

Adrian König / Roman Wixinger

Swiss Law Students' Employer Expectations – A First Empirical Insight

In autumn 2024, over 1'600 law students from five different universities in Switzerland were surveyed using a standardized questionnaire regarding their expectations of potential employers in relation to their career entry. This survey represents the first empirical study of its kind in Switzerland. In this article, selected aspects of the mentioned survey are quantitatively and descriptively analyzed and presented. The data aims to provide recruiters, HR staff, hiring partners and other interested parties in law-practice with an initial indication of where the sentiment of the upcoming generation of lawyers regarding their career entry is headed.

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1. Introduction

[1] Switzerland's legal education system exhibits a remarkable degree of heterogeneity. Law can be studied at ten different faculties¹ throughout the country, each of which fundamentally retains the relative freedom to structure its study programs.² After completing their studies, graduates face the decision of whether to enter the job market directly or to pursue the additional steps required for the bar examination. The specific requirements and conditions for those wishing to take the bar exam vary from canton to canton. Anyone aiming to become an attorney-at-law must first obtain a university Master's degree in Law.³ This is typically followed by a practical training period (an internship), the length and structure of which are determined by each canton.⁴ For example, the canton of Basel-Stadt requires 12 months of practical experience,⁵ Bern mandates 18⁶ and Zurich nearly 14.⁷ In the canton of Geneva, 18 months of internship are compulsory and

¹ These are located at the University of Basel, University of Bern, University of Fribourg, University of Geneva, University of Lausanne, University of Lucerne, University of Neuchâtel, University of St. Gallen, University of Zurich and FernUni Schweiz.

² This is reflected in differences such as, for example, the distinct examination formats. At the University of Bern, law students, following their introductory year in the bachelor's program, undergo «only» three five-hour exams, a four-hour exam and either another four-hour exam or optionally two two-hour exams (Art. 17 lit. a-e Regulation on Bachelor and Master Studies and Examinations at the Faculty of Law of the University of Bern of June 21, 2007). In contrast, the University of Zurich prescribes one- and two-semester modules, which are then examined at the end of one or two semesters, respectively (cf. §33 (2) Study Regulations for the Bachelor's and Master's Degree Programs, Minor Study Programs and Special Programs at the Faculty of Law of the University of Zurich).

³ So called «MLaw». See Art. 7 (1) lit. a of the Federal Act on the Free Movement of Lawyers (Lawyers Act, FMLA) of 23 June 2000 (SR 935.61).

⁴ Where at least «one year» is required (Art. 7 (1) lit. b FMLA), which is a matter of interpretation, see the following.

⁵ §7 of the Advocacy Act of the Canton of Basel-Stadt (BS) of May 15, 2002 (SG 291.100). The wording of Art. 7 (1) lit. b FMLA is hereby understood in the sense of a net year, i.e., twelve months *including* vacation days. For further information, see <https://www.bs.ch/gerichte-judikative/appellationsgericht/anwaltspruefung/voraussetzungen-fuer-die-zulassung> [all internet references herein and hereinafter reflect the state of access as of 23 March 2025].

⁶ Art. 6 of the Ordinance on the Bar Examination of the Canton of Bern (APV) of October 25, 2006 (BSG 168.221.1). In the Canton of Bern, additional requirements apply, such as attending university courses in «forensic medicine», «forensic psychiatry», «criminology» and «legal ethics», as well as completing an «accounting class» (Art. 1 (1) lit. b APV).

⁷ §5 lit. g of the Regulation of the Higher Court of the Canton of Zurich on the Competency Examination for the Legal Profession of June 21, 2006 (ON 215.11) *e contrario*.

candidates must also attend a semester at an «attorney-academy» to qualify for the bar exam.⁸ In principle, the required internship must be completed in the canton where the candidate plans to take the bar exam. However, variations exist here as well. In St. Gallen, for example, part of the required time can be spent in another canton,⁹ whereas Basel-Stadt does not insist that the internship be carried out within its own jurisdiction at all.¹⁰ Prospective candidates should consider the cantonal differences with respect to expected remuneration. In Zurich, for example, monthly salaries of up to CHF 7'000 gross are not uncommon,¹¹ while in the canton of Bern, according to latest investigations, 94% of the law firms pay (substantially) less than CHF 3'400 per month.¹² This pay disparity is not only economically significant for individuals beginning their careers, but may also influence the decision not to undertake internships in their home canton after graduation.¹³

[2] As a result, law students in Switzerland, both before and during their studies and especially if they aim to take the bar exam, are confronted with a multitude of available options and open questions. Moreover, advertising one's appeal as an employer in the Swiss legal sector might be challenging due to statutory restrictions on attorney advertising.¹⁴ In a highly competitive market for qualified talent, it thus becomes more difficult to stand out from competitors or even be noticed at all. This challenge is further compounded by the need to remain as close as possible to the real circumstances and the specific criteria potential employees prioritize, so as to effectively address the needs of the upcoming generation of attorneys. Employers are also currently confronted with traits often attributed to this emerging generation, such as allegedly lower loyalty, higher expectations regarding flexibility, or differing priorities in terms of work-life balance, which can lead to a certain degree of skepticism.¹⁵ All these factors (and probably more) underscore how vital it is for employers to understand the needs of potential new hires, ideally meet

⁸ Cf. Art. 30A and see Art. 31 (1) of the Law on the Legal Profession (LPAv) of the Canton of Geneva, of April 26, 2002 (rsGE E 6 10).

⁹ Up to three months can be recognized, see Art. 4 (5) of the Examination and Approval Regulations for Attorneys and Legal Agents of the Canton of St. Gallen of April 22, 1994 (sGS 963.73).

¹⁰ See §7 (2) BS-Advocacy Act.

¹¹ If it concerns a position in large law firms. ARNOLD F. RUSCH, IV. Gedanken zur Anwaltschaft der Zukunft/Ist die Anwaltsprüfung noch zeitgemäss?, in: Bohnet François/Chappuis Benoît/Schiller Kaspar/Schumacher Benjamin (Eds.), *Gegenwart und Zukunft des Anwaltsberufs/Le présent et l'avenir de la profession d'avocatue/Presente e futuro della professione di avvocato*, Bern 2023, 583; further KARL KÜMIN, *Berner Anwaltspraktikanten erhalten bescheidene Löhne*, Plädoyer 4/2024, available at <https://www.plaedoyer.ch/artikel/artikeldetail/berner-anwaltspraktikanten-erhalten-bescheidene-loehne> (Paywall).

¹² JANA SCHMID/MANUEL LOPEZ, *Verdienen angehende Anwalt*innen zu wenig? «Hauptstadt» vom 9. Januar 2025*, available at <https://www.hauptstadt.be/a/debatte-um-praktikumsloehne-in-berner-anwaltskanzleien>; salaries ranging from CHF 1,500 to 2,000 are not uncommon.

¹³ FELLMANN WALTER, *Festlegung der Kanzleistrategie*, in: Leo Staub /Christine Hehli Hidber (Eds.), *Management von Anwaltskanzleien, Erfolgreiche Führung von Anwaltsunternehmen*, Zürich/Basel/Genf 2012, No.16 ff, which notes that, for example, in Lucerne the top graduates of the University of Lucerne, perhaps also due to salary differences, do not take the bar exam in their graduation canton but in the Zurich area.

¹⁴ According to Art. 12 lit. d FMLA, attorneys «*may advertise their services, provided the advertising remains objective and meets a public need for information.*» Advertising is understood as any behavior that is systematically designed to persuade others to utilize the services of the advertiser. FELLMANN WALTER, Art. 12 BGFA, in: Walter Fellmann/Gaudenz G.Zindel (Eds.), *Kommentar zum Anwaltsgesetz*, 2. Ed., Zürich/Basel/Genf 2011, Art. 12 No. 113; thus, this does not constitute a prohibition on advertising. However, it is required that the advertising by attorneys working in the «monopoly area» must generally remain objective and meet the informational needs of the public. NICOLAS DIEBOLD, *Die Regulierung der anwaltlichen Rechtsberatung ausserhalb des «Anwaltsmonopols»*, AJP 2023, 1247 et seqq., 1268.

¹⁵ C.f. SHILPA GAIDHANI/ARORA LOKESH/KUMAR S. BHUVANESH, *Understanding the attitude of generation Z towards workplace*, International Journal of Management, Technology and Engineering 1/2019, 2804 et seqq.; c.f. MUHAMMAD A. A. ALFERJANY, *Generational differences in values and attitudes within workplace*, Psychology and

these needs and ultimately convey this alignment with actual market demands in a manner that resonates with the target group.¹⁶

[3] On this basis, the present study examines for the first time what Swiss law students expect from their *first* employer. To provide such an initial overview, more than 1'600 students from five different Swiss universities were surveyed using a standardized questionnaire, and the results were then evaluated quantitatively. The methodology will be described in the next section, followed by a chapter presenting selected aspects of the findings. The paper concludes with a final summary.

[4] It should be noted that this paper does not aim to exhaustively analyze the collected data in all detail. Rather, its primary purpose is to offer an initial overview of selected aspects and questions emerging from the data. Moreover, the authors consciously limit the interpretation of the results to provide a neutral foundation for informed debate and subsequent analyses.

2. Methodology

2.1. Study objective

[5] The primary aim of this study is to gain an initial impression of the views held by law students at Swiss universities. The focus is on identifying students' expectations and preferences concerning their impending entry into the job market. To secure broad participation, the questionnaire is deliberately kept brief.¹⁷ Rather than investigating every possible factor in detail, the intention is to provide practitioners with preliminary insights and an overview of the students' opinions and sentiments.¹⁸

Education Journal. 9/2020, 1496 et seqq.; c.f. KARINA GABRIELOVA/AARON A. BUCHKO, Here comes Generation Z: Millennials as managers, Business horizons 4/2021, 489 et seqq.

¹⁶ For further references c.f. LEEKHA CHHABRA/NEETI SHARMA/SANJEEV SHARMA, Employer branding: strategy for improving employer attractiveness, International journal of organizational analysis 1/2014, 48 et seqq.; c.f. LARA MOROKO/MARK D. UNCLES, Characteristics of successful employer brands, Journal of brand management 16/2008, 160 et seqq.; c.f. DEEPIKA PANDITA, Innovation in talent management practices: creating an innovative employer branding strategy to attract generation Z, International Journal of Innovation Science 3/2022, 556 et seqq.; c.f. RALF WILDEN/SIEGFRIED GUDERGAN/IAN LINGS, Employer branding: strategic implications for staff recruitment, Journal of marketing management 1/2010, 56 et seqq.

¹⁷ See 2.4.

¹⁸ In this regard, it should be noted that surveys requiring more than ten minutes of students' time would hardly have been compatible with the data collection method employed in the present study. This is primarily because most of the data was gathered directly during lectures, thus utilizing the allocated lecture time of the professors or lecturers involved. For details on the specific data collection methodology, see 2.3.

2.2. Target population

[6] The target population comprised law students at the assessment¹⁹, bachelor's²⁰ and master's²¹ levels. Through appropriate structuring of the questionnaire, the study ensured the exclusion of doctoral candidates and participants in continuing education.

[7] In Switzerland, a total of 13'601²² law students enrolled in the period of 2023/2024. This figure includes students from all ten faculties, namely, the University of Basel, University of Bern, University of Fribourg, University of Geneva, University of Lausanne, University of Lucerne, University of Neuchâtel, University of St. Gallen, University of Zurich and FernUni Schweiz.²³ The present study, with 1'629 participants and 1'185 valid data sets,²⁴ therefore covers approximately 9% of the total Swiss law student population. It is important to note, however, that these participants were drawn from only five (german speaking) universities, representing half of the existing faculties.²⁵

2.3. Data collection

[8] Before the start of the 2024 fall semester, students familiar with their universities' study programs were recruited.²⁶ Their task was to identify the most widely attended lectures²⁷ at the assessment, bachelor's, and master's levels at their university and to contact the respective lecturers to request permission for a brief project presentation during the second or third week of the semester. The plan was to spend approximately two minutes at the beginning of these lectures explaining the study's purpose, followed by an invitation to participate via a QR code displayed

¹⁹ This includes law students in the first two semesters of their bachelor's program, with the majority being first-semester students, as the survey was conducted in the fall semester of 2024, which represents the start of studies for the overwhelming majority of participants.

²⁰ This includes law students from their third semester onwards. It should be noted that the standard period of study for a bachelor's degree in law in Switzerland is generally six semesters.

²¹ This includes law students from their first semester of the master's program. It should be noted that the standard period of study for a master's degree in law in Switzerland is generally three semesters.

²² This figure corresponds to the data provided by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office for the 2023/2024 period. It is important to note that the number includes Bachelor's students (including those in the assessment phase) and Master's students. Doctoral candidates as well as participants in continuing education programs are excluded from this figure. Consequently, the number reflects the actual total population relevant to the scope of the survey. See the data published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, available at: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/de/home/statistiken/bildung-wissenschaft/personen-ausbildung/tertiaerstufe-hochschulen/universitaere.html?>

²³ It should be noted that universities of applied sciences also offer degree programmes in Switzerland that allow for studies in specific areas of law, such as the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW) with its Bachelor's programme in «Business Law». See <https://www.zhaw.ch/en/sml/study/bachelor/business-law>. However, the present survey focuses exclusively on the aforementioned universities. Students of universities of applied sciences are therefore not included.

²⁴ After filtering out participants from the survey who were not in the target group and removing invalid responses. See 3.

²⁵ Regarding the universities where the survey was conducted, see section 2.3 for further details. The survey was carried out at the University of Basel, University of Bern, University of Lucerne, University of Zurich, and University of St. Gallen.

²⁶ Please refer to the part after the concluding section (4.) for any named mentions.

²⁷ In selecting lectures for the assessment and bachelor levels, care was taken to choose those that were mandatory courses for the respective levels. Since master's programs in law in Switzerland generally have fewer to no compulsory courses for the general master's degree, the selection focused on lectures that, according to the experience of the assistants involved in data collection, who were students at the respective universities, were the most attended (e.g., the lecture on Debt Enforcement and Bankruptcy Law at the University of Bern).

in the lecture presentation. The duration for participation in the study took about five to ten minutes. In contrast to simply promoting the survey via email, this approach aimed to ensure that as many individuals as possible participated in the survey, since they were confronted with a direct invitation to participate during the lecture itself. This approach enabled direct outreach to the relevant target group, increasing the likelihood of obtaining a sufficiently large sample.

[9] At four of the five universities (Bern, Basel, Zurich and St. Gallen), an individual responsible for implementing the data collection could successfully be recruited.²⁸ Recruitment occurred either through the authors' personal networks or via requests to the respective student councils or other student organizations. Although the University of Lucerne did not allow data collection during lectures, it supported the study by distributing the survey link via email to its students. At the University of St. Gallen, a lecture at the assessment level could not be accessed. However, ELSA²⁹ St. Gallen agreed to forward the survey link to its members in the assessment year.

[10] Using this chosen approach, it was ultimately possible to recruit 1'629 individuals to participate in the survey. After excluding incomplete responses, the following numbers of valid responses per group remained for subsequent analysis:

Level / Objective	Bar exam	No bar exam
Assessment	339	85
Bachelor	404	110
Master	208	39

Table 1: Overview of the valid data sets.

2.4. Structure of the questionnaire

[11] The questionnaire was administered using Qualtrics³⁰ and was made accessible through both a direct link and a QR code. Although the specific structure is outlined below, this contribution's analyses do not strictly adhere to the original sequence of questions.³¹ Participants were informed about the study's purpose and assured that their responses would remain anonymous. They were informed that the questionnaire would consist of five demographic questions, followed by six further questions specific to the topic under investigation.

[12] The demographic section requested participants to provide their year of birth, gender, academic status, and current grade average. For those in their first semester (Assessment), the high school final examination grade replaced the university grade average. Participants also indicated whether they intended to take the bar exam upon completing their studies – which would require a corresponding legal internship – or whether they planned to forgo the bar exam and enter the workforce as lawyers or through another professional route. The aim was first to estimate the proportion of individuals intending to take the bar exam and second, to potentially identify any

²⁸ Please refer to the part after the concluding section (4.) for any named mentions.

²⁹ European Law Students Association. See <https://www.elsastgallen.org>.

³⁰ Qualtrics is a research-grade platform for designing, distributing, and analyzing surveys and experience data, see <https://www.qualtrics.com/>.

³¹ See 3.

differences across various academic levels. Based on their responses, participants were directed to one of two nearly identical questionnaire paths.

[13] Participants rated their personal interest in various fields of law, specifically civil law, commercial/business law, public/administrative law, criminal law, tax law, and international law, and participants were asked to rate each on a five-point scale ranging from «no interest» to «very high interest.» This assessment aimed to generate an overview of the perceived attractiveness of different legal domains, acknowledging that the provided categories were broad and not exhaustive.

[14] Participants rated their personal institutional preferences for starting a career, by indicating how appealing they found different types of organizations, including tax consulting firms, courts, international organizations, diplomatic posts abroad, prosecution authorities, private companies (in-house counsel), academic institutions, consulting firms, auditing and accounting firms, non-governmental or non-profit organizations and compliance or risk management positions. For those intending to take the bar exam, the category of law firms was also included.³²

[15] Participants were subsequently asked how many hours beyond a standard eight-hour workday they would be willing to work more on average, even if not explicitly required. The options ranged from zero to four additional hours, in increments of half an hour, to determine whether individuals would be willing to exceed the «typical» Swiss workday of approximately 8 hours.³³

[16] Salary expectations were examined through a three-part question. Participants first identified their minimum acceptable salary, below which they would not accept employment. Next, they specified a «fair salary,» representing a salary commensurate with their qualifications and perceived as appropriate. Finally, they reported their «desired salary,» reflecting the salary they would ideally select if given unrestricted choice. Responses were provided using sliders ranging from zero to CHF 10'000.³⁴ The distinction between these salary types was intended to differentiate realistic lower bounds and fair estimates from aspirational or ideal expectations, thereby mitigating potential conflation or distortion between notions of fairness and desirability.

[17] Participants were asked about the importance of various workplace attributes that might influence their choice of employer or that they found fundamentally appealing or unappealing. These attributes included home-office options, at least five weeks of vacation, a convenient or central office location, flat hierarchies, an informal first-name culture, a performance-oriented work environment, quality legal research tools (e.g. Swisslex³⁵ etc.), proper office facilities, fringe benefits (such as for example free beverages), general mentoring support and/or bar exam preparation, social and sports activities, an employer who places importance on gender-neutral language, clear commitments of the employer to diversity & quotas, that the employer enjoys a high level of prestige and flexible working hours. These aspects were each rated on a five-step scale ranging from «not important» to «very important» to capture the extent to which participants valued these factors in a potential workplace.

³² It is also the only material difference between the questions posed to the group of participants intending to take the bar exam and those who do not.

³³ According to the Federal Office for Statistics, the actual average weekly working hours for full-time employees in 2023 was 40 hours and 12 minutes, which corresponds to 8.04 working hours per day. See <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/2024-0577-d>; the legal literature in Switzerland often cites a figure of 42 hours per week. C.f. MATTHIAS MEIER, *Rechte und Pflichten während der arbeitsvertraglichen Kündigungsfrist*, Bern 2022, 103.

³⁴ The scale was deliberately capped at CHF 10'000, as higher salaries for entry-level legal positions and intern wages for law clerks are unrealistic. C.f. 1.

³⁵ www.swisslex.ch.

[18] Participants were asked to evaluate how appealing they found various employer branding measures. These included opportunities for personal discussions with current employees, the provision of «standard» promotional items (such as a notepad or pen), or «higher-quality» promotional items (such as a quality coffee mug for lectures), testimonials from former employees of the prospective employer, university-based workshops, a strong social media presence offering substantive content and open-house events. All these measures were evaluated in light of restrictions on advertising within the legal field, recognizing that employers nonetheless strive to communicate with potential recruits through less formal channels.

[19] Participants were asked about their usage of common social media platforms, specifically LinkedIn, Xing, Facebook, Instagram, X, TikTok and Snapchat. This question aimed to determine which platforms participants typically use, thereby revealing how prospective employers might most effectively reach suitable candidates. Given that most employers now maintain a strong LinkedIn presence, this question primarily sought to evaluate LinkedIn usage across different stages of study.

2.5. Data analysis

[20] As previously noted, the objective of this data analysis is not to examine all the collected data in this paper in exhaustive detail. Rather, the analysis presented here aims to provide an initial overview of the most relevant findings emerging from the questions described in the previous section. To achieve this, participants who were not part of the target group and those who did not complete the survey were excluded from the results. After this selection, 1'185 participants remained for analysis. In some parts of the analysis, the total sample was broken down by whether participants intended to take the bar exam, and in other parts, it was examined separately according to the academic levels assessed.

[21] In all analyses, care was taken to describe the data descriptively (frequencies, mean values, quartiles) and to quantify the uncertainty in the form of confidence intervals or measures of dispersion.

[22] The data was used to address the following aspects:

- **Legal field interest:**³⁶ What is the nature of students' interest in the various domains of law? For each legal domain, the percentage of students selecting each interest level (ranging from «no interest» to «very high interest») was determined.³⁷ The results are presented in a two-dimensional histogram (heatmap) to illustrate how many students fall into each category. To quantify statistical uncertainty, a binomial distribution was assumed for the responses pertaining to each subfield. The 95% confidence intervals for all bins were found to be within ±3%. In this article, «±x percentage points» refers to the absolute margin of error on the 0–100% scale, not to a relative uncertainty estimate. Considering this statistical uncertainty, percentages are reported in whole numbers. Due to rounding, not all rows of the histogram sum to 100%. The subfields are ordered according to popularity, based on

³⁶ For the results, refer to section 3.1.

³⁷ For a detailed description of the options available to survey participants regarding this aspect, see section 2.4.

the proportion of students indicating «very high interest.» This analysis is based on all 1'185 valid responses.

- **Salary expectations:**³⁸ What do salary expectations among the surveyed law students look like in terms of minimum salary and salary perceived as fair?³⁹ Robust summary statistics (i.e., the 25th, 50th [median] and 75th percentiles) were used to capture the typical range of expected salaries and reduce the effect of outliers. This approach provides a clear view of the overall distribution of salary expectations and allows for a comparison of these percentiles with reference data from the Federal Statistical Office, highlighting how students' expectations align with actual entry-level salaries for law graduates. Furthermore, the analysis distinguishes between students planning to take the bar exam and those who do not, under the assumption that students intending to pursue the bar might expect lower wages during their compulsory internship period. The summary statistics rely on 951 valid responses (Assessment n=339, Bachelor n=404, Master n=208) for students who aim to take the bar examination and 234 valid responses (Assessment n=85, Bachelor n=110, Master n=39) for students who do not.
- **Additional workload willingness:**⁴⁰ On average, how many additional hours beyond an eight-hour workday are participants willing to work per day without being prompted by their employer? Students were asked to indicate how many hours they would work beyond official requirements each day.⁴¹ Responses were grouped into discrete time bins, and the percentage of students in each bin was calculated. Since these calculations involve proportions, 95% binomial confidence intervals were added as error bars to illustrate the statistical uncertainty. It is important to note that these intervals only capture the uncertainty arising from limited sample size. They do not account for potential systematic errors. Moreover, self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability bias, over- or underestimation, and misinterpretation of the question. To explore potential differences across cohorts, the results were visualized in grouped bar charts categorized by participants' academic level. Results draw on 1'185 valid responses divided among Assessment (n=424), Bachelor (n=514) and Master (n=247).
- **Employer attributes:**⁴² Which employer attributes are important to the surveyed law students? To assess which attributes, such as flexible working hours, mentoring, or an employer with high prestige, are most valued, participants rated each attribute on a five-point scale ranging from «not important» to «very important».⁴³ The percentage of respondents selecting each importance level was then calculated, employing the same methodological approach used in analyzing interest in legal fields. Findings are derived from the full set of 1'185 valid responses.⁴⁴

³⁸ For the results, refer to section 3.2.

³⁹ For a detailed description of the options available to survey participants regarding this aspect, see section 2.4.

⁴⁰ For the results, refer to section 3.3.

⁴¹ For a detailed description of the options available to survey participants regarding this aspect, see section 2.4.

⁴² For the results, refer to section 3.4.

⁴³ For a detailed description of the options available to survey participants regarding this aspect, see section 2.4.

⁴⁴ Refer to the preceding points.

2.6. Data quality and limitations

[23] Although the study's target population was approached directly and non-target individuals were filtered out, the dataset cannot be guaranteed to be entirely free from participants who did not belong to the intended group. As with most empirical research using questionnaires, this study is subject to potential sources of bias. It is impossible to ensure that all respondents answered entirely truthfully and common distortions such as social desirability, self-selection, or non-response bias cannot be ruled out.⁴⁵ While the study aimed to minimize these issues, they remain an inherent limitation of the chosen methodology. Furthermore, not all law students at the five participating universities could be surveyed. Although a substantial number of individuals was reached, primarily by timing the data collection to coincide with highly attended lectures, organizational and time constraints prevented the inclusion of respondents from the Universities of Neuchâtel, Geneva, Lausanne, Fribourg and FernUni Schweiz. This limits both the representativeness and the generalizability of the findings for the entire population of Swiss law students. In particular, the distribution of the survey was restricted to universities located in the German-speaking regions of Switzerland.

[24] Also, the questionnaire design merits consideration. To keep the survey concise and encourage a higher rate of complete responses, the number of questions was deliberately kept to a minimum. This approach aligns with the aim of the study, which was to capture a preliminary picture rather than an exhaustive account of every factor that might affect entry into legal practice. The authors acknowledge that some categorizations and cutoffs may appear somewhat arbitrary. However, these decisions were made in the interest of balancing comprehensive data collection against the need for brevity.

3. Results

[25] The following section analyses the collected data based on selected research questions previously described. The specific distribution of the 1'629 and, respectively, 1'185 valid responses by their level of study can already be found in the methodology section.⁴⁶ Of the 1'185 valid responses, 80% indicated their intention to pursue the Bar Exam after graduation, while 20% stated they did not. Furthermore, 35% of respondents were male and 65% were female. This gender distribution closely approximates the official statistics from the Federal Statistical Office, which reports a gender distribution of 62% female students in the legal field for the period 2023/2024.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See further: ROBERT J. FISHER, Social desirability bias and the validity of indirect questioning, *Journal of consumer research* 2/1993, 303 et seqq.; JELKE BETHLEHEM, Selection bias in web surveys, *International statistical review* 2/2010, 161 et seqq.; OVE SJÖSTRÖM/DORTHE HOLST/SVEN OVE LIND, Validity of a questionnaire survey: the role of non-response and incorrect answers, *Acta odontologica scandinavica* 5/1999, 242 et seqq.

⁴⁶ See Table No. 1.

⁴⁷ See Fn. 22.

3.1. Legal field interest

[26] To gauge students' interest in different areas of law, participants rated their level of interest on a five-point scale ranging from «no interest» to «very high interest».⁴⁸ Figure 1 shows these ratings with a heatmap.

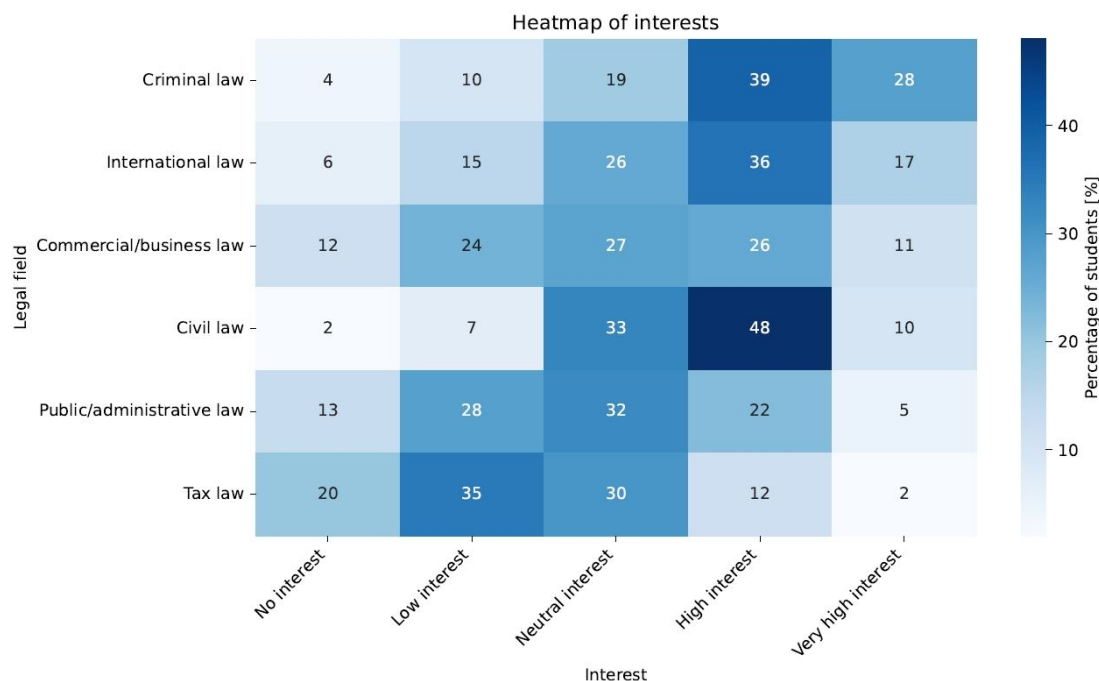


Figure 1: Interest of the students in selected legal fields (All students) Based on 1'185 valid responses, the 95% confidence intervals for all bins were calculated using a binomial model and found to be within ±3%.

[27] Criminal law stands out as the most popular field, with 67% of respondents indicating «high interest» or «very high interest,» followed by civil law (58%) and international law (53%). Notably, civil law exhibits a relatively narrow range of responses, as 81% of participants report «neutral interest» or «high interest.» By contrast, public/administrative law and tax law garner comparatively lower enthusiasm: only 27% and 14% of students, respectively, report «high» or «very high» interest in these domains.

3.2. Salary expectations

[28] This section explores participants' salary expectations by examining both their perceived minimum salary (i.e., the lowest acceptable amount) and the salary they consider fair.⁴⁹ As pre-

⁴⁸ See 2.5.

⁴⁹ See 2.5.

viously outlined, the analysis differentiates by study level, while also separating those who plan to sit for the bar exam after graduation from those who do not.

[29] To contextualize the figures in this section, it is useful to refer to standardized gross earned income data for Master's graduates in law one year after graduation, as reported by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office: CHF 44'200 per year (25th percentile), CHF 65'000 per year (median) and CHF 90'000 per year (75th percentile). These correspond to monthly salaries of CHF 3'700 (25th percentile), CHF 5'400 (median) and CHF 7'500 (75th percentile).⁵⁰ It should be noted that the data provided by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office encompass all students, including those planning to take the bar exam and those who do not.

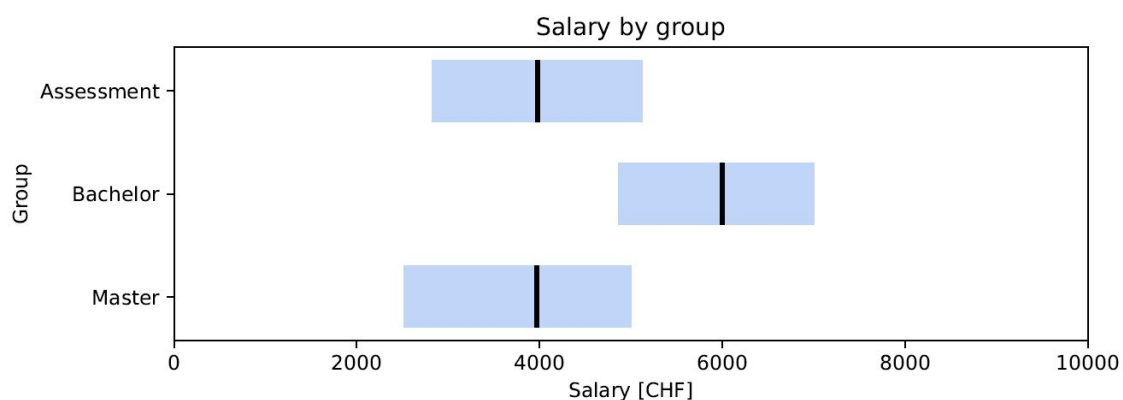


Figure 2: Minimum salary expectation (Students who aim to take the bar exam after their graduation). The box width reflects the 25th to 75th percentile range, with the median salary (50th percentile) marked by a vertical line. Sample sizes were as follows: Assessment ($n=339$), Bachelor ($n=404$), Master ($n=208$).

[30] Among participants intending to sit for the bar exam after graduation, the boxplot of minimum salary expectations reveals clear distinctions across the three study levels (Assessment, Bachelor, and Master). The Assessment and Master groups exhibit closely aligned boxplots, suggesting similar thresholds regarding the lowest acceptable salary. By contrast, the Bachelor group's boxplot is positioned farther to the right, indicating a noticeably higher minimum salary expectation.

⁵⁰ See the data published by the Swiss Federal Statistical Office, available at: <https://www.bfs.admin.ch/asset/de/32028759>.

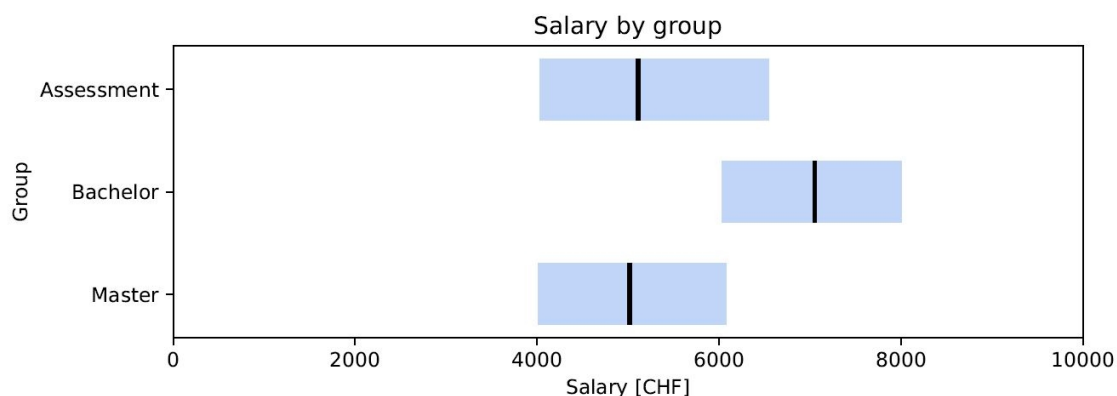


Figure 3: Fair salary expectation (Students who aim to take the bar exam after their graduation).

[31] Analysis of fair salary expectations yields a similar ranking across the study levels, although with clearly higher values overall.

Monthly salaries [CHF/month]	25 th percentile	50 th percentile	75 th percentile
Reference (BFS) ⁵¹	3'700	5'400	7'500
Assessment minimum	2'800	4'000	5'100
Bachelor minimum	4'900	6'000	7'000
Master minimum	2'500	4'000	5'000
Assessment fair	4'000	5'100	6'500
Bachelor fair	6'000	7'000	8'000
Master fair	4'000	5'000	6'100

Table 2: Overview of the salary expectation data for students who aim to take the bar exam after their graduation.

[32] Although all three groups, on average, consider a fair salary to surpass their minimum acceptable amount, their relative positions differ. For both minimum and fair salary, Bachelor-level respondents report the highest expectations. Meanwhile, the Master group aligns with the Assessment level on perceived minimum and fair salary. These findings suggest that salary expectations in this population may be influenced by academic progression.

[33] It is also important to note that the stated minimum salaries, as mentioned in the introduction, do not fully reflect the actual circumstances in each canton. For instance, in the Canton of Bern, internship salaries ranging from CHF 1'500 to CHF 2'500 are not uncommon, and salaries of CHF 2'500 are already regarded as relatively favorable, given that 96% of law firms in that canton pay less than CHF 3'400 per month.⁵²

⁵¹ Reference Value for all law graduates one year post-graduation, irrespective of their pursuit of bar admission. See Fn. 50.

⁵² See Fn. 12.

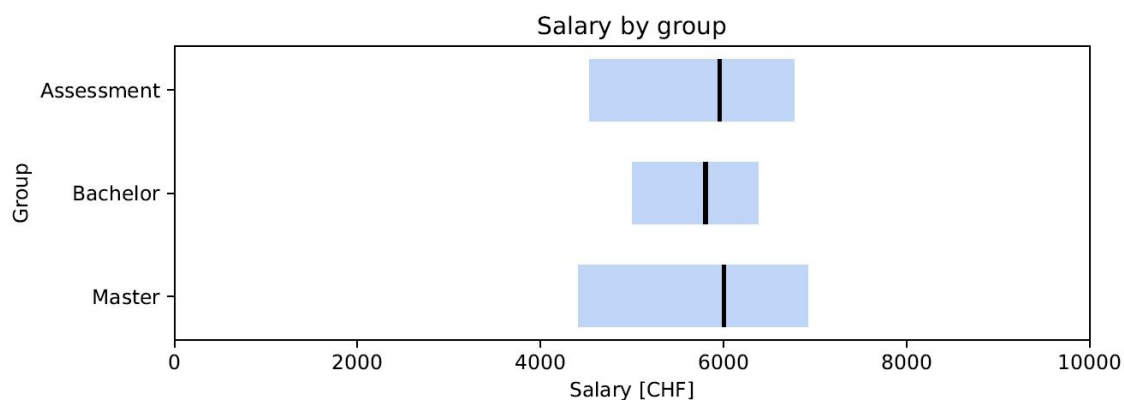


Figure 4: Minimum salary expectation (Students who do not aim to take the bar exam after their graduation). The box width reflects the 25th to 75th percentile range, with the median salary (50th percentile) marked by a vertical line. Sample sizes were as follows: Assessment (n=85), Bachelor (n=110), Master (n=39).

[34] This figure illustrates expected minimum salaries by study level for respondents who do not plan to take the bar exam after graduation. All three groups appear closely aligned, indicating comparable thresholds for the lowest acceptable salary.

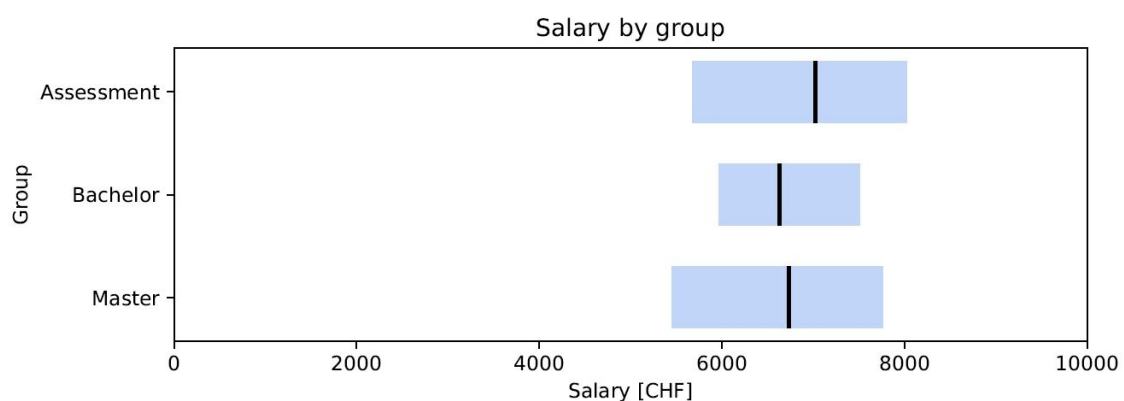


Figure 5: Fair salary expectations (Students who do not aim to take the bar exam after their graduation).

[35] This figure presents the fair salaries as perceived by individuals who do not plan to take the bar exam. Similar to the perceived minimum salary, any differences are minor and lack statistical significance, given the sample size.

Monthly salaries [CHF/month]	25 th percentile	50 th percentile	75 th percentile
Reference (BFS) ⁵³	3'700	5'400	7'500
Assessment minimum	4'500	6'000	6'800
Bachelor minimum	5'000	5'800	6'400
Master minimum	4'400	6'000	6'900
Assessment fair	5'700	7'000	8'000
Bachelor fair	6'000	6'600	7'500
Master fair	5'400	6'700	7'800

Table 3: Overview of the salary expectation data for students who do not aim to take the bar exam after their graduation.

[36] In comparing students who do not plan to sit for the bar exam, it becomes apparent that the fair salary is consistently around CHF 1'000 higher than the minimum salary, mirroring the pattern observed among those intending to pursue the bar exam.

[37] Furthermore, the data suggest that internships requiring bar exam preparation tend to offer lower remuneration, a point supported by earlier references. Overall, the Swiss Federal Statistical Office's statistics, which do not distinguish between the two groups, are generally in line with the expectations reported by the students, providing a reasonable benchmark for interpreting the findings.

[38] Overall, the data indicate that students planning for the bar exam recognize the likelihood of completing an internship, which typically offers lower compensation than permanent positions, as noted in the introduction. Even though the Swiss Federal Statistical Office does not distinguish between these two groups, its aggregate figures remain broadly in line with the salary expectations reported by students. This alignment suggests both an awareness among prospective bar exam candidates that internship wages are generally lower and a consistency, at the aggregate level, between official statistics and self-reported expectations.

3.3. Additional workload willingness

[39] This section examines respondents' willingness to work additional hours beyond the «standard» Swiss workday of 8 hours, without any explicit requirement from their employer.⁵⁴

⁵³ Reference Value for all law graduates one year post-graduation, irrespective of their pursuit of bar admission. See Fn. 50.

⁵⁴ See 2.5.

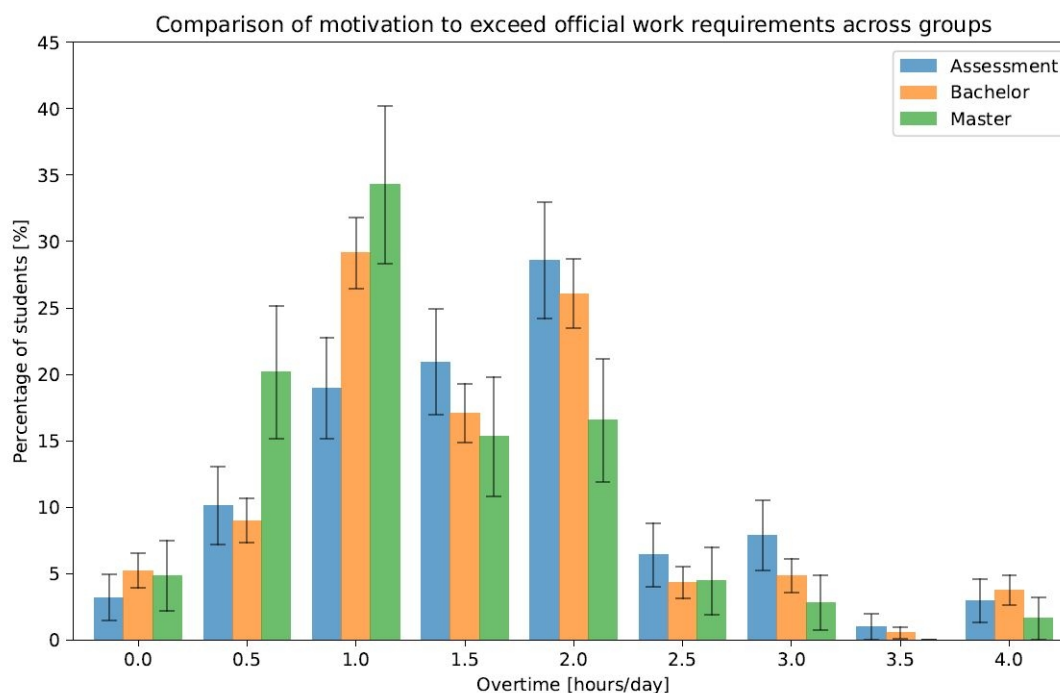


Figure 6: Comparison of motivation to exceed official working hour requirements across groups (Assessment $n = 424$; Bachelor $n = 514$; Master $n = 247$). Error bars represent the 95 % confidence interval (binomial model) and do not account for systematic errors such as perception bias.⁵⁵

[40] The figure plots the number of additional hours on the horizontal axis, displayed in 30-minute increments from 0 to 4 hours, and the relative frequency of respondents (in percentage) on the vertical axis.

[41] Across all groups (Assessment, Bachelor, and Master), the bulk of participants indicate a willingness to work approximately one to two extra hours per day. It is important to note that it is likely that these findings *overestimate* actual long-term willingness. It is possible that participants respond optimistically about their ability to handle extra work when posed a hypothetical question, especially if they have limited real-world experience managing such hours. In this context, Master students' lower reported values could indicate a more realistic perception of working more than required, perhaps because they are closer to entering the job market and already have some insight into daily professional workloads. By contrast, both the Assessment and Bachelor groups may be more idealistic in their assessments, as reflected in their higher indicated willingness to take on additional hours.

3.4. Importance of selected employer attributes

[42] This section presents students' views on the significance of various employer attributes, rated on a five-point scale «Not important,» «Rather unimportant,» «Indifferent,» «Important»

⁵⁵ C.f. REGINA P. SCHLEE/MARY T. CURREN/KATRIN R. HARICH/TINA KIESLER, Perception bias among undergraduate business students by major, *Journal of Education for Business* 3/2007, 169 et seqq.

and «Very important».⁵⁶ Figure 7 shows the proportion of responses for each category, allowing a direct comparison across multiple attributes.

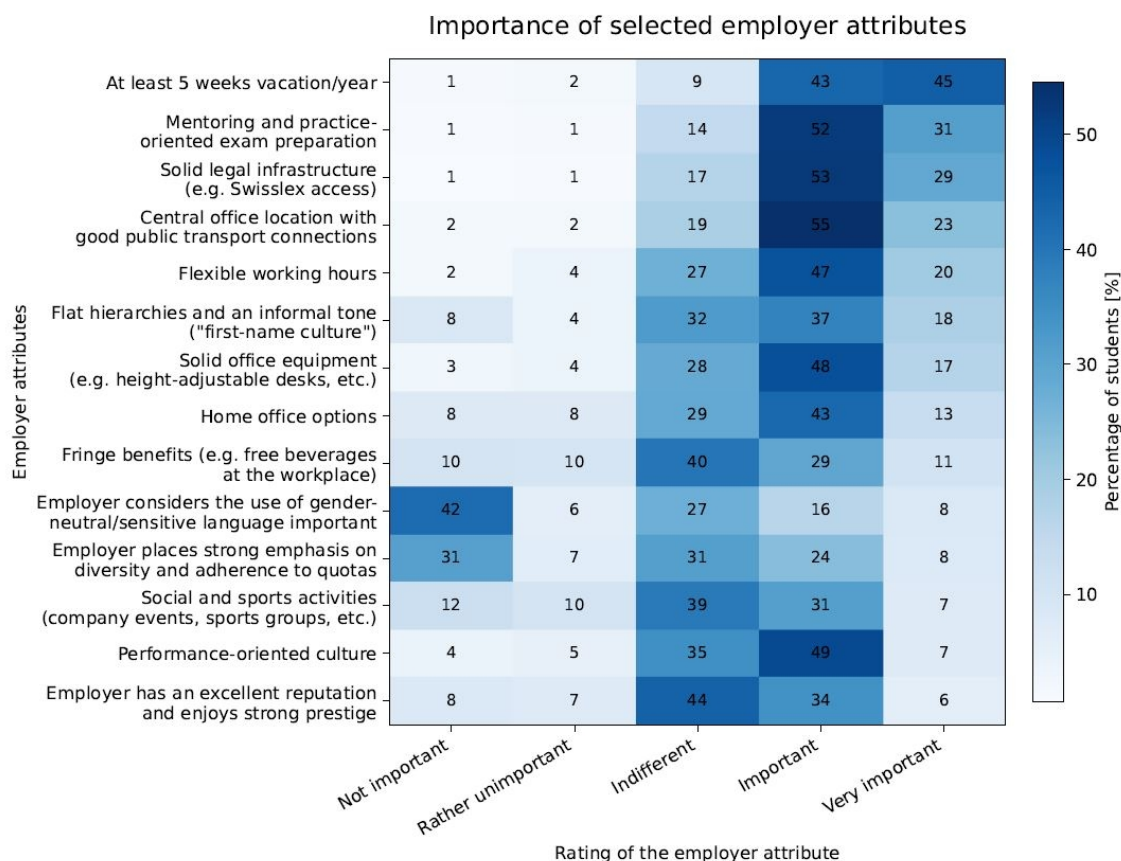


Figure 7: Evaluation of selected employer attributes. Based on 1'185 valid responses, the 95% confidence intervals for all bins were calculated using a binomial model and found to be within ±3%.

[43] The most highly valued attribute is five weeks of vacation, with 88% of respondents classifying it as «Important» (43%) or «Very important» (45%). Mentoring and a solid legal infrastructure also rank high, each surpassing 80% combined in the top-two categories. Similarly, a centrally located office receives 78% positive ratings («Important» or «Very important»). By contrast, other job features such as flexible working hours (67% top-two ratings), solid office equipment provided (65%), a performance-oriented culture (56%), remote work (56%) and flat hierarchy (55%) occupy a moderate position in overall importance.

[44] In the lower tier, fewer than half of participants attach strong importance to fringe benefits (like free beverages) (40%), a prestigious employer (40%), or social activities (38%). These attributes thus show a broader spread of opinions, with a relatively higher share of neutral or ambivalent responses. Notably, gender-inclusive language (24% top-two ratings) and diversity and quotas (32%) garnered the least support, accompanied by a substantial «Not important» fraction of 42% and 31%, respectively.

⁵⁶ See 2.4.

[45] Overall, benefits like more holiday or mentoring that affect the person itself seem to be more important to students. In contrast, attributes like social activities, gender-inclusive language and formal diversity measures are rated lower, suggesting that many respondents either see these as less directly relevant to their immediate needs or remain unconvinced about their tangible benefits.

4. Conclusion

[46] The present study provides a preliminary insight into the expectations of future generations of Swiss lawyers and attorneys. To ensure objectivity and enable subsequent research, the authors present a concise and descriptive account of the data, deliberately avoiding over-interpretation. Despite certain methodological limitations, such as partial university coverage and potential response biases, the study captures key trends among a substantial segment of the German-speaking Swiss law student population. With nearly 1'200 valid responses, the dataset affords a robust overview of central themes, including students' interests in legal fields, salary expectations, and workplace preferences.

[47] The authors also intend to use these data for additional analyses that address questions not yet explored in this study, such as students' preferred institutions for potential employment, their social media usage behavior (e.g., on LinkedIn), and the types of marketing measures they favor. In addition, it is worth noting that the academic performance (grades) of individual respondents was collected throughout various phases of their studies. This will enable future research to compare high-achieving students with the overall population to investigate potential differences in attitudes or expectations. The fact that this is the first study of its kind highlights a gap in the existing literature. With approximately 16'000 students, law constitutes a relatively large field of study in Switzerland and plays a significant role in the nation's economy and overall value creation. Particularly at a time when younger generations may be criticized for alleged negative work attitudes,⁵⁷ it becomes all the more important to shed light on these issues. Evidence-based data, such as those presented here, can support practitioners in positioning themselves as attractive employers for upcoming cohorts of legal professionals.

ADRIAN KÖNIG, MLaw, B.Sc. Mn. BA, CAS ILE, Trainee at LALIVE SA in Zurich. M.Sc. in Business Administration with a specialization in Corporate Finance, student at the University of Bern.

ROMAN WIXINGER, M.Sc. ETH in Physics, Data Scientist at Ergon Informatik AG, Research Software Engineer at Engineers for Science.

⁵⁷ It should be noted that generational criticism is by no means a modern phenomenon. Already in the earliest advanced civilizations, including Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, older generations expressed concerns about the perceived moral decline of youth. Historical texts and inscriptions consistently attest to recurring themes of disrespect, idleness and ethical decay among younger cohorts. See REINHOLD MEYER, *The generation gap in antiquity*, *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 5/1970, 347 et seqq.; ALAN B. SPITZER, *The historical problem of generations*, *The American Historical Review* 5/1973, 1353 et seqq.; for further examples of old texts see [https://www.autenrieths.de/jugendvonheute.html#:~:text=,184%20v.%20Chr](https://www.autenrieths.de/jugendvonheute.html#:~:text=,184%20v.%20Chr;); see also in the media <https://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/mensch/psychologie-warum-menschen-auf-die-jugend-schimpfen-a-1215590.html>.

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