

We Agree With Lawrence Solan About BigLaw Pay

Written by Staff

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Brooklyn Law school professor Larry Solan has been taking a lot of flack for [an article he wrote for HuffPo](#) with a modest proposal for easing the economic pinch on recent grads, and helping them get on the job training:

Legal education is said to be in crisis. Law school applications are down sharply as prospective law students question whether the high cost of legal education is worth it. A good part of the declining interest results from the loss of entry-level jobs at large law firms, which typically pay salaries high enough to offset post-graduation debt.

[...] Why not cut associate pay in the early years? For example, offer them \$75,000, \$125,000 and \$175,000 for the first three years, respectively. This salary cut will permit firms to continue to train the next generation of elite lawyers in substantial numbers, while shifting some of the cost of training its most junior associates from the clients to the trainees themselves. Moreover, although large firms face pressure to remain competitive, the promise of these substantial raises should be a significant enticement to attract the best talent. Finally, savvy business clients will respect and choose firms that honestly link compensation to the realities of the market.

Naturally, saying that BigLaw associates should start out making less than half what they currently do, and less than what's needed to manage the average law school debtload, doesn't make one a lot of friends. But we know the true story behind Solan's article. The fact of the matter is that the evil masterminds behind HuffPo unfairly edited Solan's original piece in order to make him look like a total asshole. With a little bit of cyber-sleuthing and meta-data analysis, we've been able to uncover a deleted section of the article:

The salary reductions would of course not happen in isolation. While bringing associate salaries back to a mid-1990s level, we'd also reduce the average salary salaries for tenured professors from \$154,000 to \$104,000, and for assistant professors from \$94,000 to \$73,000, increase the minimum teaching load from 1/1 to 2/2, with many professors teaching a 3/2 load, and reduce tuition from \$50,000 per year to \$20,000. We would likewise expect other schools to follow suit, and for state schools to bring their rates down to the mid-1990s levels of \$7-10,000 per year.

Far from absurd, this proposal is now entirely reasonable. Solan's argument continues:

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The total tuition rate for students would drop by about \$90,000, and with students graduating with an average of \$100,000 of debt now, the numbers would drop to less than \$10,000. Instead of paying \$1150 a month on loans, grads would be paying \$115. The \$75,000 pay rate is still low, but when it comes with more than \$12,000 in reduced (after-tax) expenses, it starts to look not quite so bad. Plus, the low debt loads will mean students aren't tied to Big Law jobs that they're not well matched with just to pay off their loans, and more students will be able to pursue public interest jobs without even needing the support of LRAP or other programs.

It's too bad Solan's article wasn't published in its entirety, because his model for moving forward makes a lot more sense than the idiotic ideas that actually ended up on HuffPo.