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Where to Find the Whole Truth

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Prospective students looking to compare particular law schools may be best served by going to the source - the American Bar Association. Each year, together with the Law School Admissions Council, the association publishes a portion of the information collected for its annual questionnaire in "The Official Guide to A.B.A.-Approved Law Schools." The guide, \$24 at www.ababooks.org, fills in many of the holes in the U.S. News & World Report rankings.

After reviewing U.S. News, for example, an applicant might consider the University of California, Los Angeles, for its 96.5 percent employment rate within nine months of graduation. But as part of its computation, U.S. News removes graduates not seeking employment - 39 in the case of U.C.L.A. The 2006 bar association guide shows that these 39 students make up 12 percent of the graduation class - one of the largest proportions in the country - and that the employment rate is closer to 85 percent.

Another student might pick the Columbia School of Law for its student-faculty ratio. What the candidate may not realize is that the 11.2-to-1 ratio reported by U.S. News applies only to faculty in fall semesters. The 2006 A.B.A. guide reveals that the ratio is closer to 16 to 1 for the spring. For context, 11.2 to 1 was among U.S. News's Top 10 faculty-student ratios, but schools that reported a 16-to-1 student-faculty ratio in the fall were ranked toward the bottom of the Top 100. In fact, the guide says, nearly one-third of Columbia's full-time law faculty does not teach in the spring. These are tenured and visiting professors and those with joint appointments at other institutions, says a law school spokesman. The guide discloses that the school accommodates its law students with 32 additional part-time teachers.

The bar association and the admissions council also offer an interactive Web site (<http://officialguide.lsac.org/docs/cgi-bin/home.asp>) that helps students sort and evaluate different law schools, using criteria like employment rates after graduation, bar passage rate, size of faculty, student body breakdown and tuition. The site includes descriptions, photographs and admissions profiles for all A.B.A.-approved law schools.