined to 14,200 in 2022. While this may not seem like a significant drop, it reflects the stagnation in the field. Considering the broader context of challenges faced by educators and institutions, such as budget cuts and shifting education models, the employment figures paint a more complex picture of the state of legal academia.

Decline in Law School Applicants

The study's findings are further compounded by the decline in the number of law school applicants. In 2010, there were approximately 91,000 applicants pursuing legal education. However, this number dwindled significantly to 64,000 in 2022. The decrease in demand for law school enrollment could have a cascading effect on both law school economics and the employment prospects for law professors.

Defining Law Professors: An Important Note

It's worth noting that the Bureau of Labor Statistics defines law professors as "law teachers, post-secondary" who work at "colleges, universities, and professional schools." The figures may also encompass clinical faculty if they are not classified as lawyers by their employers, according to Simkovic. Understanding this classification is pivotal in interpreting the data and recognizing the diverse landscape of legal education.

In conclusion, the declining pay and employment figures, coupled with diminishing law school applicants, signify a challenging environment for law professors and legal education institutions. These trends raise crucial questions about the sustainability and attractiveness of pursuing a career in legal academia. The education community, policymakers, and stakeholders must collectively address these concerns to ensure the continued excellence of legal education.

Don't be a silent ninja! Let us know your thoughts in the comment section below.