

# Post-recession, more students see law career as a way to give back

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For today's generation of aspiring law students, a career in the law is less about making a buck, and more about making an impact. According to a recent survey, undergraduates considering law school report that their top reason for doing so is to pursue a career in politics, government or other public service. Students also listed having a passion for the work, looking for an opportunity to give back to society, and wanting to help advocate for social change as other top reasons for thinking about law school. They listed higher paying jobs and the prestige of being a lawyer as being less important to them.

Lawyers Weekly spoke to administrators from South Carolina's law schools to learn more about how it is impacting their approach to teaching law. Jill Kunkle, senior associate director of career services at the University of South Carolina School of Law said that her university has adopted a pro bono program to give students more opportunity to get hands-on public service experience. She also pointed toward fellowship opportunities provided by the school to help students explore public service careers while gaining valuable experience. Andrew Abrams, dean at the Charleston School of Law, said that while he has noticed somewhat of an uptick in student interest in public service, he also feels that this has always been a part of the culture at the school. "We've always attracted students interested in public service," he said. "The vast majority of our students weren't coming in with the goal of going to work in New York City in giant law firms with huge billable hours, but were instead interested in a personal-touch practice."

While some administrators said they don't believe the altruistic interest in law school is different now than in years past, Abrams disagreed and offered an explanation. He said that some of the change may relate to the economic downturn during the Great Recession. "As the economy softened, enrollment continued, and even went up," he said "When students were coming to school because the economy was soft, they weren't necessarily there for the right reasons." However, when the economy worsened, and law jobs became more scarce and enrollment plummeted, leading to the majority of students who applied doing so because they had a passion they wanted to pursue. "

Abrams pointed to the school's history as an early adopter of a pro bono requirement as a condition for graduation as evidence of its commitment. In fact, he said that most students do far more than the 30-hour pro bono minimum required for graduation. But beyond what Charleston has always done, he said the law school has created new programs and classes to accommodate students' rising interest in government and other public sector work. He also pointed toward the school's internship program which is aimed at giving students the chance to work in public service fields in the real world. "In some ways, that's often more valuable than just sitting in a class because they're rolling their sleeves up and working in areas that will interest them after school." Kunkle said that apart from offering a government and public interest job information fair, USC offers third-year students the chance to represent clients and appear in court under the supervision of faculty to get real-world experience in criminal practice, nonprofit law, juvenile justice, child protection advocacy and special education. "These courses instill practical skills to help our students make a smooth transition from law student to lawyer," she said.