

Incredibly Bad Timing
Or
An Expensive Joke
Or
Just Plain Dumb

If a college administrator hasn't been hiding under a rock, totally incommunicado for the past several years or is incompetent, surely s/he knows how poor the market is for newly minted law graduates. The six-figure debt many students incur to obtain law degrees is well documented in the popular and academic press. A high percentage of those new lawyers are yet to find a job in their chosen field. However, these well known facts didn't stop President Saunders hooking her fourth tier university with a fourth tier private law school and encouraging students to take up the study of law.

A recent usmnews.net editorial entitled "[4th Tier \(Unranked\) School Joins Forces With Another 4th Tier \(Unranked\) School Which Equals 4th Tier Thinking](#)," began with a Hattiesburg American story which wasn't much more than an advertisement for the University of Southern Mississippi and Mississippi College School of Law. The public relations blather claimed,

A unique partnership between the University of Southern Mississippi and Mississippi College School of Law will enable undergraduates to obtain their Bachelor of Arts degree from Southern Miss after one year of study in the MC Law program.

The College of Arts and Letters is pleased to partner with Mississippi College's School of Law in this endeavor," said Dr. J. Mark Wrighton, associate dean, Undergraduate Programs and Assessment. "We anticipate that it will further the university's efforts to recruit and to retain high-caliber students and build even more interest in the college's programs."

Another report that makes the point that USM/SofL program and its administrator-hawkers are dishonest and/or incompetent. Consider a recent *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, "[Law Schools on the Defensive Over Job Placement Data](#)" by Katherine Mangan

If students were skittish about applying last year, they're likely to be even more so after a year in which disgruntled law-school grads took to the blogosphere, and eventually the courts, to air their grievances, and mainstream news sources published a flurry of exposés about puffed-up employment statistics and deflated law-school graduates.

It started in May, when the Thomas Jefferson School of Law, in San Diego, was hit with a class-action lawsuit. Three months later, separate

class-action suits were filed by seven former students of New York Law School and Thomas M. Cooley Law School, in Lansing, Mich. This month, the lawyers who sued New York Law and Thomas M. Cooley announced plans to sue 15 more law schools in seven states as soon as they corral enough clients.

The plaintiffs' lawyers predict that within the next few years, every law school in the country will be sued.

The suits, whether filed or threatened, accuse law schools of using inflated postgraduate employment and salary statistics to attract prospective students. ***The New York and Thomas M. Cooley suits seek "to remedy a systemic, ongoing fraud that is ubiquitous in the legal education industry and threatens to leave a generation of law students in dire financial straits."*** (Emphasis added.)

The main complaint is that employment numbers reported by law schools are misleading at best, fraudulent at worst. Law schools posting employment rates of 94 percent may neglect to point out that the figure is based on only the 40 percent of graduates who report. It also lumps together all kinds of jobs, so that a part-time office clerk or a full-time coffee barista is counted as employed.

Permanent changes in the legal landscape are likely to leave their mark even when the economy improves. Big law firms are no longer willing to pay top dollar to train young associates, and entry-level jobs are being outsourced or replaced by technology. (Emphasis added.)

According to the National Association for Law Placement, only about 64 percent of 2010 law graduates had jobs requiring a law license nine months after graduation.

For graduates with full-time jobs, the median salary fell 13 percent, to \$63,000, from the previous year.

Over all, the legal field had a net loss of 50,100 jobs—about 4.3 percent—from January 2008 to last month, according to an analysis of data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics by the blog LawShucks. (That number includes paralegals and other legal professionals.)

At the same time, the number of students graduating from law schools continues to increase, with a record 44,004 new lawyers entering the market last year.

Law school administrators have a different tune when they defend themselves in suits. No longer is the law degree an outstanding career path, instead they tell a different tale:

‘A law degree is not like an insurance policy or a warranty on a lawn mower or a new car,’ says Don LeDuc, president and dean of Thomas M. Cooley Law School.

Given past, current, and future prospects for employment in law, usmnews.net's editorial could have been entitled, “Incredibly Bad Timing, An Expensive Joke (at the Expense of Gullible Students), or Just Plain Dumb.”