

# From Paper Chase to Money Chase

## Law School Class of 2002 Reports Significant School Loans

**R**esults of a nationwide survey conducted among third year law students early this spring—the Class of 2002—and released in November, reveal that an alarming 94% of respondents have financed their studies through school loans and 50% graduated in 2002 with law school loan debts of \$75,000 or more.

“Debt levels like these have to produce enormous pressure on graduates to seek higher salaries,” noted Sheila Siegel Ketcham, Equal Justice Works program associate for research and advocacy and manager of the survey. “The results clearly indicate that salary is edging out type of work as the key factor in legal career choices.”

Nearly 5% of all graduating law students, 1,622, from all 50 states and the District of Columbia responded voluntarily to the online, web-based survey. 66% of respondents indicated that law school debt is the reason they currently are not considering lower-paying public interest or government jobs. More than one-third (39%) of respondents showed significant interest in federal employment, but fewer than 3% found they could accept federal positions. Nearly one-half (46%) said they would be more interested in federal employment if employee benefits included loan repayment assistance (LRAP) programs.

An additional survey conducted among public interest employers supported the employment

recruitment value of loan repayment programs. Among the 326 public interest and government employers from all 50 states and the District of Columbia who responded to the survey, 82% reported LRAPs are an effective recruiting tool and 67% added the programs aid in retention of employees.

According to David Stern, Equal Justice Works Chief Executive Officer, “Although LRAPs are key to ensuring that the next generation of lawyers will include law school graduates who are able to pursue and to afford public service careers, solving the law school debt will require the contributions of many stakeholders, including policy makers, law schools, employers and students. If in the future only the wealthy can afford to become lawyers, ultimately only the wealthy will be able to afford lawyers.”

The educational debt and public interest employers surveys were conducted during the spring of 2002 and are part of a nationwide study of law students, public interest law employers and law

schools being conducted by Equal Justice Works (formerly the National Association for Public Interest Law), the National Association for Law Placement and the National Legal Aid and Defender Association. The study is designed to determine obstacles and enticements to public interest and government legal careers. Visit [www.equaljusticeworks.org](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org) to view complete study. ■

