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Phone: +1 646 783 7100 | Fax: +1 646 783 7161 | customerservice@law360.com

# Law Professor Pay 'Plummeted' Since 2013, Scholar Finds

By **Emily Sawicki**

Law360 (October 27, 2023, 4:09 PM EDT) -- U.S. law professors' real salaries have dropped an average of 24% between 2013 and 2022, according to recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data compiled and reported by a professor at University of Southern California's Gould School of Law.

Earlier this month, law and accounting professor Michael Simkovic shared his findings on Brian Leiter's Law School Reports, writing that average pay for law professors "plummeted over 20 percent this decade amid declining enrollments." According to Simkovic, average inflation-adjusted compensation for law professors hit its peak in 2013, at \$179,000, falling to \$136,000 by 2022.

"The decline is both economically and statistically significant. (That is, it exceeds the margin of error due to statistical sampling.)," Simkovic wrote, adding that the "pay cut was most severe for the lowest paid faculty members — presumably those at lower ranked and more leanly funded institutions, junior faculty members, clinicians and teaching fellows."

Among the lowest paid faculty — those in the 25th percentile of pay nationally — the decline in "real" income-adjusted pay was 34%, dropping from \$95,761 in 2013 to \$63,330 in 2022, Simkovic said.

Speaking with Law360 on Friday, Simkovic said he was familiar with the Bureau of Labor Statistics data from previous research he had published and came across the numbers while looking at data from the bureau.

"I also did get the sense that, for a lot of law professors, pay had not been going up very quickly, and I've heard some remarks from professors at a variety of institutions that they felt they were falling behind people who were practicing law," Simkovic said. Upon looking at the salary numbers, Simkovic said the data bore out that impression.

"I think most people understand that the pay will be somewhat lower in an academic role than it would be in private practice, but how much lower is the question," Simkovic said when asked about professors' salary expectations. "I don't think people expected it to be three times lower, or one-third or one-quarter of what it would be if they were in private practice."

In his blog post, Simkovic provided more data to that point.

"Graduates of top law schools working in elite law firms currently earn around \$450,000 per year within five years of graduation, roughly 3.2 times the average law professor salary," Simkovic wrote. "Hours of many mid-level law firm associates appear to be similar to those self-reported by professors, with many law firms offering work-from-home options."

While professors' pay can vary based on the ranking of the institution in which they work, the gulf between the two is "definitely widening," Simkovic said.

Simkovic said other recent data from the U.S. Department of Commerce pointed to an increase in billable rates in practice areas like corporate law and tax that lead to an even wider disparity for professors in those areas, who are presumably foregoing increasingly robust paychecks to work in academia.

When it comes to the factors behind the decrease in real wages, Simkovic said there are many

potential variables, not least among them a declining interest in attending law school. According to data Simkovic cited from The Law School Admission Council Inc., both applications and enrollment peaked "around 2010" and dropped by 42% as of 2022.

"Demand has to have some effect on resources, on revenues," Simkovic said Friday, adding that "it may not be the full story."

Other factors include the ways schools choose to spend their money, the amount of outside income they may receive from sources such as donors and endowments, and how many other types of students they enroll for programs like masters of law and even undergraduate law degrees, for which enrollment numbers are not included in the reporting Simkovic undertook this month.

"I think what happens now is people start to ask the question, 'Is this happening at my institution? Is faculty compensation keeping up with inflation? Is it keeping up with overall pay growth, is it keeping up with pay for lawyers, is it keeping up with housing costs in the area where I live?'" Simkovic said.

He continued: "If it's not, I think the question a lot of law professors are going to be asking is, 'What can we be doing differently to ensure we're providing value to our students so that they think it's worth going to law school and worth paying a high price for?' The higher value the thing you provide students is, the higher you can charge for it."

--Editing by Lakshna Mehta.

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